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Realizing a 'More Than Earthly Paradise of Love':
Scotland's Sexual Progressives,
1880 – 1914

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
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Abstract

In 1889, the Edinburgh-based natural scientist Patrick Geddes predicted a future in which a ‘more than earthly paradise of love’, known previously only to poets and their muses, would be realized. Similar intimations of an imminent utopia of transformed sexual relations were being felt and articulated by other young, progressive men and women in cities across Britain, intent on eradicating what they perceived to be the hypocritical sexual and social conventions of their parents. Within the current historiography, the primary setting for this late-Victorian generational revolt is often considered to be London. This thesis shifts the focus to Scotland, exploring the progressive challenge to Victorian sexual attitudes and behaviour in Glasgow and Edinburgh. It looks in detail at two married couples, Bella and Charles Pearce, and Patrick and Anna Geddes. Both were broadly-speaking feminists and socialists, committed in differing ways to heralding in a new age of egalitarian, altruistic and fraternal relations between the sexes. Both were also responsible for some of the period’s key texts on the Woman Question and the Sex Question, Bella Pearce the editor of ‘Matrons and Maidens’, the first feminist column in a socialist newspaper, and Patrick Geddes the author of *The Evolution of Sex*, a popular science book on the cause of sexual differentiation. Utilizing the methodologies of gender history and the history of sexuality, this thesis analyzes the exact nature of their sexual and gendered discourse, situating it precisely within the wider discursive field of fin de siècle feminist, socialist, scientific, medical, sociological and religious thought. However, it also aims to reflect thoughtfully on the relationship between the couples’ discourse and their subjectivity, examining the ways in which their intimate and social lives affected their ideas about sex. Overall, the thesis argues that whilst in some aspects the sexual and gendered attitudes and behaviour of late-Victorian Scottish sexual progressives were similar to those of feminists and socialists elsewhere in Britain, in other important ways they were different and distinctive. An understanding of them is therefore vital to a full appreciation of the complexities of British progressivism during this period.

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Abbreviations

BDSW	Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women
BNL	Brotherhood of the New Life
FJC	Francis Johnson Correspondence
GWSAWS	Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women Suffrage
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LLS	Labour Literature Society
NAC	National Administrative Committee
NLS	National Library of Scotland
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
RSG	Ruskin Society of Glasgow
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SLP	Scottish Labour Party
TLH	Thomas Lake Harris
TWL	The Women's Library
US	University of Strathclyde
WEU	Women's Emancipation Union
WLP	Women's Labour Party
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

Introduction

Without recognizing the possibilities of individual and of racial evolution, we are shut up to the conventional view that the poet and his heroine alike are exceptional creations, hopelessly beyond the everyday average of the race. Whereas, admitting the theory of evolution, we are not only entitled to the hope, but logically compelled to the assurance, that these rare fruits of an apparently more than earthly paradise of love, which only the forerunners of the race have been privileged to gather ... are yet the realities of a daily life towards which we and ours may journey.

Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, 1889¹

Time must bring many changes, especially in the relations between men and women, which have in the past been of the most unreasonable and absurd nature ... There is much *sex-life* wasted which might otherwise do great things both for ourselves and for others; that is one of the mysteries of life of which we have yet more to learn.

But the time will come when we know more of these things, and when we shall have grown healthier, wiser, and stronger mentally, morally, and spiritually, when we shall be only helpful to each other and no longer a hindrance. The marriage of that time will be something very different from now, something which as yet we can hardly realise, and out of which will come the true regeneration of the race.

Bella Pearce, 1894²

In 1889, the Edinburgh biologist Patrick Geddes and his former pupil John Arthur Thomson suggested to the readers of their popular science book that relationships of transcendent love were within the reach of the average man and woman. What was required to achieve such unions was a new sexual ethic. Society should acknowledge women's true equality with men, institute a renewed spirit of cooperation between the two sexes, and give full play to women's innate altruistic tendencies. After all, the two natural scientists asserted, nature was not 'red in tooth and claw' as the Darwinist Thomas Huxley alleged, but driven as much by love as selfishness. Women therefore had a crucial part to play. Only with their influence could sexual relations evolve beyond the crude impulses of lust towards their ideal of self-sacrificing, co-operative, loving partnerships. Young souls would be duly lifted out of 'the moral mud of modern conditions' and higher, purer, ethical standards would be restored.³ Five years later, Bella Pearce, a prominent activist for the new Independent Labour Party in Glasgow, delivered a similar message to the socialist readers of her women's column. The future held the real promise of a 'heaven upon earth', when the true nature of relations between the sexes would be revealed. For Bella, its attainment was implicated equally with the progress of the labour movement as with the advance of women's rights, seeing them as 'twin manifestations of the one force which is pressing us forward towards higher conditions of life.'⁴ Nonetheless, the 'new life' she sought within the parameters of the ethical socialist

¹ Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex* (London: Walter Scott, 1889), p. 267.

² Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 1 December 1894, p. 7.

³ Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, 'The Moral Evolution of Sex', *Evergreen*, 3 (Summer 1896), p. 81.

⁴ 'Lily Bell', 'Poor Mrs. Fawcett', *Labour Leader*, 30 November 1895, p. 1.

movement was founded on comparable principles to that of Geddes and Thomson's evolutionary ideal: sexual equality, a spirit of fraternity and higher individual standards of morality.

Similar intimations of an imminent utopia of transformed sexual relations were being felt and articulated by other young, intellectual, middle-class men and women in cities across Britain. In draughty meeting-halls and drawing-rooms, bands of earnest, like-minded souls gathered to precipitate the dawning of a new, more authentic sexual morality. The gendered, social conventions which had structured the respectable world of their parents came to be understood as shallow and hypocritical. The socialist Edward Carpenter, for example, looked back on his upper middle-class childhood in 'smart' Brighton as a home in which he never felt at home, a vacuous and monotonous world where the lives of his sisters were governed by a tedious round of shopping, gossiping, balls and dinner parties.⁵ Marriage in its current form was denounced as a 'vexatious failure', in the pages of the *Westminster Review* the feminist writer Mona Caird depicting it as a loveless affair entered into by women educated for little else, who were motivated solely by their need for financial security.⁶ Indeed, in its mercenary nature, marriage was increasingly presented as analogous to prostitution, 'The same idea – the purchase of womanhood' ruling 'from base to summit of the social body'.⁷ Yet whilst wives and mothers were respected as the moral guardians of the nation, prostitutes were reviled as 'the great social evil', a duplicity necessitated by the continued operation of the double moral standard, which punished single sexual transgressions by women with social ruin, whilst excusing men's promiscuity as necessary to their health.

The progressive response to such sexual hypocrisies was to talk about sex more frankly and openly than ever before. Josephine Butler's campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts and W. T. Stead's exposé on child prostitution in the *Pall Mall Gazette* created a new, politicized discourse around sex. This stood in direct contrast both to respectable society's prior silence and the knowing, sexually explicit slang that continued to predominate in the male-dominated spaces of music halls, men's clubs and public houses.⁸ This new way of speaking about sex was utilized to great effect in securing key political reforms, including the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, which raised the age of consent for heterosexual sex to sixteen and imposed new regulations on brothels, whilst also criminalizing male homosexuality. However, sexual openness was also an important marker of modernity, a way for New Women and New Men to at once signal their disdain for the 'morbid delicacy' that forbade discussion of such subjects, whilst casting themselves

⁵ Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 11-23.

⁶ Mona Caird, 'Marriage', *Westminster Review*, 130:1 (1888), p. 197.

⁷ Mona Caird, 'Ideal Marriage', *Westminster Review*, 130: 1 (1888), p. 635.

⁸ For an analysis of music hall's discourse of sexual knowingness, see Peter Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning: Music Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture', *Past and Present*, 144 (August 1994), pp. 138-170. According to one 1870s music hall aficionado, there were two ways of understanding 'seduction', 'society's way' and 'the music hall way'. He writes, 'Society frowns at it; the music hall laughs at it. Society looks upon it as detestable, and the seducer as a villain; the music hall treats it as a subject for jest, and the seducer as a hero and a conqueror.' Letter entitled 'Confessions of a Singing Saloon Habitué', *Glasgow Herald*, 6 March 1875, p. 4.

in the heroic mould of enlightened pioneers.⁹ Birth control campaigner George Drysdale, for example, decried the ‘rigid and ruinous secrecy’ in which sex was shrouded, entreating society to join him in looking this truth ‘steadily in the face, whatever difficulties it occasions us’, whilst Geddes and Thomson similarly emphasized the need to ‘grapple with each question, whoever be shocked; not shirk it, gloss it, retreat from it, in our feeble virtue.’¹⁰

Alongside the Sex Question and the Woman Question, the progressives of the late-Victorian age demonstrated an equal determination to confront the many and tangled exigencies of the Social Question. Often converted to what Stephen Yeo has referred to as the ‘religion of socialism’ by reading texts such as Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty* (1877) or William Morris’s *News From Nowhere* (1889), they worked within a variety of political and non-political arenas to ameliorate the chronic social problems caused by decades of urbanization and industrialization. Their efforts were part of a ‘great wave of altruism’ that the Edinburgh political economist Joseph Shield Nicholson believed was sweeping the country, the new concern for the urban poor precipitated by a combination of the economic downturn of the 1880s and a number of high profile social surveys, including Andrew Mearns’ pamphlet *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883) and Charles Booth’s seventeen-volume *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1892-7).¹¹ For the progressive individuals caught up in this altruistic ferment, the period was experienced as one of great transition and change, when a sense of discontinuity with the past created the freedom and confidence to imagine radically new ways of being in the future. The South African writer Olive Schreiner later recollected that ‘no one who did not *live* through it can ever know the joy, and hope, and passion of enthusiasm with which we worked in those years of the eighties’, perceiving it as ‘the brilliant sunrise, without which there could not have been any day’.¹² As with their rejection of conventional sexual mores, when tackling social issues the progressives’ enemy was middle-class hypocrisy, Carpenter coming to see as ‘immoral parasitism’ the overseas labour that had sustained his affluent childhood.¹³

Yet whether progress was pursued in the direction of social action or sexual emancipation, renunciation of bourgeois values did not equate to amorality; liberation did not mean license. Instead, progressives sought to replace the old morality with a new, more ethical blueprint for

⁹ A Doctor of Medicine (George Drysdale), *The Elements of Social Science* (London, 1882), pp. 262-3, quoted in Chris Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity: Havelock Ellis and the New Politics* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), p. 165.

¹⁰ Drysdale, *The Elements of Social Science*, p. 185, quoted in Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*, p. 164; Geddes and Thomson, ‘The Moral Evolution of Sex’, p. 75.

¹¹ The comment was made by Nicholson during a speech entitled ‘Historic Progress and Ideal Socialism’, given in 1894 to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford. See Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 237.

¹² Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 5 January 1895; Olive Schreiner to S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner, 8 May 1908, quoted in Ruth Livesey, *Socialism, Sex and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 3.

¹³ Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, p. 22.

sexual and social relations based not on money or convention but mutual honesty and respect. As Chris Nottingham has rightly asserted, the key word here was earnestness.¹⁴ Bella Pearce canvassed support for a national women's party amongst those who were beginning 'to think seriously and earnestly' about female emancipation, whilst her husband Charles was described by the socialist writer R. B. Cunninghame Graham as an 'honest, earnest, whole-souled, simple [man]'.¹⁵ In a similar vein, the socialist Edith Ellis related the following conversation in her fictional account of life in Fellowship House, a communal living experiment in London: "'Miss Merton" he said seriously, "you were in dead earnest the other night and I've been in dead earnest for months. As for Mr. Renton, he was in earnest I believe, before he was born."'"¹⁶ Such assertions of sincerity did little to assuage the fears of the conservative majority however. Whilst the borderlines of class were threatened by events such as the violent clashes of Bloody Sunday in November 1887 and the subsequent strikes by match girls and dockers, the borderlines of gender were rendered equally vulnerable by the twin peril of the masculine New Woman and effeminate decadent man. The novelist George Gissing predicted a period of imminent 'sexual anarchy', whilst *Punch*, a day after the beginning of the second trial of Oscar Wilde, published a now infamous piece of doggerel. According to 'Angry Old Buffer', 'When Adam delved and Eve span/ No one need ask which was the man', but the bicycling, footballing, New Woman had made him fear a future in which sex would be eradicated, unless he speculated, 'as end to all the pother,/ Each one in fact become the other.'¹⁷

This thesis explores the progressive opposition to conventional sexual morality, but shifts the focus to Scotland, a location not previously considered as a setting for the generational revolt of the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. It is a nation with a very distinctive religious and moral culture, and one that presented its progressives with a formidable challenge. Whilst the austerity and rigorous discipline associated with Scotland's Calvinistic heritage had undoubtedly been tempered by the 1890s and 1900s, the influence of Protestant values still permeated the public and private lives of the majority of Scots, in both urban and rural areas. As Callum Brown has argued persuasively, despite the constant anxieties voiced by nineteenth-century clergymen over the increasingly 'heathen' tendencies of the working classes, Thomas Chalmers referring to the 'deep and dense irreligion' which had 'stolen imperceptibly on the great bulk of our plebian families', secularization was neither an inevitable nor indeed a demonstrable consequence of industrialization

¹⁴ Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*, p. 97.

¹⁵ 'The Independent Labour Party In Camlachie', *Scotsman*, 28 August 1894, p. 6; Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 21 April 1894, p. 7.

¹⁶ Mrs. Havelock Ellis, *Attainment* (London, 1909), pp. 136-7, quoted in Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*, p. 98.

¹⁷ Letter from George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 2 June 1893. The full passage reads 'I am driven frantic by the crass imbecility of the typical woman. That type must disappear, or at all events become altogether subordinate. And I believe that the only way of effecting this is to go through a period of what many people will call sexual anarchy.' Arthur C. Young (ed.), *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz 1887-1903* (London: Constable, 1961), p. 171. *Punch*, 27 April 1895, p. 203.

and urbanization.¹⁸ Figures for religious adherence for the period 1880 to 1914 show no appreciable decline, with numbers peaking in 1905, when 50.5% of Scotland's population was affiliated to a church.¹⁹ Religious leaders continued to dominate public discourse on subjects including housing, temperance and sanitation, with many clergymen and kirk elders elected to the secular civic bodies formed to administrate the new welfare and educational reforms, such as the School Boards and Town Councils.²⁰ Furthermore, the oral testimonies of those who were children during the late-Victorian and Edwardian era consistently recall their early lives as being 'all religion', with repeated Church attendance on Sundays and weekday evenings and participation in organizations such as the Boys' Brigade and the Band of Hope structuring their social and spiritual lives.²¹

Concomitant with Scotland's entrenched and pervasive Presbyterian religiosity was the cultivation of a particular set of national characteristics, which included a marked and overt attachment to the notion of respectability, an intolerance for religious unorthodoxy, an emotional reserve or 'dourness' of manner and a prudishness over sex. For example, the biologist John Arthur Thomson, raised in the village of Saltoun in East Lothian, described himself as being 'born stiff', while the Scottish colourist John Duncan Ferguson wrote with frustration that 'Calvinism has produced a state of mind in Scotland that makes the Scots artist afraid to paint a nude and the Scots buyer afraid to hang one of his wall'.²² Edinburgh, a city renowned for its institutions of finance, law, medicine, journalism and education, was seen as a particular enclave of the rigid and righteous middle-class mentalité. One commentator in 1885 remarked that 'The city has a calm, steady character in keeping with the predominance of legal, educational, literary and artistic pursuits, from which it derives its chief maintenance, and contrasts boldly with the fluctuations, excitements and mercantile convulsions which produce so much vicissitude in manufacturing towns.'²³ Patrick Geddes railed against Edinburgh's 'dull prosperity' and 'soul-deep hypocrisy', whilst the London man of letters Israel Zangwill was similarly disdainful towards the 'frigid society of Edina', residents of a 'cold and stately' city, which sat 'on its height with something of the austere mournfulness of a ruined capital'.²⁴

¹⁸ Thomas Chalmers, *The Right Ecclesiastical Economy of a Large Town* (Edinburgh, 1835), p. 21, quoted in Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 5.

¹⁹ Brown, *Religion and Society*, pp. 62-4. See also Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2009).

²⁰ T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: 1700-2000* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 364-367.

²¹ Brown, *Religion and Society*, p. 149.

²² Letter John Arthur Thomson to Patrick Geddes, 10 August 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10555, fols. 48-9. Quoted in Sian Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh: Cultural Connections in the Bell Epoque* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 73.

²³ F. H. Groome (ed.), *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1885), p. 354, quoted in Richard Rodger, *The Transformation of Edinburgh: Land, Property and Trust in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 20.

²⁴ Patrick Geddes, 'The Scots Renaissance', *Evergreen* (Spring 1895), p. 133; Israel Zangwill, 'Without Prejudice', *Pall Mall Magazine*, 8:34 (February 1896), p.329.

The thesis examines in detail two married couples who in many ways sat uneasily in this culture, Bella and Charles Pearce in Glasgow, and Patrick and Anna Geddes in Edinburgh. Both were broadly-speaking feminists and socialists, committed in differing ways to what Holbrook Jackson, in his review of the 1890s, phrased as the ‘smashing up [of] the intellectual and moral furniture of their parents.’²⁵ Both were also at the heart of vibrant, progressive subcultures, experiencing the same collective sense of millennial hope and idealism characteristic of their London colleagues. Furthermore, both couples also conducted their challenge to the values of Scotland’s respectable society across several fronts, including alternative religion, politics, art, sociology and science. The plurality of late-Victorian progressivism was recognized at the time as one of its distinguishing features, in 1887 the naturalist W. H. Hudson referring disparagingly to the ‘ten thousand fungoid cults’ which had recently ‘sprung up and flourished exceedingly in the muddy marsh of man’s intellect’.²⁶ The specific anti-establishment causes often championed by progressives included vegetarianism, dress reform, hydropathy, occultism, theosophy and the anti-vivisection and anti-vaccination movements, as well as socialism and feminism. Yet as Terry Eagleton has noted, despite the seeming incongruity of such commitments, fin de siècle intellectuals were able to blend ‘belief systems with staggering nonchalance, blithely confident of some invisible omega point at which Baudelaire and Kropotkin consort harmoniously together and Emerson lies down with Engels’.²⁷

Bella and Charles Pearce were no exception. Committed disciples of John Ruskin, they were also ethical socialists, joining the Independent Labour Party in 1894, a year after its formation. Charles campaigned as a labour parliamentary candidate for the 1895 general election, whilst Bella was the editor of the first feminist column in a socialist newspaper, for four years writing the pioneering ‘Matrons and ‘Maidens’ column in Keir Hardie’s *Labour Leader*. However, the Pearces were also devout Christian spiritualists, following the teachings of a notorious American-based prophet and sexual mystic called Thomas Lake Harris. The founder of several utopian communities in New York State and California known collectively as the Brotherhood of the New Life, Harris preached a doctrine inspired by the philosophy of the Swedish seer Emanuel Swedenborg, which taught that religion needed to be ‘re-sexed’ and that the path to divine communion lay in an esoteric sexual experience called ‘conjugal marriage’. The Pearces therefore embody what Matthew Beaumont has referred to as the complex ‘elective affinities’ that existed between the seemingly contradictory ideologies of materialism and mysticism at the fin de siècle.²⁸ Conversely, Patrick and Anna Geddes, whilst also rejecting the orthodox Christianity of their parents, turned not to spiritualism

²⁵ Holbrook Jackson, *The 1890s: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Cresset, 1913, 1988), p. 154.

²⁶ W. H. Hudson, *A Crystal Age* (London, 1887), p. 265, quoted in Matthew Beaumont, ‘Socialism and Occultism at the Fin de Siècle: Elective Affinities’, in Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn (eds), *The Ashgate Companion to Nineteenth Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 173.

²⁷ Terry Eagleton, ‘The Flight to the Real’, in Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (eds), *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 12.

²⁸ Beaumont, ‘Socialism and Occultism at the Fin de Siècle’, pp. 165-180.

but to the positivist ‘religion of humanity’ of August Comte, subscribing to its simple moral code of ‘living for others’. In a similar way to Bella and Charles, they were moved to respond to the endemic social deprivation they witnessed in Scotland, instigating a large-scale programme of slum regeneration in their home town of Edinburgh. However, they resisted joining a national socialist organization, preferring practical action to political rhetoric and living by the motto of *Vivendo Discimus*, or ‘by living we learn’. A natural scientist by training, Patrick Geddes was also the co-author of one of the period’s most influential books on sex. His 1889 *Evolution of Sex* informed popular attitudes on the biological origins of sexual differentiation for at least two decades, as well as influencing the work of feminists Jane Addams, Frances Swiney and Eliza Burt Gamble.

The nuanced understanding of sexual progressivism in Britain between 1880 and 1914 that is prompted by a detailed study of these two couples, constitutes an important revision to the current historiography. Firstly, it challenges the view that during this period, London alone provided the setting for the anti-Victorian revolt. Judith Walkowitz, in her brilliant postmodern reading of the overlapping ‘narratives of sexual danger’ circulating during the 1880s, focused resolutely on London as the stage for the ‘cultural contests over sexuality and gender’ engaged in by her ‘wide panorama of social actors’, including the members of the Men and Women’s Club.²⁹ Similarly, Chris Nottingham, in his excellent study of the life and times of sexologist Havelock Ellis, emphasized the critical role played by London in the formation of fin de siècle metropolitan progressive culture; as a central meeting point, a source of cheap lodgings and a place of reinvention, where ‘one could join the “New Age” and avoid the eyes of those who might deride a newly assumed identity’ and where ‘a provincial girl, could, literally, become a “New Woman”’.³⁰ The provinces feature only as places from which the progressive intellectual elite escaped or else as receptive markets for their ideas. In addition, the vast majority of the protagonists in Ruth Brandon’s group biography of late-Victorian intellectuals and their sexual relationships, *The New Women and the Old Men*, are English, with many adopting London as their primary base, whilst the studies on the fin de siècle written from a literary studies’ perspective tend also to place London centre stage.³¹ Elaine Showalter’s account of the anxieties caused by fin de siècle ‘border crossings’ is based largely on individuals, scandals, court cases, social surveys, clubs and journals located in London, whilst England’s capital city is similarly the only metropolis considered in Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst’s anthology for the period.³² Finally, with the exception perhaps of Lesley Hall’s *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880*, the broader historical surveys of changing sexual attitudes and practices during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reference

²⁹ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 5.

³⁰ Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*, p. 102.

³¹ Ruth Brandon, *The New Women and the Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question* (London: Papermac, 1990).

³² Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990); Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Scotland only briefly, with Frank Mort's study of the medico-moral regulation of sex since 1830 and Michael Mason's reinterpretation of Victorian sexual culture focused exclusively on the English context.³³

Yet as this study illustrates, cities outside of London were the sites of important, independent and distinctive progressive subcultures, significant 'constellations', to use Beaumont's words, in the wider 'cosmos' of late-Victorian counterculture.³⁴ Whilst they were undoubtedly connected to London through friendship networks, as well as employment and organizational ties, they were also rooted firmly in their home cities, the products of a particular confluence of personalities, ideological traditions and geographical space. The sexual discourses they produced therefore often reflected local as well as national and international perspectives, and an understanding of them is vital to a full appreciation of the complexities of British sexual attitudes and behaviours during this period.

Secondly, the detailed study this thesis provides of the Christian mysticism of Charles and Bella Pearce reveals for the first time the interconnections between ethical socialism, feminism and the American organization they were members of, the Brotherhood of the New Life. Historians such as Stephen Yeo, Logie Barrow and Matthew Beaumont have considerably furthered our understanding of the relationship between the British labour movement and non-conformist Christianity, spiritualism and occultism.³⁵ Similarly, relations between feminism and the various branches of the late-Victorian 'mystical revival' have been pursued to great effect in full-length studies by Alex Owen, Joy Dixon and Diana Basham.³⁶ However, the particular sexual mysticism espoused by the Brotherhood and the attraction it held for turn of the century British feminists and socialists has been almost wholly neglected. Clearly, Thomas Lake Harris, based in America, did not loom as large in the progressive consciousness as did the theatrical personage of theosophy's Madam Blavatsky, described memorably by W. H. G. Armytage as 'the gross blue-eyed carnivore among the vegetarian lambs of early socialism'.³⁷ However, by the mid 1890s Harris was undoubtedly a well-known if somewhat notorious figure within radical networks, due in part to the

³³ Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1800*, second edition (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, 2013); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, third edition (Longman, 1981; Edinburgh: Pearson, 1989, 2012); Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral Politics in England since 1830*, second edition (London: Routledge, 1987, 2000); Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

³⁴ Beaumont, 'Socialism and Occultism at the Fin de Siècle', p. 170.

³⁵ Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896', *History Workshop Journal*, 4 (1977), pp. 5-56; Logie Barrow, 'Socialism in Eternity: The Ideology of Plebeian Spiritualists, 1853-1913', *History Workshop Journal*, 9:1 (1980), pp. 37-69; Beaumont, 'Socialism and Occultism at the Fin de Siècle'.

³⁶ Diana Basham, *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989) and *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004).

³⁷ W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England, 1560-1960* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 308.

reports of sexual irregularities coming from his Californian community, as well as the defection of his most high-profile disciple, the writer and diplomatist Laurence Oliphant. His neglect in the historical literature cannot therefore be attributed solely to his relative obscurity, but is instead indicative of the fact that the majority of his British disciples were located in Glasgow, outside of elite progressive circles in London, again emphasizing the importance of a Scottish perspective.

Thirdly, the focus on the discursive context for Geddes and Thomson's *Evolution of Sex* offers a substantial revision of earlier, feminist accounts of Geddes as an 'antifeminist biologist'.³⁸

According to the foundational studies of Victorian 'sexual science' by Cynthia Eagle Russett and Susan Sleeth Mosedale, Geddes was one amongst many male scientists who responded to the patriarchal threat of the women's movement by providing scientific rationales intended to demonstrate the innate inferiority of women.³⁹ More specifically, Eagle Russett asserted that works such as *The Evolution of Sex* were an attempt by male scientists, in the light of evolutionary knowledge, to reinstate a reassuring hierarchy, women and savages acting as 'buffers' to protect Victorian gentlemen from 'a too-threatening intimacy with the brutes'.⁴⁰ However, this study builds on work on the scientific discourse of sex by historians including Angelique Richardson, Lesley Hall, Lucy Bland and Chris Nottingham, in situating Geddes's work more precisely within the complex, contradictory and overlapping representations of sexuality within late-Victorian thought.⁴¹ It emphasizes, for example, that the notion of sexual essentialism was by no means an anti-feminist one, but was instead broadly accepted by both eugenic and social purity feminists. Furthermore, taking its lead from Hall's critique of previous historiography as depicting sexology on purely patrilineal lines, it seeks to demonstrate the ways in which Geddes's theories were in dialogue with feminist discourses on sex. It reveals the influence on his thinking of the women in his progressive network in Edinburgh, as well as the attractiveness of his ideas on sexual complementarity, female-coded altruism and birth control to several prominent feminists both in Britain and America.

Finally, in its detailed portrait of two feminist and sexually unconventional subcultures, the thesis aims to make a significant contribution to the historiography on Victorian Scotland, within which a consideration of sexual discourse and behaviour is still a relative rarity. The regulation of working-class female sexuality in the nineteenth century has been explored by Linda Mahood and Louise Settle in their work on prostitution, Tim Siddon on infanticide, Andrew Blaikie on illegitimacy and

³⁸ Susan Sleeth Mosedale, 'Science Corrupted: Victorian Biologists Consider "The Woman Question"', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 11:1 (1978), p. 4.

³⁹ Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); Sleeth Mosedale, 'Science Corrupted'.

⁴⁰ Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science*, pp. 14, 201, 206.

⁴¹ Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Lesley A. Hall, 'Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity and Sexual Science in late Nineteenth-century Britain', *Gender and History*, 16:1 (2004), pp. 36-56; Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Penguin, 1995; Tauris Parke, 2002); Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*.

my earlier work on music halls, whilst the complex reality of courtship, marriage and marital breakdown in the working-classes from the middle of the nineteenth century until after the Second World War is currently under investigation by Eleanor Gordon, Annmarie Hughes and Rosemary Elliot.⁴² However, whilst a fascinating snapshot of middle-class, mid-Victorian sexual attitudes and behaviour has been provided by Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair's account of the life of Madeline Smith, who was tried in 1857 for poisoning her secret lover, indications of prevailing codes of sexual morality for the later period are rare. Indeed, they can often be found only within wider studies of Scottish women, such as Jude Burkhauser and Janice Helland's work on fin de siècle female artists and Siân Reynolds' comparison of the Parisian and Edinburgh New Woman.⁴³ Similarly, whilst earlier histories have explored the ways in which sexuality has been implicated in questions of national identity, the account provided here of Geddes's vision of a neo-romantic 'Celtic renaissance' as an antidote to London decadence is the first Victorian example of the invocation of a Scots nationalistic moral and sexual character.⁴⁴ Whilst homosexuality is only very briefly alluded to in this thesis, the Geddes papers providing only intimations of the existence of a language in which men were able to speak of same-sex desire, situating even these findings within the wider Scottish context is problematic, due to the paucity of research in this area. Whilst Brian Dempsey's work on nineteenth-century sodomy accusations is illuminating, it is limited in scope,

⁴² Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990); Louise Settle, 'Policing the "Social Evil": Prostitution in Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1892-1939' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012); Tim Siddons, 'Suspected new-born child murder and concealment of pregnancy in Scotland, c. 1812-1930' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, ongoing); Andrew Blaikie and P. Gray, 'Archives of abuse and discontent? Presbyterianism and Sexual Behavior During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' in Liam Kennedy and Robert Morris (eds), *Order and Disorder: Scotland & Ireland, 1600-2001* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005), pp. 61-84; Andrew Blaikie, E. Garrett and R. Davies, 'Migration, Living Strategies and Illegitimate Childbearing: a Comparison of Two Scottish Settings, 1871-1881' in A. Levene, S. Williams and T. Nutt (eds), *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920* (London, 2005), pp. 141-67. Eleanor Gordon, Annmarie Hughes and Rosemarie Elliot, 'A History of Working-Class Marriage, 1855-1976', AHRC-funded research project, University of Glasgow.

⁴³ Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Murder and Morality in Victorian Britain: The Study of Madeleine Smith* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Jude Burkhauser (ed.), *The Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880-1920* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1990); Janice Helland, 'Francis Macdonald: The Self as Fin de Siècle Woman', *Woman's Art Journal*, 14: 1 (1993), pp. 15-22 and *The Studios of Frances and Margaret Macdonald* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Siân Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh: Cultural Connections in the Belle Epoque* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

⁴⁴ For the Enlightenment context, for example, several historians have highlighted how ideals of sexual self-control were promoted amongst elite men as a signifier of the 'civilized' Scottish nation. Yet the only study which explores the intersection between sexuality and nationality in the nineteenth century is Geraldine Friedman's account of an 1811 court case concerning improper relations between two Edinburgh school-mistresses. Friedman argues persuasively that during the trial, the judges successfully preserved an ideal of chaste Scottish womanhood by situating female sexual agency in the Empire, embodied in the mixed race Anglo-Indian pupil who witnessed the alleged sexual activity. Geraldine Friedman, 'School for Scandal: Sexuality, Race and National Vice and Virtue in *Miss Marianne Woods and Miss Jane Pirie Against Lady Helen Cumming Gordon*', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 27:1 (2005), pp. 53-76; Rosalind Carr, 'Gender, National Identity and Political Agency in Eighteenth Century Scotland' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2008); Katie Barclay, 'Sex and the Scottish Self in the Long-Eighteenth Century', in J. Campbell, E. Ewan and H. Parker (eds), *Shaping Scottish Identity: Family, Nation and the World Beyond* (Guelph: University of Guelph, 2011); Norah Smith, 'Sexual Mores and Attitudes in Enlightenment Scotland', in Paul-Gabriel Boucé (ed.), *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982).

and Jeff Meek's more extensive work on homosexual culture in Scotland is focused on the later period of 1940 to 1980.⁴⁵

Less problematic has been situating the thesis within the historiography on late-Victorian Scottish gender. Until relatively recently, the emphasis of the research on women's political engagement in Scotland had been firmly on Edwardian suffrage militancy, with Leah Leneman's book, *A Guid Cause*, the only detailed analysis of the women's movement during this period.⁴⁶ This account has since been supplemented by Elizabeth Crawford's useful survey of suffrage individuals, organizations and campaigns in Scotland.⁴⁷ However, the accumulation of a number of studies on different aspects of female political activism during the Victorian and Edwardian periods has subsequently allowed for a more nuanced and detailed picture to emerge, one which makes apparent the extent and diversity of women's public roles. The work of Jane McDermid, Megan Smitley and Lesley Orr Macdonald on female participation in school boards, temperance campaigns, Liberal politics and Presbyterianism have revealed how such women used notions of Christian duty and civic maternalism to legitimate their involvement in philanthropic, religious, reforming and local governmental bodies.⁴⁸ For the working-class context, Eleanor Gordon's account of women's informal workplace resistances has countered previous assumptions regarding their lack of involvement in female trade union participation, whilst research by Lindy Moore, Sheila Hamilton, Wendy Alexander and others has helped plot the details of the Scottish campaigns to secure female access to higher education and medical training.⁴⁹ Finally, essay collections and anthologies edited by Douglas Gifford, Dorothy Macmillan, Catherine Kerrigan and Moira Burgess on Scottish women writers and poets have uncovered hitherto unconsidered feminist female

⁴⁵ Brian Dempsey, "'By the Law of This and Every Other Well Governed Realm": Investigating Accusations of Sodomy in Nineteenth-century Scotland', *Judicial Review* (2006), pp. 103-13; Jeff Meeks, 'Gay and Bisexual men, self-perception and identity in Scotland, 1940 to 1980', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2011).

⁴⁶ Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1995) and *The Scottish Suffragettes* (Edinburgh: NMS Publishing Ltd, 2000). See also Elspeth King, 'The Scottish Women's Suffrage Movement', in Eleanor Gordon and Esther Breitenbach (eds), *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society 1800-1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 121-150.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Crawford, 'Scotland', in *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland. A Regional Survey* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 225-251.

⁴⁸ Jane McDermid, 'School Board Women and Active Citizenship in Scotland, 1873-1919', *History of Education*, 38 (May 2009), pp. 333-347; Megan Smitley, *The Feminine Public Sphere: Middle-class Women and Civic Life in Scotland, c. 1870-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Lesley A. Orr Macdonald, *A Unique and Glorious Mission: Women and Presbyterianism in Scotland, 1830-1930* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2000).

⁴⁹ Eleanor Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland, 1850-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Lindy Moore, *Bajanellas and Semilinas: Aberdeen University and the Education of Women 1860-1920* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press: 1991); Sheila Hamilton, 'The First Generation of University Women, 1869-1930', in Gordon Donaldson (ed.), *Four Centuries: Edinburgh University life 1583-1983* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), pp. 99-115 and 'Women and the Scottish Universities, c. 1869-1939, a Social History' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1987); Elaine Thomson, 'Women in Medicine in Late Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Edinburgh' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1998); Wendy Alexander, 'Early Glasgow Women Medical Graduates', in Eleanor Gordon and Esther Breitenbach (eds.), *The World is Ill-Divided: Women's Work in Scotland in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

Scottish voices.⁵⁰ This study aims to build on this vibrant historiographical field, in particular in its analysis of the challenges faced by feminist women operating within socialist cultures in Glasgow in the 1890s.

Underpinning the thesis is a critical engagement with the methodologies of both gender history and the history of sexuality. More particularly, it draws on the productive conversations of both disciplines with post-structuralism, traced in Joan Scott's seminal 1986 essay on gender as a category of historical analysis and Michel Foucault's similarly influential 1977 text on the history of sexuality, in which he repudiated the Victorian repressive hypothesis.⁵¹ The large number of detailed studies that have been undertaken in the intervening three to four decades on wide-ranging aspects of nineteenth-century sexual attitudes and behaviours have resulted in a comprehensive re-evaluation of Victorian sexuality. We now understand fully the extent of the historical and cultural contingency of sex; that 'almost everything one wants to say about sex' has already been 'deeply marked by the power politics of gender' and that biological sexuality is only 'a precondition, a set of potentialities, which is never unmediated by human reality'.⁵²

Yet whilst remaining mindful of the determining power of the discursive field in framing our understanding of our bodies and their desires, I have tried to complement this awareness with a sensitivity towards individual human agency. Whilst my historical subjects were clearly 'bound imaginatively by a limited cultural repertoire', this did not negate their ability to choose, modify or indeed reject particular strategies from that repertoire.⁵³ As Michael Roper has cautioned, subjectivity should not be understood 'as wholly composed by ideological formations – competing, contradictory, or otherwise – but as a matter of personality formed through lived experience and the emotional responses to those experiences'.⁵⁴ Although not embracing the psycho-analytic approach to history that Roper favours, the biographical style of the chapters and the reliance on life writing by the protagonists permits a consideration not only of the ways in which progressive individuals used gendered and sexual discourse in the creation of their own identities, but in turn, how their emotional, intimate and sexual lives exerted a profound effect on the discourses they then created, recorded in the pages of popular science books, socialist newspapers and arts and crafts journals. As the poet, literary critic and homosexual theorist John Addington Symonds wrote in

⁵⁰ Douglas Gifford and Dorothy Macmillan (eds), *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); Catherine Kerrigan (eds), *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991); Dorothy Macmillan and M. Byrne (eds), *Modern Scottish Women Poets* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003); Moira Burgess, *The Other Voice: Scottish Women's Writing Since 1808: An Anthology* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987).

⁵¹ Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), pp. 1053-1075; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1976).

⁵² Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (London: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 10-11; Martha Vicinus, 'Sexuality and Power: A Review of Current Work in the History of Sexuality', *Feminist Studies*, 8:1 (Spring 1982), p. 139.

⁵³ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ Michael Roper, 'Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (2005), p. 65.

1889, ‘We are, all of us, composite beings, made up, heaven knows how, out of the compromises we have effected between our impulses and our instincts and the social laws which gird us around.’⁵⁵ It is part of our job as historians, I believe, to try and unpick this elusive dynamic.

The first chapter of the thesis is concerned with plotting the political and social lives of two of the late-Victorian period’s most fascinating and hitherto lesser-known ‘composite beings’, Bella and Charles Pearce. It begins with an account of their introduction to progressivism through the Ruskin Society, before detailing their years promoting and enjoying the fraternal sociability of ethical socialism within Independent Labour Party (ILP) circles in Glasgow. A detailed analysis of the sexual politics of Bella’s women’s column in the *Labour Leader* reveals the significant tensions within early socialism between those who prioritized the overthrow of capitalism and those who felt patriarchy should be tackled simultaneously. It is followed by an assessment of the circumstances that led ultimately to the couple’s disillusionment with socialist politics, the Pearces leaving the ILP in 1898 after just four years as active campaigners. An overview of Bella’s subsequent involvement in the Women’s Social and Political Union and her attitude towards suffragette militancy is followed by a tentative impression of how the Pearces’ gender politics may have played out in their intimate lives.

The Pearces’ narrative is continued in the second chapter, which explores their unconventional religious lives. As well as prominent Glasgow ethical socialists and feminists, throughout the 1890s and 1900s both Bella and Charles were also committed disciples of the American Christian mystical organization, the Brotherhood of the New Life. As the Brotherhood has featured very little in the historiography of British progressivism, the chapter contains a lengthy yet important digression from the Scottish context, to describe in some detail the organization’s sexual and social philosophy, which had its origins in the experimentations with communal living conducted in America during the 1850s and 60s. The ‘theo-socialism’ of its leader Thomas Lake Harris is compared to the ethical socialism of the ILP, before an attempt is made to unravel Harris’s highly esoteric ideas on sex, asking to what extent they existed purely in the spiritual realm or whether they encompassed transgressive sexual behaviours. This is pertinent because the Pearces were key protagonists within a British network of Brotherhood disciples. Not only did they run a business importing Brotherhood wine and publishing Harris’s poetry, they also disseminated some of their faith’s sexual ideas in their socialist and feminist journalism.

In the third and final chapter, the focus of the thesis moves fifty miles east, to portray the progressive subculture around the charismatic figure of Patrick Geddes in Edinburgh. A natural scientist by training, Geddes was also an intellectual maverick, a late-Victorian progressive caught up in the age’s enthusiasm for tackling both the Social Question and the Sex Question. As such, in

⁵⁵ John Addington Symonds, *Memoirs*, ed. by Phyllis Grosskurth (1889; London: Hutchison, 1984).

addition to his biological research and teaching, he spearheaded a myriad of social, artistic and civic schemes in Edinburgh, in the process gathering around him a network of feminists, artists, writers, scientists and social reformers. The first half of the chapter deals with his personal evolution as an 'ethical scientist' committed to using his knowledge to ameliorate the social problems caused by Victorian industrialization and urbanization. It details the nature of his relationship with his wife Anna, as well as with the members of his bohemian subculture in Edinburgh, seeking to ascertain the extent of their influence on his theories on sex. The second half is concerned with a revised analysis of Geddes's 1889 book *The Evolution of Sex* and its later, companion essay, the 1896 'Moral Evolution of Sex'. I argue that whilst Geddes's texts contain confused and often contradictory attitudes towards both women's rights and sexuality, they were nonetheless intended as significant contributions to progressive sexual and gendered discourses, and were received as such by contemporary feminists.

Seekers of the 'New Life'

Introduction

In January 1894, thirty-four year old Bella Pearce sat in a packed hall in Glasgow and listened for the first time to a speech by James Keir Hardie, the founding chairman of the Independent Labour Party. The party had formed exactly one year previously, at their inaugural conference in Bradford the 120 delegates agreeing that their principal objective should be to secure the collective and communal ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Hardie started his address at the Accountants' Hall on Glasgow's West Nile Street by enumerating the various material benefits that would accrue from such a change in governance. He then went on, however, to issue a warning. Without a corresponding moral transformation within the people themselves, there was a real danger that this change would do more harm than good. Purely economic measures could never hope to precipitate the ultimate goals of socialism, which according to Hardie were no less than the salvation of humanity and the establishment of 'peace on earth and goodwill to all men'.¹ These could only be realized through interior means: love for one's brother and a renewed ethic of altruism. Bella was an immediate convert to the cause:

I left that meeting ready and willing to join in the work, feeling there was hope for a movement whose leaders had their eyes open to the truth that state Socialism *alone* is powerless to overcome the evils which manifest themselves among us, that without the growth of the spirit of human brotherhood within each one of us personally we cannot even attain the outward ends we seek, or having attained, enjoy them.²

Numerous similar accounts of the moment of 'becoming a socialist' can be found in the pages of labour newspapers, socialist memoirs, and fictional renderings of the period. As Stephen Yeo has shown, their resemblance to narratives of religious conversion is not incidental, but indicative of the religious character of the emergent phase of late-Victorian socialism.³ The movement of the 1880s and 90s was imbued with an intense idealism and millenarian utopianism, specifying as its ultimate aim a paradisaical 'new life' indistinguishable from Christianity's promised land or the Second Coming of Christ. Remembered nostalgically as a time of untrammelled optimism, it was a moment in which, according to Ruth Livesey, men and women were offered the chance of 'sensing and living through another historical rhythm, the spectre of a future utopian transformation.'⁴ Those contemporaries more skeptical that the mechanics of socialism's imminent new dawn could be conveyed during the course of an evening meeting at a Co-operative Society hall, were nonetheless impressed by its sheer dynamism, the Fabian Sidney Webb conceding that the

¹ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 23 November 1895, p. 2.

² Ibid.; Lily Bell, 'Woman and Socialism. A Reply to Miss Bondfield', *Forward*, 9 February 1907, p. 3.

³ Yeo, 'A New Life', pp. 5-56.

⁴ Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain*, p. 47.

movement might hold the momentum to ‘carry us forward more rapidly than any politician foresees.’⁵

Individual motivations for joining the socialist crusade were complex and varied, and encompassed ‘poverty, religious eclecticism, unresolved guilt, domestic unhappiness, unfocussed indignation, scattered activity, wealthy aimlessness, or social unease.’⁶ What exactly propelled Bella Pearce and her husband Charles to seek out and embrace Hardie’s message of fraternal altruism shall be explored in more detail in the following pages. However, at its core was the hope that socialism’s promise of a new ethical blueprint for humanity would also encompass a transformation in relations between the sexes. Alongside the implementation of a selfless and benevolent fellowship between all their comrades, both Bella and Charles sought a reconceptualisation of the everyday and intimate heterosexual interactions of men and women, based on an acceptance of female equality and the recognition of women’s essential role in the formation of the ‘good time to which we all look forward’.⁷ For the Pearces, socialism in its fullest sense meant ‘the liberation of the feminine element in humanity, which, so far, has been held in bondage, and thus prevented from entering into the external life of society.’⁸ Reforms to achieve this feminine liberation therefore took precedence over all other personal and structural changes envisaged by ‘new life’ socialism and they spent their lives working for their enactment.

Their story is one that has until now gone largely untold. Helen Lintell’s 1990 masters’ dissertation constitutes the sole piece of scholarship focused exclusively on Bella Pearce. Whilst it provides a thoughtful examination of the sexual politics in her women’s column in the *Labour Leader*, by necessity its parameters are closely delineated, and the omission of any discussion of Bella’s religiosity occludes the consideration of an important dimension in her journalism.⁹ Incisive comment on Bella’s column can also be found in the extensive scholarship of June Hannam, Karen Hunt and Laura Ugolini on women in the ILP and Social Democratic Federation (SDF).¹⁰ This has been invaluable in placing Bella’s feminism within the wider context of the early labour

⁵ Quoted in Yeo, ‘A New Life’, p. 8.

⁶ Yeo, ‘A New Life’, p. 10.

⁷ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 21 April 1894, p. 7.

⁸ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 8 February 1896, p. 45.

⁹ Helen Lintell, ‘Lily Bell: Socialist and Feminist, 1894-8’ (unpublished masters dissertation, Bristol Polytechnic, March 1990).

¹⁰ June Hannam, “‘In the Comradeship of the Sexes Lies the Hope of Progress and Social Regeneration’: Women in the West Riding ILP, c. 1890-1914”, in Jane Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different: Women’s Politics, 1800-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 214-238; *Isabella Ford, 1855-1924* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); ‘Women and the ILP’, in David James, Tony Jowitt and Keith Laybourn (eds), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party* (Halifax: Ryburn, 1992), pp. 205-228; (with Karen Hunt) ‘Propagandising as Socialist Women’, in Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton (eds), *Propaganda: Political Rhetoric and Systems of Belief* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999); (with Karen Hunt) *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002). Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question, 1884-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Laura Ugolini, “‘It Is Only Justice to Grant Women’s Suffrage’: Independent Labour Party Men and Women’s Suffrage 1893-1905”, in Claire Eustance, Joan Ryan and Laura Ugolini (eds), *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), pp. 126-144.

movement. It has also helped to some degree to counter the confusion caused by the doubts raised over 'Lily Bell's' identity by Kenneth Morgan, Carolyn Steedman and others who have asserted that her 'Matrons and Maidens' column was periodically authored by Keir Hardie, an assumption this chapter, citing new evidence, categorically refutes.

This relative neglect in the historiography is by no means indicative of the extent of Bella and Charles Pearce's contribution to the 1890s and 1900s socialist and women's rights movements. Both contributed in multifarious ways to the local and national administration of key organizations, such as the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). It was Bella who, in 1895, was responsible for ensuring that female enfranchisement was included in the ILP's constitution. In addition, in the four years between 1894 and 1898 her 'Matrons and Maidens' column communicated the key issues and events animating contemporary feminists at a formative point in socialism's development, whilst also providing a vital forum for women attempting to work within what Livesey has described as the 'manly aesthetic' of the late-nineteenth century labour movement.¹¹

The initial objective of the following chapter therefore, is to provide a detailed biographical overview of the Pearces' lives, endeavoring to reinstate fully two intriguing and important Scottish sexual progressives to the historiography and to evoke the day-to-day texture of two lives lived in the heart of Glasgow's late-Victorian counterculture. Woven into this account, is an analysis of their considerable journalistic output, situating their particular formulation of sexual politics within the overlapping and often conflicting narratives of socialist and feminist discourse regarding sex, marriage, prostitution and the 'woman question'. The chapter begins by plotting the events of their childhood and adulthood prior to their marriage, focusing on the particular circumstances that contributed to the formation of their respective political consciousnesses, both as feminists and socialists. After an examination of their formal introduction to progressivism, what Charles called the 'forward movement', through their involvement in the Glasgow Ruskin Society, it continues with a portrait of the Pearces as a couple immersed in the subculture of early socialism in Glasgow, detailing their varied contributions to the administrative, political and financial running of the ILP during the 1890s.¹² There then follows an analysis of Bella's most significant contribution to socialist politics at a national level, her women's column in the *Labour Leader*, looking specifically at her critique of the sexual double standard and arguing that her gendered analysis of sexual exploitation ran contrary to Keir Hardie's class-driven interpretation of prostitution, a reflection of the uneasy alliance between socialism and feminism during the 1890s. An assessment of how her column was received by her readership is used as an opportunity to comment on the ambiguous relationship between the ILP and its female members during 1890s. Finally, the chapter charts Bella's transference of allegiance to the women's militant suffrage movement during the

¹¹ Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism*, p. 12.

¹² Tricotrin, 'Chats with I. L. P. Candidates', *Labour Leader*, 27 April 1895, p. 7.

1900s, exploring what prompted her defection, before ending with a tentative assessment of the extent to which the Pearces may have realized their feminist sexual politics in their intimate lives.

Earliest Recollections

Born on 5 May 1859, Bella Duncan was the third of four children of John Thomson Duncan and Margaret Fraser from Douglas in Lanarkshire, a small, coal-mining village fifty miles south of Glasgow.¹³ By the time Bella was a small child, the family had settled in Laurieston, a prosperous, newly-built district of Glasgow just south of the River Clyde, with wide streets and Georgian-style tenement blocks, designed to attract members of the city's expanding, professional middle classes. In the census, her father's occupation is listed as a book-keeper in a wholesale warehouse, a relatively low status white-collar occupation.¹⁴ Yet this description was either deceptive or the family had an additional source of income. Their flat at 34 Abbotsford Place was spacious and well-appointed, boasting three public rooms, three bedrooms and its own internal wc.¹⁵ The family had sufficient money to enable Bella's mother to remain at home, a domestic servant to be employed and all four children to attend school.¹⁶ Furthermore, in 1864 Bella's father purchased land on the Rosneath Peninsula, where he built a substantial villa named 'Lucerne' as a summer retreat for the family, a house described by one visitor as 'The most beautiful home I ever saw commanding a magnificent view of Loch Long and other waters'.¹⁷ Back in Glasgow however, the rapid industrialization of the neighbouring district of Tradeston was gradually eroding the genteel charm of their Laurieston suburb, the smoke and fumes of its factories and railways carried in on the prevailing westerly winds. By the time Bella was in her twenties, her family had joined the exodus of middle-class households removing to more salubrious quarters in the suburbs of the South Side and West End of the city, their vacant homes filled by a largely working class and immigrant population.¹⁸ Relocating just one mile south, the Duncans took up residence at 'Laurentine Villa', a somewhat grand appellation for what was another tenement flat, albeit a large one within a handsome crescent overlooking the lawns and terraces of Queen's Park.¹⁹

¹³ Although christened Isabella, she signed her personal letters 'Bella'. This is therefore how I refer to her throughout.

¹⁴ 1851-1861 Scotland Census. By 1871 John Thomson Duncan is listed as an accountant and by 1891 as a chartered accountant.

¹⁵ A drawing of the upper floor plan of 1-45 Abbotsford Place, Glasgow is available on Scran, <<http://www.scran.ac.uk/database/record.php?usi=000-000-197-902-C&scache=2se0y6fzlt&searchdb=scran>> [accessed 18 September 2013].

¹⁶ 1851 to 1901 Scotland Census; Isabella Duncan's birth certificate, 5 May 1859.

¹⁷ 1871 Scotland Census; diary of Jane Lee Waring Harris, 19 August 1903, Thomas Lake Harris Papers, Columbia University, reel 13, section 314. (Hereafter referenced TLH Papers reel/ section). I am indebted to Maureen Purdie, current owner of 'Lucerne', for generously providing me with information relating to the deeds of Lucerne.

¹⁸ Eric Eunson, *The Gorbals: An Illustrated History* (Catrine: Richard Stenlake Publishing, 1996), p. 17.

¹⁹ Ian Marshall and Ronald Smith, *Queen's Park Historical Guide and Heritage Walk* (Glasgow: Glasgow City Council, 1997), p. 16.



Figure 1.1. Abbotsford Place, Laurieston



Figure 1.2 'Laurentine Villa', Queen's Park



Figure 1.3 'Lucerne', the Duncans' summer house

In gendered terms, Bella's upbringing appears to have been typical of a mid-Victorian, middle-class family, with different roles assigned and futures plotted for herself and her sister, in comparison to her two brothers. Her earliest recollections were of the resentment and anger she felt over the 'unfair and wholly unjust discrimination made between boys and girls'.²⁰ Clearly precocious in her ability to think independently, she refused from an early age to recognize such 'arbitrary differences', instead 'claiming and taking equal liberty' for herself and in doing so, becoming the subject of disapproval and ridicule. As a child, she laid the blame for society's differing attitudes towards men and women squarely at God's door, making an early connection between her nascent feminism and her religious faith:-

In my childish ignorance, I blamed an unjust God for the infliction, foolishly fancying that to His unjust preference for the male human I owed my inferior status in life! And with all my heart and soul I repudiated the possibility of allegiance to any such Deity.²¹

On reaching adulthood, like many disaffected women of her generation, her first political affiliation was to the Liberal Party, joining the Scottish Women's Liberal Federation on its formation in 1891

²⁰ Lily Bell, 'The Women's Fight for Freedom', *Forward*, 17 November 1906, p. 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*

when aged thirty-one. According to Megan Smitley, this Scottish body believed itself to be uniquely resolute in its support of female enfranchisement, in contrast to its sister federation in England, enshrining its pro-suffrage convictions in a constitution which heralded its objectives as securing ‘just and equal legislation and representation for women’ and removing ‘all legal disabilities on account of sex’.²² Despite this, Bella became quickly disillusioned with the actions of male Liberal politicians, whom she described as ‘always ready to come and make their pretty little speeches at our meetings’ and ‘only too glad to get all the help we were willing to give them’ but who were ‘by no means desirous of going further in the matter’.²³ She appears to have relinquished the ‘last vestiges’ of her allegiance to the Liberal leader William Gladstone just one year later in 1892, after he blocked a bill to extend the franchise to unmarried women over a concern that possessing the vote might cause them ‘unwittingly to trespass upon the delicacy, the purity, the refinement, the elevation of [their] own nature, which are the present sources of its power.’²⁴

Whilst Bella’s passionately felt sense of injustice over women’s inferior status in society positioned her at odds with her family’s more conservative attitudes, what they did share was an interest in social reform and progressive politics. Bella, her father John Thomson Duncan, her eldest brother Thomas Watson Duncan and his wife Eliza, were all members of the Ruskin Society of Glasgow, which met fortnightly from October to April in ‘quiet gatherings’ in rooms and halls in the city centre.²⁵ Initially a writer on contemporary art, John Ruskin had developed his controversial critique of free-market capitalism in the 1850s and 60s, believing the root cause of the chronic social problems endemic to industrialized Britain to be a utilitarian political economy which had resolutely failed to incorporate social, moral and aesthetic considerations. In its stead, Ruskin proposed a communitarian politics that placed the well-being of citizens above what he called ‘the first great English game’ of making money, and individual job satisfaction over efficiency in the manufacturing process.²⁶ His philosophy was encapsulated in a now celebrated passage, in which he declared ‘THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE’ and that the ‘country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings’.²⁷

In the relatively prosperous middle decades of the century, the response to Ruskin’s idealistic vision of an ethically-driven economy ranged from bafflement to derision, the articles later

²² Scottish Women’s Liberal Federation, *Minutes*, 1891, quoted in Smitley, *The Feminine Public Sphere*, p. 110.

²³ Lily Bell, ‘Maidens and Matrons’, *Labour Leader*, 19 May 1894, p. 10.

²⁴ Letter from William Gladstone to Samuel Smith, MP, 11 April 1892, in Susan Groag Bell & Karen M. Offen (eds), *Women, The Family and Freedom: The Debate in Documents, Vol. 2. 1880-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), pp. 221-225.

²⁵ Printed article, ‘A Ruskin Meeting. (By a Lady Representative.)’, in ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Minute Book 1891-9’, Papers of the Ruskin Society of Glasgow, University of Glasgow Special Collections. MS Gen 1093, fol. 2. (Hereafter referenced RSG Papers, MS/folio).

²⁶ Quoted in Stuart Eagles, *After Ruskin: The Social and Political Legacies of a Victorian Prophet, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 30.

²⁷ From *Unto This Last*, quoted in Eagles, *After Ruskin*, pp. 27.

published in book form as *Unto This Last* causing an outcry when they appeared in the *Cornhill* magazine in 1860, the *Saturday Review* denouncing them as ‘windy hysterics’ and ‘intolerable twaddle’ and the publisher George Smith curtailing the run, declaring the writing ‘too deeply tainted with socialistic heresy to conciliate subscribers’.²⁸ By the late 1870s however, a severe trade depression, coupled with high unemployment, increased de-skilling in the labour market and the seemingly intractable problems of poverty and urban squalor, had weakened confidence in orthodox economic science. A new constituency for Ruskin’s alternative social and civic vision emerged amongst the professional middle classes, who from 1879 began to found Ruskin Societies in several of Britain’s industrial centres, seeking to consolidate their own understanding of ‘The Master’s’ work, disseminate his message to others and launch modest programmes of social reform.

The society in Glasgow was the first to be established and was a particularly active organization, membership rising from sixty-nine in 1881 to nearly two hundred in 1897.²⁹ For an annual subscription fee of 5 shillings for gentlemen and 2/6 for ladies, its members benefited from a varied programme of educative and social events, including fortnightly lectures, readings of Ruskin’s works, grand musical recitals, occasional public talks and annual summer outings to ‘places of natural and historic interest’.³⁰ The latter included trips to Eglinton Castle in Kilwinning, Tullichewan Castle in the Vale of Leven and the grounds of Wemyss Castle in Inverclyde, where despite the ‘extreme inclemency of weather’, fifty members and their friends visited a replica of the hut in which the explorer David Livingston had died and were brought ‘into rapport with the memory of the hero missionary’ by a reading from his journal.³¹ The fortnightly lectures were delivered by both local and national figures, with the Edinburgh natural scientist Patrick Geddes a perennial favourite.³² Occasionally, well-known national figures were engaged to address the public on Ruskin-related topics, with society members admitted for free with their membership cards. It was at one of these lectures that Bella was converted to the socialist cause, in January 1894 Keir Hardie speaking at the Accountants’ Hall on ‘Carlyle and Ruskin: The Pioneers of the Labour Party’. Two weeks later the journalist W. T. Stead spoke to a similarly full house at the Athenaeum Hall on Buchanan Street on ‘If Christ Came to Glasgow’.³³

²⁸ Edward Tyas Cook, *The Life of John Ruskin. Vol. 2: 1860-1900* (London: G. Allen, 1911), pp. 6-8.

²⁹ Eagles, *After Ruskin*, p. 153; press report of the Ruskin Society of Glasgow ‘At Home’ in the Cockburn Hotel, 25 October 1897, in ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Minute Book 1891-9’, RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/2.

³⁰ Letter from James G. Borland to Sir John Burns, ‘9th June 11’ [poss. 1894?], in ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Correspondence Book’, RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/1.

³¹ Report of the Annual Summer Meeting, 23 June 1894, in ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Minute Book 1891-9’, RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/2.

³² The tone of the correspondence between the Ruskin Society of Glasgow and Patrick Geddes is one of reverence towards an established authority. As with Ruskin, they were the disciples and Geddes the master.

³³ Printed reports of both lectures, ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Minute Book 1891-9’, RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/2, fol. 43.

The Society encouraged its female members to give lectures, and in January 1899 Bella took to the lectern, despite considering herself ‘not ... gifted in that direction’.³⁴ Entitled ‘Duality in Development’, her talk had a strongly feminist theme, Bella arguing that hitherto, ‘human development had proceeded almost entirely on masculine lines’, with the feminine half of the race not permitted ‘freedom of outlet or expression of growth’ and that equilibrium could only now be restored by removing ‘every barrier’ to the equal development of both men and women, although she closed by admitting this was a truth Ruskin himself saw only partially.³⁵ She was also actively involved in the administration of the society, serving on the committee between 1891 and 1892, regularly attending committee meetings as a member and eventually becoming Vice President in 1899. Her family were less committed however, perhaps among those members described by a newspaper report of a Ruskin Society ‘At Home’ as ‘passive rather than active disciples of the great teacher’, who made ‘a point of turning out to the social gathering at the beginning of the season’ but who then retired for the rest of the year.³⁶ Her father John is only recorded as present at two events: the opening ‘conversazione’ in 1896, when he gave a reading of ‘The Battle of the Poker’ and the summer picnic to Eglinton Castle in 1893, when he rounded off the addresses with a humorous recitation. Her older brother Tom, meanwhile, although clearly an early enthusiast, borrowing several of Ruskin’s works from the society’s library during the early 1880s, resigned acrimoniously with his wife in 1894, after what was described enigmatically by the secretary James G. Borland as an ‘illstarred meeting’ in a fellow member’s house.³⁷

No such internal machinations appear to have marred Bella’s membership however. Indeed, it may have been at one of the early lectures of the Glasgow Ruskin Society that Bella first met her future husband, an Englishman named Charles William Bream Pearce. Later described as ‘one of its earliest and most enthusiastic members’, Charles had joined the society in 1880 and was its honorary treasurer for several years, as well as sitting on numerous sub-committees, organizing many of the society’s social events and delivering five of the fortnightly lectures.³⁸ His interest in reform politics had been kindled during childhood. The son of Martha Bream and builder Richard Symons Pearce, he was born in 1840 in Stockwell, then a village in Surrey just south of Thames. His father was a Chartist, who introduced his son to the working-class movement in 1848, the year of revolutions across continental Europe and of the last and greatest Chartist rally on Kennington Common, close to the family home. Later, when a young man working for his uncle in Norwich,

³⁴ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 3 November 1894, p. 7.

³⁵ Press report of the lecture, which was given on 30 January 1899, in ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Minute Book 1891-9’, RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/2.

³⁶ Press report of the Ruskin Society of Glasgow ‘At Home’ in the Cockburn Hotel, 25 October 1897, in ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Minute Book 1891-9’, RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/2.

³⁷ Letter from James G. Borland to Peter Moir, 23rd April 1894, in ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Correspondence Book’, RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/1.

³⁸ ‘Death of Mr. Bream Pearce’, *Labour Leader*, 20 October 1905, p. 349. See Appendix for a list of Charles Pearce’s Ruskin Society lectures.

Charles became involved in a campaign for shorter working hours, helping to reduce the ‘general working day’ from thirteen hours to eleven.³⁹

Yet however tempting it is to imagine Bella and Charles forging a romantic union over an earnest discussion of Ruskinian aestheticism, it is equally possible that the couple met through the business interests of Bella’s father. John Thomson Duncan specialized in insurance accountancy, whilst by the time Charles had joined the Ruskin Society, he had settled on the profession of fire insurance brokerage, after trying his hand at dry saltery and commercial travelling. At this point he was also married. His wife was Mary Gill, a gentleman’s daughter from Yorkshire whom he had seemingly met whilst working in Norwich. They had married when Charles was twenty-two, at the Prince’s Street Independent Congregational chapel, a Nonconformist church at which his uncle was a deacon, the couple going on to have four children and moving from Norwich to Cambridge and then to Kilburn in Middlesex.⁴⁰ However, by the early 1880s, the family appears to have disintegrated. Charles moved to Glasgow, in 1881 staying with Bella’s father and eldest brother at the Duncans’ summer house on the Rosneath Peninsula, whilst Charles’s wife and their three youngest children, aged ten, twelve and fourteen, lodged at a boarding house in Matlock, Derbyshire.⁴¹ What was behind the separation is unknown. What is certain, however, is that at some point during the next decade Mary died. Although Charles remained in contact with his children, he did not live with them again.⁴² Instead, on 17 June 1891 at an address in Bath Street in Glasgow, Charles, now a widower of fifty, married for the second time, to thirty-two year old Bella Duncan.⁴³

³⁹ England Census 1861; ‘Chats with I. L. P. Candidates’, *Labour Leader*, 27 April 1895, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Marriage Certificate of Charles William Pearce and Mary Gill, 25 August 1863, Princes Street Chapel, Norwich; John Alexander, *Thirty Years’ History of the Church and Congregation in Prince’s Street Chapel, Norwich* (Norwich: Fletcher and Jarrold and Sons, 1847); Helen C. Coleman, *Prince’s Street Congregational Church, Norwich 1819-1919* (London: Jarrolds, 1919).

⁴¹ England and Scotland Census 1881.

⁴² Charles’s eldest son, Charles Edward Nettleton Pearce, married, settled in Essex and worked as a fire insurance clerk, suggesting his father’s involvement in his career path (England Census 1891, 1901). His youngest son, Ernest Richard Pearce, emigrated to America in 1889, settling in San Francisco and also working in insurance (US Federal Census 1910, 1930). In Bella’s will, three of Charles’ children were left bequests, with details given of spouses and children, suggesting continued and friendly relations (will of Isabella Pearce, lodged 24 April 1930).

⁴³ Marriage Certificate of Charles William Pearce and Isabella Duncan, 17 June 1891, 296 Bath Street, Glasgow.

The Marriage of a New Woman and a New Man

Temperamentally, Bella and Charles appear to have been markedly dissimilar. Bella was passionate and opinionated, known amongst her friends for sermonizing and easily roused to furious indignation, especially when encountering prejudice towards women. One female colleague commented that whilst she herself was able to ‘listen calmly’ during a meeting in which male socialists spoke much ‘outrageous nonsense’ concerning women’s rights, she was certain Bella would have ‘relegated every man of them to a furnace seven times heated’.⁴⁴ Describing herself as not ‘very dependent on company’, even when married Bella holidayed alone, claiming to seldom feel ‘the want of a companion’.⁴⁵ Yet her formidable social and intellectual self-reliance was tempered by a warm sociability, her friend the Cheshire-based feminist Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy describing her as a ‘clear-sighted’ but also a ‘warm-hearted’ woman, while an American visitor to her home in 1903 thought her ‘a great comfort’ and ‘a jolly good girl’ who was ‘a delightful hostess’.⁴⁶ Her natural conviviality, coupled with a firm commitment to breaking down ‘the unnatural sex barriers’ between men and women, enabled her to maintain a sparring camaraderie with even the most incorrigibly condescending of her male socialist colleagues. When George A. H. Samuel, who wrote as ‘Marxian’ in the *Labour Leader*, stayed with the Pearces in Glasgow, they treated him as if he were ‘the heir to two or three empires’, despite his well-known antipathy to women’s rights, Samuel claiming teasingly during his visit to have ‘gently disclosed to Mrs. Pearce the true view of the woman question’.⁴⁷

By contrast, Charles was reserved and serious, ‘Tricotrin’ in the *Labour Leader* describing him as a ‘tall, quiet, intuitive, subtle-minded man, who is as just as he is generous’.⁴⁸ He was particularly known for his impeccable standards of personal integrity, Hardie referring to his ‘high conscientiousness’ and the Scottish socialist William Haddow believing him ‘above reproach’.⁴⁹ A frequent public speaker, Charles was viewed as an effective rather than effusive communicator, the *Glasgow Evening News* forming an impression at the 1895 Labour Day rally on Glasgow Green of an ‘elderly, bespectacled gentleman’ who attracted a good crowd but whose style was insufficiently ‘fiery’ for the ‘ordinary [socialist] enthusiast’.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 17 April 1897, p. 128.

⁴⁵ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 1 August 1896, p. 262.

⁴⁶ Letter from Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, 23 November 1908, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy Papers, British Library, Add.Mss. 47449-55, f. 218; letter from ‘Dovie’ [Jane Lee Waring Harris] to ‘My dearest Son’, 22 September 1903, TLH Papers 12/237; letter from ‘Dovie’ [Jane Lee Waring Harris] to ‘Blessed Son’, 9 July 1903, TLH Papers 14/315. I am indebted to Maureen Wright for providing transcripts of the relevant letters from the Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy Papers.

⁴⁷ Marxian, ‘Scotland’s London’, *Labour Leader*, 4 April 1896, p. 117.

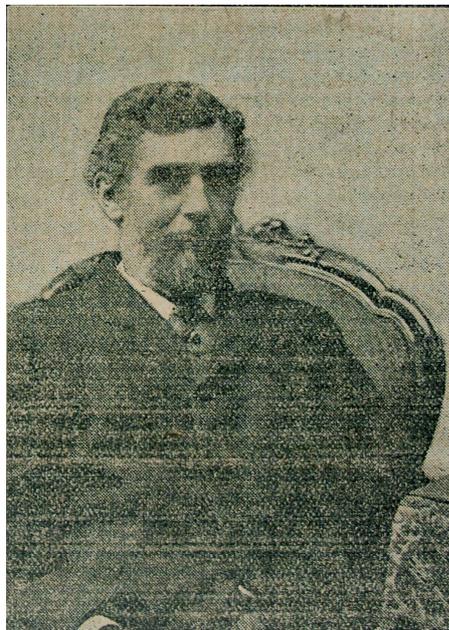
⁴⁸ Tricotrin, ‘Chats with I.L.P Candidates’, *Labour Leader*, 27 April 1895, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Keir, ‘Between Ourselves’, *Labour Leader*, 8 June 1895, p. 2; William Haddow, *My Seventy Years* (Glasgow: Robert Gibson, 1943).

⁵⁰ ‘A Modern Maying. Yesterday at the Green’, *Glasgow Evening News*, 6 May 1895.



Figure 1.4 'Lily Bell', *Labour Leader*, 1894⁵¹



Figures 1.5 and 1.6 Charles William Bream Pearce, 1895

Yet despite the disparity in their personalities, Charles and Bella Pearce's marriage was distinguished by a remarkable confluence in their personal politics. Also speaking at the 1895 rally on Glasgow Green, Bella commented that 'They heard a great deal about the new woman. This labour movement showed that they were also hearing a great deal of the new man.'⁵² Charles was indisputably one of these 'New Men', equally committed with Bella to the cause of women's

⁵¹ This line drawing appeared above Bella's 'Matrons and Maidens' column in the *Labour Leader* during the first year of its publication.

⁵² *Glasgow Herald*, 6 May 1895

emancipation and to securing their equal participation in the state, believing that ‘the man without the woman is the “very devil” in politics and works discord and war all around and everywhere.’⁵³

Initially however, it was within the organizational and ideological structures of socialism that the couple chose to work. For four intense years between 1894 and 1898 they were key local activists for the ILP in Glasgow. Their affiliation to socialism was a natural extension of their membership of the Ruskin Society, born out of the same collective unease felt by the middle classes over the all-too-evident inequity in the allocation of the material rewards of industrialization. Indeed, whilst the Ruskin Society was careful to avoid formal affiliation to any one political party, preferring to stay non-partisan, it had numerous connections to the ILP. Several individuals were members of both organizations, Charles Pearce nominating Keir Hardie for membership of the Ruskin Society in 1896. Furthermore, the Society gave numerous talks to ILP branches under its ‘extension lectures’ scheme, designed to familiarize the ‘intelligent working class’ with Ruskin’s work, whilst in turn, several prominent ILP members lectured for the Ruskin Society, including Keir Hardie, its secretary Tom Mann and the charismatic speaker Margaret Macmillan.⁵⁴

The decade prior to the ILP’s foundation in 1893 had been a time of breathtaking expansion for the socialist movement, one commentator describing how in 1883, ‘a socialist movement seemed to break out spontaneously in England, the air hummed for a season with a multifarious social agitation, and we soon had a fairly complete equipment of Socialist organizations [...] which have ever since kept up a busy movement with newspapers, lectures, debates, speeches and demonstrations in the streets’, a Labour Day parade in Edinburgh in 1894 attracting 10,000 marchers and approximately 120,000 spectators.⁵⁵ Declining at this juncture to tender a detailed and therefore potentially divisive blueprint for the future, socialism instead represented itself as a panacea, a social agency which by its nature alone would rid the world of poverty and its resultant material and moral degradations, and bring about the realization of a new social ideal. For those involved it was a moment when it seemed as if ‘we were all socialists more or less’ and was later remembered wistfully as a period of great energy and enthusiasm, when the revolution was believed to be both inevitable and imminent.⁵⁶

If the crusade of socialism had, at times, the feel of a religious revival, the moment of becoming a socialist was often related in the language of religious conversion, the ILP propagandist Katherine

⁵³ Letter Charles Pearce to Keir Hardie, 9 March 1894, FJC, ILP Archives, reel 2, 1894/42.

⁵⁴ Letter James G. Borland to John Ruskin, 8 February 1896, in ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Correspondence Book’, RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/1. Tom Mann spoke on ‘The True Veins of National Wealth’ for the Ruskin Society on 5 December 1894, although there was a ‘most disappointing attendance’. Margaret Macmillan spoke on ‘The Evolution of the Social Idea’ on 15 December 1896. ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Minute Book 1891-9’, RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/2.

⁵⁵ John Rae, *Contemporary Socialism* (1884, 1891), cited in Yeo, ‘A New Life’, p. 7; Yeo, ‘A New Life’, p. 28.

⁵⁶ Isabella O. Ford, *On the Threshold* (1895), quoted in Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism*, p. 104.

St. John Conway (later Bruce Glasier) relating how it was if ‘a great window had been flung wide open and the vision of a new world had been shown me: of the earth reborn to beauty and joy’.⁵⁷ In part this was due to the severance with past associations becoming a socialist often entailed, Charles claiming to have lost two thirds of his business in Glasgow once his political affiliations became widely known.⁵⁸ The epiphanic moment of enlightenment was usually precipitated either by attendance at a meeting or by the reading of a key socialist text, such as Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty* (1877), William Morris’s *News From Nowhere* (1889), Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, Edward Carpenter’s *Towards Democracy* or Robert Blatchford’s *Merrie England* (1894). Indeed, regarding the latter work, the *Glasgow Evening News* reported disdainfully in 1894 that ‘a veritable leprosy of that yellow-skinned brochure has of late broken out all over the industrial areas of Britain’.⁵⁹ Bella’s conversion narrative was in many ways archetypal. Keir Hardie’s speech appears to have been a typical exposition of ethical socialism, a conceptualization of the labour movement inspired by William Morris and embraced by many members of the ILP during the early 1890s. Within it, socialism was conceived less as a political pressure group campaigning to enact economic reforms and more as the realization of an ethic of fellowship. It was therefore considered imperative that its members underwent an inner moral reformation prior to or in conjunction with the overthrow of capitalism.

The objective was one with which the Pearces were in complete accord, Bella stating that the root cause of ‘the evils which manifest themselves amongst us’ to be man’s inherent selfishness, ‘a love of self, which makes him look first to his own self interest, careless of that of his brother’.⁶⁰ What was required, through the impetus provided by the socialist movement, was a fundamental shift in the way people related to one other, a ‘growth in the spirit of human brotherhood’, without which the transformation of society was impossible:

No, it is not “economic” Socialists we are most in need of. We want men and women who are Socialist in their hearts as well as in their heads, who think less of gain and more of truth and right, who feel brotherly towards each other, and therefore desire in all things to act brotherly towards each other – and that is just where true Socialism and religion are indissolubly connected, for religion implies doing good for the love of good, the doing right for the love of right – not for the love of gain in any form.⁶¹

Her assertion of the necessary symbiosis of religion and politics was a defining characteristic of ethical socialism, Robert Blatchford, the editor of the socialist paper *The Clarion*, claiming that the Labour movement was ‘but one sign of a new spirit at work in many directions throughout human affairs’ which it would be ‘affectation if not folly to refuse the name of Religion’.⁶² Its adherents

⁵⁷ Quoted in Laurence Thompson, *The Enthusiasts: A Biography of John and Katharine Bruce Glasier* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971), p. 66.

⁵⁸ William Morris, ‘The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization’ (lecture to London Institute, 1881), in Norman Kelvin (ed.), *William Morris on Art and Socialism* (Toronto: Dover, 1999); *Glasgow Herald*, 8 April 1896.

⁵⁹ ‘In the City Hall with the I. L. P. Men’, *Glasgow Evening Times*, 4 December 1894, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 23 November 1895, p. 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² From an article published in April 1897 in the *Labour Prophet*, the journal of the Labour Church movement, quoted in Yeo, ‘A New Life’, p. 6. Yeo was the first to give the ‘religion of socialism’ serious

came from a diverse range of theological and anti-theological backgrounds, including nonconformity, Anglicanism, evangelicalism and Swedenborgianism. The Pearces, as shall be explored in more depth in the next chapter, were committed disciples of the American Brotherhood of the New Life. Despite their disparate beliefs, what united ethical socialists was a conviction of the necessity for a renewed sense of altruism as a prerequisite of the 'new life', Bella emphatic that 'Socialism, without the true religious spirit inspiring each individual member of society, will never do any great good.'⁶³

During their four years as propagandists for the ILP, the Pearces performed a range of roles and functions, both individually and as a couple. Both were clearly vital members of the local party administration, Bella the treasurer and then vice-president of the Glasgow District Council, as well as president of the Cathcart and Govanhill branches.⁶⁴ Between 1894 and 1898 she served two successive terms on the Cathcart School Board, presumably elected on an ILP or a women's platform,⁶⁵ overseeing the building of a new school, promoting the use of a form of regimented, group exercise known as Swedish drill for girls and attempting, unsuccessfully, to get the shorter catechism removed from the syllabus.⁶⁶ She also appears to have resisted the focus on domestic education taken by the large majority of female school board members, questioning the remit of the Industrial Work and Domestic Economy Committee, of which she had initially been appointed

attention, challenging the prevailing orthodoxy that the period from the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s was merely a 'backwater' or 'tributary' feeding into the 'mainstream' of a more pragmatic and ideologically-sound materialist labour politics, Yeo arguing instead that it constituted a distinctive and important phase in the social history of socialism. Subsequent studies on the Labour Church movement, the Fellowship of the New Life and the Tolstoyan communities in Purleigh, Whiteway and elsewhere, have served to illustrate the pervasiveness of religious and ethical thinking within socialism at this time, as well as emphasize its continued presence within the labour movement, albeit in attenuated forms. See Yeo, 'A New Life'; Mark Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement, 1891-1902', *Journal of British Studies*, 38:2 (April 1999), pp. 217-245; Kevin Manton, 'The Fellowship of the New Life: English Ethical Socialism Reconsidered', *History of Political Thought*, 24:2 (Summer 2003), pp. 282-304; W. H. G. Armytage, 'J. C. Kenworthy and the Tolstoyan Communities in England', in W. Gareth Jones (ed.), *Tolstoi and Britain* (Berg: Oxford, 1995), pp. 135-151; Diana Maltz, 'Ardent Service: Female Eroticism and New Life Ethics in Gertrude Dix's *The Image Breakers* (1900)', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, (2012), pp. 1-17, 'The Newer New Life: A. S. Byatt, E. Nesbit and Socialist Subculture', *Journal of Victoria Culture* (2012), 17:1, pp. 79-84 and 'Living by Design: C. R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft and Two English Tolstoyan Communities, 1897-1907', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39 (2011), pp. 409-426; Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism*.

⁶³ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 25 August 1894, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Bella was also the convenor of the finance committee charged with inquiring into the accounts of the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) following its amalgamation with the ILP in January 1895. The SLP had been running since 1888.

⁶⁵ That Bella stood for the Board on an ILP platform is suggested by an article by Lizzie Glasier, in which she records her disappointment that two other women were voted off the list by the Glasgow District Council of the ILP. However, Bella was also present at the inaugural meeting of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association to promote the Return of Women to Local Boards, requesting to be made a member. The meeting was, however, over a fortnight after she had already begun her work on the Cathcart School Board. Lizzie Glasier, 'The Woman's Labour Party, Glasgow', *Labour Leader*, 13 April 1895, p. 4; 'Women and Local Boards', *Glasgow Herald*, 24 May 1894.

⁶⁶ Bella's attempts to get a swimming pond included as part of the new school's specifications led to a heated altercation with the Board's chairman, Mr. T. R. Robb, who considered it an extravagance. She lost the subsequent vote and the school was eventually completed without the pond. 'The New School for Cathcart Parish', *Glasgow Herald*, 2 October 1894.

convenor, and instead in her second term rising to become the convenor both of the Finance Committee and the Mount Florida School Committee.⁶⁷

Between 1895 and 1896, Bella was also president of the Women's Labour Party (WLP) in Glasgow, a pioneering organization closely affiliated to the ILP, which was established in 1892 as a means of 'educating women in the first principles of Socialism, initiating them into taking their part with men in the general propaganda and preparing them for the time when the franchise shall be fully extended to them'.⁶⁸ Its treasurer was Lizzie Glasier, the sister of John Bruce Glasier and a formidable campaigner in her own right, whose work, according to one male associate, was 'more satisfactory and enduring' than her brother's, for whilst he 'attacks and converts in crowds', she 'attacks only the individual and converts'.⁶⁹ Kate Taylor, previously an organizer for the Woman's Provident and Protective League, later became its secretary.⁷⁰ The WLP was clearly the envy of socialist women living in other parts of Britain. The Halifax socialist Mary Alice Taylor, who referred to herself as a 'sister in the cause', commented 'Of course we hear of the Glasgow women, and I often wish I was living there, especially when all is not going smoothly here', whilst a female socialist in London wrote similarly how 'You advanced women of the North cannot understand how servile is the place delegated by advanced men to women in the district of London'.⁷¹ The WLP flourished briefly during the middle years of the decade, in 1896 boasting seventy-seven members and its own rooms in Glasgow, although by the following year its numbers were in steep decline, the women 'straining every nerve' just to pay their rent.⁷² Nonetheless, when at its peak of activity, the organization offered an important and vibrant space for socialists of both sexes. During their 'At Homes' on Saturday evenings, male and female comrades could read the labour papers, 'discuss the burning questions of the day', make new friends or just enjoy an occasional dance, whilst their fortnightly lecture series addressed both literary subjects and the woman question.⁷³ Indeed, in January 1896 Charles Pearce himself gave a talk on 'Marriage, True and False: its Effect upon Society', his central argument being that a state's attitude towards marriage decided its place in world history, supporting his contention with 'numerous instances both from ancient and modern history'.⁷⁴ Whilst the WLP was ultimately unsuccessful in its attempts to unionize a group of seamstresses, Bella and her female comrades fared better in drawing in the children of the

⁶⁷ Cathcart Parish School Board Minute Book no. 2, 1894-8, D-Ed. 1/2/1. Strathclyde Regional Archives, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. See also McDermid, 'School Board Women', pp. 333-347.

⁶⁸ Lizzie Glasier, 'The Woman's Labour Party in Glasgow', *Labour Leader*, 13 April 1895. The series of articles continued on 27 April 1895 (p. 9) and concluded on 25 May 1895 (p. 5).

⁶⁹ Tom Wilson, 'Women's Labour Party', *Labour Leader*, 8 June 1895, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Lizzie Glasier, 'The Woman's Labour Party, Glasgow', *Labour Leader*, 13 April 1895, p. 4.

⁷¹ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 3 April 1897, p. 110; 6 October 1894, p. 7.

⁷² By April 1897 the membership of the Women's Labour Party had dropped to twenty-nine and they were unable to afford their monthly affiliation fee to the ILP. See letters from Maude Bruce, 1 April 1897 and 5 August 1897, Francis Johnson Correspondence (FJC), Reel 3, 1897/13 and 1897/51. ILP Archives, National Library of Scotland (NLS).

⁷³ Lizzie Glasier, 'The Woman's Labour Party, Glasgow', *Labour Leader*, 25 May 1895, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Omni, 'I. L. P. Notes and News', *Labour Leader*, 18 January 1896, p. 23.

movement, running a popular Sunday class to teach them ‘the rudiments of socialism’.⁷⁵ In May 1895, a picnic to Cathkin Braes was organized, where the children posed for a photograph in their red ‘Labour Crusaders’ sashes, embroidered by the women of the WLP, before returning home wearily to Glasgow, their lorries preceded by ‘quite a regiment of men on foot’ who ‘made the distance shorter by singing Socialist songs’.⁷⁶

Charles came to prominence within the ILP when he ran as the parliamentary candidate for Camlachie in the 1895 general election, campaigning on an ethical socialist platform. Accepting his nomination at a ‘great meeting’ in the Camlachie Institute in August 1894, attended by an audience ‘numbering fully a thousand’, he was careful to state that his acceptance was conditional upon a direct acknowledgement that God was ‘the father of us all’ and that the ultimate end sought was ‘the inbringing into the constituency of the fraternal spirit of His social Christ’.⁷⁷ According to the *Glasgow Evening News*, he then proceeded to tell ‘a very unwashed audience very little about politics and more about Christianity than they had perhaps heard in all their lives before.’⁷⁸ After a year of campaigning however, and with less than two months to the election, he suddenly withdrew his candidature, a decision Keir Hardie condemned as precipitous, regrettable and ‘a very bad blunder’.⁷⁹ A vehement opponent of anarchism, Charles disagreed with a decision by the ILP’s National Administrative Committee (NAC) to delete a clause in its 1895 report disowning anarchism in constitutional countries. Whilst Hardie believed it a purely constitutional matter, Charles was concerned it could be interpreted as giving anarchists ‘a negative support’.⁸⁰ That it prompted him to take such a drastic step reflects his deep commitment to a fraternal, Christian conception of socialism as ‘a party working for the realization of the ideal life’, believing members of the ILP had a duty to ‘unequivocally disown all sympathy with methods whose uttermost weapons are dynamite and the bomb.’⁸¹ The replacement ILP candidate for Camlachie, the trade unionist Robert Smillie, went on to suffer ignominious defeat at the polls, gaining just 696 votes in comparison to the 3,198 cast for the Liberal Unionist candidate Alexander Cross, a result broadly replicated across Britain, with not a single one of the thirty-two socialist candidates gaining a seat. Beatrice Webb dubbed the election ‘the most expensive funeral since Napoleon’, with even Hardie losing his West Ham seat, attributing his defeat to failing to run an effective local campaign and instead ‘taking the country as his parish’.⁸²

⁷⁵ Bella and Charles were on the planning committee for the Sunday children’s classes. Omni, ‘I. L. P. Notes and News’, *Labour Leader*, 25 January 1896, p. 31.

⁷⁶ Omni, ‘I. L. P. Notes and News’, *Labour Leader*, 25 May 1895, p. 5.

⁷⁷ ‘The Independent Labour Party in Camlachie’, *Scotsman*, 28 August 1894, p. 6; letter by C. W. Bream-Pearce, ‘Camlachie Candidature’, *Labour Leader*, 1 June 1895, p. 10.

⁷⁸ The Lorgnette, *Glasgow Evening News*, 5 April 1895, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Keir, ‘Between Ourselves’, *Labour Leader*, 8 June 1895, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Labour Leader*, 1 June 1895, p. 6.

⁸¹ Letter by C. W. Bream-Pearce, ‘Camlachie Candidature’, *Labour Leader*, 1 June 1895, p. 10.

⁸² Beatrice Webb’s diary, 10 July 1895, quoted in Keith Laybourn, *The Rise of Socialism in Britain c. 1881-1951* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997). *Labour Leader*, 20 July 1895, p. 2. Yeo argues that the defeat marked a watershed in the labour movement, with the emphasis in the 1880s and early 1890s on personal ethics and fraternity replaced increasingly by the exigencies of electioneering and party bureaucracy, although Kevin

Despite this debacle Charles initially remained an active worker for the cause, Hardie having forgiven him enough by the following March to describe him as belonging to the ‘thinking, solid element of the movement’.⁸³ Whilst not on the NAC or among the core of nationally recognized speakers, the couple were nonetheless at the heart of the local movement in Glasgow, contributing in a variety of ways to the dissemination of the socialist message and the necessary party bureaucracy. At the Labour Day rallies on Glasgow Green in 1895 and 1896, both Charles and Bella spoke to crowds of thousands of working men and women, moving resolutions in support of female suffrage, Bella remarking triumphantly that there was ‘Not a hand held up in opposition; not a dissenting voice to be heard.’⁸⁴ They could also regularly be found on the platform at the numerous meetings of ILP branches, chairing the speeches of prominent propagandists such as Margaret McMillan, Carolyn Martyn and Katherine St John Conway, whilst also working intensely behind the scenes, attending council meetings, forming new branches and organizing visiting speakers, Bella describing herself as ‘in the front of the “seat of war”’ when the NAC visited Glasgow during the winter of 1894.⁸⁵



Figure 1.7 Labour Day on Glasgow Green, 1897

With the emphasis of the ILP during this early period as much on ‘making socialists’ as on formulating policy or winning elections, social events were seen to perform a vital function in the party, Bella valuing the opportunities they presented to consolidate bonds of fellowship above the

Manton and Mark Bevir stress the continuities between the two periods. See Yeo, ‘A New Life’, Manton, ‘The Fellowship of the New Life’ and Bevir, ‘The Labour Church Movement’.

⁸³ Keir, ‘Between Ourselves’, *Labour Leader*, 7 March 1896.

⁸⁴ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 18 May 1895, p. 4.

⁸⁵ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 8 December 1894, p. 5.

raising of funds that often ran as a corollary, commenting after a bazaar held during the 1896 New Year's holiday in Glasgow:

the outward success of the undertaking – much as we value that – is, I would say, the least of it. We want money, certainly, and are glad to have it for our work, but what we want most of all is the free flow of love and sympathy and friendship amongst ourselves, uniting us in our labours and making us feel brotherly and sisterly towards each other, by the influence of which spirit alone shall we be able to attain the end we seek.⁸⁶

The Pearces participated fully in the culture of the 'new life', hosting a tea at the Co-Operative Rooms after the 1894 municipal elections, putting up comrades when they arrived in Glasgow and in 1895 and 1896 traveling to the annual ILP conferences in Newcastle and Nottingham, where Bella 'eloped for three hours' with *Labour Leader* writer 'The Wastrel', taking an evening paddle steamer down the Trent as Archie MacArthur, a fellow Glaswegian Christian socialist, played 'Sweet Maree' and 'Ever of Thee' on the fiddle.⁸⁷ The couple were also among the thirty-six guests present at the first *Labour Leader* staff party, described in the *Leader* as a 'great function ... entirely without precedent or rival', where Bella toasted 'The Readers' and Hardie 'The Cause' ('Royalty being "hoff"'). Charles acted as a croupier with John Bruce Glasier, and Hardie's younger brother George played the mandolin, the evening rounded off by a rendition of the ballad of the Irish rebellion 'That Night at Skibbereen'.⁸⁸ Despite their occasional differences of opinion, the Pearces were clearly good friends of Hardie, visiting his mother when she was ill, looking after his pair of 'bonny wild birds' in their office, and loyally defending him during the frequent internal power struggles of the ILP.⁸⁹

One of the fiercest and most protracted altercations was with the Labour Literature Society (LLS), a small co-operative concern in Glasgow and the printers of the *Labour Leader*. It concerned the financial management of the Society and the extent to which it was indebted to both Hardie and the Scottish Labour Party. Hardie accused them of 'contemptible and unworthy conduct', whilst the

⁸⁶ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 11 January 1896, p. 11. However, neither did Bella pass up opportunities to raise money for the party. Reporting on a large meeting in Tradeston when the NAC were in Glasgow, the *Labour Leader* journalist included an anecdote about Bella's efforts to secure a decent collection, revealing in the process a forthright manner. He writes, 'If I were asked "What is a test of bravery?" I would reply, "Asking a collection." Applying this test Mrs C. W. Pearce is brave indeed. It was cleverly done. "The chairman has said that the flowing tide is with us. Some tides were said to be silvery. I hope this one will be so. Generally the colour is that of our native Clyde. There is a common desire to buy a penny tart with a bawbee, but all having voted Socialist and for Justice, I hope you will do justice to the collection box." 'Laying Siege to Glasgow. (From Our Special War Correspondent.)', *Labour Leader*, 8 December 1894, p. 3.

⁸⁷ Charles was clearly present too. 'The Wastrel' joked 'In the evening – shall I say it? – Lily Bell and I eloped for three hours. There was another man present. Here you have another innovation of this nineteenth century – to wit, the personally conducted elopement.' The tone of the piece is of mild flirtation, typical of male *Labour Leader* writers during the 1890s when describing encounters with their female associates. The Wastrel, 'On the Dander', *Labour Leader*, 11 April 1896, p. 121.

⁸⁸ *Labour Leader*, 9 February 1895, p. 4.

⁸⁹ Letters from Charles Pearce to Keir Hardie, 9 March 1894, 13 February 1895 and 22 February 1895, FJC Reel 2: 1894/42, 1895/32 and 1895/35, ILP Archives. See also Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 31 March 1894, p. 7. In his letter of March 1894, Charles used his report on the condition of Hardie's birds to reiterate the need for the ILP to commit to female equality, commenting 'The little man sings freely and sweetly & brings the "music of the spheres" into our office very often – and well he may for his mate is as free as he is & she educates the children to his joy.'

LLS in their turn accused Hardie of printing ‘partial, misleading and inaccurate’ statements about them.⁹⁰ Charles was closely implicated in the affair, politically manoeuvring behind the scenes on Hardie’s behalf, including, according to the LLS, deliberately withholding payments from the Ruskin Society and his own company, C. W. Pearce & Co., in an attempt to bankrupt them. Charles also co-authored a strongly-worded two-page supplement in the *Labour Leader* defending Hardie’s position, in response to a twenty-eight page pamphlet produced by the LLS.⁹¹ Bruce Glasier attempted to act as an intermediary, writing to Hardie that ‘The roof of things appears to be tumbling in here’ and expressing serious concern that the dispute might result in ‘an insurrection in the Labour movement in Glasgow that will affect not only Scottish but English centres.’ Whilst he thought Charles ‘actuated by good motives’, he also stated that he was, in his opinion, ‘very ignorant of the feeling of the chaps and the wives of the case.’⁹² Hardie eventually took the LLS to court, and the dispute appears to have reached some sort of resolution. However, for Charles, a man of such reputed high integrity, the row undoubtedly soured his relationship with party politics, contributing to his ultimate disillusionment with socialism and departure from the ILP.

Things were brought to a head by another internal party dispute, this time over funding. The Pearces were significant ILP donors, responding to the sporadic appeals for money in the *Labour Leader*, as well as acting as trustees for several of the Glasgow branches.⁹³ The largest and most controversial donation however, was made in 1895, the ensuing debacle reflecting the challenges faced by a newly-formed, working class party in financing elections, prior to affiliation with the trade unions.⁹⁴ As an alternative means of fund-raising, the ILP in Glasgow planned to host the city’s first, week-long ‘Scenic Bazaar’, hiring the entire suite of rooms in the Fine Art Institute, ‘the most swagger building in Glasgow’, and contracting a Liverpool firm to provide decorations using theatrical scenery.⁹⁵ When in July 1895, the general election was called earlier than expected, Charles was approached for funds and agreed to loan the party £500 to finance the campaigns, the money to be repaid with the proceeds from the bazaar.⁹⁶ When all six candidates failed to win a seat, accusations began circulating that the money had come from the Glasgow Wine, Spirit, and Beer Association, and was therefore ‘tainted money’, or else from the Conservative Association,

⁹⁰ Kier, ‘Between Ourselves’, *Labour Leader*, 17 August 1895, pp. 2-3; pamphlet, ‘Mr. J. Keir Hardie versus Labour Literary Society, Limited, A Reply to the Article Signed “Keir” in the “Labour Leader” of August 17th, 1895’ (Glasgow: Labour Literature Society, 1895).

⁹¹ James Alston, Alexander Haddow, C. W. Bream Pearce, ‘Mr. Keir Hardie and the Allies of the Liberal Party’, Supplement to the *Labour Leader*, 30 November 1895, pp. i-ii.

⁹² Letter from John Bruce Glasier to Keir Hardie, 3 March 1895, GP 1/1/266. Glasier Papers, University of Liverpool Special Collections.

⁹³ For example, each gave 10s 6d when funds were urgently sought to pay off a £400 debt accrued by the NAC. See ‘Indebtedness of the Administrative Council of the I.L.P.’, *Labour Leader*, 21 December 1895, p. 9. Charles was trustee for the Dennistoun, Central and Govanhill ILP branches. See David Lowe, ‘Trouble in the Second City’, *Labour Leader*, 13 June 1895, p. 205.

⁹⁴ Yeo, ‘A New Life’, p. 42.

⁹⁵ Haddow, *My Seventy Years*, p. 37.

⁹⁶ Keir, ‘Between Ourselves’, *Labour Leader*, 18 April 1896, p. 133.

charges which Charles categorically refuted.⁹⁷ He was however, forced to admit that donors to the election fund included friends whom he knew to be ‘Socialist in principle’, but who, as yet, had ‘not yet severed their connection with the other political parties’, as well as members of the Ruskin Society.⁹⁸ The donors, however, had requested anonymity, fearing the association with socialism could damage their business interests. According to William Haddow, one of Charles’ allies within the ILP, Charles then offered to donate the money unconditionally, an offer presumably made with the assent of his friends. The party, however ‘would have none of it’, and the loan was repaid to Charles, at least in part.⁹⁹ The damage caused to the party in Glasgow by the controversy appears to have been severe, Haddow describing how ‘many branches went out of existence and the I. L. P. for a number of years was in the doldrums’.¹⁰⁰ Charles left the party shortly afterwards, the *Labour Leader* sub-editor David Lowe commenting that his error was ‘in being too generous to unworthy recipients’ and that he was clearly ‘made of too fine stuff’ to live happily within party politics.¹⁰¹

Matrons and Maidens

Despite the couple’s extensive involvement in the financial, political and administrative work of the ILP in Glasgow, Bella’s most significant role within the party and the one in which she wielded the greatest influence at a national level, was as the editor of ‘Matrons and Maidens’, the weekly women’s column in the *Labour Leader*. Writing under the pseudonym of ‘Lily Bell’, it was a role she undertook for four years from the newspaper’s inception in March 1894 until her eventual dismissal in December 1898. Initially unconvinced of the appropriateness of a separate women’s section, complaining to Hardie that ‘You don’t set up a special column headed “For men only”’, she agreed only on the premise that she used it ‘to abuse the men’.¹⁰² Yet whilst the column’s tone was feminist from the outset, Bella’s plans for its content were initially relatively modest, envisaging it as a ‘sympathetic ear’ for women in the movement, a place where they could share problems encountered in their political and domestic lives, Bella even promising hints on

⁹⁷ Letter, C. W. Bream Pearce, ‘Important Detail’, *Labour Leader*, 23 November 1895, p. 4; Haddow, *My Seventy Years*, pp. 37-40.

⁹⁸ ‘The Independent Labour Party. How Election Funds Were Got’, *Glasgow Herald*, 8 April 1896; Letter, C. W. Bream Pearce, ‘The Independent Labour Party’, *Glasgow Herald*, 10 April 1896. The Ruskin Society was quick to protect its political independence, the president William Martin and honorary secretary James G. Borland writing to the *Glasgow Herald* to reiterate its strict non-partisan approach, stating ‘the society exists for quite other purposes than political warfare’ and that if members had made donations to the ILP election fund, it was as individuals and not as members of the Society. Charles, who was then honorary treasurer of the Ruskin Society, was called to explain the situation at a special meeting with its council. See letter William Martin and James G. Borland, ‘The Ruskin Society and the I. L. P.’, *Glasgow Herald*, 9 April 1896; letter from James G. Borland to C. W. Bream Pearce, 11 April 1896, ‘The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Correspondence Book’, MS Gen 1093/1, RSG Papers.

⁹⁹ Haddow, *My Seventy Years*, pp. 37-40. William Haddow was one of the founder members of the Scottish Labour Party in 1888 and ILP in 1893. He was later referred to as the ‘Grand Old Man’ of the Socialist movement in Glasgow. See ‘Obituary. Mr. W. Martin Haddow: Socialist Pioneer’, *Glasgow Herald*, 22 January 1945, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Haddow, *My Seventy Years*, p. 40.

¹⁰¹ David Lowe, ‘Trouble in the Second City’, *Labour Leader*, 13 June 1896, p. 205.

¹⁰² Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 31 March 1894, p. 7.

dressmaking and domestic economy.¹⁰³ Such advice was never to materialize, however. Instead, as Bella grew in confidence both as a feminist and as a writer, ‘Matrons and Maidens’ matured into a broad-ranging weekly opinion-piece, commenting on issues at the fore of contemporary feminist campaigns, including women’s suffrage, the sexual division of labour, female entry into higher education, the New Woman and rational dress.

What particularly distinguished the column was its radical critique of contemporary sexual relations. As Lucy Bland has noted, from the 1880s, the consciousness that a double standard of sexual morality existed for men and women became a distinguishing feature in feminist campaign programmes. Bella’s ‘Matrons and Maidens’ column both reflected and contributed towards the increasing prominence accorded the issue, Bella repeatedly denouncing the ‘damnable theory’ which held that ‘sexual vice’ was ‘an indulgence *necessary* to the human male animal’ but which judged harshly any woman who erred from contemporary middle-class sexual norms.¹⁰⁴ Like many feminists, much of the blame, she believed, could be apportioned to the medical profession, asserting that doctors had ‘taught our young men, ay, and older ones also, that incontinence is a necessity of their lives, and have encouraged them in the indulgence of their passions as being necessary to health’, a position she maintained in the face of fierce criticism from male doctors within her readership.¹⁰⁵ As Bella reiterated on several occasions, it was a discourse of male sexuality which operated within a mutually reinforcing relationship with two similarly egregious facets of hegemonic sexual attitudes: women’s sexual objectification and their lack of bodily autonomy. Women, both in cultural and legal terms, were considered to be the possessions of men, their market value determined solely by their ability to satiate male ‘bestial lusts’: it was as if, Bella noted bitterly, women were ‘mere feminine dolls and puppets, whose strings are pulled by the men for whose amusement we caper and dance’.¹⁰⁶

During her four years as editor of the ‘Matrons and Maidens’ column, Bella steadily emplotted the reach of the sexual double standard in numerous aspects of contemporary society, drawing her readers’ attention to its pervasive influence in legal, medical, political and military spheres as well as in the cultural and social world. Contributing to the national debate on marriage, instigated in 1888 by Mona Caird in the *Westminster Review*, Bella was critical of the institution in its current incarnation, although like Caird, held back from calling for its dissolution. Decrying it as a ‘miserable travesty’, she highlighted the inequity of English marriage laws, which decreed that a husband could obtain a divorce solely on the grounds of their spouse’s adultery, but not a wife, and which made no provision either for marital rape or for the knowing transmission of a venereal

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Lily Bell, *Matrons and Maidens*, *Labour Leader*, 10 April 1897, p. 114.

¹⁰⁵ Lily Bell, *Matrons and Maidens*, *Labour Leader*, 22 February 1896, p. 68 and also 29 February 1896, p. 76 and 7 March 1896, p. 82.

¹⁰⁶ Lily Bell, *Matrons and Maidens*, *Labour Leader*, 20 March 1897, p. 90.

disease.¹⁰⁷ Also like Caird, she drew parallels between contemporary marriage and prostitution, construing both as sexual transactions of an inherently commercial nature, commenting in an early column that marriages were often ‘little more than “respectable” forms of prostitution, where women sell themselves as freely as their sisters on the streets’.¹⁰⁸ Towards prostitutes themselves, whilst like many feminists of the period she struggled to perceive them as anything other than passive victims of either male seduction or economic hardship, her writing was free from any hint of moral judgment, her column consistently urging compassion towards ‘our sisters’ and chastising those women who ‘held themselves apart in an attitude of pharisaical superiority’.¹⁰⁹ Just like the ‘poor girl’ driven to take the life of her illegitimate child rather than face ‘the shame and disgrace which she knows will be poured upon her in exposure’, their plight served to illustrate the faults of the system rather than the failings of the individual, a system ‘which sends one sex to the devil and lets the other go scot free’.¹¹⁰ When an attempt was made by the Conservative government to reintroduce a system of regulation in India, similar to the notorious Contagious Diseases Acts, after over half the colonial British troops were reported to have contracted a venereal disease, Bella assisted in the vigorous campaign against its authorization.¹¹¹ Indeed, whilst Kenneth Ballhatchet has downplayed the effectiveness of British anti-regulationism over India, suggesting Lady Henry Somerset’s initial support for a new, repressive system of regulation split the movement, Bella’s columns depict a vibrant and active propaganda campaign, comprising of ‘many earnest and indefatigable workers’, including the veteran campaigner Josephine Butler, ‘on the warpath again – back to her old work, roused up to renewed efforts in the fight for the right by the sight of evil at hand and of fresh dangers ahead’.¹¹² Referring to the subject in no less than twenty-four of her columns between 1897 and 1898, Bella argued that the Acts would place ‘the legal stamp of authoritative approval upon that double code of sexual morality which it should be the undying effort of every honorable man and woman to abolish’.¹¹³ She therefore used her column to fight against their reinstatement, reproducing letters from sympathetic parties, issuing stern rebuttals to more critical correspondents, publicizing ‘Abolitionist’ literature such as Josephine Butler’s new paper ‘The Storm-Bell’, and reporting on the meetings of the organizations spearheading the

¹⁰⁷ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 15 February 1896, p. 58; 16 June 1894, p. 11; 16 October 1897, p. 338.

¹⁰⁸ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 26 May 1894, p. 11.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Whilst Bella did write a column in support of the National Vigilance Association, she referred only to the non-repressive aspects of its work, such as putting posters in steamers warning girls of the dangers of sex trafficking and its provision of legal fees in cases of underage sex, and not its forced closure of brothels. See Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 28 May 1898, p. 183. See also Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 95-123.

¹¹⁰ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 12 September 1896, p. 316.

¹¹¹ According to a report by the government of India published in November 1896, annual VD admissions among British troops had risen to 522.3 per 1,000, although this figure included readmissions, a fact not widely publicized at the time. See Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793-1905* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 1980), pp. 88, 90.

¹¹² See Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 23 July 1898, p. 245; 29 January 1898, p. 38. As Ballhatchet notes, however, the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful, with the imposition of a new policy of regulation in India the military authorities winning ‘the last battle in a long campaign.’ Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj*, p. 95.

¹¹³ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 20 March 1897, p. 90.

campaign, the Ladies National Association for the Abolition of Government Regulation of Vice and the Federation for the Abolition of State Regulation of Prostitution.¹¹⁴

Indeed, it is plausible that it was her preoccupation with this campaign which led to her dismissal from the *Labour Leader*. It was certainly unlikely to have been a fight that would have particularly engaged grassroots ILP men, who were far more concerned with the capitalist exploitation of the proletariat than with male power over women and who in 1897 and 1898 would have been preoccupied with the defeat of the Welsh miners' strikes or with the prospects of forging an alliance with the trade unions.¹¹⁵ Indeed, several male socialists appear to have been actively hostile to the antiregulationist propaganda, Bella commenting in February 1898, 'Seemingly my frequent expressions of condemnation of the notorious C.D. Acts have not been at all relished by a number of the male readers of this paper'.¹¹⁶

Even Hardie, despite his consistent support of women's suffrage, was liable to foreground class inequities over gender discrimination on the rare occasions he gave serious consideration to the issue of prostitution. In doing so, he can be seen to be guilty of enacting the patriarchal power imbalance he elsewhere professed a commitment to overthrowing. This can be evidenced by his response to a scandal that broke in Glasgow in January and February of 1896. It concerned the trial of a Mrs. Helen Pollok, a madam who ran a brothel on the Great Western Road in the city's middle-class West End. Whilst the *Evening Times* and *Evening News* printed in full the names, addresses, occupations and workplaces of the two girls who had on occasion worked at the brothel and who had been called to give evidence, causing them to be 'shunned as moral lepers by their sanctimonious neighbours', the evening papers withheld the identities of their male clientele.¹¹⁷ For four weeks Hardie railed against this injustice in the pages of the *Labour Leader*, promising to expose the names of the men. In the process, he precipitated a journalistic sensation comparable to that of W. T. Stead's 1885 exposé of child prostitution in London, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', albeit on a smaller scale. Newsboys were shouting and selling *Labour Leaders* 'by the gross' on every street corner and pandemonium broke out in the newspaper's office as the printers struggled to keep up with demand and members of staff cast lots 'for a few hours sleep'.¹¹⁸ The

¹¹⁴ The two organizations merged in 1915 to become the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene. For information on both bodies, see 'NA1067: Ladies National Association for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice & for the Promotion of Social Purity; 1869-1915', and 'NA1062: British Committee of the Continental & General Federation for Abolition of Government Regulation of Prostitution; fl.1880', The Woman's Library, <http://calmarchive.londonmet.ac.uk/DServe/dserve.exe?dsqIni=Dserve.ini&dsqApp=Archive&dsqDb=Pers&dsqSearch=Code=='NA1067'&dsqCmd=Show.tcl>; <http://calmarchive.londonmet.ac.uk/DServe/dserve.exe?dsqIni=Dserve.ini&dsqApp=Archive&dsqDb=Pers&dsqSearch=Code=='NA1062'&dsqCmd=Show.tcl> [both accessed 24 March 2013].

¹¹⁵ Hannam, 'Women and the ILP, 1890-1914', p. 214; Kenneth O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), pp. 96-8.

¹¹⁶ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 12 February 1898, p. 50.

¹¹⁷ Keir Hardie, 'In Militant Mood', *Labour Leader*, 1 February 1896, p. 35.

¹¹⁸ Omni, 'ILP Notes and News', *Labour Leader*, 15 February 1896, p. 57; Keir Hardie, 'In Militant Mood', *Labour Leader*, 22 February 1896, p. 61.

paper relished every detail of the drama, relating how bribes were being ‘poured out like water to prevent exposure’, how their investigator was at times thwarted by ‘the emissaries of the ghouls who we are tracking to their doom’ and how *Leader* staff themselves were unable to leave the office without being shadowed by private detectives.¹¹⁹

Like ‘The Maiden Tribute’, Hardie’s suggestive prose, which at once piqued and censured ‘the public taste for prurient and filthy detail’, was structured by the narrative form of melodrama, Hardie choosing to represent prostitution as the ‘old story of the seduction of poor girls by vicious aristocrats’.¹²⁰ Yet whilst Stead, according to Judith Walkowitz, immediately undercut the narrative’s inherent class criticism by a focus on ‘sentimental moralism ... passive, innocent, female victims and individual evil men’, Hardie, in ‘The Glasgow Scandal’, repeatedly laid emphasis on the material wealth and social standing of the ‘rich seducer’, in contrast to the poverty of ‘the victim whom he lured by his gold to her ruin’, thereby creating a salacious tale of unrivalled aristocratic and ecclesiastical debauchery and hypocrisy.¹²¹ Indeed, the whole episode, according to Hardie, smacked of a class cover-up on a grand scale, with the police, courts and media all implicated:

Bailies, religious philanthropists who hold their head high in society, lawyers, business men, great employers of labour, clergymen, and men of title *are known to the authorities* as being among those who would have been dragged through the mire, and because of this the matter was hushed up. Had they been poor people, then – then there would have been no reserve. But the rich, the great, the religious! ‘Twere sacrilege to lay hands on these.’¹²²

The brothel’s madam Mrs. Pollock was depicted as their accomplice, a ‘she-devil’ whose stock instrument of torture, the abortionist’s speculum, caused ‘piercing screams and heavy groans’ which alarmed the neighbours, whilst the girls themselves were transformed into the narrative’s victims, variously described as ‘weak’ ‘poor’ and ‘hapless’. Despite the testimony from an ex-councillor of Glasgow, that the girls ‘went to Mrs. Pollock’s of their own free will fully conscious of what they were going for’ and indeed, ‘seemed to be on the best terms with Mrs. Pollock’, in Hardie’s account they were stripped of all sexual or economic autonomy, repeatedly referred to as the daughters of working men, despite Hardie acknowledging that they were themselves ‘working girls’.¹²³ This left the working-class man, embodied by Hardie and his *Labour Leader* staff, to fulfill the role of hero, struggling against the dangers of libel action and bankruptcy to ‘do our duty

¹¹⁹ ‘Glasgow West-End Scandal: Notice to Our Readers’, *Labour Leader*, 29 February 1896, p. 73.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*; Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 85-6.

¹²¹ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 94; Keir Hardie, ‘In Militant Mood’, *Labour Leader*, 1 February 1896, p. 35.

¹²² Keir Hardie, ‘In Militant Mood’, *Labour Leader*, 1 February 1896, p. 35. Hardie’s reading of the brothel scandal as one of aristocratic sexual exploitation is reinforced elsewhere in the paper, ‘Omni’ in ‘ILP Notes’ justifying the *Leader*’s sensationalist coverage solely on the basis of the story’s class dimension, asserting that ‘Simply because two girls were poor their names were blazoned forth to the world and branded as prostitutes, and simply because their seducer is rich his name was screened, and this being purely a workers’ question the *Labour Leader* took the matter up, and hence the enormous sale.’ Omni, ‘ILP Notes and News’, *Labour Leader*, 15 February 1896, p. 57.

¹²³ Letter from George MacFarlane to Keir Hardie, and ‘In Militant Mood’, *Labour Leader*, 1 February 1896, p. 35.

by the class to which we belong' and tear aside 'the veil which hides the vice of our wealthy classes'.¹²⁴

Hardie's championing of the working-class man in his narrative of prostitution reflects what several scholars have identified as the inherent masculinity of socialism during this period, Ruth Livesey arguing that for middle-class men of letters at least, 'socialism became a site for the reclamation of manhood lost within capitalist modernity', and concluding that 'if late nineteenth-century socialism had a sex, it was male'.¹²⁵ It is clear that by contrast, the 'sexual script' utilized by Bella in her columns on the Contagious Diseases Acts would have struck a strikingly discordant note.¹²⁶ Her reading of prostitution in India as the sexual exploitation of native Indian women by the working-class British male soldiery was clearly incompatible with Hardie's melodrama of the aristocratic seduction of working men's daughters.

The incongruity of their interpretations of prostitution reflects the uneasy relationship between socialism and the women's rights movement during the 1890s, a relationship being negotiated between men and women within socialist parties and organisations throughout Europe.¹²⁷ The terms of the debate had initially been set by two texts with 'canonical status' within the movement: Frederick Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884) and August Bebel's *Woman Under Socialism* (1879, revised 1883 and 1891).¹²⁸ Broadly speaking, their central argument was that female oppression had an economic cause: patriarchy was a product of capitalism and its overthrow could therefore only be realized with the cessation of class society. By eliding the subjugation of women within a class analytic in this way, Karen Hunt has argued that 'socialist theory both recognized and then effectively shelved the question' of female emancipation, leaving a raft of 'ambiguities, absences and limitations' around the role of women in a future socialist state and how sexual equality was to be achieved.¹²⁹ The resolution of such issues fell primarily to women activists like Bella working within the socialist movement during the 1890s and early 1900s, who 'struggled to translate the tension between socialism and feminism into a creative political practice'.¹³⁰ Their challenge was twofold: to find a legitimate role for themselves as women within the socialist movement and to simultaneously rewrite the language of socialism to fully incorporate a gendered analysis, both difficult undertakings, especially prior to

¹²⁴ 'The Glasgow Scandal. Astounding Revelations', *Labour Leader*, 8 February 1886, p. 47. Whilst the paper did reveal the names of several of the men named in court, the *Labour Leader* printers refused to run the risk of printing the name of the 'old gentleman' said to be at the centre of the case. Hardie promised to publish the information in pamphlet form, although whether this ever subsequently happened is unknown.

¹²⁵ Livesey, *Socialism, Sex and the Culture of Aestheticism*, pp. 11-12. See also Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, pp. 57-63.

¹²⁶ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 97.

¹²⁷ See Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert, *Socialist Women: European Socialist Feminism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century* (Elsevier: New York, 1978).

¹²⁸ George Lichtheim, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study* (New York, 1961), p. 241, quoted in Boxer and Quataert, *Socialist Women*, p. 10.

¹²⁹ Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*, pp. 26, 24.

¹³⁰ Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p. 2.

the advent of a cohesive, national and politically efficacious women's movement. Bella commented in 1895 'I doubt whether there are many amongst us who are yet able to realise all that is involved in this question of the position of women in the Socialist movement.'¹³¹ It involved not only challenging the 'masculinist rhetoric and practice' of contemporary socialism, a movement which persisted in imagining its adherents as 'Young Men in a Hurry', but creating sanctioned spaces in which to articulate such challenges.¹³² Whilst other socialist newspapers followed the *Labour Leader* in publishing women's columns, 'Julia Dawson' editing 'Our Woman's Letter' for the *Clarion* between 1895 and 1911, as well as 'Iona's' later column for the *Leader*,¹³³ several women found fiction a more hospitable genre than male-edited socialist journalism for exploring the more transgressive implications of socialist politics, with Isabella Ford, Katharine Bruce Glasier and Ethel Carnie Holdsworth all writing novels critiquing current gender relations.¹³⁴

According to Hannam and Hunt, that such attempts were permitted at all was due to the fact that prior to 1905 and the advent of suffrage militancy, the woman question 'had few immediate political implications'.¹³⁵ Even so, the frank and repeated criticism of the behaviour of male socialists in 'Matrons and Maidens' proved controversial, with Bella criticized for being 'too hard on the men', although in her typically dry manner professed herself unlikely 'to be disturbed by any qualms of conscience on that score.'¹³⁶ Yet forming a more precise assessment of the column's reception and significance within the early British labour movement is problematic. Whilst we know that during this period the *Labour Leader* was the most widely read of the weekly socialist newspapers, its circulation in 1894 exceeding 40,000 copies, compared to 34,000 sold by the *Clarion* and between 2,000 and 3,000 by *Justice* and the *Commonweal*, such figures indicate the potential rather than actual readership of the 'Matrons and Maidens' column.¹³⁷ Bearing in mind Bella's own misgivings about the provision of a 'special column for women', some ILP men are

¹³¹ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 27 April 1895.

¹³² Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p. 61. In 1897, Hardie published extracts of his book in the *Labour Leader* entitled 'A Chronicle of the Sayings and Doings of the Young Men in a Hurry'.

¹³³ 'Julia Dawson' was the penname of Mrs D. Middleton Worrall. For a comprehensive discussion of the women's columns, see Hunt and Hannam, 'Propagandising as socialist women', pp. 167-182.

¹³⁴ See Chris Waters, 'New women and socialist-feminist fiction: the novels of Isabella Ford and Katharine Bruce Glasier' and Pamela Fox, 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's "revolt of the gentle": romance and the politics of resistance in working-class women's writing', both in A. Ingram and D. Patai (eds), *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers, 1889-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 25-42 and 57-74.

¹³⁵ Hannam and Hunt, 'Propagandising as Socialist Women', p. 179.

¹³⁶ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 23 May 1896, p. 174.

¹³⁷ The *Labour Leader* circulation figures are from a letter to Hardie from the newspaper's printers fulfilling his request for a sales statement. See letter George Mitchell, Labour Literature Society to Hardie, 21 May 1894, ILP Archives, FJC, Reel 2 1894/98. For *Clarion* circulation figures see 'Clarion (1891-1934)', Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (London/Ghent: British Library/ Academia Press, 2009), pp. 122-3. For *Justice* and *Commonweal* circulation figures, see Trevor Lloyd, 'Morris v. Hyndman "Commonweal" and "Justice"', *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, 9:4 (December 1976), pp. 119-128, especially pp. 122, 124 and 126. Kenneth Morgan believed the *Labour Leader* to be 'the most effective, because the most authoritative, vehicle for the social democratic cause', reaching thousands of working people and radical middle-class sympathizers. See Morgan, *Keir Hardie*, p. 67. By the turn of the century, however, its circulation figures had tailed off, and by the time it was taken over by the ILP in 1904 weekly sales had fallen to just below 12,000. See Hannam and Hunt, 'Propagandising as Socialist Women', pp. 168-182 (p. 168).

likely to have ignored ‘Matrons and Maidens’, seeing it as irrelevant to their concerns, one male correspondent viewing his interest in it as so exceptional as to require an apology.¹³⁸ Furthermore, the principal source for ascertaining how the column was received by those who did read it, are the readers’ letters that Bella chose to publish in the column, the vast majority of which are supportive. Whilst acknowledging these limitations, however, it is possible to draw two tentative conclusions.

The first is that the column was broadly welcomed by women within the movement, who used it as a forum for publicizing a wide-range of women-focused events, organisations and literature. Whilst some of the female correspondents were prominent within the socialist and women’s rights movements, including Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, Isabella O. Ford, Katherine St. John Conway, Edith Ellis, Jane Hume Clapperton, Sophia Jex-Blake and Mona Caird, the vast majority of letters came from local ILP branch activists. For such women the column performed a vital supportive, coordinating and unifying role, providing them with a space to vent their frustrations about socialist men, as well as to share advice, request information, report on meetings, and appeal for funds. The second conclusion to be drawn is that among male readers, the column divided opinion. Whilst several men wrote to pledge their support to the cause of women’s emancipation, specific feminist issues such as the medical perpetuation of the sexual double standard or the campaign against the reinstatement of the Contagious Diseases Act in India triggered a flurry of negative responses, one male reader, a ‘Hater of Cant’, expressing his incredulity that Hardie tolerated Lily Bell’s ‘column and a half of bigoted cant week after week’.¹³⁹

An Uneasy Alliance

Hardie stood by her, initially at least. Indeed, it is clear the editorial team of the *Labour Leader* viewed ‘Matrons and Maidens’ as providing valuable evidence of the paper’s pioneering feminist credentials, in an 1895 publicity notice stating how it had ‘from the first recognized the importance of the woman’s side of the Labour movement, and made special provision for a full and fair presentation of their views’, praising Lily Bell’s ‘fearless and intelligent handling of women’s interests.’¹⁴⁰ Later, the ILP leadership expressed their pride in the party’s early, enlightened attitude towards the woman question, Hardie claiming in 1913 that ‘ours is the one political organization wherein women stand on terms of perfect equality with men’ and Bruce Glasier in 1919 that ‘the women’s political agitation, like the political Labour movement, may be said to have been cradled in the ILP’.¹⁴¹ In actuality however, as work by Hannam has demonstrated, the position of the ILP

¹³⁸ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 31 March 1894, p. 7; 15 September 1894, p. 7.

¹³⁹ Bella responded by suggesting her correspondent find a suitable replacement among ‘the more tractable specimens of the feminine’, stating her editor was ‘well aware of my willingness to withdraw at any time.’ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 2 February 1895, p. 4.

¹⁴⁰ ‘The Labour Leader. Programme for 1896’, *Labour Leader*, 21 December 1895 p. 8.

¹⁴¹ Keir Hardie, *After Twenty Years: All About the ILP* (1913), p. 13, quoted in Hannam, ‘Women and the ILP, 1890-1914’, p. 205. J. Bruce Glasier, *James Keir Hardie. A Memorial* (Manchester and London: National Labour Press, 1919), p. 38.

towards both women and feminism was not uniform, but instead marked by contradiction, inconsistency and ambiguity, in both its rhetoric and practice.¹⁴² There are several telling illustrations of this. Firstly, the *Labour Leader*, whilst accommodating Bella's weekly critique of male power, also contained highly patronizing accounts of women by male socialist writers, who persisted in both infantilizing and sexualizing ILP female propagandists, sometimes simultaneously. One particularly notorious offender was 'Marxian' (George A. H. Samuel), a well-known and popular columnist on the paper who was on good terms with Hardie and who made no secret of his ambivalence towards women's rights, ranking the issue of marriage along with 'religion, vegetarianism, hypnotism [and] cold baths' as individual idiosyncrasies that socialism should have nothing to do with.¹⁴³ After arriving nearly two hours late for a Sunday night meeting in Tottenham, and delivering what he described as 'an atrociously bad lecture', he turned his attention to the chairperson, 'Miss Vida Knight', whom he chose to describe in the following piquant terms:

Occupying the chair shone a bright-eyed, vivacious little girl, who handled the meeting as though it were her mother's nursery, and made me feel thankful that I did not get a box on my ear for general ignorance, timidity, and incompetence....If you imagine a chic, brown-haired creature with the healthy grace and assurance of an American girl, the knowledge of an average man, and the years and artless beauty of a child, you may be able to form some idea of what Miss Knight is.¹⁴⁴

Unsurprisingly, some women activists deeply resented the condescending tone of such articles, the Leeds socialist Lizzie Maguire reacting angrily when described by *Leader* writer Jim Connell as 'irritating, fascinating, exasperating, beautiful', protesting indignantly to Bella, 'He actually admits we are intelligent and then writes such stuff!', and asserting that the women of Leeds were 'far too rational and far too much interested in Socialism to appreciate such folly.'¹⁴⁵ Bella was forced to act as an intermediary between the two parties, in her column warning Connell that whilst his article may have been written 'in a spirit of fun', 'women resent even the appearance of not being taken seriously, and are much more quick to suspect the presence of an underlying element of contempt in the "chaff" to which they are subjected than might be supposed from the fact that they so often allow it to pass unchallenged.'¹⁴⁶

Secondly, whilst in theory there were no barriers to women holding office within the ILP, with Enid Stacy, Emmeline Pankhurst, Isabella Ford, Katharine Bruce Glasier and Caroline Martyn all serving on the NAC during the 1890s and 1900s, little was done to actively encourage women to

¹⁴² Hannam, 'Women and the ILP, 1890-1914'.

¹⁴³ Marxian, 'Lanchester and Manchester', *Labour Leader*, 9 November 1895, p. 1. On Marxian's popularity, see Jim Connell, 'Women's Rights: Lizzie Maguire and Marxian', *Labour Leader*, 20 February 1897, p. 63; on his relationship with Hardie, see Lintell, 'Lily Bell', pp. 85-6; on his views on women's rights, see Marxian, 'Scotland's London', *Labour Leader*, 4 April 1896, p. 117.

¹⁴⁴ Marxian, 'Mere Egotism', *Labour Leader*, 15 May 1897, p. 165.

¹⁴⁵ Jim Connell, 'Women's Rights: Lizzie Maguire and Marxian', *Labour Leader*, 20 February 1897, p. 63; Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 13 March 1897, p. 86.

¹⁴⁶ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 13 March 1897, p. 86; Jim Connell, 'Queer Conduct Exposed', *The Labour Leader*, 8 May 1897, p. 158; Jim Connell, 'The Leeds New Woman', *Labour Leader*, 8 July 1897, p. 223.

become members. Although there were undoubtedly local variations, with branches in Glasgow among the more pro-active in facilitating female participation, women were often restricted to organizing social events and overall, numbers remained at a low level, with women comprising approximately ten per cent of the delegates to the annual conferences.¹⁴⁷ Bella herself occasionally expressed impatience at women's apparent lack of interest in politics, although understood the considerable impediments on women's time and was sympathetic to how their domestic responsibilities kept them 'on the grind from morning to night without cessation, and without question as to the justice of it.'¹⁴⁸

Finally, whilst on paper the ILP was committed to female suffrage, in practice it avoided campaigning directly on the issue. The inclusion of female enfranchisement in the party's constitution can be directly attributed to Bella herself, as a representative of the Women's Labour Party moving a resolution at the 1895 annual conference in Newcastle which sought to clarify that ILP support for extending electoral rights encompassed 'both men and women'.¹⁴⁹ Yet she was well aware of the issue's divisiveness within the party, overhearing some prominent party workers 'deprecating "the lowering of the beautiful ideal of Socialism" (!), which, they considered, would be the result of what they called "dragging in the question of women's suffrage"'.¹⁵⁰ According to research by Laura Ugolini, such views became increasingly commonplace after the election defeat of 1895, which resulted in a major shift in ILP party ideology towards an emphasis on a 'working-class, masculine, trade unionist "Labour" and a concentration on workplace, economic changes'.¹⁵¹ Although there were undoubtedly still exceptions, Ugolini argues that overall this resulted in a greater tendency amongst male ILPers to view women's suffrage variously as a middle-class issue, an irrelevant 'fad' or as an impediment to socialism, 'C. H.' suggesting in a letter to Lily Bell that as women were 'generally more conservative than men', their enfranchisement might inadvertently result in the maintainance of 'such orthodoxies as the monarchy, the Church, the parson, etc.'¹⁵²

As Margaret McMillan noted, 'the Independent Labour Party was not formed to champion women. It was born to make war on capitalism and competition'.¹⁵³ Throughout its history, the ILP chose to emphasize class unity above gender disunity, and capitalist rather than patriarchal exploitation. As such, all socialist women were engaged in a constant process of negotiation between loyalty to their gender and loyalty to their class, with a diverse range of positions taken. Whilst Isabella Ford attempted to give both identities equal weight, the SDF propagandist Dora Montefiore was overtly

¹⁴⁷ Hannam, 'Women and the ILP', pp. 214-5, 226 n. 45.

¹⁴⁸ Bella also understood that women without business experience might lack the confidence to speak up at meetings, advocating separate ILP women's groups for this reason. See Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 15 December 1894, p. 6 and 11 April 1896, p. 126.

¹⁴⁹ Minutes of the ILP Annual Conference, Series 2, Part 1, Card 4 1895 24-5, ILP Archives; 'Women's Rights', *Labour Leader*, 20 April 1895, p. 9.

¹⁵⁰ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 27 April 1895, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ Ugolini, "'It Is Only Justice to Grant Women's Suffrage'", p. 134.

¹⁵² Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 5 December 1896, p. 416.

¹⁵³ Quoted in Hannam, 'Women and the ILP', p. 214.

critical of feminists who tried ‘to stir up a sex-war instead of preaching class-war’.¹⁵⁴ For Bella, despite her sincere belief that ‘The cause of women and the cause of labour were indissolubly connected’, her first allegiance undoubtedly was to feminism, declaring in response to what she perceived to be the sycophantism and misplaced loyalty of Liberal ladies towards the male politicians they supported, ‘I hope our Socialist women will never forget that *they* are “women first and Socialists afterwards”’.¹⁵⁵

Indeed, Bella’s prioritization of issues of sex above those of class can be seen as integral to her understanding of socialism. As an ethical socialist, she was deeply committed to the individual moral regeneration that would result ultimately in a socialist utopia. Critically, however, like other ‘new life’ female socialists working within the ILP, including Isabella Ford and Enid Stacy, Bella held the movement’s reconceptualisation of personal relations to encompass not just an emphasis on selflessness and altruism but on the transformation of relations between the sexes.¹⁵⁶ True comradeship, she argued, was impossible whilst exchanges between socialist men and women were governed by the sex instinct. Instead, Bella envisaged a new model of relations between women and men, one based not on flirtation but on rationality and mutual respect. A necessary precursor to this more ‘natural relationship between the sexes’, and consequently to the sought-for fellowship and fraternity of ethical socialism, was the securing of female emancipation.¹⁵⁷ ‘Until we have free women’, Bella urged, ‘we may dream of obtaining socialism, but it will continue to remain a dream’, its attainment impossible ‘so long as any of the existing sex barriers remain.’¹⁵⁸ Indeed, she commented, even if such a utopia were achievable, its realization would be patently undesirable, for ‘Socialist men are pretty much like other men, and their Socialist “heaven upon earth” would be a male heaven only!’¹⁵⁹

The principal burden of responsibility in securing women’s rights, she placed on women themselves, believing that until they learnt to assert their own needs, socialist men could hardly be expected to take them seriously.¹⁶⁰ Freedom, she stated, ‘does not come to us, we must take it and keep it for ourselves’ and in order to do this, she proposed the formation of a national, independent association of women, ‘drawing together into one whole all those who are beginning to think seriously and earnestly, or to feel that they have their share in the work that is to be done.’¹⁶¹ Until then, if ILP men persisted in sidelining women’s issues and confining them to auxiliary roles, socialist women should go on strike, ‘refuse to do their [i.e. the men’s] work without the full

¹⁵⁴ D. B. Montefiore, *Some Words to Socialist Women* (London: Twentieth Century Press, 1908), p. 13, quoted in Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p. 64.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Labour Day Celebrations’, *Glasgow Herald*, 6 May 1895; Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 13 April 1895, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 21 April 1894, p. 7.

¹⁵⁷ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 1 December 1894, p. 7.

¹⁵⁸ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 31 October 1896, p. 382.

¹⁵⁹ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 5 December 1896, p. 416.

¹⁶⁰ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 17 August 1895, p. 4.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* and 21 April 1894, p. 7.

recognition we claim, and meantime to go on with our own', a statement prophetic of the later controversial actions of Christabel Pankhurst at the Cocker mouth by-election in 1906, when she withdrew the support of the Women's Social and Political Union from the ILP candidate.¹⁶²

Prior to the advent of the national, militant women's suffrage movement, however, the balance of power lay with the ILP. By 1898, its chairman Keir Hardie decided its newspaper could do without one of its more strident feminist voices. On 3 February, Hardie wrote to David Lowe agreeing with him that 'L.B.' was 'hopeless', before writing three weeks later to give her notice.¹⁶³ How Bella reacted to the news is not known. However, she continued to contribute occasional columns until the end of the year, her final piece appearing on 17 December 1898, reiterating the plight of "'The Queen's Daughters in India" ... so cruelly oppressed by the workings of the Contagious Diseases Acts.'¹⁶⁴ With her departure, the *Labour Leader* lost its only consistent, formalized connection to the women's rights movement, with no section specifically for women included again until 1906, when Katherine Bruce Glasier, writing under the pseudonym of 'Iona', began 'Women's Outlook', a column described by June Hannam as 'often condescending' and which emphasized women's role in the domestic sphere.¹⁶⁵

Before moving on however, it is worth pausing briefly to consider the assertion, made on at least four separate occasions in the historical literature, that 'Matrons and Maidens' was either in part or in its entirety written not by Bella Pearce but by Hardie. The suggestion was first made by Kenneth Morgan in 1975, who claimed that 'at times' Hardie wrote the women's column, an assertion concurred with by both Christine Collette in 1987 and Carolyn Steedman in 1990, who chose to refer to 'Lily Bell' in her biography of Margaret McMillan as 's/he'.¹⁶⁶ Lastly, and most seriously, in 1988 Carolyn Stephens based an entire article on the supposition that Hardie was the sole author of the column, referring to 'Lily Bell' as a 'man in drag' and ascribing the apparent sincerity of the column's feminist opinions to the fact that Hardie was an illegitimate child, thereby transforming

¹⁶² Lily Bell, 'Women and Work', *Labour Leader*, 12 December 1896, p. 424. Bella thought the WSPU was entirely justified in its action at Cocker mouth, arguing that women's suffrage should not be viewed as merely a plank in the Labour platform and reiterating that 'a Socialist regime which is not founded upon the principle of sex equality, if it were possible to institute it, would be a danger to society.' Lily Bell, 'The Lesson of Cocker mouth', *Forward*, 27 October 1906, p. 2.

¹⁶³ Letters from Keir Hardie to David Lowe, 3 February 1898 and 24 April 1898, 1898/11 and 1898/20, FJC, ILP Archives.

¹⁶⁴ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 17 December 1898, p. 415.

¹⁶⁵ Hannam, 'Women and the ILP', p. 211. In a later analysis, June Hannam and Karen Hunt are more generous towards Iona's 'Women's Outlook', describing it as a column which 'raised a wide range of issues concerning women's emancipation and the basis on which they should engage in socialist politics.' See Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁶ Morgan, *Keir Hardie*, p. 66; Christine Collette, 'Socialism and Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the Early Labour Movement', *History Workshop*, 23 (Spring 1987), p. 105. Steedman harboured 'some suspicion that on occasion Hardie wrote this column, in transfiguration from his "Daddy Time" children's column'. See Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860-1931* (London: Virago, 1990), pp. 130-1, 291 n.45.

‘Matrons and Maidens’ into a ‘barely disguised lament of a loyal son for his mother’s honor’.¹⁶⁷ What evidence all four historians base their assertions on is unknown, none of them listing their specific sources. All the *Labour Leader* staff writers wrote under a penname, with their real identities a closely guarded secret. In the second week of her column, ‘Lily Bell’ stated ‘My maidenly modesty – I too belong to the blushing set – compels me to decline with thanks all invitations to reveal myself’, adding ‘The portrait given herewith must satisfy all who want to see’, although it is by no means certain that the pen and ink illustration which accompanied the column during its first year was a true likeness of the author, no photograph of Bella as yet having surfaced.¹⁶⁸

There is, however, a wealth of evidence attesting to the fact that the overall editor of the ‘Matrons and Maidens’ column, and author of the vast majority of its content, was indeed Bella Pearce. This evidence is of three types: direct, circumstantial and textual. The direct evidence consists of references to Bella being ‘Lily Bell’ by close associates within the socialist and feminist movements. John Bruce Glasier, for example, when trying in 1919 to assert the ILP’s early feminist credentials, wrote that ‘Mrs. Pearce of Glasgow (“Lily Bell”) was hammering away at [women’s suffrage] week by week in the columns of the *Labour Leader*’, whilst David Lowe, in his 1923 biography of Hardie, stated simply that ‘Lily Bell hid the name of Mrs. Bream Pearce’.¹⁶⁹ The letters of Bella’s friend Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy hold numerous references to ‘Mrs. Pearce’ being ‘Lily Bell’, Elmy using the two names interchangeably, whilst in 1907, Teresa Billington-Greig unwittingly ‘outed’ Lily Bell in the pages of *Forward*, referring to an article of hers in the previous week as being by ‘Mrs. Pearce’.¹⁷⁰

The circumstantial evidence is extensive and what is listed here is merely a selection of the more persuasive examples. ‘Lily Bell’ was clearly an active member of the feminist networks of the 1890s and 1900s and her columns in the *Labour Leader* and later in Tom Johnstone’s Scottish socialist weekly *Forward* indicate her attendance at numerous events at which we know Hardie was absent and Bella present. For example, the ‘Matrons and Maidens’ column contains a full and favourable report of the 1896 conference of the Women’s Emancipation Union, at which we know Bella gave a paper, but which took place when Hardie was in Bradford fighting the Bradford East by-election.¹⁷¹ Similarly, the column charts its author’s blossoming friendship with Elmy, yet

¹⁶⁷ Carolyn Stevens, ‘The Objections of “Queer Hardie”, “Lily Bell” and the Suffragettes’ Friend to Queen Victoria’s Jubilee, 1897, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 21:3 (1988), pp. 108-114.

¹⁶⁸ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 7 April 1894, p. 6.

¹⁶⁹ Bruce Glasier, *James Keir Hardie*, p. 38; David Lowe, *From Pit to Parliament. The Story of the Early Life of James Keir Hardie* (London: Labour, 1923), pp. 42, 94.

¹⁷⁰ Letters of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, 11 December 1895, 15 August 1897, 18 September 1898 and 26 April 1904, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy Papers; Teresa Billington-Greig, ‘The Difference in the Women’s Movement. Autocracy or Democracy’, *Forward*, 23 November 1907, 2:7, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 24 October 1896, p. 369; Maureen Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement: The Biography of an Insurgent Woman*

whilst we know Bella and Elmy became friends, Hardie didn't meet the redoubtable, pioneering feminist until 1905.¹⁷² Finally, in the 'Matrons and Maidens' column, 'Lily Bell' occasionally related feelings of deep despondency that coincide with difficult episodes in the Pearces' lives. For example, in the same week that Charles announced the withdrawal of his parliamentary candidacy for Camlachie, 'Lily Bell' reflected 'What creatures of moods we are. Life seems to alternate between states of hope and despair', consoling herself with the thought that 'Some day the darkness will pass away and we shall see the light.'¹⁷³ Finally, the very fact that 'Lily Bell' required hiring and then firing by Hardie; that she continued her column when Hardie toured America but that 'Sophia' took over when 'Lily Bell' went to Iceland ('Sophia' being Bella's husband Charles);¹⁷⁴ that 'Mrs. Pearce' and 'C. W. Bream Pearce' attended the *Labour Leader* staff party; that the sobriquet 'Lily Bell' was reprised for *Forward* in 1906-8, a paper Hardie had no involvement in; that Lily Bell had no sons and that Hardie had two;¹⁷⁵ that Lily Bell was a drinker and Hardie a tee-totaller,¹⁷⁶ all indicate not an elaborate case of female impersonation by a busy socialist party leader but that 'Lily Bell' was indeed whom Glasier, Lowe et al said she was, Bella Pearce.

Finally, there is an abundance of textual evidence which indicates that both the 'Matrons and Maidens' column and the later pieces by 'Lily Bell' in *Forward*, were the work of a single, female, feminist voice. The tone, rhetoric and content are entirely consistent throughout the articles, the author utilizing the same metaphors, revisiting the same themes and deploying the same arguments. Furthermore, the writing contains authentic personal details that it would be utterly fanciful to believe were fabricated by Hardie in order to construct a believable feminine persona. These include grief at the author's dog dying ('I have lost a friend, one whose faithful affection never wavered and whose welcome was always assured'), accounts of her holidays to Scandinavia, Heligoland and Iceland ('I suppose we Scotch folk are more akin to the North than the South') and a moment of feminist epiphany reading Mona Caird's *The Daughter of Danaus* on a delayed train

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 167-8, 175 n. 108; Morgan, *Keir Hardie*, pp. 91-2, 301 n. 28.

¹⁷² Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 24 October 1896, p. 369; Caroline Benn, *Keir Hardie* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), pp. 201-2.

¹⁷³ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 1 June 1895, p. 4.

¹⁷⁴ We know that Charles wrote as 'Sophia' because of a letter from Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, in which she states 'Lily Bell is home again and I send a note from Her. "Sophia," the modern Sophia, by the way, is Mr. Pearce.' Letter Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, 15 August 1897, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy Papers.

¹⁷⁵ When discussing the progress of the 1897 Women's Suffrage Bill, 'Lily Bell' comments 'When I hear men talk of women in the way some do, I bless my stars I have no sons.' Lily Bell, 'Women's Suffrage', *Labour Leader*, 13 February 1897, p. 50.

¹⁷⁶ Bella and Charles Pearce ran a wine-trading company, C. W. Pearce & Co., which imported wine from the Brotherhood of the New Life in California. Bella had little patience for tee-totallers, 'Lily Bell' commenting after attending an annual conference of Women Workers in Croydon, 'It is a curious fact that religion and teetotalism are both forces which retard rather than help progress – I suppose by carrying their devotees away on to side tracks of lesser usefulness. By "religiosity," of course, I do not mean religion, which to me is the essence and true spirit of all true life.' See Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader* 13 November 1897, p. 370. In contrast, Hardie was a tee-totaller, having been committed to the temperance movement since his youth.

(‘seldom has a day’s traveling seemed to pass more quickly’).¹⁷⁷ In short, woven into the very fabric of the column are the myriad encounters, episodes and emotions that constitute the texture of an individual life.

The only piece of archival evidence which could be read to support Hardie’s authorial intervention in the column is a letter to David Lowe in June 1896 enclosing copy for the *Labour Leader*, in which Hardie commented ‘I have folded up as one some pars which can be used either in B.O. [‘Between Ourselves’] M. M. [presumably ‘Maidens and Matrons’?] or as feautres just as you find handiest.’¹⁷⁸ However, even if we accept that Hardie did on occasion contribute an odd paragraph to ‘Matrons and Maidens’, as this passage appears to suggest, the overwhelming evidence supports the contention that the column speaks with Bella’s voice. It is even possible to give her the last word on the matter. In her column of 8 September 1894, Bella related that some ‘bright youths’ had recently been led to believe that ‘Lily Bell’ was in fact a man. ‘Never mind, old man,’ she rejoindered, ‘a woman’s a woman for a’that.’¹⁷⁹

A Woman’s Party

During the 1890s, Bella had remained cautiously optimistic that the ILP as a political body could both accommodate and potentially further her feminist aims. With the 1900s, however, came a critical and irrevocable shift in her thinking. The increasing emphasis placed by some male and female socialists from the end of 1904 onwards on the attainment of adult suffrage as an alternative to women’s suffrage, left her exasperated, interpreting it as an underhand attempt to block the enfranchisement of women by tendering a remote and impractical alternative.¹⁸⁰ Socialists, she argued, were ‘apt to keep their beautiful principles for theoretical use’; when asked to put them into practice, they had ‘a knack of finding excuses of expediency for delaying that operation until the arrival of some delectable future.’¹⁸¹ No stranger herself to the utopian impulse to ‘prefigure the future in the present’, for Bella, a crucial foundation stone of that ‘delectable future’ was now within reach.¹⁸² The political landscape had shifted and the attainment of female enfranchisement appeared a real and immediate possibility. The ILP’s failure to grasp the nettle and declare itself ‘openly and boldly for the women’ was the deciding factor in ensuring Bella’s withdrawal from socialist politics.¹⁸³ According to Bella, the ILP had ‘proven itself to be first and foremost a man’s

¹⁷⁷ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 26 October 1895, p. 3; 11 December 1897, p. 405; 5 January 1895, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ Letter Keir Hardie to David Lowe, June 1896, Reel 3, 1896/63, FJC, ILP Archives.

¹⁷⁹ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 1 September 1894, p. 7.

¹⁸⁰ For a comprehensive and insightful discussion of the engagement of socialist women with suffrage campaigns during this period, see Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, pp. 105-133.

¹⁸¹ Lily Bell, ‘Woman and Socialism. A Reply to Miss Bondfield’, *Forward*, 9 February 1907, p. 3.

¹⁸² Sheila Rowbotham, *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 130, quoted in Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p. 65.

¹⁸³ Lily Bell, ‘Women and the Labour Party’, *Forward*, 12 January 1907, p. 6.

party, in which, as in the other political parties, women are a secondary consideration.’¹⁸⁴ She had even lost faith with Hardie, despite his continued support for votes for women, their relationship deteriorating perhaps understandably from the time of her dismissal from the *Leader*, with Hardie reluctant to prolong a brief stay with the Pearces in 1898.¹⁸⁵

Instead, Bella transferred her energies and resources to the militant women’s suffrage movement, whose protagonists she heralded as ‘women who dare to fight for their rights, and will plead for them never again!’¹⁸⁶ Since 1895, she had been an active member of the Women’s Emancipation Union (WEU), delivering a paper on ‘Women and Factory Legislation’ at their 1896 conference in which she argued against protective legislation for female factory workers and espoused the transformative power of socialism.¹⁸⁷ A cross-party radical feminist organization founded by Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, the WEU attracted a middle-class, mixed-sex membership possessing ‘a kaleidoscopic series of political allegiances, and shar[ing] an advanced interpretation of feminist ideals’, who lobbied on a range of issues, including employment, education, parental rights, divorce and sexuality, as well as suffrage.¹⁸⁸ Bella was in complete sympathy with the organisation’s aims, after the 1896 conference writing in the *Labour Leader* ‘I have attended a good many meetings in my time, representing all sorts and shades of opinion and convictions, but in none of them have I had more pleasure and satisfaction than in those of the Women’s Emancipation Union at which I was able to be present in London last week’. She wrote of Elmy that ‘seldom has a personality impressed me so forcibly or so deeply’.¹⁸⁹ The two women subsequently became close friends, Bella and Charles sending the Elmys gifts of wine when Elizabeth’s husband Ben became ill with a bronchial infection and Elizabeth later visiting the Pearces in Glasgow.¹⁹⁰

However, whilst the significance of the WEU in defining the tone of subsequent suffrage debates has recently been underscored by Elmy’s biographer Maureen Wright, it was with the explosion into the political arena of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1905 that Bella felt the greatest sense of excitement and anticipation, believing it to be ‘exactly the kind of party – a

¹⁸⁴ Lily Bell, ‘The Suffrage Question’, *Forward*, 9 March 1907, p. 8.

¹⁸⁵ Letter from Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, 11 February 1902, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy papers; letter from Hardie to unknown recipient, 21 November 1898, 1898/ 127A, FJC, ILP Archives. In 1899 however, relations were still cordial enough for the Pearces to attend an anti-Boer War meeting that Hardie had convened in Glasgow. See Haddow, *My Seventy Years*, pp. 40-2, 151-2.

¹⁸⁶ Lily Bell, ‘Women’s View. “The Strike of a Sex”’, *Forward*, 3 November 1906, p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ At one point, Elmy considered Bella for the WEU’s Council, although whether this transpired is not known. See letter Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, 18 September 1898, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy Papers and Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy*, pp. 167-8, 175 n. 108.

¹⁸⁸ Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy*, pp. 152-3.

¹⁸⁹ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 24 October 1896, p. 369.

¹⁹⁰ For the particular significance of the wine, see chapter 2. Elmy spent ten days in Scotland in October 1908, speaking at suffrage meetings, having long talks with fellow campaigners such as Lady Steele, Miss Methven and Chrystal MacMillan, and sightseeing. Letters from Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, 16 December 1900, 16 September 1908, 7 October 1908 and 16 October 1908, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy Papers. Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*, p. 294.

woman's party – that I advocated long ago, and hoped some day to see.'¹⁹¹ In June 1907 she was appointed honorary treasurer of its Scottish Council, which for a brief period functioned as a self-supporting body independent of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst in London, establishing its own headquarters in Glasgow, opening a branch in Edinburgh and even contemplating publishing its own edition of *Votes for Women*.¹⁹² In their desire for independence from the London suffrage campaign, they were in accord with constitutional suffragists in Scotland, Megan Smitley finding evidence of 'a turbulent relationship' between the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women Suffrage (GWSAWS) and the London umbrella-organisation for constitutional societies, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.¹⁹³ Whilst the animosity of the GWSAWS appears to have been fuelled by a lack of understanding over travel expenses, clashes over the control of policy, and a continuing sense of marginalization by the London body, it is not known what was behind the desire by the Scottish Council of the WSPU for autonomy. However, that it was passionately felt is evidenced in the description of the arrangement by Mary Phillips, a Scottish Council member who later became one of the first suffragettes in Scotland to be arrested and imprisoned:

The London Committee does not manage our affairs for us, we manage them ourselves through the Scottish Council, so the doings of the former do not directly concern us, and need not worry us. All we have to do is to mind our own business, of which there is plenty just now to keep us out of mischief ... and leave other people to mind theirs!¹⁹⁴

The Scottish Council was composed of delegates from each of the Scottish branches of the WSPU, with an old friend of Bella's named Helen Fraser appointed its principal organizer, and Teresa Billington-Greig its honorary secretary.¹⁹⁵ Outlining their principal duty as 'the supervision and direction of propaganda work', the Council organized Scotland's first large-scale suffrage demonstration in Edinburgh, on 5 October 1907 over a thousand representatives from both militant and constitutional Scottish suffrage societies processing down Princes Street in fifty decorated 'carriages, cabs, char-a-bancs, brakes and other vehicles, including one motor car'. According to

¹⁹¹ Whilst the WSPU was founded by Emmeline Pankhurst in Manchester on 10 October 1903, it was with the first act of militancy on 13 October 1905 that the organization shot to public prominence, Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney arrested and subsequently imprisoned after disrupting a Liberal Party meeting in Manchester. Lily Bell, 'The Suffrage Question', *Forward*, 9 March 1907, p. 8.

¹⁹² Entry 'Helen Fraser' in Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, pp. 230-2; Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland*, pp. 240-1.

¹⁹³ Smitley, *The Feminine Public Sphere*, pp. 123-6.

¹⁹⁴ Mary Phillips, 'Woman's Point of View: The National Women's Social and Political Union', *Forward*, 28 September 1907, p. 6 and Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, pp. 44-6. Mary Phillips described her political standpoint as 'extreme Left', and like Bella, wrote for the Scottish socialist newspaper *Forward*. It is therefore likely that the two women were close associates. However, all requests to access her papers, held by 'Camellia plc' in Kent, have been refused. According to the archivist they are part of a private collection which was acquired for investment purposes.

¹⁹⁵ Helen Fraser described Bella as one of her 'older friends' and the two appear to have been close, Bella loaning Helen £300 towards the purchase of her London house and introducing her to both Billington-Greig and Keir Hardie. Disappointingly however, she makes only fleeting references to Bella in her memoirs and oral history interviews. See will of Isabella Duncan Pearce, lodged 24 April 1930; Brian Harrison taped interviews with Helen Fraser Moyes, 19 August and 18 September 1975, The Women's Library (TWL), London Metropolitan University, 8SUF/B/054; Helen Moyes, *A Woman in a Man's World* (Alpha Books: Sydney, 1971), p. 73. For the composition of the Scottish Council, see Mary Phillips, 'Woman's Point of View', *Forward*, 22 June 1907, p. 3.

the *Scotsman* over 10,000 spectators turned out to watch the spectacle, ‘some sympathetic, a few playfully hostile, the majority stolidly apathetic’.¹⁹⁶ Smaller-scale public meetings were also staged throughout Scotland, Bella overcoming her reservations about public speaking and between July and December 1907 addressing audiences in Rothesay, Millport, Largs, Langside, Larkhall and Stirling, battling the elements in open-air meetings ‘where the roar of the winds and waves makes your voice inaudible at two yards, and when intermittent deluges of rain send all the promenaders scurrying pell-mell to the nearest shelter!’¹⁹⁷ It was clearly an exhilarating time, the experience of intense collaboration towards a shared and passionately-held goal facilitating the forging of close personal ties, in February 1907 Teresa Billington marrying her husband Fred Greig from Bella’s house in Langside, with the reception at Helen Fraser’s art studio cum suffrage office in town.¹⁹⁸ An Edinburgh WSPU activist later commented how during this period, ‘everything else was gradually swamped and I lived and moved and seemed to have my being in working for votes for women’, while Bella wrote to a friend in America describing how she was ‘devoting all my spare time to work in the Women’s Movement here which is going just as I wd wish - means a big influx of life pouring in, to the astonishment of many who think the women have gone crazy.’¹⁹⁹

Yet despite its geographical remove from the WSPUs headquarters at Clement’s Inn in London, the Scottish Council was by no means immune to the organization’s internal politicking. On 10 September 1907, Teresa Billington-Greig resigned from the WSPU in London, critical of Emmeline Pankhurst’s institution of a ‘dictatorial’ leadership style, going on to form the Women’s Freedom League with Charlotte Despard and Edith How-Martyn.²⁰⁰ Bella remained loyal to the Pankhursts, defending the WSPUs administrative structure as a ‘free and voluntary association of individuals’ and accusing Billington-Greig of overreacting, commenting archly in the Scottish socialist newspaper *Forward* ‘A sense of humour would be invaluable to those who indulge in melodramatic descriptions of the situation.’²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ ‘Women’s Social and Political Union’, *Forward*, 22 June 1907, p. 3; Mary Phillips, ‘Woman’s Point of View’, *Forward*, 12.10.1907, p. 5; ‘Scottish Women Suffragists. Demonstration in Edinburgh’, *Scotsman*, 7 October 1907, p. 8.

¹⁹⁷ Mary Phillips, ‘Votes for Women’, *Forward*, 17 August 1907, p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ Wedding Programme of Teresa Billington and Frederick Lewis Greig, Teresa Billington-Greig Papers, 7TBG/3/2/2, TWL; Brian Harrison taped interviews with Helen Fraser Moyes, 19 August and 18 September 1975, 8SUF/B/054, TWL.

¹⁹⁹ The Edinburgh suffragette was Lillias Mitchell. See Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, p. 47; letter from Bella Pearce to Brother Robert [Hart], 21 November 1906, TLH Papers 9/ 235.

²⁰⁰ Teresa Billington-Greig, ‘The Birth of the Women’s Freedom League’, in Carol McPhee and Ann FitzGerald, *The Non-Violent Militant. Selected Writings of Teresa Billington-Greig* (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 106-7. Billington-Greig appears to have remained as honorary secretary of the Scottish Council of the WSPU for approximately three months, despite having resigned from the national body, Mary Phillips explaining the arrangement as follows: ‘A few members of the Committee, for reasons of their own, have seceded from the main body. Well, the world is very wide, and there is room and to spare in it for people to take their own ways. But the Union goes on as before.’ See Mary Phillips, ‘Woman’s Point of View. The National Women’s Social and Political Union’, *Forward*, 28 September 1907, p. 6.

²⁰¹ Letter Lily Bell, ‘The Autocratic Bogy in the Women’s Movement’, *Forward*, 7 December 1907, p. 6.

The Scottish WSPU committee was reconstituted in December 1907, Bella now joint honorary secretary with Grace Paterson, with Helen Fraser and Mary Phillips continuing as organizers, although Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy also appears to have had an informal supervisory role.²⁰² Helen Fraser was the next to leave the WSPU however, resigning her membership in the summer of 1908, writing to a friend of her exasperation with her Scottish colleagues, claiming ‘it was utterly impossible to work with my Committee – I stood it as long as I could but I got to the stage where the thought of them made me feel hysterical’²⁰³ Her principal reason for defecting, however, was not the frustrations of committee work but the use by the WSPU of ‘violent tactics’, believing the suffragette Mary Leigh to have committed ‘a bad blunder’ by breaking the windows of 10 Downing Street and that it was ‘simply wicked’ to have permitted WSPU members Florence Haig and Maud Joachim to commit acts of violence.²⁰⁴ Bella, however, remained broadly supportive of the escalating militancy, in direct contrast to her husband Charles’s earlier antipathy towards the violent methods of anarchism. Although she appears never to have engaged in lawbreaking herself, she nonetheless defended passionately the right of her WSPU colleagues to do so. In a series of three articles in *Forward* in 1906, later reprinted as a one-penny pamphlet entitled ‘The Strike of a Sex’, she argued that by failing to accede to their demands for female enfranchisement, the Liberal government had left women with little alternative but to ‘declare war to the death – or to victory’, dismissing perfunctorily the criticism that the use of force was damaging the women’s movement:

What idiotic nonsense to prate of putting back the “cause” for years! It has made a live thing instead of a dead shell, a movement of the people which will not stop until it has carried them to the top of the ascent, out of the valley of humiliation in which the degradation of their womanhood has held them’.²⁰⁵

Even by 1911, when suffragette militancy had escalated to include window breaking on a mass scale (although it had not yet progressed to arson, pouring acid into postboxes and vandalism), Bella was still reluctant to dismiss such tactics out of hand, commenting that while she did ‘not always feel like defending their militant actions’, she seldom felt like condemning them, arguing that their value lay in their ability to ‘arouse and awaken the people to a new interest in our question’, both in Britain and internationally.²⁰⁶

²⁰² Mary Phillips, ‘Woman’s Point of View’, *Forward*, 28 December 1907, p. 8. In a letter to her friend Harriet McIlquham, Elmy described the arrangement as follows: ‘Helen Fraser has begun the work I want to be done in the 8 Scottish constituencies under Mrs. Pearce’s direction, Mrs. Hunter, I believe finds the funds.’ See letter Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, 16 October 1908 f. 210, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy Papers. See also Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, p. 44.

²⁰³ Quoted in Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*, p. 231.

²⁰⁴ Shortly after Helen Fraser resigned her WSPU membership, she was approached by Millicent Garrett Fawcett and asked to work for the non-militant National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). She was clearly an accomplished speaker and in 1910 was instrumental in setting up the North of Scotland Federation of Women’s Suffrage Societies. See Moyes, *A Woman in a Man’s World*, p. 32; entry on ‘Helen Fraser’ in Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*, pp. 230-2; Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, pp. 35-8.

²⁰⁵ Bella was asked to cover the women’s column in *Forward* for Teresa Billington, who was arrested and sentenced to two months imprisonment in Holloway after attending a WSPU demonstration at the opening of parliament. The three articles in *Forward* later reprinted as a pamphlet were Lily Bell, ‘Women’s View. “The Strike of a Sex”’, 3 November 1906 p. 4; ‘The Women’s Movement. News and Review’, 10 November 1906, p. 8 and ‘The Women’s Fight for Freedom’, 17 November 1906, p. 7.

²⁰⁶ Letter by I. D. Pearce, *Freewoman*, 28 December 1911, p. 112.

Whilst we have no evidence detailing Charles's attitude towards suffragette militancy, as a progressive 'new man' he would certainly have been in complete sympathy with the WSPU's aims. His feminist convictions were as deeply rooted as his wife's and are likely to have pre-dated his marriage.²⁰⁷ They were unquestionably evident by the time of his involvement with the ILP, in March 1894 Charles initially refusing the Camlachie candidacy after the party's male-dominated shortlist for the School Board elections led him to conclude that he did not have them with him 'on the question of the complementary equality of woman with man'.²⁰⁸ In his letter of refusal to Hardie, he argued forcefully not only for women's equal participation in the administration of the state, but for the regendering of politics in order to mitigate against the worst excesses of masculine aggressiveness and power play, which he held, literally, to be the work of the devil:

The male attitude of mind which claims all place + power for itself comes from Infernos and is the opposite to the condition we all wish to bring about ... When will my brethren learn wisdom? Can they not see that to exclude the qualities which are feminine from free play in the state, is to make a place for the diabolisms of their opposite.²⁰⁹

The religious origins of his theory of gender complementarity shall be discussed in more depth in the next chapter. He outlined them for a socialist audience in a three-part series of highly esoteric articles written under the pseudonym of 'Sophia' for the *Labour Leader* whilst Bella was on holiday.²¹⁰ Entitled 'The Sexes, what they are, and their relationship to each other', Charles stated that the purpose of the articles was 'for the encouragement and strengthening of all who are striving to fight their way out of the carnal sensuality, in which the higher life of all "civilized" countries is paralysed and smothered', reiterating Bella's critique of the sexual double standard but situating it within an arcane body of unorthodox Christian theology which was entirely incongruous in the pages of the *Labour Leader*, juxtaposed by accounts of the persecution of Spanish anarchists, letters on the trade union funding of socialism and reports on the International Congress of Textile Workers.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ As will become apparent in Chapter 2, from the early 1870s, Charles was a committed disciple of the Brotherhood of the New Life, a Christian organization with an explicitly feminist theology. Whilst there is no proof attesting to his concurrence with what was a key element in their teachings prior to his marriage to Bella, neither is there any evidence to suggest a shift or rupture in what was a lifetime's devotion to their precepts.

²⁰⁸ C. W. Pearce to Keir Hardie, 9 March 1894, Reel 2 1894/42, FJC, ILP Archives. The failure of the ILP's District Council in Glasgow to include more women on the School Board shortlist was clearly a source of frustration for some female socialists, although for Lizzie Glasier, treasurer of the Glasgow Women's Labour Party, it was not the ILP but the prospective female candidates who were to blame, for their 'discreditable negligence and apathy' in not lobbying harder for their nomination. See Lizzie Glasier, 'The Woman's Labour Party, Glasgow', *Labour Leader*, 13 April 1895, p. 4.

²⁰⁹ C. W. Pearce to Keir Hardie, 9 March 1894, Reel 2 1894/42, FJC, ILP Archives.

²¹⁰ Charles penned a total of nine 'Matrons and Maiden's' columns using the pseudonym 'Sophia', in which he also continued Bella's support for the campaign to halt the reimposition of the Contagious Diseases Acts in India, reported scathingly on Parliament's failure to give due consideration to Ferdinand Begg's 1897 Women's Suffrage Bill and quoted at length from Edward Carpenter's *Love's Coming of Age*. He took full advantage of the opportunity to speak from a wider public platform, Lily Bell commenting on her return, 'thanks to the assistance of Sophia, who kindly took my place in my absence, I have been relieved from this particular phase of my work for a longer period than I had anticipated.' Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 2 October 1897, p. 322.

²¹¹ Sophia, 'Matrons and Maiden's. The Sexes, what they are, and their relationship to each other', *Labour Leader*, 14 August 1897, p. 267. The series continued on 21 August 1897, p. 274; 28 August 1897, p. 286; 4 September 1897, p. 294 and 11 September 1897, p. 302; concluding on 25 September 1897, p. 318.

Yet whilst Charles' articles undoubtedly constituted highly unusual fare for the average *Labour Leader* readership, it is likely that many of the progressive men and women of Glasgow were already familiar with the arguments of his faith-based feminism. In March 1893, he had given a lecture to the Ruskin Society on 'The Relation of Woman to the New Age', three years later giving his talk to the Glasgow Women's Labour Party on marriage.²¹² Indeed, he appears to have actively sought out opportunities to voice his theories on relations between the sexes, in November 1895, following a talk by a female colleague from the Ruskin Society to the Women's Labour Party on 'Ruskin v. Emerson', delivering what the *Labour Leader* termed 'an exquisite little supplement to the lecture ... showing that men and women were not meant, and never could be, mentally and physically exactly alike; but would and ought to be perfect equal counterparts one of the other, which alone would develop perfect manhood and womanhood.'²¹³

Aside from his impromptu public speaking, and occasional forays into journalism, Charles also manifested his commitment to women's rights through his membership of the Male Electors' League for Women's Suffrage, a small organization founded by Ben Elmy, the husband of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy. The first male-only society to campaign specifically for female enfranchisement, Charles was co-opted onto its Executive on its foundation in early 1897, heralding its arrival in the *Labour Leader* as a non-partisan body comprised of 'representative men in each of the three kingdoms', with the intension of bringing to bear 'actual electoral pressure on members of Parliament or candidates' by men who already possessed the franchise.²¹⁴ In actuality, their influence on the political establishment appears to have been minimal, their propaganda activities seemingly restricted to the distribution of literature at WSPU and Women's Trade and Labour Council meetings.²¹⁵

What is more difficult to ascertain, is the degree to which Charles and Bella enacted their feminist convictions in their intimate relationship. Too little is known regarding the break-up of Charles's first marriage to make any assumptions regarding the reasons for its failure or make judgments on his behaviour. It is even harder to assert with any degree of confidence the exact nature of his second marriage to Bella. Neither of them 'made the personal political' by making reference to their relationship in their writing and the scant letters to friends, colleagues and family members that do survive are frustratingly silent on their marriage. What we do know is that despite being broadly sympathetic towards 'free unions', like most couples active in the women's rights and labour movements of the 1890s, the Pearces chose instead the legal security and social

²¹² Session Programme, 1892-3, Ruskin Society of Glasgow Minute Book 1891-9, MS Gen 1093/2, RSG Papers; Omni, 'ILP Notes and News', *Labour Leader*, 18 January 1896, p. 23.

²¹³ Omni, 'ILP Notes and News', *Labour Leader*, 30 November 1895, p. 10. The lecturer was Ellen Neilson, an active member of the Ruskin Society during the 1880s and '90s, becoming Vice-President in 1894.

²¹⁴ Sophia [Charles Pearce], 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 31 July 1897, p. 254.

²¹⁵ Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy*, pp. 163, 196; entry on 'Male Electors' League for Women's Suffrage', in Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, p. 366.

respectability of marriage. They opted for an irregular marriage union, a legal and relatively popular alternative under Scots Law to a conventional church ceremony. Referred to in common parlance as marriage ‘before the sheriff’, it was a form of union particularly attractive to those with unorthodox religious views, requiring only that the husband and wife sign a declaration of their marital union in front of two witnesses, with all parties then examined by the sheriff under oath.²¹⁶ Unlike some of her contemporaries in progressive politics such as Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and Eleanor Marx Aveling, Bella chose not to retain her maiden name, and was known predominantly as ‘Mrs. Pearce’, only after Charles’ death beginning to use the moniker ‘I. D. Pearce’. Neither did Charles incorporate his wife’s maiden name, instead continuing to use the surname ‘Bream Pearce’, an amalgam of his father’s and mother’s names in keeping with his family’s radical, Chartist associations. With regard to the sexual division of labour within their marriage, in her ‘Matrons and Maidens’ column, Bella had called for the reform of women’s association with the domestic sphere rather than its overthrow, arguing that it was ‘only because men have tried to *limit* us to domestic affairs that we are inclined to rebel against them more than we should otherwise do.’²¹⁷ As such, she supported initiatives in which school girls were taught housekeeping ‘on scientific principles’, whilst arguing that boys should become proficient in sewing and cooking, believing that such an education ‘would do more than anything else to uproot the masculine idea of male superiority’.²¹⁸ Again, there is scant evidence on the extent to which the Pearces’ domestic arrangements reflected or ran contrary to her ideas, although we know that she expressed little interest in conventional feminine accomplishments, dismissing high fashion as ‘hideous’ and claiming to have ‘not much time or opportunity for cooking or baking experiments’.²¹⁹ It is certainly apparent that despite still considering ‘home work’ as women’s ‘special work’, she extended her horizons far beyond it.²²⁰ As well as participating in local and national politics, Bella and Charles were ‘legal partners in business’, together running a wine-importing and publishing business known as ‘C. W. Pearce & Co.’, which entailed extensive transatlantic negotiations, Bella making repeated trips to North America.²²¹ However, as they had no children, the Pearces avoided what remains the ultimate test of feminist relationships, that of the allocation of responsibility for childcare.

Conclusion

The story of the married life of the Pearces feels in many ways a familiar tale. The narrative arc traced by their initial utopian optimism, subsequent political disillusionment and renewed

²¹⁶ Eleanor Gordon, ‘Irregular Marriage’, podcast on website of AHRC-funded project, ‘A History of Working-Class Marriage’, University of Glasgow, <<http://workingclassmarriage.gla.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Prof-Eleanor-Gordon.mp3>> [accessed 18 September 2013].

²¹⁷ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 4 August 1894, p. 7.

²¹⁸ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 29 June 1895, p. 9; 20 April 1895, p. 4.

²¹⁹ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 28 April 1894, p. 7.

²²⁰ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 15 December 1894, p. 6.

²²¹ Letter Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, 21 December 1900, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy Papers.

exhilaration with the arrival of the militant suffrage movement is one replicated in the life story of many feminists of their generation attempting to negotiate a route through the masculinized progressive politics of the 1890s and 1900s. Both Bella and Charles were from middle-class or upper working-class backgrounds, who became familiar with radical politics through the work of John Ruskin, before being ‘converted’ by an inspirational speech from a socialist leader. Both then immersed themselves in the ‘new life’ culture of the ILP in Glasgow, attending branch and district council meetings, giving and going to lectures, organizing children’s picnics, traveling to annual conferences and raising their glasses at *Labour Leader* socials, in an attempt to realize in the present the bonds of fellowship seen as vital in attaining the ‘new life’ of the future.

Their first commitment had always been to the securing of women’s rights and the transformation of relations between the sexes. At times, they felt progress had been made, Bella reflecting on the comradeship between the men and women of the movement that ‘considering that there has been so little time for evolution out of the old order of things, we do seem to be making some advance’.²²² Yet, as for so many idealists before and since, ultimately their vision fell foul of a combination of the fallibility of human nature and the practical difficulties inherent in constructing a social ideal. Whilst in 1886, Morris may have made the eponymous protagonist of *A Dream of John Ball*, proclaim that ‘Forsooth, brothers, fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell’, by 1909 Edith Ellis had archly reversed the sentiment, concluding after her involvement in a Fellowship of the New Life communal living experiment in London, that ‘Fellowship is hell; lack of fellowship is heaven’.²²³ For the Pearces, their disenchantment with ethical socialism was precipitated initially by the internal politicking within the Glasgow ILP, both over Hardie’s altercation with the Labour Literature Society and Charles’ £500 loan to the Glasgow election fund. However, Bella in particular also became increasingly disillusioned by the persistent failure of mainstream socialist rhetoric and practice to prioritize the attainment of female enfranchisement as a foundational element in its political program, despite her national influence as women’s columnist for the *Labour Leader*. With the increasing polarization within the party over the emphasis placed on women’s suffrage as an appropriate campaigning issue, Bella’s defection to the WSPU was virtually inevitable.

The archetypal nature of the Pearces’ life story appears to illustrate how they, like all historical subjects, were ‘forced to reshape cultural meanings within certain parameters’, in their case those set by ethical socialism and the British women’s rights movement of the 1890s and 1900s.²²⁴ Yet, to paraphrase Karl Marx, whilst the Pearces did not fully author their own texts, they were nonetheless autonomous individuals, free to make their own history, albeit under circumstances

²²² Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 1 December 1894, p. 7.

²²³ Fellowship House was a short-lived venture affiliated to the Fellowship of the New Life. Ellis made the comment in her account of the episode in her novel *Attainment* (1909), written under her married name of Mrs. Havelock Ellis.

²²⁴ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 9.

they did not produce or fully control. And in the Pearces' case, their story contains a surprising twist. As has been hinted by Charles' esoteric series of religion-infused articles as 'Sophia' in the *Labour Leader*, in the formulation of their sexual politics the Pearces also drew on the discourse of unorthodox Christianity. In addition to their work for the Glasgow Ruskin Society, the ILP, the WEU, the Male Electors League for Women's Suffrage and the WSPU, the Pearces were committed disciples of another organization, entitled the Brotherhood of the New Life. A relatively small, millenarian, Christian group, with utopian communities in New York State and California, the Brotherhood preached a distinctive and unorthodox set of beliefs regarding sex which rendered it notoriously transgressive by contemporary standards of respectability. It is the Pearces' assimilation, reinterpretation and subsequent dissemination of these beliefs which make them particularly fascinating protagonists in late-Victorian British progressivism, nuancing our current understanding of the interplay between the discourses of faith and progressive politics and underlining the importance of localized studies in plotting the eclectic array of beliefs within the anti-Victorian revolt. It is therefore, to their involvement in unorthodox Christianity, that this thesis now turns.

New Age Angels of Glasgow

Introduction

In June 1903, Bella and Charles Pearce played host to an American couple at ‘Nithsdale’, their large stone villa in the middle-class Glasgow suburb of Langside.¹ The man was Thomas Lake Harris, an imposing, eighty-year old Christian mystic and the spiritual leader of the Brotherhood of the New Life, a millenarian organization behind two utopian communities in New York State and California. The woman was Jane Lee Waring Harris, a seventy-three year old heiress, originally from New York City, who had joined the Brotherhood in her thirties, fulfilling the role of Harris’s chief amanuensis and more recently, that of his third wife.

The American couple had crossed the Atlantic for a very specific purpose. Harris had founded the Brotherhood over fifty years previously, yet despite attracting the occasional, sympathetic curiosity of public figures such as the British journalist W. T. Stead, the popular novelist Marie Corelli and the American poet Edwin Markham, Harris’s teachings had never won a broad-based popular support, in Britain or America. Even Arthur Cuthbert, one of Harris’s closest disciples, was forced to concede that ‘Notwithstanding all the manifest eloquence of his discourses, he never did at any time appeal to the popular ear, as such.’² The previous month, however, Harris had received a revelation from God that it was time for him to enter the wider public arena, to declare himself and ‘go forth and bear the message to the world.’³ The Pearces were allocated a pivotal role in this evangelizing mission. Both Bella and Charles were committed followers of Harris, his wife describing them as ‘staunch and true to the Core’, Charles having first encountered Harris’s teachings when a young man in his early thirties.⁴ Their house now became the British operational headquarters for the dissemination of Harris’s message, the prophet renaming Nithsdale ‘Battle

¹ The Pearces had bought the house four years previously from George Gemmell, who sat on the Cathcart School Board with Bella from 1894 before resigning when he moved from Glasgow in 1899. Originally located at 3 Maitland Avenue, Langside, the villa has since been demolished. However, ordnance survey maps from the period, combined with Jane Harris’s correspondence during her 1903 visit, indicate a substantial property situated within a large garden and boasting unimpeded views of nearby Queens Park, although by 1903, these views were under threat from the development of tenement flats nearby. See Ordnance Survey map of Glasgow, 1892, NLS, <http://maps.nls.uk/townplans/view/?sid=74417128&mid=glasgow_2_southwest> [accessed 15 May 2013] and letters from Jane Harris to Robert and Dolly Hart, an unknown recipient and ‘Blessed Son’, 20 June 1903, 3 July 1903, 9 July and 16 July 1903, TLH Papers 14/ 315.

² Arthur A. Cuthbert, *The Life and World-Work of Thomas Lake Harris* (Glasgow: C. W. Pearce & Co., 1908), p. 183.

³ Letter Robert Hart to Nagasawa Kanaye, 11 June 1903, TLH Papers 14/313, X. 57; diary of Jane Lee Waring Harris, 5 May 1903, TLH Papers 14/314.

⁴ Letter from Jane Harris to ‘Darlings All’, 11 October 1903, TLH Papers 9/237.

Abbey’, with Bella as the abbess and Charles the curate.⁵ Charles was said by Jane Harris to know ‘all of the most advanced men in the new thought in Glasgow’ and he began assembling ‘an audience of eager enquirers’ for the prophet’s public lectures.⁶ As news of the American visitors spread, letters began to arrive from Harris’s small number of dispersed and disparate supporters in Britain, whilst a reporter from the *Glasgow Evening News* turned up to take down the story of Harris’s life.⁷ Finally, and most auspiciously, the house received a visitation from Harris’s spiritual wife, an angelic being called ‘Queen Lily’, who materialized in the Pearces’ breakfast room to proclaim ‘this is good. The Kingdom of Heaven has found its central home and service point’.⁸

The 1903 visit marked the exciting pinnacle of what, for Charles in particular, had been a long and careful study of Harris’s esoteric teachings, which had their roots in the philosophy of the eighteenth-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. Yet in his deep interest in arcane Christian mysticism, Charles was neither an isolated nor an unusual figure in Glasgow’s progressive subculture. As the eagerness of other Scottish ‘advanced men’ (and women) to hear Harris speak indicates, many of those involved in the new emancipatory movements of socialism and feminism embraced the unconventional and eclectic religious theologies and practices that were circulating in late-Victorian Britain, which together constituted a significant and enduring ‘mystical revival’ that lasted well into the Edwardian Age.⁹ As Alex Owen notes, ‘It was considered perfectly feasible at the turn of the century to adhere to a communitarian vision and socialist principles while espousing a belief in an unseen spirit world’, with particular enthusiasm reserved for theosophy, occultism, spiritualism and mysticism, all of which drew in varying degrees from heterodox Christianity, paganism and Eastern religion.¹⁰ Indeed, the willingness of progressive individuals to embrace an ‘eclectic collation of belief systems’ is held to be a defining characteristic of the times, Ruth Livesey asserting that radical critics of late nineteenth-century capitalism exhibited a ‘remarkable disregard ... of boundaries that over a century later seemed impassable divides’.¹¹ A glance at the combined spiritual and political preoccupations of some prominent late-Victorian progressives serves to illustrate the extent of their pluralism. Edward Pease and Frank Podmore, for example, were founder members of the Fellowship of the New Life and the Fabian Society, yet were also on the council of the Society for Psychical Research, a group concerned with investigating paranormal phenomena in a scientific spirit. Similarly, Herbert Burrows and Annie Besant were socialists attached respectively to the Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society, yet were dedicated members of Madam Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society, Besant later taking over as president. W. T. Stead was the influential editor

⁵ Letter from Jane Harris to ‘My dearest Son’, 22 September 1903, TLH Papers 9/237.

⁶ Letter from Jane Harris to ‘Blessed Son’, 9 July 1903, TLH Papers 14/315.

⁷ Diary entry Jane Harris, 24 June 1903, TLH Papers 14/314.

⁸ Diary entry Jane Harris, 8 July 1903, TLH Papers 14/314.

⁹ For an extended discussion of the fin de siècle mystical revival and its relationship with humanitarian and socialist endeavours, see Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, pp. 17-50.

¹⁰ Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, p. 25.

¹¹ Livesey, *Socialism, Sex and the Culture of Aestheticism*, p. 6.

of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, yet also maintained a serious interest in psychical research, between 1893 and 1897 publishing the spiritualist quarterly *Borderlands*.¹² Even George Bernard Shaw, who resisted formal affiliation to a mystical organization, claimed during the course of one eventful evening, to have, ‘attended a Fabian meeting, gone on to hear the end of a Psychical Research one, and finished by sleeping in a haunted house with a committee of ghost hunters’.¹³

What marks out Charles and Bella Pearce’s discipleship of Thomas Lake Harris as of particular interest, amidst the fin de siècle melee of socialist and spiritual interchange, is Harris’s highly unorthodox teachings on sex. What exactly those teachings were, and the manner in which the Pearces interpreted, assimilated and reconfigured them in both their discourse and their intimate lives, shall be discussed in more detail within the chapter. In essence, however, what their connection to the Brotherhood of the New Life reveals is the circulation, albeit in a modified form, of a radical, transatlantic, Christian doctrine of sexual mysticism within the heart of ‘new life’ socialist and feminist circles in Glasgow during the 1890s and 1900s, something which runs counter to the sexual conservatism which is understood to have predominated in such networks. As work by Lucy Bland, Barbara Taylor, Ginger Frost, Jeffrey Weeks and others has shown, whilst late-Victorian ethical socialists and feminists were often highly critical of marriage, unlike their Owenite predecessors, the majority saw any suggestion of unconventional sexuality not as the justifiable renunciation of a patriarchal and/or bourgeois institution, but as either an excuse for male sexual license or a threat to the respectability and political efficacy of their movements.¹⁴ As Frost states, ‘most radicals of the end of the century theorized for the future, but lived respectably in the present.’¹⁵

The Pearces’ sexual mysticism has until now received little scholarly attention. Bernard Aspinwall was the first to note their connection with the Brotherhood of the New Life, touching on them

¹² See entries for Edward Pease, Frank Podmore, Herbert Burrows, Annie Besant and W.T. Stead in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>> [accessed 21 May 2013]. W.T. Stead visited Thomas Lake Harris and his wife in New York in 1893, Jane Harris’s account of the meeting reflecting the couple’s disdain for his practice of what they held to be a ‘lower’ form of ‘naturalistic’ spiritualism: ‘He [Stead] stayed three or four hours. It is difficult to convey the impression that he made beyond saying that he is certainly a very loving-hearted man and full of human purposes, fearless of consequences as to how his actions will return on himself and even expecting final martyrdom. Father [Harris] says he has a wonderful brain organization, and that his brain is occulted. He seemed to care more to talk on his own projects and his occult experiences than to hear Father talk and especially to dwell upon his own spiritual experience ... Father feels him to be a true precious man, fixed in the desire to do the will of God; but, in his present state one with whom we have nothing to do.’ Extract of letter from Jane Harris, 3 July 1893, TLH Papers 13/302.

¹³ Letter to Archibald Henderson, 3 January 1905, in George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters, 1898-1910*, ed. by Dan Laurence (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1972), p. 497, quoted in Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, p. 24.

¹⁴ Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 124-185; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983), pp. 261-287; Ginger Frost, *Living in Sin: Cohabiting as Husband and Wife in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 195-224; Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, pp. 205-230. See also Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*, pp. 81-117.

¹⁵ Frost, *Living in Sin*, p. 196.

briefly within a wider survey of the transatlantic exchange of ideas between Glasgow and America in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ The few historians who have analysed Bella's socialist and feminist journalism and considered her role within the ILP, ostensibly Helen Lintell, June Hannam and Karen Hunt, have not explored her religious faith.¹⁷ As a discreet object of study, Thomas Lake Harris and the Brotherhood of the New Life have also attracted comparatively little academic interest, especially in comparison to other utopian, communalistic experimentations with the sexual and social order in nineteenth-century America, such as the Shakers, the Mormons and the Oneida Perfectionists.¹⁸ To date, the only book-length study of the Brotherhood remains Herbert Schneider and George Lawson's nonetheless authoritative 1942 joint biography of Harris and his most famous disciple, the upper-class diplomat and journalist Laurence Oliphant, a volume for which Bella herself was briefly consulted before her death.¹⁹ It contains only a handful of references to Charles and Bella's involvement in the Brotherhood however, whilst the couple fails to surface at all in the various chapters and articles on the organization written in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁰ Neither has the assimilation of Brotherhood ideas within wider progressive circles in Britain been explored to any degree.²¹

The primary objective of the following chapter is therefore to trace precisely for the first time the exact nature of the connection between the Pearces and the Brotherhood of the New Life, thereby adding to the historiography a set of alternative spiritual and sexual beliefs and practices within

¹⁶ I remain indebted to Bernard Aspinwall, whose brief but evocative account of Harris's Scottish followers sparked the curiosity that led ultimately to the research behind this chapter. See Aspinwall, *Portable Utopia: Glasgow and the United States, 1820-1920* (Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, 1984), pp. 24-5.

¹⁷ Lintell, 'Lily Bell: Socialist and Feminist'; Hannam, 'Women and the ILP'; Hannam and Hunt, 'Propagandising as Socialist Women'; Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*; Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*.

¹⁸ See for example, Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: the Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981) and Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias: The Shakers, the Mormons and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1981).

¹⁹ Herbert W. Schneider and George Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim: Being the Incredible History of Thomas Lake Harris and Laurence Oliphant; Their Sexual Mysticism and Utopian Communities Amply Documented to Confound the Skeptic* (New York: Columbia University, 1942). For Bella's brief involvement in the consultation process before her death in December 1929, see letter from C. W. Pearce & Co [Bella] to George Lawton, 20 August 1929, TLH Papers 13/308. The correspondence with Lawton was then continued by her long-term housekeeper and cousin-in-law, Annie Wood.

²⁰ Robert V. Hine, *Californian Utopian Colonies* (New Haven: Yale University, 1966), pp. 12-32; Gaye LeBaron, 'Serpent in Eden: The Final Utopia of Thomas Lake Harris and What Happened There', *Markham Review*, 4 (February 1969), pp. 14-24; Joseph W. Slade, 'Historical Sketch of Thomas Lake Harris, Laurence Oliphant and the Brotherhood of the New Life', in Jack T. Ericson (ed.), *Thomas Lake Harris and the Brotherhood of the New Life. Books, Pamphlets, Serials and Manuscripts 1854-1942. A Guide to the Microfilm Edition* (Glen Rock, New Jersey: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1974), pp. 1-25; Paul Kagan, *New World Utopias: A Photographic History of the Search for Community* (New York: Penguin, 1975), pp. 19-35; Arthur Versluis, 'American Sexual Mysticism', in *The Secret History of Western Sexual Mysticism: Sacred Practices and Spiritual Marriage* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny, 2008), pp. 102-119 and 'Sexual Mysticism in Nineteenth Century America: John Humphrey Noyes, Thomas Lake Harris and Alice Bunker Stockham', in Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal (eds), *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), pp. 333-354.

²¹ The exception is W.H.G. Armytage's work on English utopian communities, which contains a useful section on Harris's British sympathizers. See Armytage, *Heavens Below*, pp. 276-281, 345. For a brief discussion of some connections between Harris and individuals within British theosophy, spiritualism and occultism, see Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, pp. 100, 102-3.

late-Victorian progressivism in Britain, one with a distinct and international lineage. It also seeks to situate those beliefs within the sexual attitudes of fin de siècle ethical socialism and feminism, in doing so further nuancing our understanding of the particular circumstances under which radical challenges to the sexual status quo are able to surface. Finally, it seeks to illustrate the importance of considering subjectivity when analyzing the interplay of discourses on sexuality, especially when individuals are forced to negotiate a path between incompatible aspects of two belief systems. As Frank Mort has commented, ‘the story of the self is not exhausted by the story of the social’ and we need to preserve a space for ‘those manifestations of selfhood which partly escape the engineering of the social’.²² The creative melding of American Christian mysticism and ethical socialist feminism that eventually surfaced in the pages of the *Labour Leader* and *Forward*, as well as in the meeting rooms and lecture halls of 1890s Glasgow, was unique to Charles and Bella and as much a result of their distinctive personalities and life experiences as their eclectic religious and political influences.

The chapter begins by outlining the religious evolution of Thomas Lake Harris and his formation of the Brotherhood of the New Life in America, paying particular attention to the exact nature of his socialism. After speculating on what may have attracted the young Charles Pearce to the Brotherhood, it then continues with an in-depth analysis of Harris’s sexual theology, including his key concepts of ‘spiritual counterparts’ and ‘conjugal love’, seeking to ascertain the exact nature of the sexual practices hinted at in Harris’s arcane mystical poetry and prose and in the accounts left by his followers. It then plots in detail the extent and nature of the Pearces’ discipleship of Harris, looking at two of the practical ways in which the couple manifested their spiritual commitment, by importing wine from the Brotherhood’s utopian settlements and by publishing Harris’s poetry. Finally, it concludes with an examination of the way in which the Pearces modified Harris’s radical ideas on sex for a progressive audience, assimilating them within the more acceptable language of social purity and amalgamating them with other discourses on sex and gender circulating in the late-Victorian period.

²² Frank Mort, ‘Introduction to the Second Edition’, *Dangerous Sexualities*, p. xvi.

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To modern sensibilities, Thomas Lake Harris appears the very embodiment of a nineteenth-century religious prophet. An intelligent, charismatic, domineering man, with a flowing, patriarchal beard and an overhanging brow, contemporary accounts comment uniformly on two particular aspects of his physiognomy; his piercing deep-set eyes and the hypnotic qualities of his voice. According to his disciple Laurence Oliphant, his eyes were ‘like revolving lights in two dark caverns’, whilst his voice ‘seemed pitched in two different keys’, one ‘near’, rapid and vivacious and one ‘far-off’, solemn and impressive, Harris switching between the two to calculated effect.²³

Born in Fenny Stratford in England in 1823, Harris was raised from the age of five in Utica in New York state, a thriving commercial town in the crucible of what became known as the ‘burned-over district’, so-called due to the fervor with which religious revivalism and communitarian experimentation swept its frontier settlements during the early part of the nineteenth century.²⁴ These spiritual fires were at their height during Harris’s childhood, and by the time he was twenty-one, he had become an itinerant preacher, breaking with the rigid Calvinism of his father’s Baptist church (a decision for which he was ‘sorely persecuted by his own family’), embracing instead the non-sectarian liberalism of Universalism.²⁵

²³ Oliphant’s description of Harris comes from a novel written after his defection from the Brotherhood, in which Harris is portrayed as the eponymous ‘Masollam’, a false and manipulative prophet. Laurence Oliphant, *Masollam: A Problem of the Period* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1886), p. 28.

²⁴ Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Harper, 1965); Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: the Burned-Over District of New York in the 1840s* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

²⁵ Diary entry of Jane Harris, 12 July 1903, TLH Papers 14/314.

From Universalism, Harris became interested in spiritualism. During the 1840s he worked under Andrew Jackson Davis, the young, self-educated, spiritualist and clairvoyant known as the ‘Poughkeepsie Seer’, a man generally credited with according the new-found craze of spiritualism a degree of respectability in America.²⁶ It was through Davis that Harris became acquainted with the work of the eighteenth-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. In 1845, a new English edition of Swedenborg’s works had introduced his ideas to an American audience, and Harris became part of a circle of liberal, intellectual, clergymen in New York, dedicated to spreading the new theology. Its appeal, according to Whitney Cross, lay in its ‘vague synthesis’ of liberal religious doctrine with ‘the scientific and sociological ideas of its day’, combined with a retention of ‘the indispensable element of revealed religion, an utter faith in the close relationship of the natural and the supernatural’.²⁷ It exercised a profound influence on the young preacher’s emergent religious understanding, Harris borrowing from Swedenborg’s writing many of the concepts and terminology that in an imaginatively modified form would later underpin his own religious schema.

After a brief, abortive attempt during the early 1850s to establish a spiritualist colony in what is now West Virginia, Harris established himself as the pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd, an unofficial Swedenborgian ‘New Church’ in New York. It was as a New Church minister that in May 1859, Harris sailed for England, seeking to build on his reputation as a nonsectarian interpreter of Swedenborg. As the work of Alex Owen has shown, in London, as in New York, the ‘pronounced, arcane element’ of Swedenborg’s teachings appealed to ‘the intellectual, philosophical, and religious proclivities of a well-educated elite’, with the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning part of a cultured circle engaged in the serious study of Swedenborgian spiritualism.²⁸ Harris’s reception within such circles was initially enthusiastic. Staying first at the house of Dr. James John Garth Wilkinson, a homeopathic doctor, feminist, anti-vivisectionist and notable translator of Swedenborg,²⁹ Harris went on to lecture in both Manchester and London, on subjects including ‘The Causes, Forms and Remedies of Modern Infidelity’, ‘Truth and Life in Jesus’ and ‘The Spiritual and Social Aspects of the Times’.³⁰ The writer William Howitt described his extempore sermons as ‘the only realization of my conceptions of eloquence’, whilst another, more hostile observer nonetheless recalled that Harris had enjoyed ‘a phenomenal success wherever he appeared, attached men of influence and wealth to his triumphant chariot and so fascinated many of

²⁶ Slade, *Historical Sketch of Thomas Lake Harris*, p. 3.

²⁷ Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, pp. 341-352 (p. 343).

²⁸ Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p. 21.

²⁹ Wilkinson later became a fierce opponent of the Contagious Diseases Acts. See Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p. 21; Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 40-2, 95; E. I. Carlyle, ‘Wilkinson, (James John) Garth (1812–1899)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29427>> [accessed 7 May 2012]; Richard Lines, ‘James John Garth Wilkinson 1812-1899: Author, Physician, Swedenborgian’, paper, Second Bloomsbury Project Conference, UCL, 16 June 2009, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/events/conference2009/lines.pdf> [accessed 7 May 2012]. My thanks also go to Sue Young, who generously shared her research on Wilkinson.

³⁰ Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 42.

the most prominent members of the New Church that they lost the possession of their common sense, their reason and their faith.’³¹

In 1860, Harris moved to Scotland, staying there for the greater part of the year.³² He continued to attract devoted followers from the middle and upper middle-classes, something which raised the ire of the Scottish press. Some forty years later, the *Glasgow Evening News* was still bemoaning the city’s loss of ‘two or three of the most highly-connected and promising young men’, who had left the country with Harris ‘for the purpose of forming some weird, impossible colony of communistic cranks a generation or so ago.’³³ The men to whom the newspaper referred were in all probability Arthur A. Cuthbert, later a close friend of the Pearces, who was eventually to contribute \$4000 annually to the Brotherhood of the New Life (the equivalent of \$110,000 in 2013) and James A. Fowler and his wife, who were also in possession of ‘considerable means’.³⁴ In England, Harris’s converts during the 1860s included the wealthy utopian and Whig politician William Francis Cowper and his wife,³⁵ the Manchester silk manufacturer and educational reformer Edward Brotherton,³⁶ the journalist J. Cumming Walters,³⁷ the homeopath and Rosicrucian Dr. Edward William Berridge, and most sensationally, the socialite, diplomatist and writer Laurence Oliphant.³⁸

³¹ Quoted in Richard Lines, ‘Swedenborgianism and Pugilism: the William White affair’, paper, Third Bloomsbury Project Conference, UCL, 15 April 2011 <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/events/conferences.htm>> [accessed 7 May 2012], p. 2; [Anon.], *New Church Life*, 20:4 (April 1900), p. 205 <http://www.heavenlydoctrines.org/New%20Church%20Life/1900_HTML.htm> [accessed 24 June 2012].

³² Harris came to Glasgow at the invitation of James Eadie. See Thomas Lake Harris, ‘Introductory Letter’, *The Triumph of Life* (Glasgow: C. W. Pearce & Co., 1903), p. 1.

³³ ‘The Lorgnette’, *Glasgow Evening News*, 24 June 1903, p. 2.

³⁴ Letter from Jane Harris to Edwin Markham, 25 March 1911, TLH Papers 13/302; Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 149.

³⁵ In privately circulated memorials of William Cowper, his wife stated that ‘No one I think ever attracted William more [than Harris]’. It was through them that Harris was introduced to John Ruskin, who was impressed by Harris’s communal living but unconvinced by his spiritualism. Both Cowper and his wife were close friends of Laurence Oliphant, who attempted without success to persuade them to join one of the Brotherhood communities in America. The Cowpers instead provided financial assistance to Japanese converts wishing to travel to America and Mrs. Cowper was given the Brotherhood name of ‘Lowly’. See Armytage, *Heavens Below*, p. 276; Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 224-45; A. F. Pollard, ‘Temple, William Francis Cowper-, Baron Mount-Temple (1811–1888)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6515>> [accessed 6 May 2012]; *Christmas Story: John Ruskin’s Venetian Letters of 1876-7*, ed. by Van Akin Burd (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1990), pp. 80-5.

³⁶ In 1860, Edward Brotherton issued a pamphlet in which he stated that ‘with the exception of the Word, no books have so come home to my heart with the sense of holiness, or purity, of heavenliness of origin, as these [of Harris’s]’. See Edward Brotherton, *Spiritualism, Swedenborg and the New Church: An Examination of Claims* (London: William White, 1860), p. 27. See also W. E. A. Axon, ‘Brotherton, Edward (1814–1866)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3574>> [accessed 6 May 2012].

³⁷ J. Cumming Walters later became editor of the *Manchester City News*, and wrote for the *Westminster Gazette* and the Sunday illustrated magazine *The Quiver*. According to Schneider and Lawton, he almost joined one of the American Brotherhood communities but changed his mind at the last moment. Arthur Cuthbert described him in 1906 as ‘a voluntary and consistent supporter of the Beloved one’s good name before the public’. See Armytage, *Heavens Below*, p. 277; Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 116 n. 30; letter from Arthur Cuthbert to Mr. Walters, 1 August 1906, TLH Papers 13/302; letter from Arthur Cuthbert to Jane Lee Waring, 3 September 1906, TLH Papers 9/235.

³⁸ For an extended discussion of the relationship between Oliphant and Harris, see Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim* and Anne Taylor, *Laurence Oliphant: 1829-1888* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

However, Harris's claims to insights beyond those that had been enjoyed by Swedenborg, combined with his continuing emphasis on spiritualism, gradually became unpalatable to many New Church ministers. By 1860, he was being denounced by the New Church in England and America as 'an habitual and systematic deceiver' with 'blasphemous pretensions'.³⁹ The range of his rich imagination coupled with an unbridled egotism, had always made it unlikely that he would remain constrained by an established orthodoxy. Instead, he returned to America, where he established a new religious organization, claiming the Brotherhood of the New Life would restore a 'paradisiacal order upon the planet' and in time, precipitate the Second Coming of Christ.⁴⁰ Declaring himself the 'pivotal man' of this new religious body, he gathered together a number of his former congregation from the Church of the New Shepherd in New York, and led them north into the farmlands of Dutchess County, forming a settlement in the hamlet of Wassaic. When numbers grew, the small band of 'chosen ones' moved four miles up the valley, to a larger farm in nearby Amenia, while by 1867, the group had relocated again, this time to Brocton, a village on the shores of Lake Erie, in western New York state. Aided by the personal fortune of Laurence Oliphant and Oliphant's mother Lady Maria, who together contributed in excess of \$100,000 (approximately \$2.8 million in 2013), Harris purchased roughly 2,000 acres of farmland. Clearly a shrewd businessman, as well as a penetrating mystic, his negotiations were apparently blessed by divine intervention, Oliphant relating to friends in England how 'a wonderful special influx' had given Harris 'great power over external people, so that even though they may not want to sell, they cannot resist his influence when he proposes to them to do so.'⁴¹

From this point on, the main industry engaged in by the Brotherhood communities was viticulture, the disciples planting vines and assembling the infrastructure necessary to manufacture and sell wine, including the construction of a vast wine cellar. The Scottish disciple Arthur Cuthbert justified the production of alcohol by arguing that as the wine was produced by consecrated hands, it carried with it a 'Divine and celestial energy', through which 'the curse that attends the abuse of wine is occultly met and counteracted.'⁴² Harris went further, asserting that hidden within the wine's particles were 'living animates' with the power to 'puncture the myriads of larvous and parasitical growths that swarm in the ultimate degree of all human flesh.'⁴³ By now, the number of settlers fluctuated between seventy-five and one hundred, the majority originating from the Southern states, along with a small number of converts from England, Scotland, Germany and unusually, Japan. In 1876, after experiencing a vision of 'great forests of sequoia, near the Pacific,

³⁹ Brotherton, *Spiritualism, Swedenborg and the New Church*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Thomas Lake Harris, *The Apocalypse* (1867), quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 57, 59.

⁴¹ Letter from Laurence Oliphant to William Francis Cooper, 6 October 1867, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 146.

⁴² Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, p. 55.

⁴³ Letter dictated by Thomas Lake Harris to Samuel Swan, date unknown, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 474.

where, mingled with the sighing winds among the evergreens, might be heard the murmur of the not far distant ocean', Harris founded his fourth and final Brotherhood settlement, his 'Eden in the West', an estate of seventeen hundred acres in the low foothills of Santa Rosa, California, named 'Fountaingrove'.⁴⁴

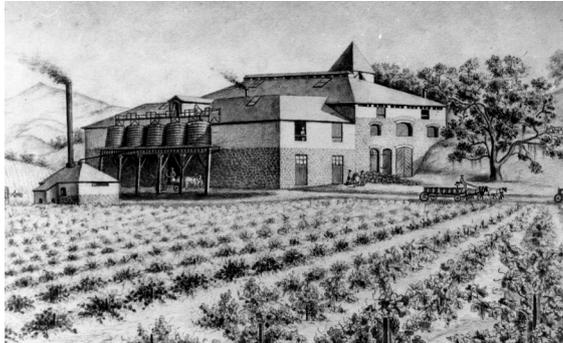


Figure 2.2 The winery at Fountaingrove, 1891



Figure 2.3 Members of the community at work, 1890s

Charles Pearce first became interested in the Brotherhood in the early 1870s.⁴⁵ Then married to his first wife Mary, with four young children, he was living in Kilburn in Middlesex and working as an insurance broker. He was also heavily involved in spiritualism, caught up in the huge wave of popular interest that had swept Britain since its arrival from America in the early 1850s. A member of the Kilburn Society of Spiritualists, he not only organized séances and gave lectures on spiritualism, including on its compatibility with the teachings of Christianity, but was a medium in his own right.⁴⁶ His friend, the spiritualist Edmund Dawson Rogers, a founder member of the British National Association of Spiritualists who would later play a key role in the establishment of the Society for Psychical Research, described his mediumship as 'of a peculiar character'; according to Rogers, Charles 'would sit at the table, and thoughts and ideas would come to him, whereupon the table would move to confirm what was in his mind.'⁴⁷ The exact circumstances of Charles's introduction to Thomas Lake Harris or to his writing is unknown, although it is logical to suppose that it was through his spiritualist contacts. The only known connection with a Brotherhood member during this period is Charles's friendship with the upper middle-class Parting family, whom he claimed to be on terms of 'personal intimacy' with from around 1867. Clearly wealthy, Mr. Parting having made money in the East India coffee plantations, Charles appears to have managed the family's finances. Mrs. Parting was an ardent and loyal disciple of Harris, as

⁴⁴ Thomas Lake Harris, 'Localities: March of Events' [undated, unpublished manuscript], quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 276; Thomas Lake Harris, *Star-Flowers; a Poem of the Woman's Mystery* (1886-7), quoted in Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ In an interview in the *Labour Leader* when standing as an ILP candidate at the 1895 general election, Charles stated that he had been connected with the Brotherhood for twenty-four years. This would date his involvement as beginning in 1871. Tricotrin, 'Chats with I.L.P. Candidates', *Labour Leader*, 27 April 1895, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1 July 1871, pp. 290-1.

⁴⁷ Edmund Dawson Rogers, *Life and Experiences of Edmund Dawson Rogers, Spiritualist and Journalist* (London: Office of Light, [1911]), pp. 34-5. For more information on Rogers, see Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 41-2.

well as a generous donor to the Brotherhood, and was eventually invited to join the Fountaingrove settlement with her sister and three daughters in 1885.⁴⁸

By 1872, Charles had become a sincere and committed convert, writing to Harris to ask whether he, his wife Mary and his children could join the Brotherhood community in Brocton, New York State.⁴⁹ He was to be disappointed, however. Harris replied that regrettably, the timing of Charles's approach was inopportune. Whilst outwardly, all was peaceful at the colony, the disciples going about their daily tasks, internally, a fierce, apocalyptic battle was taking place between the chosen ones and 'a vast gathering of the Aggressive Kings of Evil'. According to Harris, he alone, in 'these days of mortal anguish and conflict', was keeping them alive, constantly re-inforcing and re-invigorating them by the 'Arch-natural elements' which flowed through and matured in his 'transformed bi-sexual personality':

The members of my Society, relieved of every non-combattant [sic], and trained and prepared for the issue, stand at their posts prepared to perish if need be, but holding in an hitherto impenetrable form. To hold them in the body as one after another is for the time disabled, to open avenues of new life as the old avenues are closed against them, taxes to the utmost my vast resources of arch-natural substance. Obviously, therefore, you should not think of placing yourself, with your dear wife and family, in the midst of this terrific storm.⁵⁰

A more cynical interpretation is that the Pearce family lacked the requisite capital to make them attractive to Harris as initiates. The majority of Brotherhood disciples signed across their capital to Harris on their arrival at his communities; without money, suggest Harris's biographers, applicants were often turned away.⁵¹

What drove Charles and his family to seek out a new life on a Christian spiritualist community in rural North America can only be imagined. Charles was clearly both a devout Christian and an enthusiastic spiritualist and his faith is likely to have been a strong factor propelling them westwards to the very fringes of settlement in America. There may also however, have been emotional factors at play. Throughout history, individuals have become participants in similar endeavours in response to a range of psychological compulsions, and those drawn to the

⁴⁸ Margaret Parting's donations to the Brotherhood became the focus of media attention during 1892, when it was alleged that she had been 'fleeced out of a large fortune by Mr. Harris'. Charles refuted the allegation in the Glasgow press, arguing that it was 'absolutely without foundation' and that he had 'been on terms of personal intimacy with the Partings for nearly 25 years, hold some of their money invested in this city and in London, and know generally the disposition of the bulk of the remainder, and am able to say that all is under Mrs. Parting's own control.' Charles Pearce, letter 'T. L. Harris', *Glasgow Evening Citizen*, 29 December 1891. See also Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 441; letter from Dr C. H. Thompson, *The Sonoma Democrat*, 27 February 1892, printed in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 547-8.

⁴⁹ The letter from Harris responding to Charles's request to join the community is marked 'undated 1872?'. Given Charles's comment in his 1895 interview with the *Labour Leader*, dating his involvement in the Brotherhood to 1871, the date of 1872 for his approach to Harris seems reasonable.

⁵⁰ Letter from Thomas Lake Harris to Charles Pearce, [n.d., marked as possibly 1872], TLH Papers 8/235.

⁵¹ This is substantiated by the testimony of Hannah Whitall Smith, the religious seeker who visited Harris twice at Fountaingrove, and suspected his attentiveness was due to the fact that he thought she was well off. See *Religious Fanaticism: Extracts from the Papers of Hannah Whitall Smith*, ed. by Ray Strachey (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928), pp. 213-218. The biggest donor was said to be Jane Lee Waring, who contributed between \$250,000 and \$500,000 to the Brotherhood (between \$7 million and \$14 million in 2013). See Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 152, 163.

Brotherhood were no different in this regard. The nature of such dynamics are portrayed in the 1884 novel *Among the Chosen*, an evocative and believable account of life in a religious community written by Rosa Emerson, a former disciple of Harris who was brought up in the Brotherhood community at Brocton. According to Emerson's recollections, the colonists were often 'credulous enthusiasts' with 'natures born for martyrdom', secured for service at particularly vulnerable moments in their lives.⁵² In the novel, the character 'Valia', for example, is approached by 'Father John' [Harris] whilst at her mother's graveside, 'Mr Furman' preached to after losing his plantation and slaves in the Civil War and 'Lily' rescued on the brink of being incarcerated in an insane asylum by her mercenary family.⁵³ Father John is portrayed as an archetypal religious cult leader, a deluded megalomaniac with the ability to exercise an almost hypnotic power over his disciples, someone who was 'no novice in the art of winning souls' but instead able to 'seize the key-note of each nature and enter with dominating genius the secret heart of him he would control'.⁵⁴



Figure 2.4 The members of the Brotherhood of the New Life, Fountaingrove

Harris's magnetic personality aside, it is reasonable to assume that Charles may also have been attracted by the socialist ethos of the Brotherhood. As we know, his father was a Chartist and he later embraced the socialism of the ILP. Defining precisely what Harris's communitarian philosophy consisted of however, is not an easy task. In a letter written in 1877, Harris was categorical, stating 'We are socialists, believing in the association of noble and cultivated souls for

⁵² Mary S. Emerson, *Among the Chosen* (New York: Henry Holt, 1884), pp. 29, 148. Mary Emerson was called Rosa within the Brotherhood.

⁵³ Emerson, *Among the Chosen*, pp. 52, 71-2, 165.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

every industrial and human service.’⁵⁵ Yet later, he would argue that the principles and methods behind what he termed his ‘theo-socialism’ were in direct contradiction to those of the emergent labour movement.⁵⁶ The key to understanding his antipathy towards contemporary socialism lies in the divergent religious traditions behind the two movements, which were nonetheless united by a similar set of ethics. Like the ethical socialism of the 1890s, the Brotherhood emphasized the need for selflessness and the enhanced bonds of fellowship that this would engender. In his poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Earth*, Harris stated simply that ‘Extinction of all self-desire/ Must be our end and aim’, whilst Charles later commented that ‘theo-socialism’ placed him under an obligation to work ‘not for selfish but for racial ends’.⁵⁷ Such statements are entirely congruent with the ethos of the ethical socialism of the ILP, which wished to generate, in Bella’s words, a ‘growth of the spirit of human brotherhood’.⁵⁸

Yet crucially, while ethical socialists acted selflessly and fraternally to serve humanity, Brotherhood disciples did so ultimately to serve God. The Brotherhood of the New Life was an explicitly Christian organization, one whose theology was based on Swedenborgian principles. These presupposed a single, eternal, omnipotent divinity in Jesus Christ, the sacredness of the scriptures (whose meaning was revealed through divine revelation) and the literal reality of Heaven and Hell. God was equated with love; by loving others, disciples were making manifest the very essence of God. Conversely, by acting selfishly, with what Harris called ‘probrum’, they were succumbing to the temptations of the Devil.⁵⁹ Their ultimate aim was therefore not socialism, but redemption. For ethical socialists however, the crisis of faith had precipitated a very different understanding of the workings of the divine. According to Mark Bevir, the scientific, historical and moral doubts of the mid-century had led to the rise of immanentism, a faith that rejected the literalism of the Bible and instead understood God as dwelling within all things and all people.⁶⁰ A belief in an immanent God therefore, ‘encouraged people to look for the Kingdom of God on earth, not in Heaven’, through creating bonds of fellowship.⁶¹

It was when socialism appeared to diverge from prioritizing this ethic of love by inciting class hatred, that Harris became concerned. For him, it was a misunderstanding of the fundamental basis of socialism and he foresaw dire and apocalyptic consequences, in 1899 claiming such ‘ego socialism’ was ‘generating murder that tends to become organic, to become sporadic, to rise into a

⁵⁵ Letter from Thomas Lake Harris to W. A. Hinds, 22 August 1877, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 165.

⁵⁶ Harris made his most comprehensive statement on ‘theo-socialism’ in his 1891 book, *The New Republic, Prospects, Dangers, Duties and Safeties of the Times*. See Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 455-7.

⁵⁷ Thomas Lake Harris, *The Marriage of Heaven and Earth: Verified Realities*, (Glasgow: C. W. Pearce, 1903), p. 33. The poems were written between 1872 and 1873; Tricotrin, ‘Chats with I. L. P. Candidates’, *Labour Leader*, 27 April 1895, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 23 November 1895, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Arthur Cuthbert defines ‘probrum’ as ‘debased selfhood’. See Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, p. 57.

⁶⁰ Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 217-234.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

whirlwind and cataract of blood and fire.’⁶² The blame he lay squarely at the door of the socialist leaders who disseminated such explosive class ideology, making them the subject of some of his most graphic and disturbing poetic imagery, as in his 1886-7 poem, *Star Flowers*:

The labor-snakes, the bloated parasites,
Who feed in Labor’s sacred earthly shape;
The tape-worms coiling for obscene delights,
Who in that body gender by a rape ...

Man-eaters first, God-eaters last, they carry
Presumption to its foul insane extreme:
By the false conscience, creed-enwrought, they parry
The truth-blade in true conscience bare to gleam...⁶³

Yet it was not only in the constitution of their religious faith that Harris’s ‘theo-’ and Keir Hardie’s ‘ethical’ socialists differed. Whilst both movements embraced an ethos of altruism, its participants employed highly divergent means by which to achieve it. Within the ILP, denying self and fostering fellowship equated to social gatherings at cooperative halls, the singing of Labour hymns, and childrens’ picnics. Within the Brotherhood of the New Life however, the negation of self-love entailed far more extreme measures. As we have seen, Brotherhood disciples usually renounced any money or personal property, Harris arguing that individual possessions fixed man ‘in a selfish and fatal individualism and isolation from his fellows’.⁶⁴ In addition, Harris sometimes required disciples to undertake deliberately degrading tasks in order that they may ‘sacrifice every selfish motive and affection,’ Laurence Oliphant instructed to clean out the cattle shed, groom the horses and polish the boots when he arrived at the community in Amenia.⁶⁵ According to disciple Charles Hunter, in Brocton in 1870 male Brotherhood members went almost entirely without sleep for weeks for a similar purpose, Hunter commenting how ‘The power of self-hood-destruction through heavy and continuous labours was wonderful.’⁶⁶ Finally, husbands and wives were sometimes separated and children were raised apart from their parents, as Harris believed that family ties elicited a comparable covetousness to the holding of private property. Divine love had as its object the whole of humankind rather than specific individuals. To truly give oneself to God and foster a ‘love devoid of self’ therefore necessitated the disciples’ renunciation of such ‘selfish, natural ties’.⁶⁷

The latter practice in particular attracted a degree of criticism from those not wholly committed to the Brotherhood’s philosophy and culture. In the spring of 1868, Mrs. Ruxton arrived from London

⁶² Letter from Thomas Lake Harris to Edwin Markham, 5 April 1899, TLH Papers 14/313, X. 32-33.

⁶³ Thomas Lake Harris, *Star-Flowers; a Poem of the Woman’s Mystery* (1886-7), quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 456.

⁶⁴ Thomas Lake Harris, ‘Private Property and Social Life in the Light of Christ’ (unpublished MS, n.d., Columbia University Library), p. 1, quoted in Hine, *California’s Utopian Colonies*, p. 28.

⁶⁵ Letter from Laurence Oliphant to William Cowper, 29 December 1867, in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 132; Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 127-8.

⁶⁶ Letter from Charles D. Hunter to his sister, 1 December 1881, in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 318.

⁶⁷ Emerson, *Among the Chosen*, pp. 70, 156.

with her husband to start a new life on the community at Brocton. They left almost as quickly as they had arrived however, spreading rumours of the children's neglect and forcing the disciple Jane Lee Waring to defend the Brotherhood's practices, in a letter arguing that the children 'all feel that they are far richer than other children because other children have 'only one mama.'⁶⁸ Whilst divisive, it was not the child rearing arrangements that would be Harris's undoing however. Instead, what ultimately precipitated his downfall and the eventual breakup of the Brotherhood community at Fountaingrove was the far more inflammatory Sex Question.

Perpetual Inflation

The belief at the core of the Brotherhood's theology was that sex was the elemental life-force behind human and divine existence, the regenerative energy that, harnessed by Harris and aided by 'New Age angels', would banish disease and sin and ultimately precipitate the Second Coming.⁶⁹ In its sacred and sanctified state, sex powered the altruistic tendencies of humankind, its sphere of influence stretching far beyond its simple reproductive functions. It was intrinsic to the very nature of God, who declared in his new Gospel (as revised by Harris): 'I am Sex. Whosoever receiveth me, though he were born impotent, shall receive my potency; and though he had become dead, yet shall he revive in my potency, and my potency is eternal life.'⁷⁰ The human sex instinct was therefore the most important of all the senses, the 'pivotal sense' which if suitably honed and perfected through certain practices, including a kind of holy breathing called 'internal respiration' and a spiritual-sexual act termed 'conjugal marriage', could enable the disciple to achieve divine communion and access a 'transcendent sexual realm'.⁷¹ The sexual organs, and in particular the female sexual organs, were understood to be a gateway to the spirit realm, capable of receiving the very vibrations of God, Harris writing in *The Kingdom in Organization*, that:

The devout heart of woman, in answer to prayer, receives from God the nuptial spirit, which enlarges the bosom, leads the life downward into the belly, and so opens the organs of nuptiality, and causes them to glow with hymeneal fire. They meet in their angelic circles praying for perfection; and the Holy Ghost comes down upon them like a shower of bright rain, to concentrate at last in the nuptial structure. Thus the sex organ makes itself manifest as an organ of piety, cleansing its suppressed functions, and reasserting the original holiness of woman.⁷²

⁶⁸ Letter from Jane Lee Waring to Mrs. Cowper, 22 March 1870, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 245.

⁶⁹ The phrase 'New Age angels' comes from a letter from disciple Charles D. Hunter to his sister, 26 July 1881, in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 317.

⁷⁰ Thomas Lake Harris, *The Lord: the Two-in-One, Declared, Manifested, and Glorified* (Fountain Grove, 1876), quoted in Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, p. 258.

⁷¹ The cabalistic nature of Harris's writings on sexual mysticism make them extremely difficult to interpret with any degree of confidence. His most straightforward explanation of the role of sex within his theology can be found in a letter written in response to a query by a sympathetic Episcopalian minister in 1892. The letter was one of several copied and circulated amongst Harris's close associates. Also helpful is Arthur Cuthbert's biography of Harris and Rosa Emerson's novel *Among the Chosen*. See Letter from Thomas Lake Harris to Rev Dr ---, 18 January 1892, TLH Papers 9/238; Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*; Emerson, *Among the Chosen*.

⁷² Thomas Lake Harris, *The Annunciation of the Son of Man* (unpublished, undated manuscript), quoted in Schneider and Lawson, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 302.

Underpinning these ideas was a belief in the androgynous nature of the godhead, Harris asserting that God and Jesus were ‘bisexual’ and referring to them as the ‘Twain-in-One’, ‘Lord Jesus-Lady Yessa’ and ‘Christus-Christa’.⁷³ He appears to have derived the concept from the teachings of his former spiritualist mentor Andrew Jackson Davis, as well as from the writings of Swedenborg, both of which contained the idea of the divine as Father and Mother.⁷⁴ However, the notion of an androgynous deity also had wider currency within late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century religious and radical thought in Britain, surfacing in the discourse of the Shakers, Southcottians and Saint-Simoneans.⁷⁵ According to Harris’s imaginative rendering of Genesis, it followed that as God had created man in his own image, prelapsarian humankind had also been androgynous. The principal objective for Brotherhood disciples was to locate their spiritual ‘other halves’, the male or female ‘counterparts’ from whom they had been sundered at the time of the Fall.⁷⁶

Finding one’s counterpart was believed to be greatly facilitated by ‘internal respiration’, a practice known also as open, inner or divine breathing and which equated to the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost.⁷⁷ Understood not as a learned technique but rather as a gift, divinely bestowed on the worthy, it was nonetheless experienced as an altered physiological state, during which God’s breath literally flowed through one’s body. A Brotherhood disciple named ‘Mrs. L-’ described how ‘Such a tenderness of Love to the Lord’ was ‘borne in with the breath’ that when she contemplated his suffering she was moved to tears,⁷⁸ an intensity of experience echoed in the testimony of Mrs. Cuthbert, who declared: ‘What shall not be found to result from having the palpitating Breath of God heaving in our bosom, giving us the momentary assurance of His presence and His love, whilst our demon foes tremble and retire before it.’⁷⁹ Achieving open breathing was seen as a key attainment within the Brotherhood, a rite of passage, enabling the disciple to progress up the spiritual hierarchy. It was undertaken in conjunction with other ‘demagnetising’ and ‘energizing’ rituals, including massages and healing baths which the male and female disciples gave naked to one another, Harris reportedly believing that ‘before we can be in

⁷³ For an example of the use of the term ‘bisexual’, see letter from Thomas Lake Harris to Charles Pearce, [n.d., marked as possibly 1872], TLH Papers 8/235. Harris’s nomenclature for the ‘Twain-in-One’ saturates his poetry and prose. See, for example, a verse from ‘proem’, *The Triumph of Life*: ‘All sacred in all sexual, Christ, One-Twain,/ Entered mankind to bear its sexual pain./ Touch Sexual Truth, touch to the sexual knee/ Of Christa-Yessa; dare to feel and see.’ Thomas Lake Harris, *The Triumph of Life* (Glasgow: C. W. Pearce & Co., 1903), p. 34.

⁷⁴ Davis’s ‘Harmonial Philosophy’ was based on the idea of a union between Father-God (love) and Mother-Nature (substance). See Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 6. Swedenborg, however, was much less explicit regarding the dual-gendered nature of God, and Harris’s reading of this aspect of his work was controversial, one New Church critic labeling it ‘sheer nonsense’. See Brotherton, *Spiritualism, Swedenborg and the New Church*, p. 32-3.

⁷⁵ Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 161-9.

⁷⁶ Window Bill for ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Earth’ and ‘The Triumph of Life’, written by Charles Pearce in 1903 and approved by Harris, TLH Papers 9/241.

⁷⁷ Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, pp. 11-12.

⁷⁸ ‘From One of the B. N. L. to Mrs Fawcett’, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 175.

⁷⁹ ‘From Mrs Cuthbert [n.d.]’, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 168.

any true condition we must all be so innocent that we can stand naked before each other without a thought of shame, and wash and dress each other'.⁸⁰ When the 'sex question' had at one point threatened to destroy the Brotherhood, the men and boys were apparently kept 'demagnetized' by such baths, the mothers of the society struggling valiantly to cure cases of nymphomania and sexual insanity by undertaking the scrubbing 'with a will'.⁸¹ Harris himself was said to have benefited from being bathed, disciple Dr. Charles Hunter recounting what a 'help and an unburdening' Harris had found the twenty or more 'vapour and warm sitzes, rubbings, etc.' he had given him.⁸²

The ultimate objective of initiates was to consummate their (re-)union with their counterpart through 'conjugal marriage', a term Harris borrowed from Swedenborg and used to refer to the sexual consummation of a relationship with a spiritual counterpart. This sacred union, like internal respiration, was experienced as an intensely pleasurable, physical encounter, despite the counterpart's non-physical form, the angelic beings literally entering the disciple's body and sending through it vibrations, flutterings and pulsations, all of which left the disciple exhausted, as the account of one 'Sister in the New Life' testifies:

This morning for the first time, I felt [my counterpart] enter my head and also pass into my thighs. The first time that it came into my body, that is the trunk, it seemed to enter through the generative organs, and with it came the thought, this is like sexual intercourse, only infinitely more so, in that every atom of your frame enters into union with another atom to the furthest extremity of your body. I am sure I never had such a thought before, nor supposed that anything could be of such infinite magnitude. I felt infinitely calm and peaceful, nothing turbulent and passionate about it, and my only desire was to constantly pray in thankfulness.⁸³

Harris's own counterpart was called Queen Lily, whom Harris visited in his dreams and trances regularly throughout his life, relaying her divine insights in a voluminous output totaling over forty published works of mystical poetry and prose, as well as innumerable unpublished manuscripts. As Chrysantheus-Chrysanthea, Harris and Lily ruled over the communities of the Brotherhood and 'Lilistan', the heavenly realm closest to the Earth, even having two spiritual children together. His poetical account of their conjugal marriage is strikingly sensual, with references to pillowing his head on her 'translucent breast', being kissed by her 'rose-golden' lips and together them sharing in sweet communion 'unspoken thought and ecstasies divine'.⁸⁴

Sex with a counterpart was a sacramental rite, a way to achieve divine communion. Through it, not only could disciples emulate the bisexual form of the godhead, but by harnessing the pleasures

⁸⁰ 'Experiences of a Sister in the New Life', Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 519.

⁸¹ Letter from Jane Lee Waring to her brother George, 18 December 1891, TLH Papers 9/238.

⁸² Letter from Charles D. Hunter to his sister, 1 December 1881, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 351.

⁸³ Quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 511. The account is an extract from a series of letters transcribed in copy books within the TLH papers and labeled 'Experiences of a Sister in the New Life' or 'Extracts from a Lady in San Francisco to a friend in England'. The author is not known but the letters were apparently reproduced several times and circulated among the members of the Brotherhood.

⁸⁴ Thomas Lake Harris, *A Lyric of the Morning Land* (New York: Partridge and Brittan, 1854), pp. 49, 99.

engendered by their 'pure sexual fire', they could transcend their isolated selves and worldly existences, and realize a higher consciousness of the divine.⁸⁵ For example, when recounting the ecstasies of her counterpartal consummation, the 'Sister in the New Life' described feeling herself 'desolving,' [sic] 'going to pieces and being drawn into something else', while for Arthur Cuthbert, by entering into a conjugal marriage, you were effectively marrying God, for 'God himself is the only real Bridegroom, God herself is the only real Bride'.⁸⁶ Religion had until now failed to acknowledge these truths, thinking to deny sexuality rather than work to purify it, and as a result had become sterile, as Harris depicted in his 1872-3 poem 'Life One Twain':

Unsexed existence weaves but desolation;
It ends in pallid stone;
'Tis only through perpetual infloation,
That endless life is known.

As frozen seas upon the barren beaches,
Unsexed Religions are:
The lifeless faith Monasticism teaches
Puts very Heaven afar.⁸⁷

Arthur Cuthbert reiterated Harris's argument, claiming in his biography of Harris that the 'Monkish ascetic habit' of the early Christians and Buddhists was based on a mistaken understanding of God as 'sexless'. The opposite was in fact true and it was now the role of religion to acknowledge and harness the sexual power of the divine, to 'find God in sex again', Cuthbert identifying this as 'the problem of problems that must be solved'.⁸⁸

Women were accorded a pivotal role in the re-sexing of religion, for according to Harris, 'If our Lord is the door, He has placed the key of that door in the keeping of woman's hands.' This key, also referred to as the 'Woman's Word', could alone unlock the door to heaven and eternal life and constituted the 'deepest of all knowledge'.⁸⁹ As the chief intermediary between heaven and earth, Harris was enlightened in this secret female wisdom to some degree, in 1882 becoming initiated into the 'woman's way', a process which entailed approaching heaven not through masculine rationality but through female love, and which culminated in him returning to the womb of the Divine Mother, Jesus's counterpart, Lady Yessa.⁹⁰ However, the revelation of the 'Woman's Word' would only be made to the wider world when the end was at hand, when women would inaugurate the great spiritual whirlwind of judgment day. Indeed, Harris believed this process was already becoming manifest in the aims and actions of the women's movement, a 'holy cause' with which he had a great deal of sympathy. Alongside spiritual sex as a solution to female emancipation, Harris offered some more worldly and pragmatic responses to feminism, in the *Wisdom of Adepts*

⁸⁵ Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, p. 157.

⁸⁶ 'Sister in the new life' quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 511; Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, p. 157.

⁸⁷ Harris, *The Marriage of Heaven and Earth*, p. 234.

⁸⁸ Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, p. 86.

⁸⁹ Thomas Lake Harris, *Wisdom of Adepts* (printed for private circulation, 1884), quoted in Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, pp. 333-5.

⁹⁰ Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 303, 309, 362-3.

(1884) arguing that women should be accorded respect, trust and complete autonomy. If granted, the reward would be a ‘new love for man’ amongst women; if denied, the consequences would be dire, with mankind wiped out in the coming apocalypse.⁹¹



Figures 2.5 and 2.6 Women at Fountaingrove

Yet Harris’s position on women was paradoxical and inconsistent. In a neat encapsulation of polarized attitudes towards women in the nineteenth century, whilst he revered them as angels, in their ‘natural’ or unspiritual state Harris often imagined women as diabolical prostitutes, their lustful magnetism and ‘depleted and infested’ bodies penetrating, violating and defiling the brethren as they slept. The mysterious female knowledge that in some texts unlocked the door to Heaven, in others transmogrified into ‘an occult source of shame’, which women dared not reveal, reflecting Harris’s dualistic interpretation of sex in general.⁹² As he himself succinctly put it in, ‘The key of death is here, and the key of life is here’. Whilst sexual holiness was ‘the consummate flower & celestial crown of all holiness’, sexual profanation was in turn ‘the most absolute of all profanities’.⁹³

Yet what exactly differentiated holy from profane sex within Harris’s theology is difficult to ascertain, partly because it was on this point that Harris was at his most oblique, but also due to what H. G. Cocks has referred to as ‘the fundamental otherness of past sexuality’, which is often ‘profoundly indeterminate’ and resistant to modern understandings of gender and desire.⁹⁴ As the insights of queer theory in particular have shown, it is important to avoid applying modern interpretative schema to the past and to attempt instead to understand sexual theories and practices

⁹¹ Harris, *Wisdom of Adepts* in Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, pp. 333–4.

⁹² Extracts from Thomas Lake Harris, *The Golden Child*, pp. 19, 20–22 and *Declarations of the Divine One-Twain, Book II*, p. 10, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 303, 358.

⁹³ Letter from Thomas Lake Harris to Rev Dr-, 18 January 1892, TLH Papers 9/238.

⁹⁴ H. G. Cocks, ‘Religion and Spirituality’, in H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds), *The Modern History of Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), p. 167.

on their own terms.⁹⁵ In this instance, what Harris considered to be holy and unholy sex in no way correlates with the dichotomies which are often assumed to demarcate the legitimate from the illegitimate in the modern world, such as spiritual/ sensual, ascetic/ physical, unerotic/ erotic, chaste/ sexual or even married/ unmarried.⁹⁶ Instead, Harris distinguished the holy from the profane by the precise quality and origin of the emotion animating the sexual encounter. If the love between the partners was selfless and altruistic, born of the universal love for God and mankind, then the sex was held to be pure, a physical enactment of the divine love between God and mankind. If however, the sex was ultimately egoistic and selfish, its objective merely the mutual physical pleasure of the participants, it was branded ‘scortatory’, the product of an ‘inverted and debased sexual sense and passion’ and the ‘world’s greatest curse’.⁹⁷

Harris’s articulation of the possibility of sensual, sanctified and selfless sexual relations, when it eventually became more widely known, was considered dangerously transgressive. Yet it is important to determine precisely why. On a superficial level, ‘conjugal love’ and conventional, nineteenth-century ‘conjugal love’ do not appear radically dissimilar. Both were considered primarily spiritual unions within which a degree at least of sexual pleasure was permitted. The difference in the two models of marriage lay therefore, not in their fusion of the sexual and the spiritual, but in the manner in which they spoke about sex. Post-Foucault, we understand that the Victorians were by no means silent on the subject; instead, from the eighteenth-century onwards there was a proliferation of medical, scientific, religious, political and legal discourses on sex, within which it was constructed as a ubiquitous and powerful force requiring strict regulation and control.⁹⁸ According to research by Steven Seidman, the principal danger was perceived to lie in sensual desire, which once stimulated could lead to an individual becoming a ‘slave to their passions’, trapped in a ‘life of sexual excess and perversion’.⁹⁹ Simultaneously, however, marital sex was accepted as a natural and beneficial aspect of human existence, with the doctor and advice writer William Acton, for example, stating that ‘The moderate gratification of the sex-passion in married life is generally followed by the happiest consequences to the individual.’¹⁰⁰ This contradiction found an uneasy resolution in the increasing perception of marriage as a spiritual union or ‘communion of souls’, in which mutual sexual pleasure was permitted, but only as an unintended consequence of procreation. If sex was pursued for its own sake, self-destruction and social chaos would inevitably follow. Yet whilst spiritual love within orderly, well-regulated, middle-class marriages was viewed as antithetical to sensual sex, in the conjugal unions of

⁹⁵ For example, I have attempted throughout to avoid using the term erotic, as this was not one employed by Harris.

⁹⁶ Instead, you could argue that the dichotomies which Harris would have understood were between what was natural and spiritual, external and internal and connubial and conjugal.

⁹⁷ Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, pp. 56-7, 158-160.

⁹⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*.

⁹⁹ Steven Seidman, ‘The Power of Desire and the Danger of Pleasure: Victorian Sexuality Reconsidered’, *Journal of Social History*, 24:1 (Autumn 1990), p. 50.

¹⁰⁰ William Acton, *The Function and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*, third edition (Philadelphia, 1865), p. 102, quoted in Seidman, ‘Victorian Sexuality Reconsidered’, p. 51.

Harris's imagination the two were dangerously conflated. Instead of sublimating sensuality in spirituality, Harris put it centre-stage, not merely an excusable side-effect of a spiritual communion, but its prime motor, the divine driving-force of life.

Furthermore and even more worryingly to contemporaries, Harris was not content to restrict conjugal marriage to the realm of the theoretical, but instead advocated its adoption as a sexual practice. Despite realizing that 'public sentiment' did not 'permit the plain statement of this question', and restricting himself in his writing to what Rosa Emerson called the 'half-hidden voluptuousness' of his poetry, Harris's American settlements were nonetheless under continual threat from scandal, in a letter written in 1892, Harris stating that 'For the last 30 or 40 years I have been followed ... by a stream of diabolical insinuations', adding resignedly that 'Rotted minds must vent their depravity.'¹⁰¹ What particularly exercised such minds was how conjugal marriage worked in practice. The suspicion was that counterpartal consummation was neither a solitary nor a solely spiritual activity, but involved Brotherhood disciples, both married and unmarried, having sex with other disciples, in the belief that their spiritual counterparts had descended into each other's bodies. In December 1891, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on the unorthodox sexual behaviour they believed to be taking place at Fountaingrove, explaining that 'After a man has been separated from his wife and has been taken into the inner circle he is given a heavenly counterpart, which after a time is permitted by the prophet to descend and take material form in whatever woman he may see fit to designate as the affinity of the disciple, although this is, of course, all inside the community'.¹⁰² While the *Chronicle* concluded that the morals of the disciples were 'vile', describing them as 'refined sensualism', another local newspaper went further, the editor of the *Wave* pronouncing Fountaingrove an 'idealized house of sin; a den of iniquitous debauchees, whose only religion is the satisfaction of the passions, where there are no ties of affection, and where both sexes of one family bed together like dogs in a kennel.'¹⁰³

This was clearly an extreme view. However, that conjugal or counterpartal marriage within the Brotherhood entailed a degree of extra- and pre-marital sex is substantiated by a considerable body of evidence from a diverse array of sources, albeit of varying reliability. Several of the disciples who defected from the Brotherhood testified to such sexual practices and although their accounts are related through often hostile third parties and therefore cannot be entirely relied upon, they nonetheless display a striking congruity. The story of Cragie Gordon is archetypal. Expelled from the Fountaingrove community, he relayed his experiences to Rev. A. W. Manning, a

¹⁰¹ Letter from Thomas Lake Harris to Rev Dr-, 18 January 1892, TLH Papers 9/238; Emerson, *Among the Chosen*, p. 149; letter from Thomas Lake Harris to Mr. G. S. Weller, publisher of Swedenborgian journal *New Church Independent*, Chicago, 11 February 1892, TLH Papers 9/238.

¹⁰² 'Hypnotic Harris. Miss Chevallier's Strange Story. She Runs Away from the Primate. Now She Vows That She Will Break Up the Licentious Community', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 December 1891, quoted in LeBaron, 'Serpent in Eden', p. 19.

¹⁰³ Editorial, *The Wave*, 13 February 1892, from an extract printed in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 556.

Swedenborgian New Church minister intent on exposing Harris. His account included practices that he and the other disciples were under a secret oath not to divulge, either to each other or the ‘wicked world outside’:

He Gordon acknowledged to Thomas Nelmes and Mr. Alsop and in my presence that he used to commit adultery with one of the married women her husband and Harris sanctioned it, and Gordon did not think it was wrong. In fact he argued that T.H. said it was orderly – as it was not with her the man’s wife, but with his own counter-part who came into her and occupied her frame and that being the case it was with his own spirit wife and no crime.¹⁰⁴ In other accounts, it was Harris’s frame into which the spiritual counterparts descended. Robert Martin, a former member of the Brocton community, alluded obliquely to ‘illicit acts’ and ‘privileges’, ‘frowned upon in ordinary society’ but permitted to himself by Harris at Fountaingrove, whilst ‘Miss X’, a ‘cultivated and charming’ American lady who at one point contemplated joining the Brotherhood, was more forthcoming.¹⁰⁵ Her version was narrated by Hannah Whitall Smith, a Philadelphian spiritual seeker and surveyor of American religious fanaticism, and includes the description of a meeting with Jane Lee Waring, where she was enlightened on counterpartal practices:

the method of getting ... consolation from Lily Queen was rather peculiar: The troubled soul was to go to Mr. Harris’s room and get into bed with Lily Queen. ‘But what became of Mr. Harris?’ asked Miss X. ‘Oh, Lily Queen is inside of Father, and consequently he, of course, stays in the bed, and by getting into his arms we get into her arms.’¹⁰⁶

Most explicit was J. M. Shepherd, who claimed to be in possession of several letters from men who had lived at Brocton and Fountaingrove, which proved that at these communities, husbands and wives had been ‘*changed all round*’, one man stating that he was commanded by Harris to have sex with five separate women in one day, whilst another asserting that he could name nine women with whom Harris had enjoyed ‘connection’.¹⁰⁷

A further, fascinating piece of evidence of the physical enactment of conjugal marriage within the Brotherhood can be found within the architectural notes and plans for an ‘Ideal City’, drawn up by the Brotherhood disciple and architect Louis Cowles in the 1890s.¹⁰⁸ Cowles was clearly aware of their controversial nature, cautioning a fellow disciple, the poet Edwin Markham, not to show them to anyone else, stating they had a tendency to induce ‘curious effects on people’s minds’, with some ‘excited to dislike, hatred and angry opposition’.¹⁰⁹ They include plans for a spectacular ‘Social Palace’, a meeting place for the hundred male and female inhabitants, with ‘a pool of crystal water, 220 feet in length and 50 wide, under a canopy of tinted glass, where ladies with their

¹⁰⁴ The italics are Manning’s. Letter from Rev. A. W. Manning to William H. Alden, 21 March 1920 [?], quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 463.

¹⁰⁵ According to Robert Martin, these practices began with the establishment of the Brotherhood community at Fountaingrove and led to disillusionment amongst the members of the Brocton settlement. See Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 340, n. 31.

¹⁰⁶ Strachey (ed.), *Religious Fanaticism*, p. 234.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from J. M. Shepherd to James Barr, 8 August 1885, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 463-4. Shepherd was a friend of Rev. A. W. Manning. The letter substantiates the Brotherhood practice of naked, communal bathing, Shepherd reporting that ‘One man states that the men and women washed each other in a *complete nude state*’ (his italics).

¹⁰⁸ The architectural plans appear to have been drawn up in 1894 and the notes written in 1898.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Louis Cowles to Edwin Markham, 12 August 1921, TLH Papers 13/307.

knights together bath in joyous innocence' and around the sides, arranged in three tiers, '100 bowers of love's repose', presumably the settings for counterpartal sexual unions.¹¹⁰ That prototypes of such spaces existed on Brotherhood communities is hinted at in the testimony of Hannah Whitall Smith, who twice visited Harris at Fountaingrove, subsequently describing a bathroom lined with marble wash basins in order that the disciples might wash themselves free of corruptions, and rooms with no doors, 'but simply little recesses where beds were placed, because in the new order of things their ideal was that there was to be no need for secrecy, but every one could be open and above board with all they did.'¹¹¹

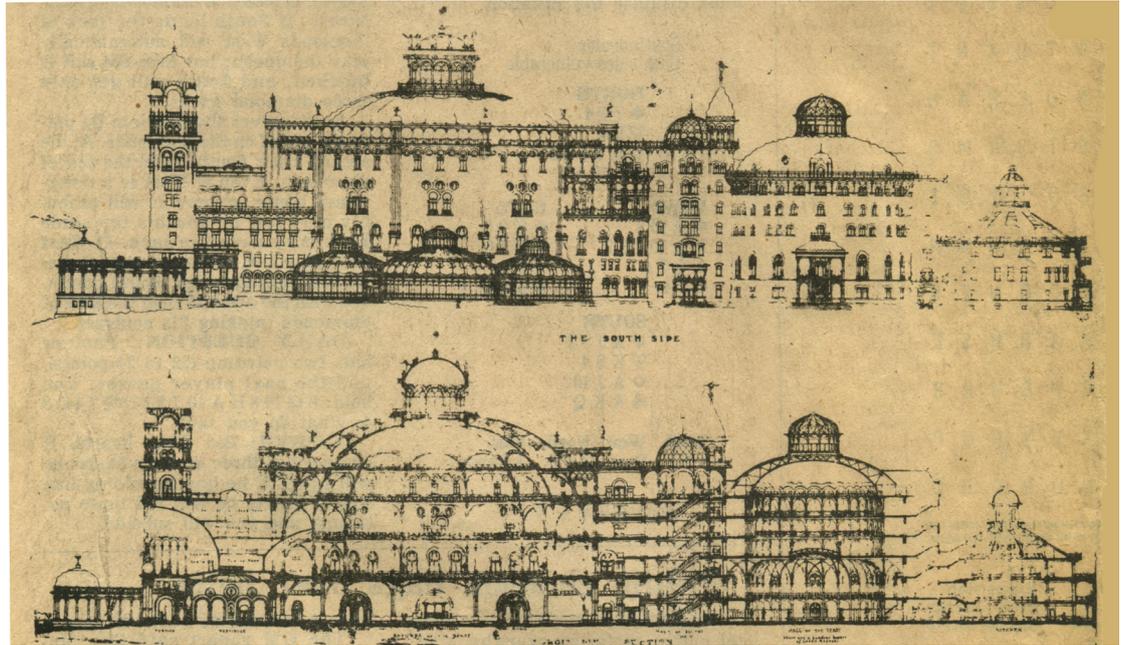


Figure 2.7 Architectural plans for an 'Ideal City' drawn up by disciple Louis Cowles in 1894

Even Harris's closest disciples did not deny that the Brotherhood members had sex. Jane Lee Waring described Harris to her brother as 'no ascetic', whilst Arthur Cuthbert alluded to their 'Breath-house' (i.e. the community buildings at Fountaingrove and Brocton) as 'no Monastery', going on to state that 'the problem is to be solved by the purification of sex, and not by its abrogation'.¹¹² The disciples did however, roundly defend themselves against all accusations of immorality, whilst in addition, very few children were born at any of the Brotherhood communities, Harris believing that reproduction should not take place until men and women had evolved 'into structural, bisexual completeness'. Only then would they be capable of producing 'the Crowning race of humankind's children', sinless and immortal, who would make 'of this sad planet more than a Paradise.'¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Strachey (ed.), *Religious Fanaticism*, pp. 214, 216.

¹¹² Letter from Jane Lee Waring to George Waring, 18 December 1891, TLH Papers 9/238; Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, p. 80.

¹¹³ Undated statement by Harris, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 181; letter from Thomas Lake Harris to Rev Dr-, 18 January 1892, TLH Papers 9/238.

One solution to the conundrum of the simultaneous existence within the Brotherhood of the small number of births, a theology centred around the divine potency of pleasurable sex and the self-perception amongst disciples that they were chaste and morally pure, is that they were practicing a sexual technique known as ‘coitus reservatus’ or ‘male continence’, later known as ‘karezza’.¹¹⁴ In common parlance, the term ‘continence’ generally denoted sexual abstinence except for procreation, and it is undoubtedly this meaning which Jane Lee Waring anticipated would be inferred from her statement in 1891 that ‘absolute continence’ was a ‘fundamental law rigidly enforced’ in all Brotherhood families.¹¹⁵ However, during the second half of the nineteenth century, ‘continence’ was increasingly used by a number of American sex reformers to mean prolonged sexual intercourse without male ejaculation, suggesting Waring’s phrase at the least contained a degree of ambiguity and may have held a second, illicit meaning.¹¹⁶

Harris’s unorthodox sexual ideas eventually led to his undoing. His nemesis came in the form of Alzire Chevallier, a ‘woman suffragist, sociologist, spiritual scientist, philanthropist, nationalist, magazine writer and reformer’ from Boston, who arrived at Fountaingrove with her mother in June 1891 in order to ‘enjoy the society of the “Primate” of the Brotherhood of the New Life, to receive spiritual illumination from him and to obtain the “divine breath” or “open respiration” which Harris professes to be able to impart, he being the sole representative of God on Earth’.¹¹⁷ On her departure six months later, she vowed to break-up the ‘licentious’ community, making a series of allegations in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and at local public lectures concerning the ‘hierarchy of Fountaingrove’ and his ‘accursed doctrine of the counterparts’. This doctrine, she claimed, was worse than that of the Oneida Perfectionists or the polygamous Mormons; it was no less than ‘a new sexology, holding the virus of a refined and subtle sensualism in whose web many a pure soul has become hopelessly entangled’.¹¹⁸ In the same year, a sympathetic biography of Laurence Oliphant by his distant relative, the novelist and biographer Margaret Oliphant, portrayed Harris as a ‘spiritual despot’, if one possessed of ‘extraordinary and imposing gifts of character’.¹¹⁹ Within

¹¹⁴ Ellic Howe and Alex Owen both believe Harris advocated a form of karezza, although whether this is founded on evidence found through their research into Victorian occult circles is unknown. See Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887-1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 65, n. 2 and Owen, *A Place of Enchantment*, p. 100.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Jane Lee Waring to George Waring, 18 December 1891, TLH Papers 9/238.

¹¹⁶ The method was initially ‘discovered’ by John Humphrey Noyes, the leader of the Perfectionist community at Oneida. His publications on male continence inspired the development of a range of similar techniques, key variants including Henry M. Parkhurst’s ‘Diana’ (1882), George Noyes Miller’s ‘Zugassent’s Discovery’ (1895) and Alice B. Stockham’s ‘Karezza’ (1897), each of which placed a varying degree of emphasis on the experience of divine transcendence engendered by the prolonged sexual encounter and the felicitous birth control consequences that also resulted. See Taylor Stoehr, *Free Love in America: a Documentary History* (New York: AMS Press, 1979), pp. 53-71, 549-635.

¹¹⁷ ‘Hypnotic Harris’, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 December 1891, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 534.

¹¹⁸ LeBaron, ‘Serpent in Eden’, pp. 14-24.

¹¹⁹ Margaret Oliphant W. Oliphant, *Memoir of the Life of Laurence Oliphant and of Alice Oliphant, His Wife* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1891), 2 vols, vol. 2, pp. 118, 124.

months, Harris had been hounded from his Eden in the West. On 27 February 1892, he married Jane Lee Waring, leaving Fountaingrove shortly afterwards, never to return.

The Department of Glasgow of the Brotherhood of the New Life

Since his visit to Britain in the 1860s, Harris had faded from the British public consciousness, Margaret Oliphant describing him as ‘a teacher who never touched the sphere of fashion, or became a public celebrity’.¹²⁰ However, the disclosures of 1891 and 1892 propelled him from obscurity to notoriety. Alzire Chevallier’s accusations were reprinted widely in British newspapers, while the biography of Laurence Oliphant was an immediate success, running to seven editions in the first year. Spiritualist and occult groups moved quickly to disassociate themselves from Harris, the spiritualism journal *Medium and Daybreak* dismissing him as a dishonest humbug whilst the theosophy journal *Path* warned its readership to beware of his work, claiming it had ‘the usual broad hint of sexual affinities and such disgusting doctrines’.¹²¹ Theosophers were incensed by the repeated connection made in the press between Harris and their spiritual leader Madame Blavatsky, the *Pall Mall Gazette* labeling both ‘religious imposters’, albeit ones that many people had found ‘an aid to a higher life’.¹²² Annie Besant, recently appointed chief secretary of the secret Inner Group of the Esoteric Section, the Theosophical Society’s school of practical occultism, responded by devoting a whole article in *Lucifer* to differentiating Harris’s ‘false mysticism’ from the ‘true mysticism’ of Blavatsky, a distinction she drew entirely on their differing attitudes toward sex. According to Besant, the keynote of the true mysticism of theosophy was asceticism, the ‘whole tendency’ of its teachings ‘towards the destruction of the sex-instinct’, with Blavatsky ruthlessly trampling on the ‘slightest indication of transferring sex to the astral plane’. However, the false mysticism of Harris deified sex and glorified the sexual emotions, after an analysis of some of his works, Besant decrying ‘Always this mania for dwelling on the sex-idea; no thought that does not centre in sex, revolve round sex’.¹²³

Charles Pearce was not deterred by such damaging publicity however. After being refused admission to the Brotherhood community at Brocton in 1872, he had continued his discipleship remotely from Britain, forced to content himself with occasional visits to the American settlements. His first was in 1885, when he received a warm welcome from Harris, Charles writing how ‘Father

¹²⁰ Oliphant, *Memoir of the Life of Laurence Oliphant*, vol. 2, p. 2.

¹²¹ *Medium and Daybreak*, 2 October 1891, p. 631 and 6 November 1891, p. 716; W. Q. Judge, ‘The Brotherhood of the New Life’, *The Path*, February 1891, pp. 346-47.

¹²² ‘A Word for Religious Imposters’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 September 1891. See also ‘The Prophet Harris at Home’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 September 1891 and letter from B. A. Cantab, ‘The Theosophists and T.L. Harris’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 November 1891.

¹²³ Annie Besant, ‘Mysticism, True and False’, *Lucifer*, 15 November 1891, pp. 177-181 (pp. 178, 180, 181). Interestingly, Arthur Cuthbert, whilst regretting the ‘spirit of narrow antagonism’ in which the article was written, agreed with its overall argument, despairing that the Buddhist origins of theosophy precluded ‘the possibility of any redemption being found for the generative principal & passion in humanity, being blind to the fact that its foundation ever was or could be essentially in the divine nature.’ A. A. Cuthbertson [presumably Cuthbert?], ‘Suggested addition to Mr. Walters lecture’, TLH Papers 13/302.

... threw both his arms around me, & drew me closely to him, & said “my dear young brother” – making me feel at ease at once’.¹²⁴ Charles stayed for over a fortnight, declaring himself ‘altogether happy’ and ‘at home’, meeting members whom he had only read about in letters and clearly reveling in the novelty of Brotherhood community life.¹²⁵ The brethren were equally taken with him, Arthur Cuthbert declaring that they all loved him ‘beyond measure.’¹²⁶

His commitment to the Brotherhood continued undiminished with the commencement of his second marriage, Bella embracing her husband’s Christian mysticism. After leaving Fountaingrove in 1892, Harris and his wife Jane had settled in an apartment in New York, a city they believed to be the Mother God’s kingdom (San Francisco belonging to the Father God).¹²⁷ In 1900, Bella made her own pilgrimage to see them, finding Harris to be a ‘grand man’ in possession of ‘the most beautiful head and face I have ever seen’, Mrs. Harris in turn calling her ‘a dear and true sister’.¹²⁸ Whilst it was now impossible for the Pearces to join a Brotherhood community, they nonetheless became key figures within a network of disciples in Glasgow, which included individuals who had encountered Harris during his visit in 1860 and who had sustained a groundswell of interest in his work. They included Richard McCully, the author of a book and a series of articles on the Brotherhood in *Light and Life*, a local journal of mystic literature, and John Thomson, who had walked fifteen miles on a Sunday to hear Harris preach in 1860 and who with his sister ran an esoteric bookshop primarily to stock Harris’s works.¹²⁹

Despite Harris’s notoriety, the Pearces did not shy away from publicly acknowledging their connection to the Brotherhood, Charles proclaiming his discipleship in the socialist press, giving lectures to the local Spiritualists’ Association on Harris’s poetry (see figure 2.8) and even organizing a trip to Fountaingrove for Keir Hardie during his 1895 American tour.¹³⁰ The subsequent report in the *Labour Leader* (written either by Hardie or his traveling companion, the London socialist Frank Smith), made no reference to past scandals, the reporter emphasizing instead the settlement’s communitarian credentials, seeing in Fountaingrove ‘an object lesson of how, inspired by noble spirit and example, men can live together in harmony’, the reporter’s only disappointment being that Harris, the ‘chief engineer of the many wonders’ was of course, by that

¹²⁴ Letter from C.W.P., Santa Rosa, 29 June 1885, TLH Papers 14/315.

¹²⁵ Letter from C.W.P., Santa Rosa, 29 June 1885, TLH Papers 14/315.

¹²⁶ Letter from A.A.C. to Dr Berridge, 22 July 1885, TLH Papers 14/315.

¹²⁷ Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, p. 389.

¹²⁸ Letter from Mrs. Pearce, 14 July 1900, TLH Papers 14/313, X.38; Jane Waring Harris diary entry, 21 June 1900, TLH Papers 14/314.

¹²⁹ Letter from Miss Thomson, Thomson and Co, to Edwin Markham, 20 February 1912, TLH Papers 9/235; ‘The Law of Life in Nature’, *Light and Life*, January 1887, pp. 95-6; ‘The Brotherhood of the New Life’, *Light and Life*, Dec. 1885–June 1885; Richard McCully, *The Brotherhood of the New Life and Thomas Lake Harris: A History and an Exposition based upon their Printed Works and upon other Published Documents* (Glasgow: John Thompson, 1893).

¹³⁰ Tricotrin, ‘Chats with I.L.P. candidates’, *Labour Leader*, 27 April 1895, p. 7; Letter from C. W. Bream-Pearce, ‘Camlachie Candidature’, *Labour Leader*, 1 June 1895, p. 10; advert for lecture, ‘Poetry of Thomas Lake Harris’, *Labour Leader*, 25 May 1895, p. 5.

time, absent, living in New York.¹³¹ Bella and Charles were one of a handful of Brotherhood disciples in Britain who actively defended Harris's reputation in the press, part of a loyal group known as the 'Department of Great Britain of the Brotherhood of the New Life', which included Arthur Cuthbert, who had moved to England in 1885, the journalist J. Cunningham Walters, the occultist Edward Berridge and the Tolstoyan William Swainson.¹³² In December 1891, Charles wrote to the *Glasgow Evening Citizen*, denouncing Alzire Chevallier's accusations as 'a tissue of falsehoods from beginning to end', whilst later, in 1906, Bella wrote to the *British Weekly* berating their thoughtless perpetuation of 'ancient slanders' in a recent article, questioning whether it had occurred to them 'to think of the pain they inflict upon the friends of the man they malign', adding 'By them he is loved and revered.' Crucially, she did not dismiss the significance of his radical sexual ideas, but rather claimed that it was his 'bold and fearless handling of sexual subjects' that had led to him being misrepresented.¹³³



Figure 2.8 Advertisement in the *Labour Leader* for Charles's lecture on Harris

¹³¹ 'America. The Chief's Tour. By a Special Correspondent', *Labour Leader*, 2 November 1895, p. 5. Hardie and Frank Smith gave a similarly effusive report of the Mormon community at Salt Lake City, downplaying their practice of 'matrimonial multiplicity', and arguing that their consistent and practical application of the 'principles of Brotherhood' were 'of far more value' than 'so-called orthodoxy' over sexual relations. The American reports provide an interest contrast to the far more hostile coverage of the 'free love' union of Edith Lanchester, a domestic example of sexual unorthodoxy, which ran simultaneously in the *Labour Leader*. See 'America: The Chief's Tour', *Labour Leader*, 19 October 1895, p. 5. Four years previously, Arthur Cuthbert had sent Frank Smith pamphlets and labour hymns written by Harris, entreating him to 'adopt them for singing' at labour gatherings. See letter Arthur Cuthbert to Frank Smith, 21 October 1891, in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 460-1.

¹³² Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 459. William Swainson was on the committee of the Tolstoyan John Coleman Kenworthy's (unrelated) Brotherhood Church, which met at the Salvation Army barracks in West Croydon. In April 1895, Swainson delivered a paper to the Brotherhood Church Social Conference entitled 'Thomas Lake Harris: Mad or Inspired?'. He later wrote a biography of Harris. Armytage, 'J. C. Kenworthy and the Tolstoyan Communities in England', p. 137; M. J. de K. Holman, 'The Purleigh Colony: Tolstoyan Togetherness in the late 1890s', Malcolm Jones (ed.), *New Essays on Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 196.

¹³³ Letter signed C. W. Pearce, 'T. L. Harris', *Glasgow Evening Citizen*, 29 December 1891; letter Isabella D. Pearce to the Editor of the *British Weekly* [undated, probably written after Harris's death in 1906], TLH Papers 13/302. Bella's letter was not published, in a letter to J. Cumming Walters Bella accusing the *British Weekly* of 'taking advantage of an editorially autocratic position to prevent the possibility of his friends protecting him.' Letter from I. D. Pearce to Mr. Walters, 27 August 1906, TLH Papers 13/302.

In what Harris termed the ‘external’ or public realm, the couple chose to manifest their faith in several different ways. The first was through political action, their faith exercising a direct influence on the pivotal decisions of Charles’s ILP career. In 1894, Charles consulted Harris when deciding whether to stand as the parliamentary candidate for Camlachie. Whilst Harris initially cabled ‘Stand’, his ambivalence towards socialism is reflected in the letter which followed, in which he warned that ‘If the mania [of the Proletariat] should be liberated into a revolutionary whirl, the political system of Great Britain will go up in a blaze, and blood will flow in rivers’, cautioning Charles that he was ‘going into a powder mine’ and that he therefore needed to keep his ‘garments clear of proprium (selfishness) – probrium that if it (once) ignites will generate the explosion.’¹³⁴ Charles clearly took Harris’s warning to heart. A year later, when he was led to believe that the actions of the ILPs NAC amounted to a tacit support of anarchism, he immediately withdrew from the election, in a letter to the *Labour Leader* stating explicitly that ‘Anarchism, in its principals and methods’, was in direct conflict with the doctrines of ‘another society – located all over the world - known as the B.N.L or Brotherhood of the New Life’, to which he owed his ‘first allegiance’.¹³⁵ Tellingly, the rhetoric of his correspondence on this issue closely mirrors that of Harris’s, suggesting the extent to which he adhered to his spiritual leader’s instructions, Charles writing in the *Labour Leader* how his dread of any sympathy being shown to anarchism arose from the ‘quick, explosive energy’ poor social conditions had generated within the working classes, ‘which, if encouraged, would be suddenly liberated, and shatter and wreck this rotten civilization almost in a moment, and overwhelm those who are rising out of it into newness of life, together with the selfish and corrupt, in one general ruin.’¹³⁶

Another significant way in which the Pearces demonstrated their commitment to the Brotherhood, was through their company, C. W. Pearce Co., which imported and sold the wine produced at Fountaingrove. Bella and Charles ran the company, founded in 1892, as joint business partners, becoming part of a worldwide distribution network dedicated to ensuring the widespread dissemination of the Brotherhood’s sanctified wine, with similar trading bases in London, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal and Australia.¹³⁷ It was this Brotherhood wine which the Pearces sent as a present to the Elmys when Ben Elmy was ill, and whilst there is no evidence that Ben was aware of the ‘Divine and celestial energy’ with which the wine was imbued, his wife Elizabeth reported

¹³⁴ ‘Reply to the letter of a British friend who asked T.L.H. to cable advice about his standing as Labor candidate for Parliament’, TLH Papers 9/235 and TLH Papers 13/302. A note on a separate page states ‘Copy of a letter to Chas & Bella Pearce in answer to whether he should run/ stand for Parliament a telegram having been sent day before saying “Stand”’.

¹³⁵ Letter from C. W. Bream-Pearce, ‘Camlachie Candidature. Bream-Pearce Withdraws – Explanatory Letter to the Branch’, *Labour Leader*, 1 June 1895, p. 10.

¹³⁶ Letter from C. W. Bream-Pearce, ‘Principles and Methods of Anarchism’, *Labour Leader*, 15 June 1895, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Post Office Glasgow Directory, 1892-1904, Strathclyde Regional Archives, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

that it had done her husband ‘more good than anything yet’.¹³⁸ The objective of the wine-selling operation appears to have been two-fold. Firstly, by distributing Fountaingrove wine, disciples such as the Pearces, living at a distance from the communities in America, were able to participate in the Brotherhood’s work, thereby becoming, in Charles’s words, part of the ‘commune’.¹³⁹ Secondly, and more straightforwardly, the profits of the business were used to fund social causes with which the Brotherhood had sympathy, Charles relating that members were obliged, after deducting working and living expenses, to ‘spend whatever profits are made for theo-social purposes’.¹⁴⁰ Whilst Charles doesn’t specify what he interpreted these ‘theo-social purposes’ to be, they are likely to have been the socialist and feminist organizations with which the Pearces had commitments. As discussed in the previous chapter, during the 1890s, Bella and Charles made regular financial donations to Keir Hardie and the ILP, raising the intriguing possibility that the Glasgow socialist movement was in a small way funded by the Brotherhood of the New Life. There is also a suggestion however, that some of the profits from C. W. Pearce & Co. found their way to the women’s suffrage movement. In 1908, the Pearces published Arthur Cuthbert’s biography of Harris, an advertisement for the book specifying that ‘The printing and publishing expenses being already paid and settled, all proceeds of the sales whatever will be forwarded at once to the Central Sister-Band, in whom, together with all the world’s sisterhood ... now focuses the immediate hope of Humanity’.¹⁴¹ Exactly who this ‘Central Sister-Band’ was isn’t stated, but it was at this time that Bella was an active campaigner for the WSPU, and it could conceivably be the case that it is to this organization that the advertisement refers.

The Pearces also used their wine-importing business to publish several of Harris’s later works of poetry, a business arrangement initiated during Harris and his wife Jane’s visit to Glasgow in 1903. Harris had recently completed two volumes of poetry, *The Triumph of Life* and *Song of Theos*, and had initially planned to stay first in London and then with Arthur Cuthbert in Wales to oversee their publication. Waiting for him at Liverpool however, was an invitation from Bella and Charles putting themselves and their house at his service. In the end, the visit lasted for almost four months, Charles assisting Harris with the preparation of the manuscripts, Jane writing that he was proving to be ‘a strong prop to Father’ and that he had ‘grown wonderfully since we met him last 17 years ago.’¹⁴² Bella was also considered ‘most precious’, with both held to be ‘alive & growing’ in their faith.¹⁴³ In line with the Brotherhood tradition of assigning disciples particularly apt or aspirational epithets, Charles was christened ‘Sir Steadfast Hold Strong’ and Bella simply ‘Lady Bella’, whilst

¹³⁸ Letters from Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, 16 December 1900 and 21 December 1900, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy Papers.

¹³⁹ ‘Chats with I.L.P. Candidates’, *Labour Leader*, 27 April 1895, p. 7.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Advertisement for Cuthbert, *The Life and World-Work of Thomas Lake Harris*, TLH Papers 9/241.

¹⁴² Letter from ‘Dovie’ [Jane Harris] to ‘My dearest Son’, 22 September 1903, TLH Papers 9/237; diary entry of Jane Harris, 18 July 1903, TLH Papers 14/314.

¹⁴³ Diary entry of Jane Harris, 18 July 1903, TLH Papers 14/314; letter from Jane Harris to Robert and Dolly Hart, 3 July 1903, TLH Papers 14/315.

Harris was 'Faithful' and Mrs Harris 'Lady Dovie'.¹⁴⁴ When not working on the poetry books, the American couple received a steady stream of visitors, took walks in nearby Queens Park and went on sightseeing trips with the Pearces to Loch Lomond, Edinburgh and the Rosneath Peninsula, visiting the Duncans' summer house.¹⁴⁵

The visit began well, Jane writing home wistfully that Fountaingrove seemed 'nearer to Glasgow than it did in New York'.¹⁴⁶ Also staying with them was Charles's cousin, Annie Wood, who described how 'quite often while we were at breakfast the Fairies would speak through Mr Harris', leaving her with a lifelong interest in spiritualism.¹⁴⁷ The Harrises' optimism quickly gave way to disillusionment, however. The caliber of the visitors calling on Harris proved disappointing, Mrs Harris writing in her diary that all seemed to be 'fastened into their old conditions' and that 'only a portion of them could in the least understand.'¹⁴⁸ Harris's only scheduled public talk, to the Glasgow Spiritualist Society, fell through, some of the Committee members displaying justified resistance to a man who had long since denegated secular or 'naturalistic' spiritualism as inherently corrupting, whilst the promised *Evening News* article never materialized. The Glasgow visit however, was not completely futile. As well as coordinating the publication of his poetry, Harris and his wife took a new convert home to New York, sixty-two year old Jessie Donaldson, whom Mrs. Harris described as 'a great acquisition, a ripe, rich soul, weighs about 200 lbs and is 6.3 and a fine pianist.'¹⁴⁹

The publishing arrangement between Harris and the Pearces endured, Charles initially assuming the dominant role. He threw himself whole-heartedly into the sale of the 1903 volumes, writing a 'Window Bill', effectively a teaser of the contents for booksellers, which Harris was 'more than pleased with', believing it would start a vibration that would only cease when the world was 'brought to its knees'.¹⁵⁰ Following Charles' death in 1905, Bella, assisted by her brother Tom, oversaw all subsequent Brotherhood publications. In 1910 she released two more volumes of poetry and over the next two decades visited America several times to liaise with the renowned poet and Brotherhood disciple Edwin Markham over the publication of a two-volume, authorized biography of Harris, as well as a fifty-volume edition of Harris's work and a shorter selection for the layperson.¹⁵¹ When Arthur Cuthbert died in 1911, Bella was the first to be contacted and in 1921, when the suggestion was raised of incorporating the vineyards at Fountaingrove to ensure

¹⁴⁴ Letter from 'Dovie' [Jane Harris] to 'My dearest Son', 22 September 1903, TLH Papers 9/237.

¹⁴⁵ Diary entries of Jane Harris, 1903, TLH Papers 14/313-4.

¹⁴⁶ Letter from 'Dovie' [Jane Harris] to 'Blessed Son', 9 July 1903, TLH Papers 14/315.

¹⁴⁷ Letter from Annie Wood to George Lawton, 23 July 1930, TLH Papers 13/308.

¹⁴⁸ Diary entries of Jane Harris, 3 July 1903 and 4 August 1903, TLH Papers 14/314.

¹⁴⁹ Another new believer, Grace Macgregor, also wanted to go back with the Harrises to America but was prevented by her husband. See letter Jane Harris to Nagasawa Kanaye, 13 December 1903, TLH Papers 9/237.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Jane Harris, November 1903, TLH Papers 9/237; C. W. Pearce, 'Window Bill', November 1903, TLH Papers 9/237.

¹⁵¹ Slade, *Historical Sketch*, p. 1.

their continued survival, she was named as one of six incorporators, with her step-son Earnest Pearce, Charles's youngest son from his first marriage, proposed as secretary, for he was considered 'at heart, without knowing it, one of us.'¹⁵² The story of the Pearces' involvement with the Brotherhood doesn't end there, however. There was an additional way in which Bella and Charles ensured that Harris's message of divine sexuality was communicated to the wider British public, through their socialist and feminist journalism.

Lost in translation: spiritual counterparts v. social purity

Whilst the majority of British progressives may have rejected Harris's advances, first in 1859 and 1860 and then again in 1903, they were unwitting consumers of a modified form of his sexual discourse for almost two decades. Between 1894 and 1912, Bella and Charles disseminated their own rewriting of Brotherhood sexual theology in their articles, columns and letters for the *Labour Leader*, *Forward*, the *Westminster Review* and the *Freewoman*. Whilst several articles dealt directly with their faith (whilst not mentioning it by name), Brotherhood concepts and terminology infused their columns, with the use of key words such as internal, external, planes, spheres, selfhood and ultimatum revealing the mystical provenance of their ideas. Even the pseudonym 'Lily Bell', the name by which Bella was known by thousands of socialists all over Britain, was in all likelihood a reference to her discipleship of Harris, 'Lily' probably alluding to Harris's spiritual counterpart, Queen Lily, with 'Bell' a shortening of her own first name.

Yet despite the Pearces proven and sincere commitment to Harris and his sexual philosophy, in translating his discourse for a British socialist and feminist audience, they also subjected it to a substantial process of revision. This was due, in the main, to the different contexts in which Harris and the Pearces operated. The first Brotherhood settlements were formed in the 1860s in the remote, rural districts of northern and western New York State, the crucible for several millenarian, utopian communities. According to Lawrence Foster, participants in such communities were experimenting with new social and sexual structures in response to deep anxieties over the perceived disintegration of social and familial relationships in frontier America, the Shakers advocating celibacy, the Oneida Perfectionists complex marriage and the Mormons polygamy.¹⁵³ Harris's project of counterpartal marriage can therefore be seen as a product of a time and place in which small-scale and contained experimentation with marriage, sex and reproduction was tentatively permitted, the Brotherhood communities surviving for thirty years before scandal finally dethroned their spiritual leader.

¹⁵² Letter Jane Harris to Edwin Markham, 25 March 1911, TLH Papers 13/302; letter James H. Freeman to Edwin Markham, 10 August 1921, TLH Papers 13/306.

¹⁵³ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, pp. 3-20.

The social and ideological space inhabited by the Pearces, however, that of the progressive subculture of 1890s and 1900s Glasgow, was one in which there was little tolerance of unconventional sexuality. This was due not just to a desire to retain respectability in order to ensure the maximum efficacy of their political campaigns, but through very real concerns over female sexual exploitation and marital desertion in an era of uneven access to reliable birth control and poor educational and employment opportunities for women. A particularly pertinent example is the posthumous reputation accorded by contemporary feminists and socialists to the life and ideas of the aural surgeon and social prophet James Hinton. Described by Seth Koven as a ‘philanthropic hedonist’, certain aspects of Hinton’s philosophy bear a striking resemblance to that of Harris’s.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps most saliently, Hinton like Harris made a connection between selfless love and sensual pleasure, believing that human desires needed to be trained to serve others, and that doing so would result in the liberation of the natural ‘pleasures, instincts, impulses’ that society was determined to repress, an attitude Hinton encapsulated in his injunction to ‘love and do as you like’.¹⁵⁵ How he anticipated this would be translated in terms of particular sexual behaviors is far from clear but he appeared to advocate both polygamy, with men permitted to take several ‘spiritual wives’, and female nakedness, due to the positive ‘moral and aesthetic influence’ he believed it had on men.¹⁵⁶ The nature and importance of Hinton’s legacy to progressive thought is a point of contention amongst historians, and more research needs to be done.¹⁵⁷ Seth Koven argues that his ideas made a substantial contribution to both philanthropic movements and social purity crusades, as well as forming part of ‘the intellectual lineage of ethical socialism, radical sex reform, and the “science” of sexuality’, Koven citing his influence on individuals such as Havelock Ellis, Ellice Hopkins, Arnold Toynbee, Edith Lees Ellis, Roden Berkeley Wriothesley Noel and Charles Ashbee.¹⁵⁸ For Chris Nottingham however, he was a highly divisive figure within progressive circles in London, with Olive Schreiner developing a profound unease over the personal ethics of a man rumored to have used his status amongst his coterie of female admirers to make inappropriate sexual advances. Nottingham noted that ‘Even in the heart of progressive London a decent distinction was drawn between professing unconventional views and their practice’.¹⁵⁹ If Hinton did, as Koven asserts, raise the question as to whether eros was compatible with altruism, the answer from the progressive networks of fin de siècle Britain appears to have been an emphatic no.

There are numerous other examples of the conservative attitudes of socialists and feminists during this period towards non-marital sex. They include the ‘fluttering in the suffrage dovecotes’ caused

¹⁵⁴ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*, pp. 47, 49. The quote regarding the ‘moral and aesthetic influence’ of female nudity is from a letter from Hinton’s disciple, the sexologist Havelock Ellis to Olive Schreiner, written in December 1885.

¹⁵⁷ Koven puts the lack of scholarly interest in Hinton down to the opacity of his prose, his lack of a coherent philosophy and the disappearance of his unpublished manuscripts, autobiography and letters. See Koven, *Slumming*, pp. 17, 300, n. 59.

¹⁵⁸ Koven, *Slumming*, pp. 16-18.

¹⁵⁹ Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*, pp. 47, 50.

in 1872 by the pregnancy out of wedlock of Elizabeth Wolstenholme (later Elmy), who was subsequently forced by her feminist colleagues to choose between her free love principles and her political career;¹⁶⁰ the resignations from the Legitimation League in 1897 following its change in agenda from securing rights for illegitimate children to promoting ‘freedom in sexual relations’;¹⁶¹ and the deep ambivalence felt by many female members of the Men and Women’s Club towards alternatives to marriage beyond spinsterhood.¹⁶² One of the only arenas in which it appears to have been possible to mount a challenge to orthodox sexuality was that of literary fiction, Lucy Bland noting that it was ‘only in an ideal fictitious world that the woman writer could explore some of the different visions of what transformed sexual relations might mean’, with novels such as *Aimee Furniss* by Katharine St. John Conway, *Margaret Dunmore* by Jane Hume Clapperton, and Gertrude Dix’s *The Image Breakers* tentatively depicting non-marital relationships between men and women.

There were a small number of exceptions however, the ‘tiny, radical minority’ of feminists, socialists, anarchists and freethinkers blessed with sufficiently robust personalities and supportive local networks to break ranks and risk forging free unions, seeing their relationships, in the words of Diana Maltz, ‘not as private romances, but as part of an ideological praxis, a way that one might perform one’s ethics.’¹⁶³ As well as individual couples such as Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Ben Elmy, Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, the ILP socialists George Belt and Dora Montefiore, and the anarchist-communists Guy Aldred and Rose Witcop, they included residents of the handful of utopian communities founded in England at the turn of the century. The most prominent was the settlement of Tolstoyan anarchists established in Whiteway in Gloucester in 1898, in which eleven couples formed free unions, Nellie Shaw living in an unmarried union with Francis Sedlak for thirty-three years.¹⁶⁴ Despite the overwhelmingly monogamous character of such relationships, to outsiders, their unconventional behavior only served to reinforce the public preconception since Robert Owen that utopian communities were synonymous with sexual promiscuity, a financial backer of a settlement in Dix’s *The Image Breakers*, at one point screeching ‘I knew it! ... People are talking of free love. Everyone is falling in love with everyone else, as always happens on a mixed colony’¹⁶⁵ Another important ideological context for radical sexual behaviours during this period was secularism. Indeed, Laura Schwartz argues that freethinking or ‘infidel’ feminists can

¹⁶⁰ E. Sylvia Pankurst, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (1931; London: Virago, 1977), p. 31, quoted in Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 155. For a full consideration of the circumstances surrounding Elmy’s marriage, see Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy*, pp. 97-101 and Sandra Stanley Holton, ‘Free Love and Victorian Feminism: The Divers Matrimonials of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and Ben Elmy’, *Victorian Studies* 37:2 (Winter 1994), pp. 199-222.

¹⁶¹ Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 156-159; Frost, *Living in Sin*, pp. 211-213.

¹⁶² Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 151; Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 155. See also Collette, ‘Socialism and Scandal’, pp. 102-111; Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*, pp. 86-94 and Frost, *Living in Sin*, pp. 199-211.

¹⁶³ Maltz, ‘Ardent Service’, p. 5.

¹⁶⁴ Frost, *Living in Sin*, p. 214.

¹⁶⁵ Gertrude Dix, *The Image Breakers* (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1900), pp. 86, 87; Maltz, ‘Ardent Service’, pp. 8-9.

be regarded as the ‘missing link’, connecting the sexual radicalism of the Owenite feminists of the 1830s and 1840s with the more ‘respectable’ post-1850s women’s movement.¹⁶⁶ As she explains, the renunciation by Freethinkers of the Christian tradition of marriage made it necessary for them to look for alternative ways of organizing relations between the sexes, resulting in a number of different proposals. These ranged from the libertarianism of George Drysdale, who in his *Elements of Social Science* advocated multiple sexual relationships in order to allow for ‘the full enjoyment of physical passion’, to a pre-Theosophical Annie Besant’s feminist calls for the reform of marriage laws and freer access to birth control.¹⁶⁷

The tenor of opinion within Charles and Bella’s particular network can be gauged very effectively by an analysis of the reaction in the *Labour Leader* to the Edith Lanchester case, the free love cause célèbre of the 1890s. Lanchester was a middle-class political activist for the SDF who in October 1895 was committed to a lunatic asylum by her father and brothers for cohabiting openly in a free union with James Sullivan, a railway clerk and fellow SDF member.¹⁶⁸ Whilst both Bella and Caroline Martyn, the two female commentators on the case in the *Leader*, were supportive, praising her for highlighting the inequity of existing marriage law and having the courage to act on her principles, other male correspondents were less sympathetic.¹⁶⁹ The author of the ‘London Letter’ pulled no punches, stating ‘If half a dozen young women, connected with the Socialist movement, fired up by a desire for freedom, were to emulate her example it would do the movement incalculable harm’, a position broadly endorsed by ‘Marxian’, who dismissed marriage reform as a private issue, marginal to the more important economic concerns of socialism.¹⁷⁰ Also illustrative of the opinion of 1890s Scottish socialists towards free love is a report of a lecture given by Lanchester on ‘Socialism and the Family’ in Edinburgh in February 1896. Despite the chairman’s opening caveat that ‘Socialism had no connection with speculations on family life and was nowise responsible for the opinions of individual socialists on the subject’, the reporter, already unimpressed by a lecture he found neither deep, interesting or agreeable, stated indignantly that ‘Miss Lanchester ... assumed the representative character and used the phrase “We Socialists” far too much: she ought really, on the family question, to speak for herself only’.¹⁷¹ His only consolation was that the large turn out had ensured the meeting was successful financially, raising £2 10s for the SDF candidature at Southampton.

¹⁶⁶ Laura Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women’s Emancipation, England 1830-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ Schwartz, ‘Freethought and Free Love?: Marriage, Birth Control and Sexual Morality’, in *Infidel Feminism*, pp. 178-216 (p. 207).

¹⁶⁸ Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*, pp. 94-106; Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 159-161; Frost, *Living in Sin*, pp. 209-211.

¹⁶⁹ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 9 November 1895, p. 3 and 22 February 1896, p. 68; Caroline E. D. Martyn, ‘Edith Lanchester’, *Labour Leader*, 15 February 1896, p. 52.

¹⁷⁰ ‘Our London Letter’, *Labour Leader*, 2 November 1895, p. 3; Marxian, ‘Lanchester and Manchester’, *Labour Leader*, 9 November 1895, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ *Labour Leader*, 15 February 1896, p. 57.

Assuming therefore, that the Pearces desired to enlighten their *Labour Leader* and *Forward* readership on the sexual aspects of their faith, a degree of circumspection was clearly required. Yet despite the hostile environment to sexually radical ideas, several of Harris's beliefs, albeit not the most controversial ones, were translated intact onto the pages of the socialist press. Firstly, both Bella and Charles allude in their writing to the androgynous nature of the deity, Charles, for example, writing as 'Sophia' in the *Labour Leader*, stating that 'sex is God in two opposite finite modes of manifestation. Woman is the mother mode of God ... Man is the male mode of God'.¹⁷² Later in the same article, Charles is also explicit on the androgynous nature of prelapsarian humankind, explaining how the 'ancient people known as the Adamic race ... was hermaphroditic or bi-sexual. Each person was a complex of the two sexes in one bodily form of woman-man, and the reproduction of the race was by a wholly different mode of generation than now obtains'.¹⁷³

Secondly, like Harris, the Pearces drew a distinction between selfish, 'natural' love, directed covetously towards individual human beings, and selfless, divine love expended for the good of the whole of God's people. In the *Labour Leader*, Bella asserts that love is like an inner divine spring, the flowing of which we have mistakenly tried to restrict, railing that 'We have damned up the outlets of our hearts, thinking, poor fools that we are, to make for ourselves private reservoirs of our own, but succeeding only in turning the living waters into stagnant pools, where the corruptions of our self-life have choked up the springs of the God-life that is within.'¹⁷⁴ Yet while she claims that 'help *is* coming', that 'New light is beginning to shine in upon us and new hopes to fill our hearts', she does not develop this into a practical statement on the need for a radical restructuring of the family, as Harris had attempted on Brotherhood settlements, referring to the potential of unselfish '*sex-life*' to 'achieve great things' as one 'of the mysteries of life of which we have yet more to learn.'¹⁷⁵ She does however, endorse someone else's fictional representation of what unselfish love might resemble, expressing her approval of the portrayal of a communal home in the novel *Margaret Dunmore*, sent to her by the author, the Edinburgh eugenic feminist Jane Hume Clapperton.¹⁷⁶ Here, in a chapter entitled 'Unselfish Love', a new, interpersonal dynamic is depicted that will evolve once families renounce their tendency to 'selfish isolation'.¹⁷⁷ In the novel, this is played out within a love triangle, in which the wife, pure, loving, maternal Rose Karratray, has to learn to relinquish her exclusive claim to the love of her husband Frank, thereby freeing him to pursue his chaste, yet passionate, intellectual partnership with Margaret Dunmore and ensuring their continued progress in their work on the science of social economics.

¹⁷² Lily Bell, 'Christ's "Second Coming"', *Forward*, 24 November 1906; 'Sophia', 'Matrons and Maidens: The Sexes, what they are, and their relationship to each other – Part III', *Labour Leader*, 25 September 1897, p. 318.

¹⁷³ Sophia, 'Matrons and Maidens: The Sexes, what they are, and their relationship to each other - Part III', *Labour Leader*, 25 September 1897, p. 318.

¹⁷⁴ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 26 May 1894, p. 11.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; 1 December 1894, p. 7.

¹⁷⁶ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 1 December 1894, p. 7.

¹⁷⁷ Jane Hume Clapperton, *Margaret Dunmore: or a Socialist Home* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1888), pp. 147-8.

Finally, also like Harris, the Pearces believed the women's movement had a critical role to play in the regeneration of humanity. Bella repeatedly refers to the feminist movement as a divine cause, asserting that Salvation will come 'through the feminine'.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, in a letter to the *Freewoman* she hints that women's compulsion to participate in feminism was fueled by a 'mysterious force', an 'occult power outside the usual experience', whilst in an article in *Forward*, she makes the striking assertion that the women's movement was in fact the Second Coming of Christ.¹⁷⁹ Radically reinterpreting the crucifixion story, Bella describes how during Christ's first appearance on the Earth, it was the female qualities within a dual-gendered Jesus that were ultimately rejected and nailed to the cross. She asks her readers:

Now, just think for a moment what it was that was rejected in Christ – that was crucified in Him. Christ stands for the Divine-feminine qualities in Man, for Love and Gentleness, for Pearce and Harmony, for Innocence and Purity, and for these qualities as embodied in Him was no place found in Judea.

It was the Woman in man that was crucified on that Cross, and She has not yet been taken down. No place has yet been found for Her here!¹⁸⁰

She then goes on to suggest that Christ has indeed come again, 'not in the form of one man, but in, and through, the women of the people'. It is therefore with purely feminist aims, such as the acknowledgement of women's influence in society, the removal of sex restrictions, and the prioritization of women's rights, that the Christian Church must now concern itself. Speaking with an eschatological fervor to rival that of her spiritual leader, she asserts that a 'crisis state in the world's history' has been reached, 'when the parting of the waves is before us'. Either humankind 'must receive and give welcome to the new Spirit' of the Feminine, or 'by despising and rejecting the same, cast ourselves into the Hell of its perversion. Which is it to be?'¹⁸¹

It is in the Pearces' portrayal of both current and future sexual relations, however, that a divergence with the doctrines of the Brotherhood becomes apparent. Despite expressing deep dissatisfaction with sex in its current form, neither Bella nor Charles go beyond tantalizing suggestions of a secret knowledge relating to a radical alternative. Women and men are described by Bella as living 'in a woeful state of ignorance' regarding their 'true relations to each other', with only a few having risen to a 'higher conception' of their sexual life.¹⁸² Yet what this 'higher conception' entails, is never fully explained, Bella only stating that it will occur in the future, that it will be very different from present-day marriage and that out of it will come the 'true regeneration of the race'.¹⁸³ Nowhere are these future sexual relationships referred to by the Brotherhood terminology of conjugal or counterpartal marriages, a phrase that would immediately have conjured transgressive associations in the minds of her readership. Indeed, at times her conceptualization of an ideal

¹⁷⁸ Lily Bell, 'Christ's "Second Coming"', *Forward*, 24 November 1906, p. 5.

¹⁷⁹ Letter from I. D. Pearce, *Freewoman*, 28 December 1911, p. 112; Lily Bell, 'Christ's "Second Coming"', *Forward*, 24 November 1906, p. 5.

¹⁸⁰ Lily Bell, 'Christ's "Second Coming"', *Forward*, 24 November 1906, p. 5.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 27 June 1896, p. 224.

¹⁸³ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 1 December 1894, p. 7.

sexual relationship as ‘the outward ultimation of a true spiritual union of love’, reads as little more than the conventional Victorian understanding of marriage as a ‘communion of souls’.¹⁸⁴

Secondly, in their discussions on sex, the Pearces incorporate other discourses circulating in late-Victorian Britain, principally that of evolutionary biology. We know that Bella attended a series of lectures by the American utopian feminist and social reformer Charlotte Perkins Stetson (later Gilman) when on a visit to Britain in 1896, and was receptive to her feminist revision of Darwinian evolution.¹⁸⁵ We also know that Patrick Geddes lectured on several occasions to the Ruskin Society of Glasgow, an organization with which the Pearces were closely involved. Furthermore, in his *Labour Leader* articles on the ‘The Sexes, what they are, and their relationship to each other’, Charles cites Henry Drummond, the popularizer of Christian evolutionary science whose 1894 *Ascent of Man* relied heavily on Geddes’s influential 1889 *Evolution of Sex*.¹⁸⁶ In this text, which shall be explored in more depth in the next chapter, Geddes argued that the physiology and psychology of sexual difference could be explained by an ‘organic see-saw’ between the twin dynamics of ‘katabolism’ and ‘anabolism’: while the male katabolic habit dissipated energy and transmitted variation, the female anabolic habit conserved energy and maintained the stability of the organism.¹⁸⁷ Bella and Charles’s understanding of sex bears a striking resemblance to the Geddes hypothesis, the only distinction being that for the Pearces, sex was not merely a phenomenon of the natural world but a creation of God, as Charles makes explicit in his series on ‘The Sexes’:

“In the beginning,” when the Creative Spirit of God had re-endowed the undifferentiated cosmic substance with creative energy, the law of the newly quickened life was manifested in two opposite but absolutely complementary motions – one positive, energetic, flowing away from the centre; the other negative, energetic, drawing back to the centre. The positive was the mode of the male, or paternal or creative method; the negative was the mode of the female, or maternal or sustaining method. Hence the creative operation of the Invisible God was seen to evolve by a law of complementary opposites.¹⁸⁸

If the God-given force of life was constituted by the harmonious operation of two opposite but complementary sexes, it followed logically that the disorder and chaos in which the world currently found itself was the result of a critical imbalance in this equilibrium. Not only had masculine rule caused the growth of individual women to become stunted, so that they no longer resembled in outward form the ‘God within’, but by denying the feminine element its ‘true place and power in

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.; Seidman, ‘The Power and the Danger of Pleasure’.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Women in Evolution’, *Labour Leader*, 28 November 1896, p. 412. For an analysis of Gilman’s appropriation of Darwinian evolution, see Penelope Deutscher, ‘The Descent of Man and the Evolution of Woman: Antoinette Blackwell, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Eliza Gamble,’ *Hypatia*, 19:2 (Spring 2004), pp. 35-55.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Sophia’, ‘Matrons and Maidens: The Sexes, what they are, and their relationship to each other’, *Labour Leader*, 25 September 1897, p. 318.

¹⁸⁷ Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, pp. 123, 271.

¹⁸⁸ Sophia, ‘Matrons and Maidens: The Sexes, what they are, and their relationship to each other – Part III’, *Labour Leader*, 11 September 1897, p. 302. For Bella’s evolutionary interpretation of sexual difference, see Lily Bell, ‘Women and the Race’, *Forward*, 1 December 1906, p. 4.

Society’, civilization had dealt itself a potentially fatal blow.¹⁸⁹ Again melding faith with evolutionary biology, Bella argued that a direct result of this sexual dissymmetry was the supremacy of the ‘Masculine principle’ of natural selection or the ‘struggle for life’ as an evolutionary dynamic in society, inferring that racial progress would only be possible with the reinstatement of its ‘complementary companion’, the feminine principle of altruism or ‘the struggle for the life of others’.¹⁹⁰ This contains another strong echo of Geddes, whose appeal to many feminists was rooted in his foregrounding of altruism as the force behind evolution.

A third difference between the sexual discourse of the Pearces and that of Harris is in their use of language. Whilst in Harris’s poetry and prose, the prefix ‘sex-’ is ubiquitous, and is used when describing both holy and unholy acts, persons, organs and illnesses, the Pearces use it rarely, instead peppering their journalism with the conventional binary of love/ lust. Furthermore, whilst for Harris, women are often the active agents in sexual, sensuous encounters, either as counterpartal queens or infernal whores, the Pearces reinstate women as the guardians of pure, spiritual, asexual love, with men relegated to its antithesis, the hell of lower, sinful, sexual, animal lust. Charles, for example, bewails the effect of the ‘brutal lust of the dominant male’ on women who would otherwise be ‘sweet and pure in their bodies as when they descended fresh from the heavens through the sacred gate of motherhood to gain an earthly experience’.¹⁹¹ Similarly, according to Bella, ‘Love, which is the true feminine, hasn’t had a chance to develop – it is so choked up by the overflow of animal sexuality, which parades through the world ever taking its sacred name in vain.’¹⁹²

Finally, what is resolutely excised from the Pearces’ journalism is any sense of sex as a source of sensual pleasure. Whilst for Harris, sex, even when conducted with a spiritual being, was an intensely physical and pleasurable activity, for Bella and Charles, it was something to be warned against and avoided, or else regulated and controlled. The perpetrators of the majority of sexual evils were men, deceived by the medical profession into believing that the free indulgence of their passions was necessary to their health. Instead, their ‘uncontrolled excesses’ had entailed ‘untold suffering and sacrifice of life’ on women, and on the unwanted children their ‘animal sensuality’ had produced, born into an inheritance of degraded sexuality.¹⁹³ The solution was the institution of a single-code of sexual morality and the securing of bodily autonomy for women. It is this understanding of sex, drawn from the discourse of feminism, and not Harris’s far more transgressive understanding, which dominates the Pearces’ writing.

¹⁸⁹ Lily Bell, ‘The Women’s Movement. News and Reviews’, *Forward*, 10 November 1906, p. 8; Lily Bell, ‘Women and Adult Suffrage’, *Forward*, 15 December 1906, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Lily Bell, ‘The Women’s Fight for Freedom’, *Forward*, 17 November 1906, p. 7.

¹⁹¹ Sophia, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 31 July 1897, p. 254.

¹⁹² Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 19 October 1895, p. 4.

¹⁹³ Letter from I. D. Pearce, *Freewoman*, 14 December 1911, p. 71; Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 8 June 1895, p. 4.

Conclusion

The Pearces were loyal and devoted disciples of the Brotherhood of the New Life, publishing several volumes of Harris's esoteric poetry, running a business selling his wine and defending his radical sexual beliefs in the local and national press. Yet they were also active participants in the British ethical socialist movement of the 1890s and the women's suffrage movement of the 1900s. Whilst socialists tended to avoid the Sex Question altogether, the emphasis within feminist discourse was less on the power of sex to transform society and more on the need for men to be sexually disempowered, for their oppressive sexual behaviors to be proscribed. When the Pearces translated Harris's theology for their progressive readership, what began as a doctrine of divine transcendence through sensual pleasure, the creation of a millenarian preacher steeped in the mysticism of Swedenborg, therefore became transformed into a critique of the sexual double standard. Whilst they retained recognizable, if relatively innocuous elements of Brotherhood theology, such as a belief in an androgynous deity, a distinction between selfish and altruistic love and a sense of the divine mission of an awakened womanhood, they also incorporated ideas circulating in their own socio-political context, principally that of equal rights feminism, social purity and evolutionary biology. Whilst the language they used was at times deceptively similar to that of Harris's, silences and subtle changes in emphasis fundamentally altered its meaning, allowing their discourse to quietly take its place, unnoticed by Mrs. Grundy, in the columns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century press.

Yet despite this hostile environment to sexual unorthodoxy, within their own minds, Bella and Charles were somehow able if not to reconcile then at least to hold coterminously these two antithetical attitudes towards sex, fusing mysticism's sensualism with feminism's asceticism in a way that made sense to them. The *fin de siècle* was, after all, a time when progressive individuals appeared able to be pluralistic in ways which seem improbable to us. Furthermore, the Pearces' sexual discourse does not, of course, equate to their subjectivity; they may indeed, have written one thing, and done another. Unfortunately however, the extent to which Bella and Charles applied Harris's sexual theology to their own intimate lives is unknown. Whilst their personal papers may have contained some answers, a large number of them were burnt after Bella's death by Annie Wood, Charles's cousin and their long-term housekeeper, who thought them either too personal or no longer required.¹⁹⁴ All we do know is that with each other, the Pearces had no children.

It could of course be that case that conjugal marriage, the sexual act at the heart of Harris's doctrine, did not equate to the transgressive practice that outsiders presumed. Despite the accumulation of evidence, including the testimony from embittered ex-disciples, the architectural

¹⁹⁴ Letters Annie Wood to George Lawton, 15 July 1930 and 23 July 1930, TLH Papers 13/308. However, Annie Wood did, in conjunction with Bella's younger brother James R. H. Duncan, bequeath ninety-three volumes of Harris's works to the Library of Congress in Washington.

plans for ‘100 bowers of love’s repose’ and the lurid rumours spread by Alzire Chevallier, there is still no hard proof that counterpartal encounters were anything other than solitary experiences, or that continence, when referred to by Brotherhood disciples, meant sexual intercourse without orgasm rather than no sex at all.¹⁹⁵ It could also be the case that even if unorthodox sexual relationships were conducted on Brotherhood settlements, if husbands and wives were indeed ‘*changed all round*’, the Pearces were unaware of it.¹⁹⁶ Neither Charles nor Bella lived on a settlement, Charles only visiting Fountaingrove periodically and Bella’s involvement with the organization dating from after Harris’s deposal. Although Bella alluded in her journalism to a ‘higher conception’ of selfless sexual relations, a knowledge known only to ‘very few’, but which would ultimately lead to ‘the true regeneration of the race’, she may well have been hypothesizing about an imagined future rather than hinting at secret knowledge of an illicit present.¹⁹⁷

It seems unlikely however, that the Pearces, experts on Harris’s sexual theology and key members of the Brotherhood’s ‘Department of Great Britain’, would not have been at least partially aware of any practical experiments made with the sexual order on the American settlements. Promoting such experiments openly within the progressive circles of late-Victorian Glasgow would have been a different matter however. Whilst the Pearces were generally open about their connection to the Brotherhood, in their journalism they chose to be far more circumspect. As one of the few feminist voices in the socialist press of the 1890s, it was difficult enough for Bella to assert that the path to the ‘new life’ lay through female emancipation and the eradication of the sexual double standard. The response from her male socialist readership if she had suggested utopia could also be obtained through harnessing the divine power of sex or through consummation with one’s spiritual spouse can only be imagined. Furthermore, cautionary tales from their progressive forefathers and mothers were legion. The Pearces only had to consider the posthumous reputation accorded to James Hinton, the rhetoric employed against Edith Lanchester and the experience of their free loving friends the Elmys, to understand the consequences of promoting sexually unorthodox behaviours.

When Harris died in March 1906, his disciples in New York steadfastly refused to believe the end had come, watching over him ‘for signs of remaining life, in vain, till decomposition showed in the body.’¹⁹⁸ During the latter part of his life, Harris had become convinced not only of his own divinity but his immortality, yet in truth, even his ideas proved disappointingly transitory. Harris’s particular brand of eschatological Christian mysticism had never held the same appeal amongst progressive intellectuals as had Theosophy or the occultism of the Order of the Golden Dawn. After his death, if Harris lived on at all in the public consciousness, it was as a deluded sensualist, who through his hypnotic powers had managed to deceive Laurence Oliphant out of his

¹⁹⁵ Letter from Louis Cowles to Edwin Markham, 12 March 1922, TLH 13/307.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from J. M. Shepherd to James Barr, 8 August 1885, quoted in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, pp. 463-4.

¹⁹⁷ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 1 December 1894, p. 7; 27 June 1896, p. 224.

¹⁹⁸ Letter from Arthur Cuthbert, 8 April 1906, in Schneider and Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*, p. 503.

inheritance. Bella and Charles's faith-inflected articles in the socialist press will have done little to counter this reputation. Whilst the *Labour Leader* boasted the largest readership of the socialist weeklies, and 'Lily Bell' enjoyed a high profile as labour's first feminist columnist, the Pearces' obscure references to occult forces, hermaphroditic ancestry and the Divine-femininity of Christ were neither explicit enough nor frequent enough to engender more than curiosity in their readership. By 1927, there were still piles of Harris's books littering the office of C. W. Pearce & Co., Bella admitting 'I am afraid there will never be much demand for them!'¹⁹⁹ In many ways, the disciples were their own worst enemy. Arthur Cuthbert intentionally restricted the circulation of his book on Harris, fearing its harsh reception amongst 'disputatious company' if he sent it out for review to the literary periodicals, content instead for it to be read solely by those 'who are indeed already friends from the deepest ground'.²⁰⁰ The much-anticipated biography by Edwin Markham, which Bella hoped would finally enlighten 'prejudiced minds', remained unfinished on his death in 1940, the American poet overwhelmed by the scale of the task.²⁰¹

Yet as the Pearces' assimilation of the theories of the Edinburgh evolutionary biologist Patrick Geddes has shown, Harris's was not the only sexual discourse in circulation with a uniquely Scottish connection. It is therefore with Geddes, and his own network of feminist and socialist progressives fifty miles east of Glasgow, that the next and final chapter is concerned.

¹⁹⁹ Letter Bella D. Pearce to Edwin Markham, 1 June 1923, TLH Papers 13/307.

²⁰⁰ Cuthbert, *Thomas Lake Harris*, 'Postscript', p. 7.

²⁰¹ Letter Bella Pearce to Edwin Markham, 8 May 1923, TLH Papers 13/307.

Edinburgh's Scientist of Love

Introduction

If within the progressive subculture of Glasgow, the Sex Question was discussed largely in the language of feminism, in Edinburgh, its principal idiom was science. This is because the personality leading the city's anti-Victorian revolt in Scotland's 'east windy west endy' capital was Patrick Geddes. A natural scientist by training, having studied under the anatomist and Darwinist Thomas Huxley, Geddes was a progressive by inclination, who as well as holding down a part-time professorship in botany at the University of Dundee, instigated numerous civic, educational and artistic projects in his preferred home city of Edinburgh. These included a program of sympathetic slum regeneration, an annual summer school inspired by the university extension movement, a pioneering sociological museum, a Celtic avant-garde journal and publishing house and a number of university halls of residence. Yet no matter in which language issues relating to sex were aired, it remained a delicate subject, as an anecdote related by Geddes's daughter Norah illustrates:

At U. C. D. [University College Dundee] in the garden one day [Geddes] heard his old friend and colleague, Professor Steggall (Mathematics), murmuring:
 'I always stood up for you, old chap.'
 'What do you say?'
 'Oh, nothing.'
 'Yes, but tell me.'
 'I only said I always stood up for you.'
 'But why and when?'
 'Oh, you know, the book on Sex. But I always told them you'd given up that sort of thing long ago.'¹

The book was the 1889 *Evolution of Sex*, written by Geddes in collaboration with his former pupil, the biologist John Arthur Thomson.² It was the first in a new series of cheap and accessible science volumes, edited by the future sexologist Havelock Ellis, and designed 'to bring within general reach of the English-speaking public the best that is known and thought in all departments of modern scientific research'.³ By the 1880s, science, and in particular the life sciences, wielded an unprecedented authority within Victorian thought and culture. As Frank Turner has shown, during

¹ Related by Norah Geddes to Philip Boardman, 9 January 1939, quoted in Philip Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes: Biologist, Town Planner, Re-educator, Peace-warrior* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 112.

² Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*. John Arthur Thomson (1861-1933) attended Geddes's classes in practical botany and zoology at Edinburgh University in 1881, when Geddes was an Assistant to the Professor of Botany and part-time lecturer in natural sciences at the Medical School. He became his lifelong friend and collaborator. He held the Chair of Natural History at Aberdeen from 1890-1930 and was the author of several highly popular general science books. With regard to the division of labour on the *Evolution of Sex*, it is generally accepted that Geddes provided the original ideas and Thomson summarized the existing literature and improved the clarity of the writing.

³ Advertisement for 'The Contemporary Science Series', Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 323.

the second half of the nineteenth century, a newly legitimised scientific profession was highly successful in ‘combining research, polemic wit and literary eloquence’ to press the superior claims of ‘the scientifically educated against the resistance of religious orthodoxy, received opinion, and intellectual obscurantism’, addressing audiences ranging from skilled mechanics to the aristocracy.⁴ The methodology on which scientists based their claims for cultural dominance was empiricism, an objective and secular approach which, through its meticulous, patient and exhaustive uncovering of the facts, promised to reveal the fundamental truths of existence, what Thomas Huxley phrased as ‘the resolute facing of the world as it is, when the garment of make-believe, by which pious hands have hidden its uglier features, is stripped off’.⁵ With the growth in the new social sciences of anthropology, sociology and psychology, human behaviour was increasingly understood to have biological foundations, leading a generation of progressives and conservatives alike to seek solutions to ethical, social and political problems by recourse to the laws of the natural world.⁶ Indeed, according to one contributor to the *American Popular Science Monthly* in 1882, classifying phenomena ‘as manifestations of a universal law’ had become ‘the intellectual pastime of the nineteenth century’.⁷ Whilst remaining contentious, the theory of organic evolution was particularly pervasive, permeating many such attempts to draw ideological conclusions from biological evidence. A friend of Geddes, the Edinburgh eugenic feminist Jane Hume Clapperton, was emphatic in her belief in its deterministic status, declaring that ‘the doctrine of evolution ... must be regarded as explanatory of things as they are, and prophetic of things as they will be, and should be’.⁸

One of the issues on which the new ‘ethical naturalists’ believed themselves uniquely qualified to pronounce was the role and position of women in contemporary society.⁹ Commentators from a variety of scientific as well as political and personal standpoints extrapolated on the implications for womankind of the new evolutionary knowledge, with individuals including the naturalist Charles Darwin, philosopher Herbert Spencer, psychologists George John Romanes and G. Stanley Hall, psychiatrist Harry Campbell, biologist and novelist Grant Allen and eugenicist Karl Pearson together creating what Cynthia Eagle Russett has referred to as a ‘sexual science’, an in-depth and sustained examination of the biological origins of sexual difference.¹⁰ Geddes and Thomson’s

⁴ Frank Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 131. See also Martin Fichman, ‘Biology and Politics: Defining the Boundaries’, in Bernard Lightman (ed.), *Victorian Science in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 94-118.

⁵ Quoted by Havelock Ellis, in *The New Spirit*, second edition (London: Walter Scott, [n.d.]), pp. 7-8. Ellis called Huxley ‘one of the most militant and indefatigable exponents of the scientific spirit during the past half century’.

⁶ Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science*, pp. 3-6.

⁷ Nina Morais, ‘A Reply to Miss Hardaker on the Woman Question,’ *Popular Science Monthly*, 21 (1882), pp. 70-8 (p. 70).

⁸ Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, p. 27.

⁹ The phrase is used by Thomas Dixon in *The Invention of Altruism*, p. 275.

¹⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1871, 1901); Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1861); George John Romanes, ‘Mental Differences Between Men and Women’, *Nineteenth Century*, 21: 123

Evolution of Sex was in conversation primarily with this body of literature, introducing an original hypothesis on the evolutionary process behind sexual differentiation that was intended to supersede ‘the bewildering superabundance of widely different theories’ currently in circulation, and fulfil the urgent need for ‘an explanation at once rational and ultimate, to comprehend and underlie all the preceding ones’.¹¹ In addition however, the text, in conjunction with its 1896 companion essay ‘The Moral Evolution of Sex’, also spoke to the more marginal, predominantly medical discourse of ‘sexology’. Emergent in Britain during the 1890s, sexology was concerned broadly with the analysis of sexual behaviour and more particularly with the taxonomy and terminology of aberrant psycho-sexual identities such as homosexuality, lesbianism, paedophilia, sado-masochism, nymphomania, transvestism and zoophilia.¹² In its new, medicalized way of speaking about sexuality, it constituted a significant marker of modernity, a discourse within which, as Rita Felski has noted, ‘the vocabulary of morality and religion ceded ground to the discourse of science’ and ‘homosexuality was redefined as an inborn condition, a medical aberration rather than a form of sin.’¹³ Whilst Geddes and Thomson confined themselves to the study of heterosexual pairings, their advanced ideas on sexual ethics, ‘romantic eugenics’ and birth control nonetheless constituted an important contribution to turn of the century sexological ideas.¹⁴

There is now an extensive historiography on both the biological discourse of Victorian sexual science and the medical discourse of fin de siècle sexology. However, the full complexity of the wider discursive field within which such ideas were generated, disseminated and debated has only recently been fully appreciated and understood. The foundational studies of sexual science, written

(May 1887), pp. 654-72; G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton, 1904); Harry Campbell, *Differences in Nervous Organisation of Man and Woman* (London: H. K. Lewis, 1891); Grant Allen, ‘Plain Words on the Woman Question’, *Popular Science Monthly*, 36 (1889); Karl Pearson, ‘Woman and Labour’, *Fortnightly Review*, 61 (1894) and Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Sexual Secondary Characters* (London: Walter Scott Ltd, 1894). See also Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science* and Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, pp. 39-44.

¹¹ Geddes, ‘Sex’, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th ed., 24 vols, vol. 21 (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1888), p. 723. See also Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 33.

¹² This is in contrast to America, where sex theorists paid far more attention to ‘normal’ heterosexuality. See Vern Bullough, ‘The Development of Sexology in the USA in the Early Twentieth Century’, in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds), *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 16.

¹³ Rita Felski, ‘Introduction’, in Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds), *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 4.

¹⁴ There was clearly a considerable degree of overlap between the biological discourse of ‘sexual science’ and the medical discourse of ‘sexology’. Sexual scientists commented on men and women’s sexual natures while sexology’s sexual stereotypes contained implicit gendered assumptions, principally that homosexual men were effeminate and lesbians mannish. Indeed, Havelock Ellis straddled both fields, becoming Britain’s foremost sexologist, yet also publishing *Man and Woman* (1894), a widely read ‘sexual science’ compendium of physiological and psychological gender differences based on a variety of medical and scientific sources. However, the conflation of the two fields in much of the historiography has led, I believe, to some confusion. Cynthia Eagle Russett uses ‘sexual science’ solely in reference to the scientific discourse on gender difference that blossomed in the second half of the nineteenth century. However Lucy Bland, Laura Doan, Roy Porter, Mikulas Teich and Lesley Hall all use ‘sexual science’ and ‘sexology’ interchangeably to refer to the culturally marginal body of knowledge around sexual behaviour and the erotic that developed in the late nineteenth century. Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science*; ‘Introduction’, in Porter and Teich, *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science*, pp. 1-26; Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds), *Sexology in Culture and Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Hall, ‘Hauling Down the Double Standard’, pp. 36-56.

by feminist historians during the 1970s and 80s, depicted its practitioners as reactionary, ‘antifeminist biologists’, responding to the threat to their masculine prerogatives occasioned by the rise of the women’s movement, by providing ‘rationales and prescriptions based *outside* of science for maintaining the female status quo.’¹⁵ Conversely, the traditional understanding of sexologists, generated in the context of the ‘sexual revolution’ of the 1960s and 70s, was as paradigmatically progressive, the pioneers of a medical field which sought to bring enlightenment to what was perceived to be a monolithic system of Victorian repression.¹⁶

More recently, however, historians such as Chris Nottingham, Lesley Hall, Lucy Bland and Angelique Richardson have resisted ascribing the fields’ protagonists dualistic or polarized positions and have instead worked to reveal the ‘dense cultural grid’ of conflicting and overlapping scientific, medical, feminist, anti-feminist, reactionary and progressive representations of sexuality within the late-Victorian period.¹⁷ Such work has shown that the relationship between the new literature on sex and the contemporary feminist movement was less antagonistic and more symbiotic than initially delineated. There is now an appreciation that a wide array of prominent feminists engaged productively with both sexual science and sexology, reappropriating, reconfiguring and subverting its hypotheses to further their own agendas. Furthermore, there is a new awareness of the extent of the debt sexual scientists owed both to their close female associates and to wider feminist debates, campaigns such as the resistance to the Contagious Diseases Acts forming ‘the contextual matrix within which the ideas of sexologists were generated.’¹⁸ Finally, we have a more nuanced understanding of the heterogeneity of the scientific and medical commentators themselves, several of whom, such as Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, were committed to a range of progressive causes, including feminism, and whose work on sex was ‘quite unmistakably intended to serve radical purposes’ and was accepted as such by their peers.¹⁹

Patrick Geddes, however, has yet to benefit extensively from such historical revisionism. From the early feminist surveys of sexual science he emerges as a deeply unsympathetic figure. Susan Sleeth Mosedale refers to him as a ‘spinner of speculative webs’ who ‘misused reason’ to insist upon ‘the opposite traits and capacities of men and women’, whilst Cynthia Eagle Russett similarly depicts

¹⁵ Sleeth Mosedale, ‘Science Corrupted’, pp. 3, 4; Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science*. See also Alan P. Barr, ‘Evolutionary Science and the Woman Question’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 20 (1992), pp. 25-54.

¹⁶ Hall, ‘Hauling Down the Double Standard’, p. 38. Hall refers explicitly to Edward M. Breecher’s, *The Sex Researchers* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1970) and Paul Robinson’s, *The Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), although argues that the Whiggish narrative of enlightenment was implicit within several texts on Victorian sexual mores published in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

¹⁷ Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*; Hall, ‘Hauling Down the Double Standard’; Bland, *Banishing the Beast* and Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*. See also the essays in Bland and Doan, *Sexology in Culture*. The phrase ‘dense cultural grid’ is from Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Hall, ‘Hauling Down the Double Standard’, p. 44.

¹⁹ Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*, p. 150.

him as a sexual essentialist and ergo an enemy of feminine aspiration.²⁰ Their evaluations of the *Evolution of Sex* are echoed in later studies of other aspects of nineteenth-century sexuality. Lucy Bland, in her analysis of the sexual politics of late-Victorian and Edwardian feminism, refers to the ‘deeply conservative’ logic of Geddes and Thomson’s arguments and infers a degree of skepticism towards their ‘professed support for women’s rights’.²¹ Jeffrey Weeks, in his study of the regulation of sexuality since 1800 similarly concludes that they were ‘relatively conservative’ figures, whilst Thomas Laqueur, in his historical investigation of changing scientific and medical understandings of sexed bodies, cites their theory of sexual difference as the most extreme example of a post-Enlightenment belief in two, incommensurable, opposite sexes, a belief, according to the implicit assumption underlying his thesis, which had predominantly negative consequences for women.²²

Conversely however, Geddes’s biographers, on the rare occasions when they have commented on his sexual and gendered discourse, have been more forgiving. Amelia Defries reflected that his pronouncements on ‘art and sex’ led her to feel as if she had discovered ‘a new continent of Thought’, whilst Philip Boardman believed Geddes’s inclusion of a summary of birth control methods in the *Evolution of Sex* positioned him ‘among the first to strike early blows for freedom of discussion in a field hitherto forbidden’.²³ Both Defries and Boardman were former disciples however, and their loyalty can therefore at least in part be assumed. Yet his most recent biographer, the urban historian Helen Meller, is also broadly complimentary of the impact of his sex research on women, arguing that he ‘produced an argument of potent emotional strength for the “New Woman” of the 1890s’, an argument which she claims the women of his Edinburgh circle then transposed into ‘a highly moral, self-disciplined but intense pursuit of romantic love.’²⁴ Exactly how this transaction worked in practice however, is not explored in any depth.

Geddes was a considerable polymath and an important, early figure within several other disciplines, notably urban planning and sociology. As with his biographers, historians working within these fields have also been inclined to be more positive when reflecting on his sexual

²⁰ Sleeth Mosedale, ‘Science Corrupted’, pp. 32-41 and Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science*, pp. 89-92, 102-3. See also Stephanie A. Shields, ‘The Variability Hypothesis: The History of a Biological Model of Sex Differences in Intelligence’, *Signs* 7:4 (Summer, 1982), pp. 773-4.

²¹ Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 78.

²² Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, p. 189; Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 6. This assumption, which is never explicitly stated, is nonetheless present throughout Laqueur’s book, which opens with a quote from Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Human-not-quite-human*: ‘The first thing that strikes the careless observer is that women are unlike men. They are “the opposite sex” (though why “opposite” I do not know; what is the “neighboring sex”?). But the fundamental thing is that women are more like men than anything else in the world.’ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 1.

²³ Amelia Defries, *The Interpreter: Geddes, The Man and his Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1927), p. 206; Philip Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes: Biologist, Town Planner, Re-educator, Peace-warrior* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 117; Paddy Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person: An Introduction to the Ideas and Life of Patrick Geddes* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975), p. 99.

²⁴ Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 84. Geddes’s other biographer who chose not to comment on the *Evolution of Sex* is Philip Mairet, author of *Pioneer of Sociology: The Life and Letters of Patrick Geddes* (London: Lund Humphries, 1957).

research. For example, both Jill Conway in 1972 and Eileen Janes Yeo in 2004 have argued that his emphasis on the importance of female-coded altruism had a positive impact on British sociology, Yeo asserting that Geddes's insistence that 'art, culture, education, libraries, parks, ethical consumption and social surveys' could all be 'fields of action for the "civic matriarch"', led to an enduring feminisation of the concept of the citizen.²⁵

The central objective of this chapter is therefore to provide a reevaluation of Geddes's life and discourse, one which draws upon the previous insights of historians of feminism, sexuality, subjectivity and sociology, but which strives to pay closer attention to the contested, unstable and heterogeneous discursive realm within which Geddes's ideas were situated. An important element in this revisionism is a reappraisal of the extent to which his theories were influenced by his relationship with his wife Anna and the women within the avant-garde subculture that they together helped create in Edinburgh, and how these theories in turn shaped national and international, popular, feminist and progressive attitudes towards sexuality. In doing so, the intention is to present Geddes as a complex and multifaceted fin de siècle voice on sexuality and gender, someone who can perhaps, like Havelock Ellis, be seen as 'a transitional figure, consciously striving for modernity', but who was unavoidably caught up in the traditions of his historical present.²⁶

The chapter begins with a short summary of his early life, paying close attention to the gendered assumptions that structured his upbringing and the particular, sociological influences behind his commitment to social action. This is followed by an analysis of his relationship with his wife Anna, arguing that her willingness to embrace an ideal of female service within their marriage was the combined result of her conventional, middle-class upbringing and Geddes's tendency to structure all his relationships on a master-disciple model. A portrait of the progressive subculture in Edinburgh then follows, with close attention paid to the nature of its feminism and the unconventional yet moral quality of its sexual ethics. However, the reach of Geddes's ideas on women and sex went beyond Edinburgh, and the second half of the chapter is therefore concerned with a detailed reevaluation of his two important late-Victorian texts on sex, the book *The Evolution of Sex* and the essay 'The Moral Evolution of Sex'. The aim of the analysis is two-fold: to suggest what contemporary feminists may have found appealing in Geddes's theories and ideas and to demonstrate the degree to which such ideas were constituted as much by his intimate and

²⁵ Jill Conway, 'Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution', in Martha Vicinus (ed.), *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 152-4; Eileen Janes Yeo, 'Feminizing the Citizen: British Sociology's Sleight of Hand?', in Barbara L. Marshall and Anne Witz (eds), *Engendering the Social: Feminist Encounters with Sociological Theory* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004), pp. 105-6. Chris Renwick has also conducted an important recent analysis placing the *Evolution of Sex* in its sociological context. However, he sidesteps the implications for women of Geddes's evolutionary theories and concentrates solely on his practical interventions into Edinburgh's social problems. See Chris Renwick, *British Sociology's Lost Biological Roots: A History of Futures Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 70-97 and 'The Practice of Spencerian Science: Patrick Geddes's Biosocial Program, 1876-1889', *Isis*, 100:1 (March 2009), pp. 36-57.

²⁶ Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*, p. 149.

social relationships in Edinburgh as by contemporary scientific, sociological, sexological and eugenic discourse.

Biosocial Beginnings

Patrick Geddes was born in Ballater in west Aberdeenshire on 2 October 1854, the cherished youngest son of Alexander Geddes, a semi-retired Black Watch sergeant-major and Janet Stivenson, a former school-mistress. When three years old, his parents moved to Perth, and it was here, in a hillside cottage just outside the town, that Geddes spent the remainder of what he later described as a ‘rarely fortunate and happy childhood with the best of parents, passed in neither poverty nor riches’.²⁷ His one sister and two brothers were much older, and in gendered terms, conformed to conventional, lower middle-class expectations, his brothers carving out careers abroad in trade and banking, and his sister Jessie remaining at home after the death of her fiancé.²⁸ The roles adopted by his parents were similarly unexceptional, his father’s family moniker of ‘General’ and his mother’s of ‘Chancellor of the Exchequer’ indicating a division of labour structured by patriarchal power relations.²⁹ Despite this, Geddes remembered his father as an attentive and affectionate if still authoritarian presence, as the youngest son Geddes benefiting from ‘a modifying if not relaxing of parental supervision’.³⁰ As Eleanor Gordon has commented, there were ‘many different ways of being a father’ in nineteenth-century Scotland, and Alexander Geddes was far removed from ‘the dour, aloof or drunken figure of the popular stereotypes’, reading aloud from the Bible after supper (he was an elder in the Free kirk), taking Geddes on long countryside walks, and closely involving him in the family garden.³¹ On receipt of his gold pocket watch at aged forty, Geddes wrote ‘I have been a pupil of many great naturalists, each of whom knew far more than you ever dreamt of, but I have to thank you for my love of nature and of gardens’.³² A precocious child, Geddes at aged nine was ‘dux’ or first in his class ‘almost every day’, devouring the contents of the local Mechanics Library and winning numerous prizes during his school career at Perth Academy.³³ Indeed, the ease with which he obtained such distinctions led him to question their inherent value, throughout his lifetime never seeking or gaining any recognized, academic qualifications.

²⁷ Patrick Geddes, quoted in Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 13.

²⁸ His brothers Robert and John settled in Mexico City and New Zealand respectively. His sister Jessie initially devoted herself to looking after Geddes when a young boy. See introduction to the letters of Patrick Geddes by Norah G. Mears, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508, fol. 105.

²⁹ The nicknames were awarded by Geddes’s eldest brother John. Geddes was ‘Deputy-Assistant-Adjutant-General’ and his sister Jessie ‘Correspondent in Chief’. See Introduction to the letters of Patrick Geddes by Norah G. Mears, Geddes Papers, NLS MS 10508, fol. 166.

³⁰ Patrick Geddes, ‘Earliest Recollections’ [undated], NLS, quoted in Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 13.

³¹ Eleanor Gordon, ‘The Family’, in Lynn Abrams, Eleanor Gordon, Deborah Simonton and Eileen Janes Yeo (eds.), *Gender in Scottish History since 1700* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 254.

³² Letter from Patrick Geddes to his father, 16 April 1898, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508, fols 13-14.

³³ Letter from Patrick Geddes to his brother Jack Geddes, 17 October 1863, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508, fol. 1.

Geddes's idiosyncratic approach to his professional training was in evidence from the beginning. He abandoned a degree course in botany at the University of Edinburgh after just one week, due to his distaste for its emphasis on the formal classification and dissection of dead specimens rather than the study of 'living nature in evolution'.³⁴ Instead, he sought out tuition in London from Thomas Huxley, the celebrated champion of Darwinian evolution and notorious agnostic, who was currently teaching an intensive five-month course in the natural sciences at the Royal School of Mines. Geddes proved an able and enthusiastic student, for the next two years Huxley employing him as a demonstrator on the course, as well as sending him on research trips to Cambridge University, where he worked under the leading embryologists Michael Foster and Francis Balfour, and to the University of Paris's marine biological station at Roscoff in northwest Brittany. It was at Roscoff, and during a subsequent stay at a marine station in Naples, that Geddes was to conduct his most influential biological research. It related to an important question currently exercising the scientific community. The development of new, more powerful microscopes had shown that organisms previously assumed to be singular were in fact, composites of two or more separate entities. What was now under scrutiny was the relationship between these entities. Geddes's research focused on a simple marine organism called a radiolarian. He asserted that the yellow cells contained within it were an algae and furthermore, that the living arrangement between the animal and the algae did not follow a master/slave model, as had previously been assumed, but that the two organisms had instead evolved to work cooperatively, an interaction Geddes termed 'reciprocal accommodation'.³⁵ In 1881, his work was awarded the Ellis Physiology Prize by the University of Edinburgh and was subsequently published in *Nature*, securing his reputation as a young biologist of considerable talent and promise.³⁶ In testimonials written for his (ultimately unsuccessful) applications for professorial posts in natural history and botany at the University of Edinburgh in 1882 and 1888, Charles Darwin wrote that he had read several of Geddes's biological papers with 'very great interest' and had formed 'a high opinion' of his abilities. The naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace also recommended Geddes, saying that he was 'well known as an original thinker and worker in some of the most interesting and difficult branches of biological study', whilst the German biologist August Weismann believed Geddes ranked 'among those of the living English investigators who have most deeply thought out the general biological problems which concern both the vegetable and the animal kingdom.'³⁷

Despite this early success however, Geddes was increasingly drawn towards utilizing the insights he had gained from evolutionary biology for the betterment of human society. This impulse was part of the wider 'great moral awakening in later Victorian Britain', which manifested itself within

³⁴ Meller, *Patrick Geddes*, pp. 25-6.

³⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of Geddes's 'reciprocal accommodation' research, see Renwick, 'The Practice of Spencerian Science', pp. 42-47 and *British Sociology's Lost Biological Roots*, pp. 76-81.

³⁶ Patrick Geddes, 'Further Researches on Animals Containing Chlorophyll', *Nature*, 25 (1882), pp. 303-305.

³⁷ *University of Edinburgh, Chair of Botany. Letter of Application from Patrick Geddes*, 14 February 1888, quoted in Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, pp. 103-4.

the scientific world as a growing tendency by a new generation of ‘ethical naturalists’ to seek solutions to social problems.³⁸ The particular framework of Geddes’s thinking around the relationship between science and the social was the consequence of his exposure, during the formative early years of his intellectual development, to three specific theorists on the issue. Firstly, whilst in London during the 1870s he had acquainted himself with the work of August Comte, the French historian and philosopher, who in his six-volume *Cours de Philosophie Positive* asserted the existence of a ‘Hierarchy of Sciences’, beginning with mathematics and rising through the other ‘preliminary sciences’ of astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology, before reaching the pinnacle of the study of society or ‘sociology’, a term originated by Comte.³⁹ The philosophical school that developed around this scientific study of humanity Comte termed ‘positivism’, summarising its moral code as ‘living for others’ or ‘altruism’ (another Comtean neologism), and asserting that biology should ‘indicate the germ of this principle, presenting it in a form uncomplicated by disturbing influences.’⁴⁰ Whilst Huxley was antipathetic towards any such attempts to accord the workings of animal organisms an explanatory power in human society, in his ‘Lay Sermons’ deriding positivism as merely ‘Catholicism minus Christianity’, Geddes was less dismissive, believing Huxley’s criticisms ‘were somehow missing the essential significance of this new doctrine’.⁴¹ Instead, Geddes became one of several late-Victorian intellectuals ‘more or less sympathetic to the Positivist cause while uncommitted to its details’,⁴² for a brief period attending the ‘bright week-night meetings’ of the London Positivist Society and later converting his fiancé to the positivist ‘Religion of Humanity’.⁴³

Secondly, and also in defiance of Huxley, during his summer at Cambridge Geddes read Herbert Spencer, the popular scientific philosopher who understood evolution to be a universal process governing every facet of animal and human existence.⁴⁴ In his comprehensive, five-part *Synthetic Philosophy*, published over three decades from 1862 to 1892, Spencer traced the workings of

³⁸ Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism*, p. 230.

³⁹ For useful summaries of Comte’s philosophy and a detailed analysis of its impact in Britain, see Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism*, pp. 41-89 and T. R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ August Comte, *System of Positive Polity* (1851-4), quoted in Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism*, p. 41.

⁴¹ See for example, his 1871 essay ‘Administrative Nihilism’, in T. H. Huxley, *Collected Essays*, 9 vols., Vol. 1: *Methods and Results* (London: Macmillan, 1893), pp. 251-289. Thomas Henry Huxley, *Lay Sermons, Addresses and Reviews* (New York: D. Appleton, 1871), p. 140. Patrick Geddes, ‘Introduction’, in Susan Liveing, *A Nineteenth-Century Teacher: John Henry Bridges, M.B., F.R.C.P.* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1926), p. 1.

⁴² Wright, *The Religion of Humanity*, p. 261. Other examples include the sociologists Victor Branford, Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse and Lewis Mumford, and the Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb. According to Geddes, by 1926, despite the dwindling number of Positivist Societies, ‘the man in the street [was] far more of a positivist than he knows’. See Geddes, ‘Introduction’, in Liveing, *A Nineteenth-Century Teacher*, p. 9.

⁴³ Geddes, ‘Introduction’, in Liveing, *A Nineteenth Century Teacher*, p. 2. In a letter written in 1886, Geddes’s fiancé Anna Morton refers to their joint commitment to the ‘religion of humanity’, even regretting that her mother was ‘not young enough to make our beliefs hers’. See Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 14 February 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS MS 19253, fols 5-8.

⁴⁴ According to Geddes’s biographer Philip Boardman, when Geddes mentioned to Huxley that he had read Spencer’s *Principles of Biology*, Huxley retorted ‘You’d have done far better to spend all your time on embryology!’ See Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 35.

evolutionary mechanisms from philosophical first principles to their specific manifestations in the fields of biology, psychology, sociology and ethics. His guiding principal was that evolution was an inherently ethical phenomenon, believing that greater differentiation of organisms led to their greater cooperation and therefore, that if evolution was allowed to take its course, human behaviour would emerge that was both ‘widely beneficial and of a higher type’.⁴⁵ Finally, whilst in Paris during the winter of 1878, Geddes also encountered the theories of the social observer Frederic Le Play, attending a lecture at the Sorbonne by one of his disciples, Edmond Demolins.⁴⁶ Le Play was a retired mining engineer who was skeptical of the abstract reasoning of Comte and instead advocated a scientific and methodical approach to the study of human society, Geddes influenced primarily by his insistence on the importance of the social survey and his triad of social units, ‘Lieu, Travail, et Famille’, which Geddes transposed as ‘Place, Work, Folk’.⁴⁷

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If the work of Comte, Spencer and Le Play provided Geddes with contrasting models for the application of scientific ideas to the social arena, it was in Edinburgh during the 1880s and 1890s that he was to test their practical value, in the process developing his own distinctive ‘biosocial’ theories and methodologies. A ten-week period of temporary blindness during a year-long field trip to Mexico further signaled his retreat from original biological research, rendering him no longer

⁴⁵ Renwick, ‘The Practice of Spencerian Science’, p. 40. Geddes’s key reference work was Spencer’s *The Principles of Biology*, citing it in the *Evolution of Sex* and in his later work with Thomson, their 1914 book *Sex*. See Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology*, 2 vols. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1864, 1867); Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, pp. 299, 315; Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *Sex* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), pp. 246.

⁴⁶ Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh*, p. 83; Meller, *Patrick Geddes*, pp. 34-8.

⁴⁷ Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 41.

able to conduct extensive work using microscopes.⁴⁸ Instead, on his arrival in Edinburgh in 1880 as a young man of twenty-six, Geddes instituted what would become a lifelong pattern of supplementing paid university teaching work and scientific writing with an array of social schemes. Professionally, he lectured at the University of Edinburgh in zoology and natural history, as well as working as an assistant in the department of Practical Botany, before in 1888 becoming Professor of Botany at the University of Dundee, a part-time post financed by his childhood friend and benefactor Martin White. Simultaneously, however, he spearheaded several projects designed to alleviate the chronic social problems of Edinburgh's impoverished Old Town. Long deserted by the city's middle and upper classes for the genteel Georgian terraces of the New Town, the tenement slums of old Edinburgh were places in which, according to Geddes's friend the political economist James Mavor, 'unredeemed squalor had reigned for at least half a century'.⁴⁹ Geddes's first efforts to mitigate this squalor were conducted through a small organization known initially as the Environment Society and then in 1885 as the Edinburgh Social Union. Modeled in part on the work of the social reformer Octavia Hill, its activities included the purchase, renovation and management of rental properties, with tenants' behavior monitored by female rent collectors, as well as the cultivation of wasteground, the planting of window-boxes, the provision of art classes and Saturday night entertainments, and the decoration of public buildings, including more than twenty murals by artists including Phoebe Anna Traquair and Charles Hodge Mackie.⁵⁰ The underlying hope was that enhancing the environment of the Old Town would generate a corresponding improvement in the lives of its residents, enabling them to achieve their evolutionary potential.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁹ James Mavor, 'My Windows on the Street of the World', 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1923), vol. 1, p. 215.

⁵⁰ Geddes was the secretary of the Environment Society when it formed in 1884 and chaired the Decorative Committee of the Edinburgh Social Union, before leaving its Executive Committee in 1889. See letter from James Oliphant to Anna Morton, November 1884, quoted in Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*, p. 83; letter from Jean Craigie Cunningham to Patrick Geddes, 21 November 1889, Geddes Papers, NLS MS 10569, fols 1-2; Jim Johnson and Lou Rosenberg, *Renewing Old Edinburgh: The Enduring Legacy of Patrick Geddes* (Glendaruel: Argyll, 2010), pp. 64-8 and Graham Urquhart, 'Patrick Geddes and the Edinburgh Social Union: Planning, Poverty, Philanthropy', <http://hodgers.com/mike/patrickgeddes/feature_six.html> [accessed 15 August 2013].

The Ivy and the Tree

It was during this early period of social engagement that Geddes became acquainted with Anna Morton, the woman who would become his wife. Born on 19 November 1857 in Liverpool, she was the fourth of seven children of Annie and Frazer Morton, her mother Irish and her father an Ulster Scot and affluent merchant who had settled with his family in Egremont, a prosperous suburb of Liverpool.⁵¹ Like Bella Pearce's family, the Mortons raised their children to conform to contemporary notions of respectable gendered behavior and aspirations. Her father came from a strict Presbyterian family and had 'very definite opinions ... on the conduct becoming to (even very) young ladies', not permitting his daughters to climb or jump from walls or engage extensively in sports or games.⁵² Their mother, whilst less strict in this regard, looking on their physical play 'with an indulgent eye when father was safely at business', was otherwise unyielding in her compliance with social proprieties, Anna referring to her mother's terror least unconventional behavior led to 'any talk about a girl'.⁵³ Unlike Bella however, there is no suggestion that Anna Morton rebelled against such gendered restrictions. After attending boarding school, she was permitted to nurture her talent for the acceptably feminine accomplishment of music, studying piano, German and singing in Dresden for a year before becoming a music teacher. Still unmarried at the age of twenty-six, she struggled to resolve herself to the prospect of a lifetime of 'living alone', later recollecting her frequent feelings of loneliness and discontentedness, frustrated by her emotional dependency 'on the people I liked best' but with no obvious way of achieving the 'fuller better life' of which she dreamed.⁵⁴

Her horizons expanded considerably however, on the marriage in 1883 of her younger sister Edith to James Oliphant, the headmaster and owner of a private girls' school in Edinburgh. A philosopher by training, Oliphant counted himself one of Patrick Geddes's 'select friends', in November 1884 Geddes appointing him treasurer of the Environment Society.⁵⁵ On her annual visits to the Oliphant household, Anna apparently listened 'with breathless interest' as Geddes and Oliphant discussed solutions to the social problems of Edinburgh 'far into the night'.⁵⁶ Her interest piqued, she attended a course of extra-mural lectures given by Geddes, possibly on 'The Production and Use of

⁵¹ Entry for Frazer Morton, RootsWeb, <<http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=kosmoid&id=117730&style=TEXT>> [accessed 17 August 2013]; entry for Anna Geddes, n. Morton, in Elizabeth Ewan, Sue Innes, Sian Reynolds and Rose Pipes (eds), *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 133.

⁵² Introduction to the letters of Patrick Geddes by Norah G. Mears, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508, fol. 185.

⁵³ *Ibid.*; letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 14 February 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 5-8.

⁵⁴ Letters from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 28 March 1886 (fols 13-16) and 3 April 1886 (fols 19-22), Geddes Papers, NLS MS 19253.

⁵⁵ Letter from James Oliphant to Anna Morton, November 1884, quoted in Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*, p. 83.

⁵⁶ Introduction to the letters of Patrick Geddes by Norah G. Mears, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508, fol. 186.

Wealth in Relation to Social Progress’, writing what she later referred to as ‘silly papers’ for him.⁵⁷ That her lecturer made an impression can be detected between the lines of a letter written at the end of her first visit, in which she states ‘I am very sorry to find that we shall not be able to go and see you to-morrow afternoon. I wanted to thank you very much for all the pleasure you have given me during my visit, but I must content myself I suppose, with writing my good-bye & thanks.’⁵⁸ On her return home to Liverpool, she was sufficiently inspired to start a club for working-class girls with her younger sister Bex and begin to eschew fashionable clothing, her new, progressive interests causing anxiety to her mother who thought it ‘a pity’ that she now had ‘different ideas’ from the majority of her respectable, Liverpool acquaintance.⁵⁹ Undeterred, Anna continued her correspondence with Geddes, in around 1885 Geddes sending her a paper he had written for the Royal Society of Edinburgh on the principles of economics, a biologically-driven perspective on the importance of considering ethics, aesthetics and altruism in industrial production which Anna found ‘extremely interesting’, despite being advised by her brother and a friend to ‘write and thank you for it before I opened it, and so avoid the painful necessity of confessing my inability to understand it!’⁶⁰

After three years of friendship, during which time both withheld their feelings of increasing attraction, the moment of disclosure came in January 1886.⁶¹ Martin White invited Geddes on a European tour as a paid tutor-companion, and the prospect of their imminent departure forced him to act. Inviting Anna to Edinburgh’s Botanic Gardens one Sunday morning when they were closed to the public, he proposed, in a typically eccentric gesture breaking in half a piece of opal from his trip to Mexico with a geological hammer and giving Anna half in lieu of an engagement ring.⁶² She accepted, although welcomed reassurance from Geddes that by becoming his wife, she would be ‘a help & not a hindrance’ to his work.⁶³

Her insecurity is indicative of the gendered power-imbalance that structured their early relationship and is further reflected in her letters to Geddes written during their engagement. Whilst Anna emerges as a confident, teasing and solicitous fiancé, her correspondence also conveys a reverence

⁵⁷ Interestingly, one of the comments made by Geddes in the margins of Anna’s papers relates to the role of women, Geddes writing disparagingly about ‘the model housekeeper who devotes herself to stimulating the gluttony of the men of her household’. See Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 75; letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 28 March 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 13-16.

⁵⁸ Letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 5 March 1883, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10503, fol.1.

⁵⁹ Letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 11 February 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 1-4.

⁶⁰ Patrick Geddes, ‘An Analysis of the Principles of Economics’ (Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, XII, 1884); letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, poss. 1885, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10503.

⁶¹ In a letter written by Anna to Geddes after their engagement, she describes how she was ‘always so afraid of letting you see too much of what I felt when I thought you were only kind to me as you were to so many others; and I went sometimes to the opposite extreme & made you think I did not care at all; and then you did not make as distinct signs as you thought even you did’. Letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 11 February 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 1-4.

⁶² Introduction to the Geddes Papers by Norah G. Mears, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508, fols 189-190.

⁶³ Letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 28 February 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 9-12.

for Geddes's opinions and a diffidence concerning her own. She refers to him as her 'severe old lecturer', promises to pass the time apart thinking of 'what you want me to think about' and anticipates him teaching her how to better articulate her thoughts.⁶⁴ When Geddes makes what she refers to as some 'wise speculations' in one of his letters, she hesitates to comment, despite rereading it several times, saying she needs time to 'grasp it all' and 'take it all in'.⁶⁵ Conversely, she is 'half shy' about articulating her own feelings, concerned that Geddes will disparage or reprove her.⁶⁶ Indeed, on one occasion Geddes does grumble about the quality and quantity of her letters, Anna responding defensively that preparations for the wedding combined with an unaccustomed lack of sleep have left her tired, and meant that she has 'been very stupid sometimes I know, but I think we shall be all right when you come back, shan't we?' and saying that by contrast his letters had been 'everything' to her.⁶⁷ Drawing on an image very common in Victorian art and literature of the husband as a stalwart oak tree and the wife as a clinging vine, she describes how she sometimes had the feeling of 'a piece of ivy that has been trailing on the ground amongst the damp grass and out of the sun, but that at last has found the tree that it can twine itself around & grow into and by which it gets into the sunshine'.⁶⁸

Anna's unquestioning acceptance of her lack of the power of self-determination and embrace of a patriarchal model of marital union was the result of two things. Firstly, despite her mother's anxiety over her new-found progressiveness, Anna had clearly absorbed the normative attitudes towards women which had structured her respectable, middle-class, mid-Victorian upbringing, her expectations of life circumscribed by precisely the 'ice-barriers of masculine authority and conventionality' railed against by Bella Pearce in her *Labour Leader* columns.⁶⁹ As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have demonstrated, the nineteenth-century rhetoric of separate spheres prescribed that women's natural domain was the home, a place of sanctuary in which she fulfilled her true destiny of ministering to the emotional, physical and spiritual needs of her husband and children.⁷⁰ An intelligent and able woman with a genuine interest in tackling issues of social deprivation, Anna had nonetheless been raised to consider her potential contribution to society solely as a wife and mother, possessing no professional aspirations of her own. Conversely, Geddes had long cultivated an identity as an eccentric genius, an enduring stereotype of intellectual approach and prowess that was (and continues to be) coded resolutely as male. According to Jeffrey Weeks, 'identities offer a sense of agency at the same time as they show their arbitrariness. They are about becoming rather than being'; Geddes, by using the identity of eccentric genius to

⁶⁴ Letters from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 11 February 1886 (fols 1-4); 28 February 1886 (fols 9-12); 28 March 1886 (fols 13-16), Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253.

⁶⁵ Letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 28 February 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 9-12.

⁶⁶ Letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 11 February 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 1-4.

⁶⁷ Letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 28 March 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 13-16.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ 'Lily Bell', 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 9 June 1894, p. 11.

⁷⁰ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

realize his own ‘sense of self, of individuality’, was able to draw inspiration from a pantheon of contemporary male role-models that included Carlyle, Ruskin, Darwin, Huxley, Spencer and Comte.⁷¹ By the time of his engagement to Anna at age thirty-one, his erudition and ebullience meant that he was widely known as ‘the Professor’, a familiar character within Edinburgh intellectual, progressive circles who could already boast an international reputation for his biological research.

Secondly however, Anna’s intellectual and emotional deference to Geddes can be read as a continuation of the pupil-teacher dynamic that had structured their early courtship. Indeed, it was on this model that Geddes based the majority of his relationships, often preferring the devotion of disciples rather than the respect of peers. His friend, the sociologist Edmond Demolins, commented that he had ‘rarely met a man with such an ability to attract people and retain them once he has conquered them’, although a fictional rendering of Geddes by a former acolyte offers a more unsympathetic portrait.⁷² In Riccardo Stephens’ gothic novel *The Cruciform Mark*, Geddes is depicted as ‘Professor Grosvenor’, a brilliant if unscrupulous professor of psychology in possession of a number of characteristically Geddesian traits, including a love of symbolism, an impressionistic manner of speech and a compulsion to persuade young students to participate in his numerous, transitory enthusiasms. The narrator relates how ‘Women hung round him and protested that he was “so suggestive” - of what, they could rarely say. Men were attracted also; there were always one or two at his feet, but as a rule they presently got up and went away, laughing or angry, leaving their places to be immediately filled by younger and more enthusiastic fellows’.⁷³ This depiction is corroborated by the numerous expressions of affection, allegiance and gratitude contained within letters written to Geddes over his lifetime. His wide-ranging intellect, infectious idealism and emotional expressiveness (the result, according to one friend, of his ‘man. woman soul’), appear to have engendered epiphanic moments of revelation from both men and women. The painter John Duncan professed himself Geddes’s ‘very faithful disciple’, claiming that he carried his notes with him ‘as my Scriptures’ and would ‘diligently strive to live up to them’, a task that would ‘come all the easier as they so completely coincide with my own aspirations – aspirations which you have evoked in me.’⁷⁴ Ernest Grafse, a German colleague from Freiberg

⁷¹ Jeffrey Weeks, ‘Remembering Foucault’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14:1-2 (January/ April 2005), p. 193.

⁷² Edmond Demolins’s newsletter ‘Le Mouvement Social’, bound in with *La Science sociale*, 1892-3, p. 80 (copy in Musée Social, Paris), trans. by Christelle LeRigueur. I am indebted to Siân Reynolds for my copy of the newsletter.

⁷³ Riccardo Stephens, *The Cruciform Mark: The Strange Story of Richard Tregenna, Bachelor of Medicine (Univ. Edin.)* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1896), p. 121-2. Riccardo Stephens was a Cornishman whom Geddes employed as the house physician for his university halls of residence in Edinburgh. Their disagreement occurred in 1895 and was over money, Geddes appearing to have reneged on paying Stephens a bonus by a certain date and Stephens in turn beginning to charge residents for his services. Stephens’ novel, a gothic murder-mystery, was published the following year. See Stewart A. Robertson, ‘Patrick Geddes’, *Scottish Educational Journal* (29 April 1932) and letter from Patrick Geddes to Dr. Stephens, 26 October 1895, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508A, fol. 116.

⁷⁴ Jean Craigie Cunningham describes Geddes as ‘the true Answerer ... beloved of all – possessing of grace that man. woman soul, which the occultists strives painfully to attain’, before continuing ‘I am avowedly

whom Geddes appears to have visited in around 1891, described how since Geddes had left, he had ‘wandered once more through the new world of ideas you opened for me’, admitting that he was ‘writing like a boy of sixteen’, but asking Geddes not to laugh at him, ‘for if my soul is aflame, my dear friend, it is all your work.’⁷⁵ Similarly, the kindergarten teacher Fanny Franks, who had attended Geddes’s summer school in Edinburgh in 1903, likened consuming his glittering and elusive philosophy to ‘something like the baby [must feel] when it is drinking in the mothers milk. It knows nothing of the elements of which it is made – nor of the effects it is to produce; but merely feels “that is the food for me!’.⁷⁶

On occasion, the expressions of devotion are sufficiently ambiguous to raise the suspicion that disciples of both genders occasionally misread Geddes’s intensity as a sexual invitation. This was certainly the case with Anne Murray, a nurse and sister of a friend whom Geddes met prior to his engagement to Anna.⁷⁷ In a letter written in June 1885, she claimed to be ‘no longer the meek woman who was learning to be content to be the very commonplace person she had so long bemoaned herself to be’, warning Geddes teasingly ‘Are you not afraid of your own creation’, before three weeks later writing more earnestly that it was ‘a very great matter to me to hear you talk in a way that I never heard from any other’, and that she owed Geddes ‘a great deal’.⁷⁸ Similarly heartfelt is the early correspondence of Alex Michael, a young printer who had undertaken some work for Geddes during the late 1870s and was endeavoring to better himself through ‘book-learning’ and the ‘regulation of his habits’.⁷⁹ In a letter sent in 1885, he stated that while Geddes ‘may have reasons for wishing not to hear from me again’, he never saw his name without feeling ‘the liveliest emotion’, treasuring an ‘odd part’ of the journal *Nature* because it contained some of his writing, and stating that his devotion to him was ‘unequalled in my life and unquenchable in itself.’⁸⁰ Finally, in 1895, Geddes received a letter from H. Lowerison from Barnet in Hertfordshire (possibly the Fabian socialist Harry Lowerison), who confessed to being nervous

always a disciple of Geddes – avowedly always trying to practice his theories’. Letter from Jean Craigie Cunningham to Patrick Geddes, 1 September 1891, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10569, fols 4-7. See also postcard from John Duncan to Patrick Geddes, [undated], Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10531, fol. 208.

⁷⁵ Letter from Ernest Grafse to Patrick Geddes, 15 February 1891, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10525, fols 89-91.

⁷⁶ Letter from Fanny Franks to Patrick Geddes, 13 September 1903, Geddes Papers, University of Strathclyde (hereafter US), T-GED 9/503.

⁷⁷ According to Paddy Kitchen, Anne Murray was the sister of George Murray, the Keeper of Crypyogamia at the National History Museum. Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*, pp. 74, 81-2.

⁷⁸ Letters from Anne Murray to Patrick Geddes, 8 June 1885, fols 31-2 and 29 June 1885, fols 33-4, both Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10524.

⁷⁹ Letters from Alex Michael to Patrick Geddes, 18 September 1885, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10524, fols 47-8; 11 December 1890, MS 10525, fols 67-70.

⁸⁰ Letter from Alex Michael to Patrick Geddes, 18 September 1885, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10524, fols 47-8. In a subsequent letter, Michael wrote to Geddes that ‘You will be surprised to hear that I am married although there is nothing very surprising in the fact itself.’ Patrick and Anna Geddes clearly took an interest in Michael, maintaining a correspondence with him for over a decade and sending him copies of the *Evergreen* and circulars of the Celtic Library to distribute when he moved to Dunedin in New Zealand with his family in around 1890. The relationship experienced some sort of crisis in 1898, when Geddes accused him of being ‘diabolically selfish’ and Michael was forced to make a ‘miserable apology’. Letters from Alex Michael, 19 December 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10524, fols 106-9; 11 August 1896, MS 10528, fols 121-4; 24 November 1898, MS 10530, fol. 268.

as he prepared to visit Geddes in Edinburgh during the Easter break, quoting the beginning of a poem by Walt Whitman:

“Are you the new person drawn towards me?
To begin with, take warning, for
I am really far different to what you suppose”
You remember Whitman?
Still I am drawn to you.
H ‘L’⁸¹

Published first in 1860 in the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the poem was one of forty-five within the ‘Calamus’ cluster, which was concerned with love between men, what Whitman termed ‘comradeship’. Whilst the precise context of the poem is unclear, and could equally constitute a warning from a master to a disciple as from a man to his prospective male lover, its position within the Calamus series suggests the latter. In the poem directly preceding it, Whitman describes his joyful anticipation of the arrival of his ‘dear friend, my lover’, culminating in a moment of perfect happiness as he contemplates the ‘one I love most’ sleeping next to him: ‘In the stillness, in the autumn moonbeams, his face was inclined toward me,/ And his arm lay lightly around my breast.’⁸² It is still, of course, impossible to assert with confidence whether Lowerison’s choice of poem indicated a homoerotic interest in Geddes, and in turn whether Geddes would have correctly interpreted its significance. All that can be averred, is that the letters of both H. Lowerison and Alex Michael present the intriguing possibility that within the progressive circle surrounding Geddes in Edinburgh in the 1880s and 1890s, there may have existed a space and a language in which to speak tentatively of same-sex love.

The Emperor of Edinburgh

Patrick Geddes and Anna Morton married on 17 April 1886, exchanging vows at Anna’s parents’ house in Egremont. Within six months they had moved into a flat in James Court, a tenement block just off the Royal Mile and in the heart of what Geddes called Edinburgh’s ‘infernal slumdom’, intending by their action to prove how standards of living could be raised by simple improvements to the environment.⁸³ Even amongst their progressive circle it was a radical move, after a visit to his mentor, Alex Michael describing how ‘when I walked down the eastmost close and gazed up astonished at the grimy, towering houses, I could hardly realize that you lived up there but the row of flower-boxed windows suggested to me your whereabouts.’⁸⁴ As well as planting window-

⁸¹ Correspondence between Patrick Geddes and Mr. H. Lowerison, 2 April 1895, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508A, fol.100. The reference in his letter to his love of nature, suggests that H. Lowerison was indeed Harry Lowerison, a socialist, naturalist and educationalist who in 1901 established a mixed-sex ‘Ruskin School Home’ in Heacham-on-Sea in Norfolk. See Kevin Manton, ‘Establishing the Fellowship: Harry Lowerison and the Ruskin School Home, a Turn-of-the-Century Socialist and his Educational experiment’, *Journal of the History of Education Society*, 26:1 (1997), pp. 53-70. See also ‘Calamus 12’, Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), p. 358.

⁸² ‘Calamus 11’, Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 358.

⁸³ Patrick Geddes, ‘Nearly fifty years ago ...’, undated typescript, quoted in Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 86.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*, p. 113.

boxes, Geddes donned a night-shirt in place of overalls and set about painting external walls and organizing the clearing of refuse, whilst Anna ran a girls' Saturday morning sewing club, both undertaking their 'social experiment' with 'enthusiasm and conviction'.⁸⁵ Whilst they occupied a whole flat, their neighbours were 'one-roomed families' with whom they shared a common stair, their daughter Norah recollecting how they experienced 'through window and ceiling many uncongenial sounds and sights'.⁸⁶ Not all were 'quarrelsome, drunk and disorderly' however, and the more 'douce' or respectable of the close's inhabitants included a cobbler, a plumber's mate and a Corporation street sweeper, all of whom kept 'a clean house and presentable children'; beyond the pail even for them however, were the 'tinker families' on the top floor, with whom 'it was impossible for the others to associate with such was the dirt and vermin in their homes'.⁸⁷ Initially, the James Court inhabitants viewed the advent among them of the earnest middle-class couple 'with amusement, not altogether unmingled with suspicion', although according to Geddes, the collective improvements soon began to bring about 'a new atmosphere, that of a more collective and social life: the court is no longer a mere huddle of sooty hovels, pile upon pile; but as pleasantly varied and harmonious whole'.⁸⁸ In the wider world of British politics, their actions were viewed as part of a wave of altruism sweeping the country, the exiled Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin commenting on how:

a young teacher in Edinburgh who, four years ago, was making plans of statistical sociology beyond all bounds, has now just got married, leaving his house and taking a very poor flat among the workers. Everywhere, in one form or another, one finds similar things. It is a complete reawakening. What direction will it take?⁸⁹

The answer of course, was that the ethical 'reawakening' of the late-Victorian period took a variety of different directions, each one made distinctive by the politics of its initiator and the locale in which it originated. In London, young metropolitan progressives keen to usher in the new age could choose between the practical apprenticeships supplied by the Reverend Samuel Barnett at Toynbee Hall, the utopian idealism of the Fellowship of the New Life, the gradualist, integrative approach of the Fabian Society and the revolutionary Marxist rhetoric of the SDF. In Manchester, a progressive's education might well begin amidst the fraternal conviviality of one of Robert Blatchford's Clarion choirs or cycling clubs, although a visit to Millthorpe, near Sheffield, would acquaint them with an alternative path; Edward Carpenter's simple life of sandal making, Whitmanesque comradeship and naked air bathing. As we have seen, north of the Border, it was

⁸⁵ The detail that Geddes undertook the manual jobs in his night-shirt is a recollection of his daughter Norah and is quoted in Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 87. The remaining quotes are also from Norah in a manuscript of her reminiscences, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19266, fol. 18. I am indebted to Bob Morris for this reference. For their activities in James Court, see also Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*, pp. 112-114.

⁸⁶ Recollections of Norah Geddes, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19266.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 4.

⁸⁸ Mavor, *My Windows on the Streets of the World*, p. 214; Geddes is quoted in Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*, p. 113.

⁸⁹ Letter from Peter Kropotkin to Elisée Reclus, 1886, quoted in Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 87.

the ethical socialism and fraternal altruism of the ILP that dominated the character of Glasgow's ethical reawakening.

In Edinburgh however, the principal character of what Geddes's colleagues J. Arthur Thomson and W. Macdonald called the recent 'communal quickening of the conscience', was determined largely by Geddes. It was therefore more idiosyncratic, based around a fusion of sociologically informed urban regeneration, a Celtic arts and crafts movement, and adult education initiatives.⁹⁰ In direct contrast to the political campaigning of Bella and Charles Pearce in Glasgow, Geddes professed a 'total dissent from contemporary political methods', believing that lasting social and cultural change could come about only through relatively modest, practical schemes, gradually implemented at a local level.⁹¹ Refusing to affiliate himself with any one political party, Geddes turned down an invitation to speak at an SDF meeting in 1895 by likening his alternative, more organic approach to that of a gardener, working steadily at 'experiments and sowings' and 'preparing at present for future season'.⁹² He expressed a similar ambivalence towards Fabianism, in 1899 commenting to Anna that he had 'never got anything from a Fabian somehow – No understanding in common', although the couple later became close friends with one of the founders of the Fabian Society, Frank Podmore, and his wife Eleanor.⁹³ Indeed, it may well have been Geddes's apolitical stance that enraged William Morris during a dinner in Edinburgh in 1889, James Mavor recalling how in venturing to try and explain a point Geddes had just made, Mavor inadvertently found himself the target of Morris's ire, Morris turning upon him 'with a roar, shaking his fist at me across the table, and blazing with magnificent leoline passion. "You!" he said. "Geddes knows no better; but you! you know; and yet you say these things."' ⁹⁴ Geddes's closest political friends were the exiled European anarchists Peter Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus, although his connection to them was more through the discipline of geography than politics, Geddes inviting Reclus to lecture on the subject in Edinburgh.⁹⁵ His support of such individuals was nonetheless bold, especially during a period of bomb-attacks and assassinations in France by

⁹⁰ J. Arthur Thomson and W. Macdonald, 'Proem', *Evergreen* (Spring 1895), p. 11.

⁹¹ Letter from Patrick Geddes to Mr. Campbell, 1 November 1895, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508A, fol. 119. In the letter, Geddes illustrates the reason behind his aversion to politics by explaining that 'I similarly won't go to temperance meetings, not because I don't want much greater temperance, but because I find in practice that the political teetotalers won't come to a real temperance Café when I build one and I must wait until I see the members of the home rule association furthering Scottish literature work for the Scottish Universities Scottish art, Scottish industries of a very greater extent before I could join them.'

⁹² Letter from Patrick Geddes to R. Allan, secretary of the SDF, 15 November 1895, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508A, fols 130-1.

⁹³ Letter from Patrick Geddes to Anna Geddes, 1899, quoted in Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 168; letters from Eleanor O. Podmore ['Dreolin'] to Anna Geddes, 12 January [1905], 19 February [no year] and undated letter, Geddes Papers, US, T-GED 9/585, 9/592 and 9/2023/1-3. The poet Rachel Annand Taylor appears to have been part of the same friendship network, Eleanor Podmore referring to herself in her correspondence as 'Dreolin', the Irish gaelic for wren and Rachel Annand Taylor as 'Banabhard', the Scots gaelic for poetess. Frank Podmore was one of the founding members of the Fabian Society. In 1907, he and his wife Eleanor separated after what Alan Gauld refers to as 'alleged homosexual involvements'. He was also forced to resign without pension from his job at the Post Office and later appears to have committed suicide. See Alan Gauld, 'Podmore, Frank (1856–1910)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35552>> [accessed 29 August 2013].

⁹⁴ Mavor, *My Windows on the Street of the World*, vol. 1, p. 199

⁹⁵ For an extended discussion of Geddes's anarchist connections, see Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh*, pp. 91-97.

those purporting to be anarchists, which led to the instigation of repressive measures against anyone with anarchist connections. His assistance extended to providing a refuge in Edinburgh to both the anarchist journalist Augustin Hamon and Reclus's nephew Paul, both of whom were sought by the French authorities, Geddes harbouring Paul Reclus under the false name of 'George(s) Guyou'.⁹⁶ However, Geddes was careful to disassociate himself from the attitudes of his anarchist friends towards violence, in a biographical sketch of Elisée Reclus writing 'Of [his] extreme political philosophy – his adoption and development of the doctrines of Anarchism – little need here be said', elsewhere in the article referring to the 'impractical and extreme' nature of his social convictions.⁹⁷

The one organization Geddes did maintain a prolonged connection with was the non-partisan Ruskin Society of Glasgow. Between 1886 and 1898, Geddes lectured for them on five separate occasions, his topics including 'Population, Progress and Poverty' and 'Some Adaptations of Ruskin's Ideals to Practice'.⁹⁸ He also conducted personal tours of his various education, civic and sociological initiatives as part of specially organized visits to Edinburgh (see figure 3.2), on one occasion an additional carriage having to be put on the one o'clock train from Glasgow in order to accommodate the large numbers of Ruskin Society members on the excursion.⁹⁹ Given Bella and Charles Pearce's active involvement in the administration of the Society, it seems likely that Geddes would have met the Pearces at least once, although all that can be verified is that Charles was present at Geddes's lecture in Glasgow in February 1896.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh*, pp. 95-6.

⁹⁷ Patrick Geddes, 'A Great Geographer : Elisée Reclus, 1830-1905', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 21:9-10 (Sept-October 1905), pp. 490-496, 548-555 (pp. 550, 496). Geddes's youngest son Arthur later married a descendent of Elisée Reclus, Jeannie Colin. See Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 426.

⁹⁸ Stuart Eagles, 'Ruskin Societies, 1879-1912: Partial list of lectures', website of the Ruskin Society, <<http://www.theruskingsociety.com/Documents/RuskinSocietiesLectureList1879-1912.pdf>> [accessed on 29 August 2013]. Geddes also later became honorary Vice-President of the Ruskin Society of Paisley.

⁹⁹ Printed report of 1894 visit by the Ruskin Society to University Hall, Edinburgh, 'The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Minute Book, 1891-9', RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/2.

¹⁰⁰ In a press report on Geddes's lecture on 'The Social Observatory: Its Uses and Possibilities', given to the Ruskin Society of Glasgow in February 1896, Mr. Bream Pearce is reported as being present. See 'The Ruskin Society of Glasgow Minute Book, 1891-9', RSG Papers, MS Gen 1093/2.

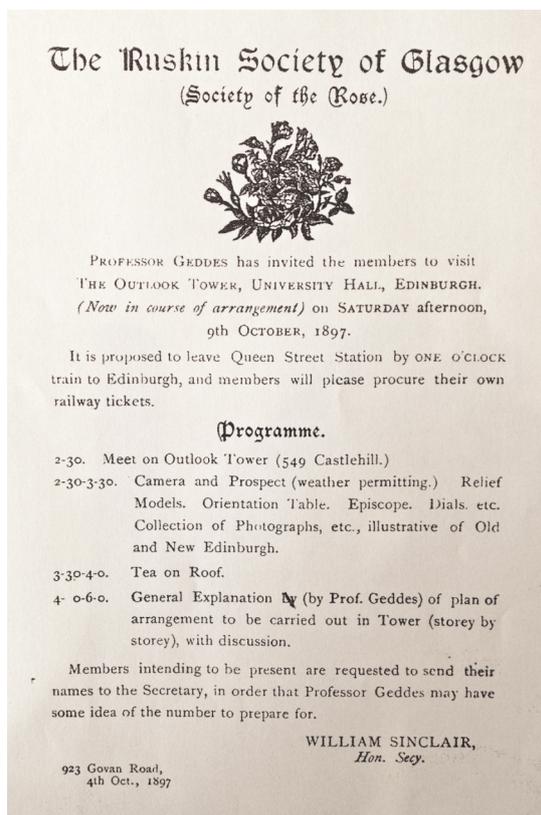


Figure 3.2 Programme for the 1897 Ruskin Society excursion to Edinburgh

Instead of political campaigning, Geddes instigated and ran an impressive portfolio of diverse yet inter-connected schemes designed to temper the worst examples of insanitation and overcrowding within Edinburgh's 'plaguey if picturesque, Closes' and simultaneously reinstate the city as one of Europe's foremost 'Powers of Culture'.¹⁰¹ Firstly, under the auspices of what would later be called the Town and Gown Association, Geddes undertook an extensive programme of slum clearance and rebuilding work, in 1896 giving the London writer and radical thinker Israel Zangwill a rain-sodden tour of the construction sites:

It was a stormy morning when the mercurial Professor of Botany, reeking naught of the rain that saturated his brown cloak, itself reluctantly donned, led me hither and thither, through the highways and byways of old Edinburgh. Everywhere a litter of building operations, and we trod gingerly many a decadent staircase ... The Professor's own destruction was conservative in character, for it was his aim to preserve the ancient note in the architecture, and to make a clean Old Edinburgh of a dirty. Air and light were to be no longer excluded, and outside every house, as flats or storeys are called, a balcony was to run, giving on sky and open ground ... The moral effect of grappling with an evil that had seemed so hopeless could not fail to be inspiring; and, as we plodded through the pouring streets, "I will remove this I will reconstruct that," cried the enthusiastic Professor, till I almost felt I was walking with the Emperor of Edinburgh.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Israel Zangwill, 'Without Prejudice', *Pall Mall Magazine*, 8:34 (February 1896), pp. 327-8.

¹⁰² Zangwill, 'Without Prejudice', p. 329. Geddes clearly proved an invigorating host for Zangwill, who described Geddes as 'effervescent', 'many-sided' and 'a man over-brimming with ideas'. See 'Editorial Preface', *Pall Mall Magazine*, 1:1 (May 1893), pp. v-vii; 'Pall Mall Magazine' in Alvin Sullivan (ed.), *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837-1913* (Greenwood Press: London, 1984), pp. 306-310; William Baker, 'Zangwill, Israel (1864-1926)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37087>> [accessed 8 April 2010]; Zangwill, 'Without Prejudice', pp. 327-9.

In addition, in 1895 and 1896 Geddes published four, seasonal issues of a Celtic literary and artistic journal called the *Evergreen*, a venture in which he was joined by the poet William Sharp.¹⁰³ Dubbed by the *Times* a Northern ‘Yellow Book’, due to the ‘Scoto-Beardsleyan’ feel of its illustrations, it was actually intended as a vital ‘counter-influence’ to both Edinburgh hypocrisy and London decadence, the latter movement described by Geddes as ‘an orgie of strange narcotics and of the strangest sins.’¹⁰⁴ Receiving a mixed reception from the national press, *Nature* memorably dismissing it as ‘Bad from cover to cover; and even the covers are bad’, it was part of a wider resurgence of interest in Celtic mythology, history and literature, which manifested itself most famously in Ireland, in W. B. Yeats’s 1893 study *The Celtic Twilight* and the affiliated political cause of Irish nationalism.¹⁰⁵ Yet Scotland also saw its own ‘Celtic Renaissance’, a movement spearheaded by Geddes and based around a revival in what Murray Pittock and Isla Jack have identified as ‘a peculiarly national Scottish pastoralism and celebration of nature’, which would bring a re-birth of intellectual and moral vigour.¹⁰⁶ Its influence, Geddes believed, would extend beyond Scotland’s borders, a new generation of Scots artists and writers forming part of a pan-Celtic movement with the ability to threaten England’s cultural dominance. It would no longer be acceptable, argued Geddes, for ‘London to educate Iona’; Iona would instead educate London.¹⁰⁷ After the winter of ‘all-pervading “Decadence”’, spring for Geddes was in the North.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ William Sharp, a Scots-born writer, also wrote in secret under the pseudonym of Fiona Macleod. Indeed, his wife stated to W. B. Yeats that Fiona Macleod was a ‘secondary personality’ induced in Sharp by his love for Edith Wingate Rinder, a married woman with whom he became acquainted when in Rome. Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough have called Sharp ‘one of the more interesting cases of cross-gender behavior’ in the nineteenth century. It is Fiona Macleod’s poetry that distinguishes the literary content of the *Evergreen* and the subsequent series of volumes published by Geddes within the ‘Celtic Library’ series. See letter from W. B. Yeats to Maud Gonne, 14 January 1907, quoted in Terry L. Meyers, *The Sexual Tensions of William Sharp: A Study of the Birth of Fiona Macleod, Incorporating Two Lost Works, “Ariadne in Naxos” and “Beatrice”*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 19; Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 195; Flavia Alaya, *William Sharp – “Fiona Macleod”, 1855-1905* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 152 and the William Sharp ‘Fiona Macleod’ Archive, ed. by William F. Halloran, Institute of English Studies, University of London, <<http://www.ies.sas.ac.uk/research/current-projects/william-sharp-fiona-macleod-archive/william-sharp-fiona-macleod-archive>> [accessed 30 August 2013].

¹⁰⁴ *Times*, 24 May 1895, in Cuttings Book, p. 4, Geddes Papers, US, T-GED 8/1/8; W. Macdonald and J. Arthur Thomson, ‘Proem’, *Evergreen* (Spring 1895), pp. 9-15; Patrick Geddes, ‘The Sociology of Autumn’, *Evergreen* (Autumn 1895), p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ Geddes took the criticism from the national press in good spirits, printing a pamphlet of extracts from both complimentary and critical reviews, writing in the Winter edition that ‘Good or bad, frankly experimental at least it has been, from cover to cover’. ‘The Evergreen: Press Opinions’, Geddes Papers, US, T-GED 8/1/8; Patrick Geddes, ‘Envoy’, *Evergreen* (Winter 1896), pp. 155-6.

¹⁰⁶ Murray Pittock and Isla Jack, ‘Patrick Geddes and the Celtic Revival’, in Susan Manning, Ian Brown, Thomas Owen Clancy and Murray Pittock (eds), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature. Vol. 2: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire, 1707-1918* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 340. See also Murdo Macdonald, ‘Celticism and Internationalism in the circle of Patrick Geddes’, *Visual Culture in Britain* 6:2, pp. 69-83.

¹⁰⁷ Patrick Geddes, ‘A Plea for Celtic Art’, quoted in Pittock and Jack, ‘Patrick Geddes and the Celtic Revival’, p. 341.

¹⁰⁸ Patrick Geddes, ‘The Scots Renaissance’, *Evergreen* (Spring 1895), pp. 136-7.



Figure 3.3 Cover of the *Evergreen*, Spring 1895

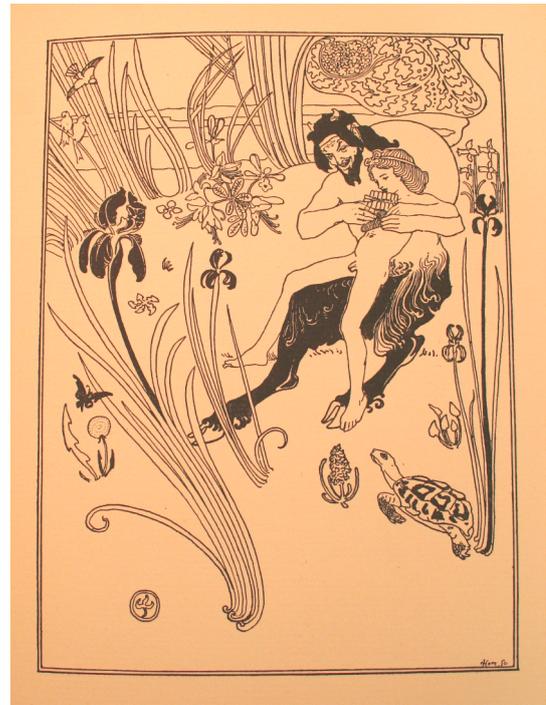


Figure 3.4 John Duncan, 'Apollo's School Days', in the *Evergreen*, Spring 1895

Many of the *Evergreen's* illustrations were the work of teachers from the 'Old Edinburgh School of Art', a Celtic art school also founded by Geddes and run by John Duncan, which was intended to attract students from all classes, and provide tuition in design and crafts as well as painting.¹⁰⁹ In addition, it attempted to pioneer a new, more collaborative style of teaching, Geddes conceiving it not as an institution for the formal transference of knowledge and skills from tutor to students, but instead as 'a body of artists and their assistants working together with common ideals'.¹¹⁰ His original ideas concerning education extended to his annual 'Summer Meeting' in Edinburgh, a transmutation of the university extension movement which began in 1886 and ran for over a decade, at their height the Meetings attracting approximately 150 students from Britain, Europe and America.¹¹¹ Offering a month-long programme designed to synthesize knowledge from the arts and sciences, practical work was valued as highly as the 'mere hearing of lectures'.¹¹² After the mornings' talks, the afternoons were taken up with field trips and the evenings with dances, concerts and impromptu moonlit walks up Arthur's Seat. From 1896 the Summer Meetings were run from the Outlook Tower, Geddes's regional and civic museum housed in a six-story building at

¹⁰⁹ Nicola Gordon Bove and Elizabeth Cumming, *The Arts and Crafts Movements in Dublin and Edinburgh, 1885-1925* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998), pp. 27, 51.

¹¹⁰ Letter from John Duncan to Patrick Geddes, 4 November 1895, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10527, fols 242-243.

¹¹¹ A critical account of the Edinburgh Summer Meetings is given by Riccardo Stephens in *The Cruciform Mark*, who describes 'a series of classes held just then in Edinburgh and kept going in a very remarkable and ingenious fashion.' According to Stephens, 'Professor Grosvenor', 'with his usual taste for paradox, held to the theory that holidays were the time when everyone was best able and most anxious to work. This demand must be supplied, which justified the importuning of lecturers, eminent and otherwise, to take their holidays in Edinburgh, and spend them in lecturing, with or without pecuniary profit to themselves'. Stephens, *The Cruciform Mark*, pp. 183-4.

¹¹² Pamphlet advertising the eleventh Edinburgh Summer Meeting, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10509, fol. 52a; Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 133.

the end of the Castle Esplanade, at the top of which was a camera obscura from which one could view Edinburgh and its regions, Geddes's sociological area of study.¹¹³ Finally, during the 1890s, Geddes also established Britain's first university halls of residence in an attempt to reposition the university at the heart of city life and create what his friend Elisée Reclus termed 'La Cite du Bon Accord'.¹¹⁴

Geddes's motto was 'Vivendo Discimus', or 'by living we learn', and it was this conviction that united all his social projects, believing that the way forward lay not through 'analysis and observation ... criticism and pessimism', but rather 'through action, through experiment'.¹¹⁵ A vital partner in his actions and experiments was his wife Anna, who in her marriage as in her engagement, embraced what Clare Jones has termed the 'Ruskinian ideal of women as supporters and enablers of men', Anna working tirelessly, without complaint and certainly without official recognition, researching, administrating and facilitating Geddes's work.¹¹⁶ James Mavor described her 'infinite patience and loyalty to her husband's ideals' and it is clear that she proved a highly valuable complement to her husband's chaotic energy and enthusiasms, their daughter Norah describing how Anna provided what Geddes lacked: 'judgment, discernment, steadiness and staying power'.¹¹⁷ None of Geddes's schemes were particularly lucrative, and for many years the family had considerable financial worries, Geddes later relating how he had continually struggled with 'insufficient income and increasing debts', but how Anna 'was very brave and encouraged me to go on thinking instead of pot-boiling, in faith that that was best'.¹¹⁸ The couple also had three children, Norah (b. 1887), Alasdair (b.1891) and Arthur (b.1895), all of whom were educated at home, in line with Geddes's antipathy towards formal education. With such numerous and complex demands on her time, it is unsurprising that Anna was at times overwhelmed, their daughter Norah recollecting that at one point early in their marriage, Anna 'sat down on one of the beds & cried with strain, weakness and fatigue'.¹¹⁹ That she ever seriously resented the absence of an intellectual life of her own is only hinted at once in the archives, in a letter to Geddes written when she was staying with her sister in London in 1892. Anna had been visiting the British Museum to undertake some research into music and musicians for the Summer Meeting the following year, and described

¹¹³ Meller, *Patrick Meller*, pp. 102-9,

¹¹⁴ See Elisée Reclus, 'La Cite du Bon Accord', *Evergreen* (Autumn 1896), pp. 103-106.

¹¹⁵ V.V.B. [Victor Branford] and P.G. [Patrick Geddes], 'Prefatory Note', *Evergreen* (Autumn 1895), p. 8.

¹¹⁶ Claire G. Jones, *Femininity, Mathematics and Science, 1880-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2009), p. 112.

¹¹⁷ Mavor, *My Windows on the Street of the World*, vol. 1, p. 214; Letter from Norah Geddes to Philip Boardman, 23 June 1947, quoted in Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 90. The French sociologist Edmond Demolins, after visiting the Summer Meeting in 1892, described Anna's role in the following terms: 'She is the devoted and necessary helper to her husband; she helps with his correspondence which is extensive; she attends some classes; she organizes musical and artistic meetings, evening receptions, some outings; young men and young ladies have as much contact with her as with Mr Geddes; her house is open and all of them are accepted. I can't give you a more accurate idea of her role than by saying that all these meetings have, to the highest degree, a family character.' Demolins, 'Le Mouvement Social', p. 84.

¹¹⁸ Letter from Patrick Geddes to Norah Geddes, 12 November 1920, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508, fol. 144.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Norah Geddes to Philip Boardman, 24 March 1939, quoted in Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 90.

how ‘I like very much to go the Museum & lose myself in the books. It is so nice to be free from interruptions, and in this small house I in particular never seem to find a quiet corner; and alas! I can’t lose myself in my work as you do, at least when I’m in the house.’ Even on this occasion she was thwarted however, her anxiety over leaving her daughter Norah too often with a ‘well-meaning, but exceedingly rough’ servant, meaning she resolved in the future to keep her ‘as much as possible beside us’.¹²⁰

Figures 3.5 and 3.6 have been removed due to Copyright restrictions

Also imperative in supporting, realizing and continually reconfiguring Geddes’s progressive agenda was an eclectic, middle-class and self-consciously avant-garde subculture in Edinburgh. In line with his preferred master-disciple model for relationships, the men who were closest to Geddes were often either former natural history students or artists or writers in receipt of his patronage. As well as the artist John Duncan and the poet William Sharp, they included the sociologist and businessman Victor Branford, the geographer A. J. Herbertson and the bursar of the Outlook Tower T. R. Marr, all of whom remained lifelong friends.¹²¹

The women at the heart of the progressive Geddes circle were a mixture of artists, social reformers and feminists. Whilst not members of what Leah Leneman has identified as the three Edinburgh

¹²⁰ Letters from Anna Geddes to Patrick Geddes, 21 December 1892, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 25-6 and 27 December 1892, fols 35-6.

¹²¹ Victor Branford met Geddes at the University of Edinburgh and was responsible for setting up the British Sociological Society in 1904. A. J. Herbertson worked closely with Geddes during the early 1890s, before disseminating many of his ideas as an influential pioneer of geography. T. R. Marr was Geddes’s assistant at the University of Dundee in 1894 and bursar of the Outlook Tower between 1895 and 1901. See Meller, *Patrick Geddes*, p. 14, n. 6 (Victor Branford), pp. 126-9 (A. J. Herbertson) and pp. 16-17, n. 31 (T. R. Marr).

households pivotal in the early women's movement (the McLarens, the Mairs and the Stevensons), several of them were nonetheless closely involved in a variety of feminist causes.¹²² The Geddeses' closest friends were the Hill Burton family, whose female members constituted a formidable dynasty with close connections to the early campaigns for women's work, higher education and female suffrage. Patrick and Anna's peer was the artist Mary Rose Hill Burton, a founder member of the Edinburgh Lady Artists' Club and a teacher at the Old Edinburgh School of Art, who was responsible for some of the murals at University Hall and in the Geddeses' Ramsay Gardens home.¹²³ Mary Rose's mother, Kate, whom Geddes referred to as his 'second mother', had served with Florence Nightingale in the Crimea and was active in the Edinburgh Ladies Education Association, an important organization which instituted the setting-up of University-level courses for women.¹²⁴ Her aunt, Mary Burton, was an early campaigner for female suffrage, accompanying the suffrage lecturer Miss Taylour on her meetings across Scotland in the 1870s and herself speaking at a large meeting in Glasgow in 1881.¹²⁵ She was also the first female director of the Watt Institute and School of Arts (later Heriot-Watt University) and in the early 1890s was president of the pro-suffrage Edinburgh Women's Liberal Association.¹²⁶

Geddes was also acquainted with the Edinburgh eugenic feminist Jane Hume Clapperton, whose novel *Margaret Dunmore* Bella Pearce had reviewed so favourably in the *Labour Leader*.¹²⁷ Their mutual friend James Mavor described her as a woman with a 'remarkable mind', who had grappled with the question of sex 'with delicacy as well as boldness'.¹²⁸ She was most known for her book *Scientific Meliorism*, in which she advocated the use of birth control as 'the *only possible method* by which society can reach to the foundation of its miseries, its poverty, its pauperism, and check these *at the source*', such arguments, according to her friend the feminist and SDF socialist Dora Montefiore, causing her to be 'cut' by many of her nearest relatives.¹²⁹ Clapperton and Geddes appear to have met in 1890, and whilst they clashed over slight differences in their views towards birth control and social reform, their relationship was nonetheless one of mutual respect, Clapperton referring to his 'genius' and Geddes citing *Scientific Meliorism* in the *Evolution of*

¹²² Leneman, *A Guid Cause*, pp. 11-39; Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, pp. 18-26.

¹²³ Entry 'Mary Rose Hill Burton', in Ewan et al, *BDSW*, pp. 55; Janice Helland, *Professional Women Painters in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commitment, Friendship, Pleasure* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 123-149. Mary Rose Hill Burton's father was John Hill Burton, the historiographer Royal of Scotland. The close friendship between the Geddes and Hill Burton families was cemented when Anna's younger sister Bex married Cosmo Hill Burton, Mary Rose's brother, although he died after contracting a fever a year into the marriage.

¹²⁴ Letter from Patrick Geddes to Willy Burton, 5 December 1889, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508A, fols 48-51; Leneman, *A Guid Cause*, p. 15.

¹²⁵ Mavor, *My Window on the Streets of the World*, vol. 1, p. 169.

¹²⁶ Entry 'Mary Burton', in Ewan et al, *BDSW*, pp. 54-5; Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland*, pp. 227, 231, 246.

¹²⁷ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 1 December 1894, p. 7.

¹²⁸ Mavor, *My Window on the Streets of the World*, vol. 1, pp. 225-6.

¹²⁹ Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, p. 95; D. B. Montefiore, *From a Victorian to a Modern* (London: E. Archer, 1927), p. 115.

Sex.¹³⁰ Another strong female character with whom Patrick and Anna became close from 1909, was the Dundee-based poet Rachel Annand Taylor, described by her former literary tutor Herbert Grierson as having a robust ‘disregard for the more bourgeois virtues of prudence and respectability’.¹³¹ Despite being the secretary of the Women’s Liberal Association and involved in the Women’s Debating Society in Dundee, she declared herself indifferent to contemporary feminist politics, describing herself as ‘equally inimical ... to the opposing camps of hausfrau and suffragist’.¹³² Finally, the other female members of Geddes’s circle about whom we have less information, whilst not perhaps prominent feminists, nonetheless appear to have embraced the expanding opportunities for women in the 1880s and 90s. In her letters to Anna, Kate Cooke related her experience of being the solitary female in a practical chemistry class whilst Jane Hay detailed her exploits in South Africa, where she revelled in the freedom the colonies could offer women, riding twelve to eighteen miles a day, sleeping in wagons, doing her own cooking and generally ‘living like gypsies’.¹³³

Geddes himself was not an active supporter of the campaigns for female suffrage. Whilst there is no record of his views towards the WSPU, in 1909 he refused with regret an invitation by Charlotte Despard to speak at a meeting of the militant Women’s Freedom League.¹³⁴ Anna similarly appears to have eschewed joining any feminist organization, despite being sent a selection of Women’s Emancipation Union papers by Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy (which may well have contained a paper written by Bella Pearce).¹³⁵ Whilst part of their resistance may well have been due to Geddes’s dislike of centralized politics, as we shall see, in his scientific writing he also displayed ambivalent views towards both female suffrage and women’s paid employment, although these attitudes did change over time.

Nonetheless, Geddes and Anna’s numerous and interrelated ventures in Edinburgh can be seen to have benefited many women. Firstly, they created real educational and employment opportunities, by commissioning works of art from female artists for the Edinburgh Social Union, the Town and Gown Association and the *Evergreen*, by employing women as teachers at the Summer Meetings

¹³⁰ Letter from Jane Hume Clapperton to Patrick Geddes, [undated, poss. 1890], Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10525, fols 57-8; Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 299.

¹³¹ H. J. C. Grierson, ‘Rachel Annand Taylor’, *Aberdeen University Review*, 30 (1942-4), pp. 152-6 and Rachel Annand Taylor, the Preface to *The Hours of Fiammetta* (1910), pp. 5-6, both cited in B. Dickson, ‘Taylor, Rachel Annand (1876-1960)’, *ODNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/60218> [accessed 24 Feb 2010].

¹³² Letter from Banabhard [Rachel Annand Taylor] to ‘My dear’ [prob. Anna Geddes], [undated, prob. 1908/9], Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10572, fols 12-3; entry ODNB.

¹³³ Letter from Kate Cooke to Anna Geddes, 10 October 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10503, fols 18-21; letter from Jane Hay to ‘My Dear Folk’ [Anna and Patrick Geddes], 25. January 1891, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10525, fols 80-5.

¹³⁴ Letter from Charlotte Despard to Patrick Geddes, 22 November 1909, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19260. Geddes’s reply, dated 4 December 1909, is written below the letter and is hard to decipher. What is clear is that he turns down the invitation to speak because of what might be considered a ‘very old-fashioned view’, although offers to help in other ways.

¹³⁵ Letter from E. L. W. Elmy to ‘Madam’ [presumably Anna Geddes], 12 June 1897, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10577, fol. 40.

and the Old Edinburgh School of Art, and by providing extra-mural lectures at the Summer Meetings and the art school.¹³⁶ Secondly, they helped create a vibrant, intellectual and progressive social space, particularly appreciated by women, in which many of the rigid, gendered conventions of respectable, middle-class Edinburgh society did not apply. Rachel Annand Taylor related how visits to Edinburgh left her ‘ever so much re-animated, and restored’, whilst Eleanor Podmore wrote effusively to Anna that ‘so many others besides myself must be trying to tell you & the Professor how you have helped to remake their lives & fill them with beauty’.¹³⁷

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This sense of liberation from gendered norms was particularly apparent at the Summer Meetings held in Edinburgh every August, which attracted an eclectic mix of male and female students from a variety of social backgrounds, including for at least one year Mona Caird, who wrote a ‘charming account’ of a Summer Meeting to her friend Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy.¹³⁸ The French sociologist Edmond Demolins was a frequent lecturer at the Meetings, and was struck by the ability, attitude and ambition of the female students, in his newsletters home effusing that ‘in no other country of the world is the woman closer to man than by the mind set, the intellectual habits

¹³⁶ An important caveat is that whilst Geddes did not actively restrict participation in his schemes to unmarried women, he made little allowances for women’s domestic responsibilities and clearly preferred women with ‘no home ties’. As we have seen, his own wife Anna had little time outside her domestic responsibilities for an independent, intellectual life. See letter from Kate Cooke to Patrick Geddes, 3 September 1896, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10528, fols 133-4.

¹³⁷ Postcard from Banabhard [Rachel Annand Taylor] to Anna Geddes, 3 December 1907, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10572, fol. 3; Letter from Eleanor O. Podmore to Anna Geddes, 12 January [1905], Geddes Papers, US, T-Ged 9/585.

¹³⁸ Letter from E. L. W. Elmy to ‘Madam’ [presumably Anna Geddes], 12 June 1897, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10577, fol. 40.

and the practice of life', noting in particular their independence, physical robustness and desire for intellectual self-improvement.¹³⁹ He was similarly impressed by the nature of relations between the sexes, finding them considerably more enlightened than those in fin de siècle France. According to Demolins, the men in Edinburgh were more reserved, less vulgar and more honorable in their treatment of women, relating that when a 'Frenchman, of a mature age' ventured 'a cheeky hint' on one of their excursions, while in France it would have raised a laugh, 'here everyone seemed embarrassed'.¹⁴⁰ The manners of the women he found similarly straightforward, his female hosts at a dinner treating him without 'the slightest awkwardness' or 'shade of coquetry'.¹⁴¹ Indeed, in many ways the sexual culture at the Edinburgh Summer Meetings appears close to what Bella Pearce was trying to foster within ILP circles in Glasgow, a 'spirit of comradeship', born of 'joint sympathies and interests', that was devoid of flirtation or other 'unnatural sex barriers'.¹⁴² Furthermore, at least within the surviving correspondence, there is no hint of the condescension or overt hostility towards women and women's issues that blighted some of Bella's relationships within socialism.

The progressive, liberated and feminist circle which formed around Geddes in 1890s Edinburgh was clearly the sum of its constituent parts, and the role played by its participants, as well as by its chief protagonist, should not be ignored. However, there are two qualities that can be attributed at least in part to the 'Professor'. Firstly, like Geddes, the subculture was refreshingly unconventional. Geddes had begun his revolt against the values of bourgeois respectability when a young man, his former teacher the Scottish geologist James Geikie describing him in 1881 as 'a damned good fellow. You know – with strong radical tendencies: – hates humbug and all that sort of thing – don't set much store by Mrs Grundy – etc. etc. etc.'.¹⁴³ This disregard for conventional sexual morality manifested itself during his engagement to Anna, in 'escapades' that his fiancé knew her Mother would have termed 'most improper conduct'.¹⁴⁴ The proprieties of Edinburgh society, what Geddes called 'the current forms of dull prosperity, of soul-deep hypocrisy, so rife among us in this "east-windy, west-endy" town', were similarly ignored at the Summer Meetings, with women accorded equal freedom of movement and access to the educational program.¹⁴⁵

Yet secondly, and as importantly, the atmosphere promoted by Geddes in Edinburgh was also what he termed highly 'moral'. By this, he meant that ideally, sexual relationships should only be conducted within monogamous, loving and permanent unions, preferably marriage. This is despite, as we shall see, in his writing asserting that affectionate sex outside of marriage was preferable to

¹³⁹ Demolins, 'Le Mouvement Social', p. 83. According to Siân Reynolds, Demolins visited in 1892, 1893, possibly 1894 and 1895. See Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh*, p. 85.

¹⁴⁰ Demolins, 'Le Mouvement Social', p. 104.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁴² Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 15 September 1894, p. 7 and 1 December 1894, p. 7.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*, p. 74

¹⁴⁴ Letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 14 February 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253.

¹⁴⁵ Patrick Geddes, 'The Scots Renaissance', *Evergreen* (Spring 1895), p. 133.

loveless sex within it, revealing a discrepancy between his discourse and his behaviour. Just like other sexual progressives of the period, whilst Geddes was happy to critique the current model of sexual relations and speak theoretically of more radical configurations, in reality, he followed conventional sexual norms. In his intimate life, he was unquestionably faithful to Anna, despite the ‘adoring women’ who sat at his feet ‘with rapt eyes’, stimulating him to talk.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, it appears that Geddes, in common with Bella Pearce and her fellow feminist campaigners, placed the main burden of responsibility for achieving monogamous sexual relations on men. Just as Bella called on men to ‘deny themselves the indulgence of [sexual] excesses, condoned by Society and the State alike’, so Geddes argued that it was men’s responsibility not to sink into moral degeneracy but instead to act with sexual self-control, to obey an ‘individual spirit of duty’ and a ‘collective soul of honour’.¹⁴⁷

That Geddes then attempted to enforce this model of masculinity within his progressive circle, can be illustrated by an episode at his Ramsay Lodge halls of residence in June 1897, when three of the male students were caught ‘living on improper relations’ with two of the female servants. As Geddes had established the halls to be self-governing, the transgression was summarily dealt with by a Committee of the male residents, who showed ‘at once a determined front against the evil doers’, immediately expelling the culprits (or at least the two who confessed).¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Geddes remained devastated by the ‘awful calamity’, his friend the accountant Thomas Whitsun writing that he could not get his ‘wearied face’ out of his mind and reflecting that its greater impact on Geddes was because his morals were ‘no doubt very different & of a much higher grade than mine’.¹⁴⁹ Geddes overcame his despondency by writing to the Committee, giving them advice on how to maintain ‘a moral surveillance’ over the residents, clarifying that by this he meant ‘not merely a mechanical control of rooms, hours, &c’, but by ‘a moral impulse of each individual & the group as a whole’.¹⁵⁰ Geddes was conscious that by allowing the men liberty from an external disciplinary system and upholding instead the principle of self-acting government, he had exposed them to ‘individual & collective dangers’:

For, just as our muscular tone speedily fails without active exercise, & our intellectual tone cannot exist without active mental culture, so our moral tone, without clearly formed moral purposes of one kind or another also sinks, & indeed most surely of all – most silently too, generally quite unobserved, until the necessarily resulting disaster.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 393.

¹⁴⁷ Letter from I. D. Pearce, *The Freewoman*, 14 December 1911, p. 71; letter from the Outlook Tower to ‘Gentlemen’, 23 July 1897, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10509, fols 69-73. The letter is typed and unsigned but is written in Geddes’s distinctive style.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from Thomas Whitsun to Patrick Geddes, 21 July 1897, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10529, fols 56-7. See also letter from George F. Henderson, Ramsay Lodge to Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, 30 July 1897, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10529, fols 60-2.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Thomas Whitsun to Patrick Geddes, 21 July 1897, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10529, fols 56-7.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from the Outlook Tower to ‘Gentlemen’, 23 July 1897, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10509, fols 69-73.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

The way to avoid such disasters was by the institution of higher aims and aspirations. Geddes's 'single-suggestion for the present' was an edifying 'opening night' at the beginning of the winter session, a ritualistic occasion attended by 'friends of the Hall Scheme' including 'many leading citizens & distinguished men outside Edinburgh', at which the 'collegiate aims' would be reinforced.¹⁵² Yet already painted on the walls of Ramsay Lodge's common room were images designed to inspire the male students to strive for higher moral ideals. Like other late-Victorian progressives, most notably William Morris, whilst Geddes might have claimed that in questions of sex 'the road lies forward, not back', he found his most potent archetypes for ideal sexual relations in a semi-fictional past. As Murray Pittock and Isla Jack have commented, 'the revivification of a mythical or remote historical past as the premise for an alternative future was widespread in Scotland'¹⁵³ Sometimes, as with Morris, it was the medieval codes of chivalry that appeared to Geddes to yield the best expression of 'the normal, vital condition of the true fellowship, of the ideal sister and brotherhood.'¹⁵⁴ However, inspiration also came from the heroes and heroines of Scotland's Celtic mythology, the common room of Ramsay Lodge containing a mural series by John Duncan depicting scenes from James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems, including the awakening and symbolic rebirth of the Celtic hero *Cuchullin*.¹⁵⁵

Whether Geddes succeeded in the long-term in reforming the sexual morals of the male Ramsay Lodge students, either through art or ritual, is not known. Whilst Geddes clearly held some degree of power in Edinburgh, as the founder of a summer school, an art school and several halls of residence, it is obvious that a number of the young male students were reluctant to embrace his masculine ideal. Clearly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, an alternative mode of masculinity was in circulation in the city, one which eschewed notions of personal morality, respect for women and sexual self-control and which instead valorized more immediate sexual pleasures and gratifications. Yet the influence Geddes wielded over sexual attitudes and behaviour was by no means confined to his progressive circles in Edinburgh. He was also an internationally renowned academic, and whilst he did not published extensively, the American sociologist Lewis Mumford referring to his books as 'but notes written on the margins of his thinking', the texts he did produce attracted a national and international audience.¹⁵⁶ His most important science book was arguably his first, the influential 1889 *Evolution of Sex*.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Pittock and Jack, 'Patrick Geddes and the Celtic Revival', p. 339.

¹⁵⁴ Geddes and Thomson, 'The Moral Evolution of Sex', p79.

¹⁵⁵ Macdonald, 'Celticism and Internationalism', pp. 72-76; Megan Ferguson, 'Patrick Geddes and the Celtic Renaissance of the 1890s' (unpublished Phd thesis, University of Dundee, 2011), pp. 90-1.

¹⁵⁶ Boardman, *The World of Patrick Geddes*, pp. 145-6. Mumford also wrote of Geddes that he was 'primarily a scientist, shy of committing his thought to writing, lest the provisional and dynamic and tentative became static and absolute'. See 'Mumford on Geddes', *Architectural Review* (August 1950), p. 81, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10651, fols 29-32.

A Vast Mothers Meeting

In April 1890, *Nature* warned the public against a new work of popular science, published during the previous year. *The Evolution of Sex*, it cautioned, whilst containing many ‘useful and suggestive’ theories for advanced biology students, constituted wholly inappropriate reading material for the general reader.¹⁵⁷ According to *Nature*, the authors, rather than providing a balanced, reliable synthesis of well-respected opinion, had instead forwarded their own, highly conjectural hypothesis:

General readers demand, with right, that those who speak to them with the voice of authority shall give them the authoritative views. Controversial matter they are not remotely interested in, and when it cannot be avoided they must have it carefully distinguished from matter beyond controversy. These authors are controversialists from the first page of their book to the last: they are partisan controversialists offering their wares and their wisdom as accredited doctrine and determined result.¹⁵⁸

The ‘controversial matter’ that so exercised *Nature* was a new theory concerning the origins and nature of sexual difference, a subject currently of intense debate. While a broad consensus had begun to emerge amongst biologists that the constitution, age, sex and environment of the parents might be influencing factors in determining the sex of the foetus, there nonetheless existed a confusing number of widely differing theories. What was needed, according to Geddes, was a rational and definitive explanation to supersede all the preceding ones, an explanation he believed his theory provided. He had already sketched the key points in a paper to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1886 and in his entries on ‘Reproduction’ and ‘Sex’ in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.¹⁵⁹ In the *Evolution of Sex* however, he substantiated them in full, providing a detailed compendium of evidence from the natural world. Drawing on a new understanding of cell metabolism, which envisaged organisms as in a continual state of chemical flux, Geddes and Thomson argued that the physiology of all living matter, including the phenomena of sex, could be explained by an ‘organic see-saw’ between the twin dynamics of ‘anabolism’ and ‘katabolism’.¹⁶⁰ When a mother had enough to eat, the result was female offspring with an ‘anabolic’ habit, under which energy was conserved and the stability of the organism maintained. Poor nutritive conditions, however, generated male offspring with a ‘katabolic’ habit, with a tendency to dissipate energy and transmit variation. This constitutional difference at the cellular level was responsible, asserted Geddes and Thomson, not just for the structure of the different sex organs, sperm being

¹⁵⁷ Review, ‘The Evolution of Sex’, *Nature*, 10 April 1890, p. 532.

¹⁵⁸ ‘The Evolution of Sex’, *Nature*, 10 April 1890, p. 531.

¹⁵⁹ Patrick Geddes, ‘Theory of Growth, Reproduction, Sex, and Heredity’, *Proc. Roy. Soc. Edinburgh*, 1884-1886, 13:911-931; ‘Reproduction’, vol. 20, pp. 407-422 and ‘Sex’, vol. 21, pp. 720-724, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th ed., 24 vols. (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1888).

¹⁶⁰ Geddes did not originate the terms, which according to the Oxford English Dictionary were first used by the leading embryologist Michael Foster in 1876, the same year that Geddes had studied briefly with him at Cambridge University. See Renwick, *British Sociology’s Lost Roots*, p. 195, n. 68. Geddes himself stated in the *Evolution of Sex* that the words anabolic and katabolic were ‘new, unfamiliar, and undeniably ugly’. See Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 123.

katabolically small, active and flagellate, and the ovum anabolically large, passive and quiescent, but for a panoply of psychological and ethical differences between the sexes:

The feminine [anabolic] passivity is expressed in greater patience, more open-mindedness, greater appreciation of subtle details, and consequently what we call more rapid intuition. The masculine [katabolic] activity lends a greater power of maximum effort, of scientific insight, or cerebral experiment with impressions, and is associated with an unobservant or impatient disregard of minute details, but with a stronger grasp of generalities. Man thinks more, women feels more. He discovers more, but remembers less; she is more receptive, and less forgetful.¹⁶¹

Their hypothesis marked a radical departure from the Darwinian explanation for secondary sexual characteristics, which conceptualized them not as constitutional and static, but functional and dynamic, the outcome of a long process of natural and sexual selection.¹⁶² Generation after generation, argued Darwin, birds and animals in possession of attributes most useful for attracting mates or seeing off rivals, such as elaborate plumage or large antlers, were more likely to succeed in reproducing and when they did, they transmitted their superior attributes to their offspring.¹⁶³ Yet with the assumption that sexual differentiation was a process that occurred over time, came the possibility that evolution could potentially take a different course. For those unnerved by the perceived conflation of the sexes by New Women and decadent men, this raised the terrifying prospect of racial degeneration, in which civilized, sexually segregated society regressed to a prior, barbaric and hermaphroditic ancestry.¹⁶⁴ Evolutionary feminists, however, seized the opportunity such a discursive loophole presented, positing women as powerful agents of change in a very different biological destiny to that envisaged by Darwin.¹⁶⁵ The metabolic essentialism of Geddes and Thomson however, admitted neither outcome. While the physical, intellectual and emotional differences between the sexes ‘may be exaggerated or lessened, ... to obliterate them it would be necessary to have all the evolution over again on a new basis.’¹⁶⁶

Yet the challenge to contemporary scientific opinion presented by the *Evolution of Sex* lay not just in its belief in the intrinsic and immutable nature of sexual dimorphism but also in its emphasis on the extent to which difference suffused the body. According to research by Thomas Laqueur, Londa Schiebinger and Cynthia Eagle Russett, prior to around 1750, the influence of an Aristotelian-Galenic humoral model of the cosmos meant that women were considered similar, if inferior beings, to men, merely deficient in the requisite heat necessary to achieve metaphysical male perfection.¹⁶⁷ This is what Laqueur refers to as the ‘one-sex’, hierarchical understanding of men and women, within which sexual difference was confined to the reproductive organs, with the

¹⁶¹ Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 271.

¹⁶² For an extended comparison of the theories of Geddes and Darwin, see Russett, *Sexual Science*, pp. 89-92.

¹⁶³ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*.

¹⁶⁴ See Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, pp. 41-4.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1898).

¹⁶⁶ Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 267.

¹⁶⁷ See Laqueur, *Making Sex*, Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1989) and *Nature's Body, Sexual Politics and the Making of Modern Science* (London: Pandora, 1993) and Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science*.

first detailed illustration of a discrete female skeleton appearing in 1759.¹⁶⁸ After 1800, however, according to Laqueur, a ‘two-sex’ model of sexual difference predominated, in which the sexes were seen as fundamentally incommensurable. This historical interpretation of changing attitudes towards sexed bodies has not gone uncontested. Sally Shuttleworth has suggested that Laqueur was ‘too easily seduced by the economy of his central thesis’, whilst Karen Harvey and Mary Fissell have criticized his reliance on scientific and medical texts produced by and for a social elite, arguing instead that ordinary people will have made use of a wide range of sources, from erotica to public executions, to make sense of their bodies.¹⁶⁹ Utilizing such sources, they have advanced evidence to suggest, for example, that in the eighteenth century male and female genitals were thought of as both similar and different, sometimes within the same text. What is certain however, is that the mid to late-Victorian period saw the emergence of a newly-authoritative discourse of sexual science, one which asserted with increasing confidence that men and women were fundamentally, innately different.

The organ recognized as increasingly critical was the brain. In an influential 1887 journal article, the psychologist George J. Romanes added an evolutionary rationale to already well-established arguments regarding the existence of conspicuous, scientifically verifiable disparities in men and women’s ‘intellect, emotion and will’, which were of such magnitude that the author believed males should be classified ‘in one psychological species and the females in another’. The underlying cause was women’s relatively smaller brain size, the psychologist dismissing as unscholarly the ‘small section of the public’ who believed the absence of female geniuses in history to be due to deficiencies in women’s education:

Although it is usually a matter of much difficulty to distinguish between nature and nurture, or between the results of inborn faculty and those of acquired knowledge, in the present instance no such difficulty obtains ... Women by tens of thousands have enjoyed better educational as well as better social advantages than a Burns, a Keats, or a Faraday; and yet we have neither heard their voices nor seen their work.¹⁷⁰

While the *British Medical Journal* disagreed with Romanes over the significance of the ‘missing five ounces’ of women’s brain matter, stating cerebral physiology was not yet sufficiently advanced to permit a conclusive verdict, it was nonetheless ‘thoroughly with him in his condemnation of the fatuous notion of some feather-brained reformers that there is no such thing as

¹⁶⁸ This was by the French anatomist Marie Thiroux d’Arconville and incorrectly represented the female skull as proportionately smaller than the man’s and emphasized the breadth of the pelvis by greatly exaggerating the narrowness of the ribs. As Londa Shiebinger has commented, despite the new scientific emphasis on objectivity and precision, eighteenth century anatomists, even female ones, “‘mended” nature to fit emerging ideals of masculinity and femininity.’ See Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, pp. 195-8, 203.

¹⁶⁹ Sally Shuttleworth, ‘Review of “Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud”’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 3:4 (April 1993), p. 635, Karen Harvey, ‘The Substance of Sexual Difference: Change and Persistence in Representations of the Body in Eighteenth Century England’, *Gender & History*, 14:2 (August 2002), pp. 202-223 and Mary Fissell, ‘Gender and Generation: Representing Reproduction in Early Modern England’, *Gender & History*, 7:3 (November 1995), pp. 433-456.

¹⁷⁰ George John Romanes, ‘Mental Differences Between Men and Women’, *Nineteenth Century*, 21: 123 (May 1887), pp. 654-5, 665.

sex in mind'.¹⁷¹ For Geddes and Thomson, however, Romanes did not go nearly far enough. Sexual distinctions, under their new schema, went way beyond 'a mere matter of muscular strength or weight of brain'; instead, they were a manifest expression of the anabolic or katabolic tendencies of each microscopic cell in the body, 'the highest outcome of the whole activities of the organism – the literal blossoming of the individual life'.¹⁷²

As Angelique Richardson has demonstrated, anti-feminist sexual scientists such as Romanes did not hold the monopoly on the belief in the biological basis of sexual difference. Eugenic feminists similarly understood sex to be biologically determined, although believed that 'feminism might work *with* rather than against nature, intervening in the process of biological evolution in order to alter biological destiny'.¹⁷³ However, the uncompromising totalitarianism of Geddes's biological account certainly constituted the antithesis of the environmental feminism advanced by John Stuart Mill, in his 1869 essay *The Subjection of Women* querying whether 'any one knows, or can know, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have only been seen in their present relation to one another' and arguing instead for the current artificiality of women's natures, 'the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others'.¹⁷⁴

In the *Evolution of Sex*, Geddes also chose to question several key tenets of environmental feminism, what Sandra Holton has termed the 'humanistic' or egalitarian faction of the woman's movement.¹⁷⁵ This is despite by 1889 having worked alongside progressive women in the Edinburgh Social Union and reflects an indecision over feminism that was still present in 1909, when Geddes refused Charlotte Despard's offer of speaking for the Women's Freedom League. Firstly, Geddes categorically rejected female suffrage as a panacea, based on his understanding of the 'deep difference' between men and women, declaring infamously 'what was decided among the prehistoric Protozoa cannot be annulled by Act of Parliament'.¹⁷⁶ Secondly, he opposed women engaging in paid work, claiming the increasing 'inter-sexual competition for subsistence' was having 'complexly ruinous results ... upon both sexes and upon family life'. Instead, he promoted a vague, increasing 'civicism' of women, presumably referring to female participation in schemes of urban regeneration and social housing similar to those he and Anna were engaged with in Edinburgh.¹⁷⁷ Finally, he provided a biological rationale for patriarchy, arguing that the historic division of labour was not 'a mere product of masculine bullying', as some feminists might have

¹⁷¹ 'The Mental Difference Between Men and Women', *British Medical Journal* (20 August 1887), pp. 415-6.

¹⁷² Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 267-8. Indeed, they stated Romanes recent discussion 'sorely disappoints us in this regard'. See also Geddes, 'Sex', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 21, p. 724.

¹⁷³ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 35.

¹⁷⁴ John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill, *Essays on Sex Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 149.

¹⁷⁵ This is in comparison to 'essentialist' feminists. Sandra Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 28.

¹⁷⁶ Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 267.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 268, 297.

wanted to suggest, but instead a rational response to organic difference. He gave as an example, the ‘poor [male] savage, who lies idling in the sun for days after his return from the hunting, whilst his heavy-laden wife toils and moils [sic] without complaint or cease’, arguing that this constituted an entirely rational domestic economy, considering the ‘extreme burst of exertion which such a life of incessant struggle with nature’ required of men.¹⁷⁸

Yet despite its inclusion of such polemics, throughout the 1890s feminists from a range of ideological traditions, in particular eugenics and social purity, responded favourably to the *Evolution of Sex*. This was in part due to the strategic way individuals within the women’s movement selected, appropriated and subverted discrete and sometimes contradictory ideas from a wide spectrum of scientific opinion. It was also no doubt because of inherent ambiguities and inconsistencies within Geddes’s work, which facilitated multiple interpretations. Nevertheless, there were three interrelated aspects of his treatise on sexual difference that rendered it a genuinely useful piece of science for the women’s movement.

The first was Geddes’s sincere commitment to the idea that women, whilst different, were fundamentally equal to men. This was a commitment he shared with the *Evolution of Sex*’s editor, Havelock Ellis, who in *Man and Woman*, his exhaustive 1894 compendium of the secondary sexual characteristics, dismissed the ‘everlasting discussion regarding the “alleged inferiority of women”’ as ‘absolutely futile and foolish’.¹⁷⁹ Within the conservative rhetoric of evolutionary biology such a conviction of sexual equality was manifestly progressive, as Geddes himself was keen to emphasize, stating that ‘few maintain that the sexes are essentially equal, still fewer that the females excel’, the vast majority of authorities presupposing male superiority.¹⁸⁰ In the *Descent of Man*, Darwin had maintained that civilised, modern man enjoyed a decided intellectual pre-eminence in whatever he chose to take up and that this was an inevitable consequence of natural and sexual selection. The struggles by males of successive generations for subsistence and over rivals had necessitated the development of courage, pugnacity, competitiveness, strength and indeed, genius.¹⁸¹ According to Darwin, due to the laws of inheritance, these attributes, because acquired during maturity, were then ‘transmitted more fully to the male than to the female offspring’; indeed, it was fortunate that man had not become ‘as superior in mental endowment to woman, as the peacock is in ornamental plumage to the peahen’.¹⁸² Spencer elaborated on Darwin’s

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 271, 268-9.

¹⁷⁹ Ellis, *Man and Woman*, pp. 393-4. The book was the twenty-fourth volume to be published within the ‘Contemporary Science Series’.

¹⁸⁰ Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 37.

¹⁸¹ According to Darwin, male superiority was manifest across many disciplines, whether they required ‘deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands’, including poetry, painting, sculpture, music, history, science and philosophy. See Edward O. Wilson (ed.), *From So Simple a Beginning: The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), p. 1204.

¹⁸² Wilson (ed.), *From So Simple a Beginning*, p. 1205. Elsewhere in the *Descent of Man*, Darwin is more circumspect regarding the ability of natural and sexual selection to provide a universal, causal explanation for all inherited characteristics, stating for example ‘Why certain characters should be inherited by both sexes,

hypothesis, detailing a litany of distinctive mental traits acquired by the ‘weaker sex’ as survival techniques in their relationships with the ‘aggressive, unscrupulous, intensely egoistic’ males of early, barbaric tribes. These included persuasion, deception, intuition, a love of approbation and a fascination with power (which accounted for female religiosity), all of which had enabled women and the race to prosper. Crucially, however, Spencer also attributed the restricted growth of women’s nervo-muscular system to the early cessation of their individual evolutionary development, in order to ensure the preservation of vital energy for the fulfilment of their reproductive functions.¹⁸³ As Geddes put it, if Darwin’s man was an ‘evolved woman’, Spencer’s woman was an ‘arrested man’, analogous to children and the lower races in her deficiency in the ‘latest products of human evolution’, specifically abstract reasoning and the sentiment of justice.¹⁸⁴

Geddes rejected both Darwin and Spencer’s hypotheses, later referring to the use of ‘epigrams’ such as ‘evolved woman’ and ‘undeveloped man’ to sum up sexual difference, as crude, unscientific and ‘practically dangerous’ generalisations, their threat presumably residing in the easy ammunition they provided those in search of scientific justifications for discrimination against women.¹⁸⁵ In contrast, he expounded a scientific reconfiguration of the notion of sexual complementarity, stating that ‘to dispute whether males or females are the higher, is like disputing the relative superiority of animals or plants. Each is higher in its own way, and the two are complementary.’¹⁸⁶ This is not to deny that alongside his explicit professions of belief in female equality, nestled, unscrutinized, an assumption of sexual hierarchy, as this prior passage hints at. Most would surely consider it preferable to be an animal rather than a plant, just as katabolic man’s ‘greater cerebral ... originality’ and ‘scientific insight’ were clearly of a higher status than anabolic woman’s ‘common sense’ and ‘greater patience’, however sincere Geddes’s rhetoric of equality.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, it was his failure to scrutinise the implicit values inscribed within his lists of secondary sexual characteristics that made his work vulnerable to later criticism, some Edwardian feminists finding it ‘reactionary’.¹⁸⁸ The Franco-Polish feminist and pacifist Jean Finot for example,

and other characters by one sex alone, namely by that sex in which the character first appeared, is in most cases quite unknown.’ Wilson, *From So Simple a Beginning*, p. 940. According to Eagle Russett’s interpretation, on the critical issue of whether intelligence was transmitted in the male line alone, ‘it can only be said that Darwin waffled’. Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science*, p. 81.

¹⁸³ Spencer’s construction of an antagonistic relationship between individual development and reproduction, first articulated in an unsigned *Westminster Review* article of 1852, later gained great currency in the debate over women’s higher education, with authorities such as Henry Maudsley and Grant Allen arguing strenuously that intellectual exertion had the potential to make women sterile. Herbert Spencer, ‘A Theory of Population, deduced from the General Law of Animal Fertility’, *Westminster Review*, 57:112 (April 1852), pp. 468-501; Maudsley, ‘Sex in Mind and in Education’; Allen, ‘Plain Words on the Woman Question’.

¹⁸⁴ Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 37. Herbert Spencer, ‘The Study of Sociology. IV – Preparation in Psychology’, *Contemporary Review*, 22 (June 1873), pp. 524-532 (also published in *Popular Science Monthly*) and ‘The Comparative Psychology of Man’, *Popular Science Monthly*, 8 (January 1876), pp. 257-269. For a broader discussion of the strategic place the analogy between race and gender occupied in nineteenth and twentieth-century scientific theorizing about human variation, see Nancy Leys Stepan, ‘Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science’, *Isis*, 77:2 (June 1986), pp. 261-277.

¹⁸⁵ Geddes and Thomson, *Sex*, p. 208.

¹⁸⁶ Geddes and Thomson, *Evolution of Sex*, p. 270.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-1.

¹⁸⁸ Letter from Geddes to Victor Branford, 9 January 1919, Geddes Papers, NLS MS 10557, fol. 75.

illustrated the spuriousness of Geddes's assignation of anabolic and katabolic traits, in his 1913 *Problems of the Sexes* outlining a set of diametrically opposite conclusions, which, he argued, possessed an equal chance of being truthful:

Let us take up the argumentation without allowing ourselves to be disturbed by all those which have made it deviate. Does not the spermatozoon of man, smaller, more variable, already indicate the versatility, the fickleness and the weakness of man? The passive ovule incarnates seriousness and weight. The government of men and affairs should belong to woman; for since she is more balanced, more reflective, more stable, she will be able to perform her duties with continuity in her ideas and proceedings. Distrust arises concerning the spermatozoon ... He must be regarded with suspicion and kept away from commanding positions. Nature herself has indicated our path. Woman must rule, and man has only to submit to her laws and inspiration. Thus for whole pages, we could continue to demonstrate the superiority of woman and the necessity for the slavery of man.¹⁸⁹

What Finot misunderstood was that in the context of 1890s debates about sexual difference, Geddes was neither being intentionally anti-feminist or indeed interpreted as being so. Many feminists ascribed to similar views of the natural, sexed qualities of men and women, with the New Woman writer Sarah Grand stating in 1892 that 'Womanhood is a constitutional difference which cannot be altered' and suffrage campaigner Millicent Garrett Fawcett similarly asserting in 1889 that 'We do not want women to be bad imitations of men; we neither deny nor minimise the differences between men and women,' and that to a large extent, the claim of women to representation depended on those differences.¹⁹⁰

The second element within the *Evolution of Sex* which resonated with 1890s feminists was the emphasis that Geddes placed on female-coded altruism and its role in the future evolution of the race. His early biological research on 'reciprocal accommodation', along with his commitment to Spencerian evolutionary philosophy and Comtean positivism, had led him to challenge the primacy of natural selection. According to Geddes, nature was not 'red in tooth and claw', as his first teacher Huxley had asserted, although neither was it 'one hymn of love', propelled by what has more recently been termed 'the survival of the nicest'.¹⁹¹ Instead Geddes conceptualised evolution as entailing the co-existence of 'two divergent lines of emotional and practical activity', egoism, which he equated with hunger and nutrition, and altruism, which he associated with love and reproduction (see figure 3.6).¹⁹² As his diagrammatic representation of this process illustrates, progress was held to be dependent on a symbiotic and increasingly intricate relationship between

¹⁸⁹ Jean Finot, *Problems of the Sexes*, translated by Mary J. Safford (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), pp. 135-6. Havelock Ellis described Finot's feminism as 'of a thorough-going character – claiming complete social equality with men for the woman of the future, and declaring that only thus can peace and harmony be brought, into the world'. See *Eugenic Review*, 5:3 (October 1913), p. 281.

¹⁹⁰ Sarah Grand to John Blackwood, 5 December 1892, quoted in Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 104; Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 'The Appeal Against Female Suffrage: A Reply', *The Nineteenth Century*, 26 (July 1889), p. 96.

¹⁹¹ Thomas Huxley, 'The Struggle for Existence: a Programme', *Nineteenth Century*, 23:132 (Feb 1888), pp. 161-80; Geddes and Thomson, *Evolution of Sex*, p. 279 (the full quote is 'The optimism which finds in animal life only "one hymn of love" is inaccurate, like the pessimism which sees throughout nothing but selfishness.');

Lee Alan Dugatkin, 'Survival of the nicest: the quest for a biological explanation for "altruism is intricately linked to our ideas of goodness. No wonder biologists have taken it personally"', *New Scientist*, 192: 2577 (November 2006), p. 56.

¹⁹² Geddes and Thomson, *Evolution of Sex*, pp. 280-1.

these two streams, before reaching an ‘ideal unity’ in which the two became harmoniously entwined.

Fig. 3.6 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

Yet inherent within the diagram is an ambiguity, which the accompanying text does little to resolve. Firstly, no explanation is provided for egotism and altruism’s dramatic coming together, after previously following increasingly divergent trajectories. Secondly, whilst diagrammatically, each stream is accorded equal significance, in the text, it is the agency of the altruistic impulses which is emphasized. In the attainment of his evolutionary ideal, Geddes anticipates that sexual attraction must become less, not more selfish and that love must ultimately overcome hunger.¹⁹³ Similarly, in the book’s concluding paragraphs, he asserts that ‘each of the greater steps of progress is in fact associated with an increased measure of subordination of individual competition to reproductive or social ends, and of interspecific competition to co-operative association’, before continuing with a rousing rejection of ‘survival of the fittest’ as the sole or even dominant mechanism of evolution:

For we see that it is possible to interpret the ideals of ethical progress, through love and sociality, co-operation and sacrifice, not as mere utopias contradicted by experience, but as the highest expressions of the central evolutionary process of the natural world. The ideal of evolution is indeed an Eden; and although competition can never be wholly eliminated, and progress must thus approach without ever completely reaching its ideal, it is much for our pure natural history to recognise that “creation’s final law” is not struggle but love.¹⁹⁴

Whilst altruism is by no means conceived of as an exclusively feminine trait, the female sex, especially as mothers, are held to have ‘a larger and more habitual share of the altruistic

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 281.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 311-2.

emotions'.¹⁹⁵ According to the recollections of a former student, Geddes made this connection between maternity and evolutionary progress explicit in his lectures, which he closed with an effective re-gendering of evolution:

I recall the thrill which went through an audience as he traced the basal feature of all life to be the sacrifice of the mother for her offspring and closed by saying, with his usual fingering of the abundant locks and the phrase over the shoulder: "So life is not really a [male] gladiator's show; it is rather – a vast mothers' meeting!"¹⁹⁶

The third and final aspect of Geddes's 1889 text that contemporary feminists found valuable was its discussion of birth control. In an extension of his critique of natural selection, Geddes questioned Darwin and Spencer's insistence that 'positive checks' to population growth, such as disease, starvation, war and infanticide, were a necessary evil, insisting instead on the evolutionary benefits of enhancing 'individuation' through a 'conscious and rational adjustment of the *struggle* into the *culture* of existence'.¹⁹⁷ Vital to the perpetuation of this culture was the deliberate spacing of children at least two years apart, ensuring that mothers, their health no longer destroyed by the 'cruelly exhaustive' practice of annual pregnancies, could devote more time to each child.¹⁹⁸ To this end, Geddes provided a brief description of the main 'artificial preventive checks to fertilisation' or birth control methods, causing the *Evolution of Sex* to be banned from at least one public library, and attracting the censure of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Nature*, the latter of which arguing that a warning should have been placed on the title page.¹⁹⁹

One of Geddes's sources was clearly Jane Hume Clapperton. Whilst he doesn't appear to have met her until a year after the *Evolution of Sex* was published, he was clearly aware of her work, citing *Scientific Meliorism* along with Charles Drysdale's *The Population Question* (1878) and Annie Besant's *The Law of Population* (1887) in his chapter on family limitation. Yet for Clapperton,

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-1. The dichotomy Geddes sets up between altruism, reproduction and femininity on the one hand, and egoism, nutrition and masculinity on the other is further illustrated by his explanation for the 'degenerate maternal instincts' of the female cuckoo, which he ascribes to its insatiable appetite. As reproduction and nutrition vary inversely, there is in the cuckoo simply 'too much hunger and gluttony for the higher developments of love'. See pp. 274-9.

¹⁹⁶ S. A. Robertson, 'A Scottish Tribute', *Sociological Review*, (London: October 1932), p. 395. The foregrounding of altruism in the story of evolution reached its apotheosis in the influential 1902 book, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, written by Geddes's friend, the Russian anarchist, mathematician and naturalist Peter Kropotkin, who based his argument for communism on examples of cooperative behaviour drawn from the natural world. According to Kropotkin, the lesson from nature was 'Don't compete! – competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it! ... Therefore combine – practise mutual aid! That is the surest means of giving to each and to all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral.' Geddes later referred to it as a 'valuable account of the inadequately appreciated "other side" of the struggle for existence'. See Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939) and Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *Evolution* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911), p. 253.

¹⁹⁷ My italics. Geddes and Thomson, *Evolution of Sex*, p. 292.

¹⁹⁸ Geddes and Thomson, *Evolution of Sex*, p. 296.

¹⁹⁹ The *Pall Mall Gazette* 'regretted that the counsel given is associated with details in questionable taste, and concerning which a little reticence would have been advantageous'. See 'The Contemporary Science Series', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 August 1890 and 'The Evolution of Sex', *Nature*, 10 April 1890, p. 532. For the banning of the book from a public library, see letter from J. Butt, Eastbourne to Thomson and Geddes, 30 October 1892, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10525, fols 147-154.

Geddes did not go far enough. Whilst Clapperton strongly advocated the use of ‘artificial checks to conception’, in a class-inflected analysis believing that sex was ‘the only pleasure besides drinking that the base nature can enjoy’, Geddes was more cautious.²⁰⁰ In another example of Geddes’s dual identity as both unconventional progressive and guardian of a masculine ideal of sexual self-control, whilst he dismissed the prejudice surrounding the discussion of ‘neo-Mathusian proposals’ as ‘based in a moral cowardice’, he was also anxious that birth control might lead to ‘exaggerated sexuality’. Furthermore, he was concerned that this trait might become even more pronounced when passed down the generations. This meant he stopped short of recommending ‘mechanical methods’ and instead suggested ‘prudence after marriage’, the familiar Victorian edict of restricting sex in marriage to procreative purposes.²⁰¹

Geddes’s ideas on inherited sexual traits were clearly informed by eugenics, Geddes reviewing favourably Francis Galton’s *Natural Inheritance* for the *Scottish Leader* in 1890 and the sociologist Victor Branford describing him in 1904 as a ‘Galtonian’, albeit ‘a critical one’.²⁰² However, they were also based on an understanding of sexual behaviour as itself subject to evolutionary forces. In the *Evolution of Sex*, Geddes described how in its lowest form, the ‘love of mates’ manifested as the crude, physical pairings of the lowest organisms, a union in which ‘there is physical attraction, and the whole process is very much a satisfaction of proto-plasmic hunger’. With the increasing intellectual, emotional and moral sensibilities of birds and mammals, however, came the development of ‘what pedantry alone can refuse to call love’, with ‘every shade of flirtation, courtship, jealousy, and the like’.²⁰³ Conceptualising sex in this way, meant that there was therefore a risk that a lack of sexual self-control, possibly triggered by the widespread use of birth-control, might result in racial degeneration, a falling back to the ‘ethical level of the harlots and profligates of our streets’.²⁰⁴ However, such an understanding also admitted the possibility that the evolution of sex was not over, Geddes depicting a potential future in which ‘the rare fruits of a more than earthly paradise of love’, previously known only to poets and their heroines, would become one of the ‘realities of daily life towards which we and ours may journey’.²⁰⁵

Realizing a More Than Earthly Paradise of Love

It was in Edinburgh that Geddes attempted to realize this ‘more than earthly paradise’, first and foremost in his intimate relationship with his wife Anna. The two continued to exchange love letters throughout their thirty-one year marriage, Geddes writing to Anna touchingly in 1910: ‘Yes,

²⁰⁰ Letter from Jane Hume Clapperton to Patrick Geddes, 15 October [1890], Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10525, fols 57-8.

²⁰¹ Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, pp. 293-7.

²⁰² Patrick Geddes, ‘Mr. Francis Galton on Natural Inheritance’, 14 March 1889 (I am indebted to Chris Renwick for this reference); Branford is quoted in Renwick, *British Sociology’s Lost Sociological Roots*, p. 144.

²⁰³ Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 264-6.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

dearest, you are always young and beautiful to me, and have grown fairer through the years, sweeter, wiser, madder and all! I am glad to have the sense to know it, the eyes to see it, the heart to feel it.’²⁰⁶ In addition, Geddes also tried to create the conditions for evolved sexual relations amongst the progressive subculture in Edinburgh, by imbuing his many enterprises with a spirit of romanticism, unconventionality and high morality. However, equally as important as examining how Geddes’s evolutionary-driven sexual discourse influenced others, is determining the ways in which the individuals who peopled his intimate and social life helped to reconfigure his discourse. This process can be begun by an analysis of his and John Arthur Thomson’s 1896 essay, ‘The Moral Evolution of Sex’, published in the *Evergreen*. In the intervening seven years since the appearance of the *Evolution of Sex*, he and Anna had had two further children, the Summer Meetings had reached their peak of popularity, the art school had been inaugurated along with the Celtic publishing house, the Outlook Tower had been purchased and at least two halls of residence had been opened. Geddes was therefore now immersed in the feminist and progressive opinion of 1890s Edinburgh, as well as possessing far more personal experience of marriage, sexual relations and family life. It is to be expected therefore, that by 1896 his perspective on both the Woman Question and the Sex Question will have shifted.

In ‘The Moral Evolution of Sex’, Geddes is much more understanding regarding women’s desire for professional autonomy. He is no longer anxious about the ruinous impact on the family of men and women competing economically, and instead depicts the ideal ‘woman-worker’ as one who works with men to fulfil her own aims and ambitions, described by Geddes in his typically convoluted style as ‘she who works not merely or mainly For men as the help and instrument of their purpose, but who works With men as the instrument yet material of her purpose’.²⁰⁷ Having lived for several years in the heart of Edinburgh’s Old Town, he is well-informed on the wide range of occupations undertaken by working-class as well as middle-class women, including that of ‘doctor and nurse, teacher and typist, dressmaker, mill girl, shop girl, and all the rest’.²⁰⁸ However, despite his close relationships with women involved in the feminist movement in Edinburgh, when discussing New Women he again displays his preference for practical action over political campaigning, implying that ‘those who call themselves New and Advanced and what not, without working’ are both masculine and unproductive members of society.²⁰⁹ Fundamentally, what his 1896 essay revealed is an indecision over women’s roles, encapsulated in his use of a bee metaphor to illustrate the differing options available to contemporary women:

The ‘Queen’ [bee] is no queen but an imprisoned Mother; the ‘Neuters’ are no neuters, but the busy Sisters of the hive. For the first is the life-long imprisonment, the narrow home of motherhood; for the others the life of energy and of labour, for them the freedom, the sunlight, and the flowers.

²⁰⁶ Letter from Patrick Geddes to Anna Geddes, 7 July 1910, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508, fol. 75.

²⁰⁷ Geddes and Thomson, ‘The Moral Evolution of Sex’, p. 80.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Here is your contrast of house-mother and new woman – sure enough as old as the world.²¹⁰ On first impression, the life Geddes depicts for the New Women neuters, with their freedom, sunlight and flowers, is far more attractive than the life-long imprisonment of motherhood. However, subsequently in the text Geddes is far more positive about the happiness brought to mothers by their children, whilst cautioning against ‘over-envying’ the New Woman, denigrating the worldliness of her vocation and referring elliptically to her ‘poisoned sting’.²¹¹ Overall, he appears caught between wanting to idealise women as mothers whilst acknowledging the legitimacy of the feminist struggle for wider economic opportunities, a struggle perhaps engendered by a conflict between his scientific understanding of women’s innate, sexed characteristics, his experience of the aspirations and ambitions of the women in his circle and his relationship with his wife.

By 1896, Geddes’s views on sex have also undergone a transformation. Seven years earlier, he had conceptualised an idyllic, loving relationship as one in which physicality was transcended, with spiritual and romantic love evolving beyond the crude impulses of lust. In ‘The Moral Evolution of Sex’ however, sex is reconfigured as a vital element in the attainment of Geddes’s earthly paradise, no longer something to be disciplined and controlled but celebrated and enjoyed. In a remarkable passage, Geddes reinterprets the biblical phrase ‘Consider the lilies how they grow’. Instead of, as in Luke 12:27, the lily exemplifying natural, unsought-for, God-given beauty, as a lesson against vanity or materialism, Geddes transforms the flower into a potent symbol of the natural phenomenon of sex:

Consider then the lily: face its elemental biologic-moral fact. ‘Pure as a lily’ is not really a phrase of hackneyed sham-morals; for it does not mean weak, bloodless, sexless, like your moral philosopher’s books, your curate’s sermons. Its Purity lies in that it has something to be pure; its Glory is in being the most frank and open Manifestation of Sex in all the organic world. Its magnificent array is to show forth, not conceal: these wear their lucent argent for the passion-fragrant night, and these roll back their swart-stained robes of scarlet-orange to the sun-rich day; naked and not ashamed, glowing, breathing, warm, each flower showers forth its opulence of golden dust, stretches forth to welcome it in return. This, when we consider, is How they Grow.²¹²

This shift in thinking may have been prompted by changes in Geddes’s intimate life. When Geddes and Anna married in 1886 they were undoubtedly virgins.²¹³ Their first child was born eighteen months after their marriage, with each subsequent child spaced four years apart. Whether this was achieved through ‘mechanical methods’ or ‘prudence after marriage’ is unknown, although in 1914 Geddes was still advocating a ‘higher degree of temperance in married life’ and warning of the risk of ‘smothering love in physical fondness’.²¹⁴ However, the overwhelming evidence from their correspondence is of a loving and physically passionate relationship. Anna referred to Geddes

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., p. 76.

²¹³ In an oral history interview conducted with Philip Boardman in 1968, Arthur Geddes stated that his father had once told him ‘he never had sexual relations with any woman except your Mother. He said this voluntarily; it was not in answer to any question and I have no doubt that it was true.’ Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, p. 393.

²¹⁴ Geddes and Thomson, *Sex*, p. 139.

during their engagement as her ‘perfect, passionate lover’ and later wrote that she was ‘sometimes almost dying’ to see him, whilst Geddes expressed similar sentiments when in Boston in 1899, exclaiming ‘oh, dear lassie, how I long with it all for you, and to have you in my arms again – and all, and all – and all.’²¹⁵

Geddes translated this new openness about sex into an innovative new application of eugenics. Whilst in 1889 he had been concerned lest children inherited their parents’ exaggerated sexuality, seven years later the focus of his anxiety had switched. His central concern now was not sexual licentiousness but the emotional sterility of marriages of convenience. In what could be termed a form of ‘romantic eugenics’, Geddes asserts that the physical and psychological health of children is determined by the emotional authenticity of their parents’ relationship at the time of conception. Thus, the strength and courage of illegitimate historical heroes such as William the Conqueror and Don Juan of Austria is accounted for by the love between their mother and father. Conversely, the ‘sinister devilry’ of Philip II, Pedro the Cruel and ‘imbecile kinglets without end’, is seen as a direct result of their parents’ arranged marriages. The same logic is used to explain the particular ‘organic vigour’ and ‘ingenium perfervidum’ of the Scottish race, which Geddes’s claims is due to the ‘exceptional freedom in marriage choice, in love choice, illegitimacy and all’ that he believed existed in Scotland. His central argument is that having loveless marital sex is as immoral as having illegitimate loveless sex. There may, he declared, ‘be base-born children without wedlock, but there are also too many base-born with it’.²¹⁶

As with his attitude to the role of women, however, the contradictions in Geddes’s thinking about sex remained. Whilst he asserted the need for openness, declaring ‘here as everywhere the road lies forward, not back. We must grapple with each question, whoever be shocked; not shirk it, gloss it, retreat from it, in our feeble virtue’, when speaking about sex he continued to utilise metaphors from nature, rather than employing a more explicit use of language.²¹⁷ In addition, it is clear he felt far more able to be unconventional on the pages of the *Evergreen* than he did in real life. The scandal at Ramsay Lodge happened the year after the publication of ‘The Moral Evolution of Sex’. Yet Geddes did not stop to question whether the sex between the male students and the female servants had been loving and thus legitimate or loveless and therefore base. Instead, the immediate assumption was that the men, by acting sexually, had acted dishonourably. Whilst the sex of a lily could be celebrated, the sex of a male student, even for Geddes, was still firmly taboo.

²¹⁵ Letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 3 April 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 19-22; letter from Anna Geddes to Patrick Geddes, [undated, poss. 1887], Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10503, fol. 28; letter from Patrick Geddes to Anna Geddes, 17 March 1899, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508, fol. 31.

²¹⁶ Geddes and Thomson, ‘The Moral Evolution of Sex’, pp. 76-7.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 75.

Conclusion

In 1912, Jean Finot lambasted Geddes and ‘the numerous prophets and adepts’ of his theories as the worst among recent scientists who shored up popular prejudices against women, describing the *Evolution of Sex* as ‘one of those mirages which, while springing from science, are nevertheless illusory and erroneous’.²¹⁸ A year later, Geddes’s friend and disciple, the progressive educationalist Cecil Reddie, was ‘assaulted by Suffragettes’ whilst giving a paper on sex education at Cambridge, the women ridiculing the ‘Laws of Nature’ Reddie had imbued from his master. In 1919, Geddes himself reflected back on his life and work, two years after Anna’s death from fever in India and of his eldest son Alasdair in the First World War. He lamented the failure of the *Evolution of Sex* to influence scientific and popular opinion, arguing that advanced people like George Bernard Shaw had found it ‘technical’ and advanced women ‘reactionary’: ‘It is as with a shop: we have stocked our goods: but where are the customers? if woman & people don’t come!’²¹⁹

His self-assessment was overly harsh. When first published, the book was an immediate commercial success, an American edition in 1890 and a French translation two years later securing an international reputation for its authors. Furthermore, one of its core arguments reached an even wider audience through its inclusion in Henry Drummond’s 1894 *Ascent of Man*, although not in a form which Geddes would have welcomed. A Christianized account of human evolution by an evangelical Scottish theologian, the *Ascent of Man* sold 30,000 copies in Britain within five years of its publication.²²⁰ According to Tom Dixon, the *Evolution of Sex* was its most important source, Drummond drawing from it Geddes and Thomson’s emphasis on the altruistic, self-sacrificing nature of mothers.²²¹ In the process, Dixon argues, Drummond developed ‘their relatively sober analysis into something more colourful’, ultimately using their analysis to reinforce an anti-feminist message that it was natural for women to subordinate their needs to that of their husband and children.²²²

However, several feminists took a very different message from the *Evolution of Sex*. The American settlement worker Jane Addams embraced Geddes’s understanding of women’s inherently anabolic characteristics, in her works *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902) and *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907), according women a crucial role in the ethical regeneration of American society, by virtue

²¹⁸ Finot, *Problems of the Sexes*, p. 132.

²¹⁹ Letter from Patrick Geddes to Victor Branford, 9 January 1919, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10557, fols 74-8.

²²⁰ Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism*, p. 284.

²²¹ Drummond does reference *Evolution of Sex* regarding its emphasis on altruism, commenting that Geddes and Thomson, ‘more clearly than any other writers, have grasped the bearings of this theme in all directions, and they fearlessly take their stand-point from the physiology of the protoplasm.’ Henry Drummond, *The Lowell Lectures on the Ascent of Man* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1894), p. 34. See also Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism*, pp. 283-302.

²²² Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism*, p. 298.

of their altruistic, cooperative and pacifist tendencies.²²³ Geddes and Addams became close friends, in 1900 Geddes and Anna staying with Jane at her Hull House settlement in Chicago and later that year Addams lecturing for Geddes at the International School he organized for the Paris Exposition of 1900. Other feminists seized on specific aspects of Geddes and Thomson's hypotheses and subjected them to a more radical reformulation. The British social purist Frances Swiney used the anabolic/ katabolic distinction to argue that women represented a higher stage of evolutionary development than men, in her *Awakening of Women* (1899) asserting that 'Anabolism implies growth, concentration, conservation, unification, cohesion and solidarity. Katabolism on the other hand, signifies division, dispersion, disintegration, decay and death.'²²⁴ Similarly, in the *Evolution of Woman* (1894), the American suffragist Eliza Burt Gamble argued that women's anabolic qualities justified an expansion of their role in public life, as keepers of the 'industrial arts of peace, the virtues of the home and of the family, and the ultimate welfare and happiness of the state'.²²⁵

The changing reception accorded Geddes's work by feminists, from being embraced in the 1890s to being assaulted in the 1910s, is more a reflection of the continuing diversity of opinion within the women's movement over biological essentialism, than of the *Evolution of Sex's* inherent progressive or reactionary nature. That Geddes himself construed his arguments surrounding sexual complementarity, female-coded altruism and birth control as radical and unconventional is clear. These ideas were further nuanced by a progressive circle of artists, writers, scientists and feminists in Edinburgh whose contribution has until now been overlooked. Yet confusion over Geddes and the impact of his ideas on sex can also be attributed to an indecisiveness within his work over feminism and the role of women. Furthermore, illustrating again that the self is by no means solely a constituent of discursive norms, there was a conspicuous disjunction between Geddes's sexual discourse and aspects of his social and intimate life. Whilst in theory he encouraged egalitarian social relations, including between the sexes, his personality ensured that his wife, children, friends and colleagues were often required to play supporting and subsidiary roles. In addition, whilst Geddes consciously fashioned an identity as an anti-Grundy, anti-establishment maverick, a progressive who critiqued marriages of convenience and emboldened others to speak about sex, in reality, both as a husband and as the founder of several educational establishments, he upheld a model of masculinity based on high personal morality and sexual self-control. This may well have been partly due to the influence of the feminist members of his circle, keen to eradicate the sexual double standard; it may also have been Geddes's nostalgia for the gendered ideals of a semi-

²²³ Conway, 'Stereotypes of Femininity', pp. 151-2; Jill Conway, 'Women Reformers and American Culture, 1870-1930', *Journal of Social History*, 5:2 (Winter 1971/2), pp. 164-177.

²²⁴ Frances Swiney, *The Awakening of Women; or, Woman's Part in Evolution* (London: William Reeves, 1899), p. 20, quoted in Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 50. See also George Robb, 'Eugenics, Spirituality and Sex Differentiation in Edwardian England: The Case of Francis Swiney', *Journal of Women's History*, 10:3 (Autumn 1998), pp. 97-117.

²²⁵ Erika L. Milam, *Looking for a Few Good Males: Female Choice in Evolutionary Biology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. 24-5 and Rosemary Jann, 'Revising the Descent of Woman: Eliza Burt Gamble', in Barbara T. Gates and Ann B. Shteir (eds.), *Natural Eloquence: Women Reinscribe Science* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), pp. 147-163.

fictional medieval or Celtic past. However, it could equally have been a relic of his Free kirk upbringing, his moral compass set firmly in early childhood by his religiously devout, socially conventional parents. Whatever the derivation of his sexual ethics however, Geddes nonetheless succeeded through his numerous ventures in creating a vibrant, romantic and highly moral atmosphere that women in particular found liberating. If Bella Pearce did indeed visit Geddes on a Ruskin Society outing, one suspects she can only have approved.

Conclusion

Bella Pearce's feminist friend Helen Frazer once overheard a comment, made with what sounds like wistful optimism, that if, during a talk by the theosophist Annie Besant, the roof of the Athenaeum had fallen in and the entirety of the audience had been 'extinguished', 'all the cranks in Glasgow would be gone.'¹ To the conservative majority, this is what Patrick and Anna Geddes, and Bella and Charles Pearce were, 'cranks', the Victorian appellation for all those whose multifarious, unconventional beliefs and practices fell outside of what was considered rational and appropriate behavior. Such difficult individuals were the cuckoos in the middle-class nest, at once part of bourgeois culture yet deliberately situating themselves outside it, from this privileged position launching a persistent sally of attacks on the hypocrisies of their age's sexual and social codes.

The response by the establishment in Scotland took various permutations, rarely any of them positive. The most common reaction was derision. When the Scottish press reported on the socialist Labour Day rallies on Glasgow Green, occasions attended by upwards of six thousand working people, their accounts were laced with jovial condescension. The platform speakers, which in 1895 and 1896 included the Pearces, were referred to as a gang of 'bellicose and not-on-any-account to be compromised' reformers, who took as the object of their bitter and furious rhetoric, the 'ghouls and blood-suckers that dwell in the West End and fatten on the working-man'. The audience was described as a 'curious crowd', for the most part comprising of 'the kind of men one sees in the free seats at any big political meeting in the city'.² The Ruskin Society similarly struggled to be taken seriously, dismissed by one commentator in the *Glasgow Evening News* as 'Haverin' Socialists', the Scots adjective referring to those who babbled or talked foolishly.³ As in England, Scotland's women's rights campaigners were ridiculed as 'shrieking sisters', in danger of unsexing themselves through their calls for higher education and the suffrage, although the *Bailie*, a weekly Glasgow satirical journal, added a Scottish inflection to their derision, referencing John Knox when lambasting them as 'the Monstrous Regiment of Women'.⁴ Thomas Lake Harris and his disciples, perhaps unsurprisingly, were also the objects of the newspapers' contempt. The *Scotsman* dismissed Harris's theology as 'composed in about equal parts of blasphemy, socialism, and pure nonsense', whilst for the *Glasgow Evening News*, the Brotherhood of the New Life amounted to nothing more than a 'weird, impossible, colony of communistic cranks'.⁵

¹ Moyes, *A Woman in a Man's World*, p. 21.

² 'A Modern Maying: Yesterday at the Green', *Glasgow Evening News*, 6 May 1895.

³ 'The Lorgnette', *Glasgow Evening News*, 5 April 1895, p. 1.

⁴ 'The Monstrous Regiment', *Bailie*, 1 November 1882, p. 11; 'The Monstrous Regiment of Women', *Bailie*, 8 November 1882.

⁵ 'New books', *Scotsman*, 15 February 1892, p. 2; 'The Lorgnette', *Glasgow Evening News*, 24 June 1903, p. 2.

About Patrick Geddes, however, the press was more circumspect. Just like his arts and crafts journal, the *Evergreen*, which was viewed both as ‘the stuff bibliographical treasures are made of’ and ‘an elaborate and expensive joke’, he appears to have received a mixed reception.⁶ Whilst in one account of the Edinburgh Summer Meetings, he is portrayed as a serious if eccentric educational pioneer, the reporter left musing over large sheets of paper covered with ‘mysterious-looking hieroglyphics in blue pencil’ that Geddes had used to enliven the interview, in another commentary he is depicted as a deluded and impractical fantasist.⁷ The *Glasgow Herald*, despite acknowledging Geddes’s role as ‘the renovator of Old and the leader of Young Edinburgh’, was singularly unimpressed with his manifesto for a ‘Scots Renaissance’, believing it contained ‘much sad, unpractical, and inspiring nonsense’. Whilst seeing some merit in his attempts to revivify ideals from Scotland’s Celtic past, and conceding that ‘imperfect ideals are better than no ideals at all’, the reporter nonetheless concluded bracingly that ‘The young men whom Mr. Geddes has gathered round him would perhaps do better if they were to take a cold bath in the hard reality of life before they set themselves to believe that Scotland’s hills and Scotland’s dandelions make the modern Elysian Fields’.⁸

Sometimes however, the consequences of being progressive could be more serious than merely attracting the disdain of the Scottish press. Charles Pearce claimed his business interests in Glasgow were cut by two thirds after he declared himself a socialist, although this did not deter him and Bella from making public declarations of allegiance to the notorious Thomas Lake Harris. Probably, by this point, respectable Glasgow ‘society’ considered them beyond the pale. Both couples were fortunate in retaining the support of their families. Charles’s father had been a Chartist, whilst several members of Bella’s family belonged to the Ruskin Society. Furthermore, her eldest brother Tom shared her unorthodox Christian faith, a Brotherhood disciple describing him in 1912 as ‘a reader and admirer of all the writings for many years’.⁹ The bonds of affection between Patrick Geddes and his parents, coupled with their pride in his achievements, overcame any reservations they might have held about his idiosyncratic career path or religious heterodoxy, whilst even Anna’s upright and conventional family appear to have been won over by Geddes’s charm. Her mother, whilst anxious about the hostile reception his work sometimes received in

⁶ The first quote is from *Black and White*, the second is from the *Star*. Both are taken from ‘The Evergreen: Press Opinions’, Geddes Papers, US, T-GED 8/1/8.

⁷ ‘The Future of Education: Prof. Geddes and the Edinburgh Summer Gathering’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 September 1895; ‘Scottish Renaissance and Scottish Philistinism’, *Glasgow Herald*, 10 August 1895.

⁸ ‘Scottish Renaissance and Scottish Philistinism’, *Glasgow Herald*, 10 August 1895.

⁹ Letter from Arthur Cuthbert to Edwin Markham, 8 October 1912, TLH Papers, 13/307. Both Tom Watson Duncan (a chartered accountant like his father) and his wife Eliza appear to have been followers of Harris. The American prophet and his wife stopped for tea at the Duncans’ ‘beautiful home’ in Giffnock during their 1903 visit to Glasgow, whilst Tom went on to assist Bella in her attempts to publish Edwin Markham’s biography of Harris. I have been unable to determine the meaning behind the curious comment made by Arthur Cuthbert in 1906 when recommending that Tom provide Bella with assistance, Cuthbert asserting that the publishing work would ‘have to be absolutely under her, for I believe the Duncan family, as “Duncans”, are apt to be arrant rogues’. It suggests, however, an earlier altercation between Bella’s parents and Cuthbert, who appears to have once lived in Glasgow. Diary of Jane Harris, 4 August 1903, TLH Papers, 14/314; letter from Arthur Cuthbert to ‘Lady Dovie’ [Jane Harris], 10 September 1906, TLH Papers, 9/235.

Edinburgh, spoke ‘very lovingly’ about Geddes, valuing in particular his emotional demonstrativeness.¹⁰

Indeed, Anna’s account of two significant conversations with her mother after her engagement provides an alternative portrait of the relationship between progressives and their parents, in contrast to that forwarded by Holbrook Jackson. In his review of the 1890s, Jackson asserted that one manifestation of the decade’s anti-Victorian revolt had been a generational polarization, claiming that never ‘was there a time when the young were so young or the old so old’, with ‘the snapping of apron-strings’ causing ‘consternation in many a decent household’.¹¹ Yet in contrast to this impression of animosity and distrust, the relationship between Anna and her mother appears defined instead by respect and a mutual desire to understand the other’s position. When discussing religion, whilst her mother was initially critical of Anna and Patrick’s positivist ‘religion of humanity’, she was easily convinced of how much they had in common on the subject, and concluded by reassuring Anna that she was ‘never in the least troubled about the safety of our souls or any-thing of that kind’.¹² The two women also had a ‘warm conversation’ about sexual proprieties, including ‘the amount of liberty that should be allowed to girls’. Yet despite both Anna and her mother remaining ‘more convinced than ever’ that each was in the right, the discussion left no feelings of rancor, Anna commenting that ‘of course each respected the others opinion & there was no ill feeling’.¹³ Such warm familial relations were clearly not enjoyed by all Scotland’s sexual progressives however. For the Edinburgh eugenic feminist Jane Hume Clapperton, the price for expressing radical views on birth control was social ostracism. Her friend the suffragist and socialist Dora Montefiore described how when Clapperton’s ‘wildly unconventional’ book on social reform, *Scientific Meliorism*, was published in 1885, ‘many of her nearest relatives “cut” her for having written it’.¹⁴

What sustained the sexual progressives in their quest to realize a utopian ideal of reformed sexual relations were the emotional and intellectual ties fostered within their own subcultures, both in Scotland and with friends and colleagues in other parts of Britain. Their friendships were founded not just on a shared philosophy and vision of a ‘new life’ but the myriad events which form the texture of everyday life. Charles and Bella Pearce sent Brotherhood wine to the Elmys; Anna and Patrick Geddes’s daughter Norah stayed with the Fabians Eleanor and Frank Podmore; the Pearces looked after Keir Hardie’s song-birds in their office; Jane Hume Clapperton publicized Geddes’s slum regeneration programme in London’s Pioneer Club; the WSPU campaigner Teresa Billington got married from the Pearces’ house in Langside; Arthur Geddes married a young relative of the

¹⁰ Letter from Anna Geddes to Patrick Geddes, 28 March [undated, poss. 1887], Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10503, fols 26-7; letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 11 February 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 1-4

¹¹ Holbrook Jackson, *The 1890s*, p. 33.

¹² Letter from Anna Morton to Patrick Geddes, 14 February 1886, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 19253, fols 5-8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Montefiore, *From a Victorian to a Modern*, p. 115.

anarchist Elisée Reclus; the progressive educationalist Cecil Reddie sent Geddes cold cures from his school in Derbyshire. Yet as Edith Ellis noted, fellowship could be hell as well as heaven and there were also arguments between Scottish progressives. An Edinburgh friend of the Geddeses, May Nitchie, wrote to Patrick in 1896 distraught over a recent disagreement, regretting that she had let her ‘wild McGregor blood boil up as it did and not only up but over’, whilst Patrick often clashed with the poet Rachel Annand Taylor, who resented his requests for poetry on demand, on one occasion calling him an ‘insatiable egotist’ and vowing to Anna that she would ‘not forgive Merlin for days and days’.¹⁵ Several of the relationships within Charles and Bella Pearce’s ethical socialist network in Glasgow broke down irretrievably, not over the wider, ideological questions addressed by Bella in her column, such as the role of women within socialism, or the feminist challenge to the sexual double standard, but over much more mundane matters, including the internal politicking surrounding Charles’s loan to the 1895 election fund and Keir Hardie’s altercation with the Labour Literature Society.

Whilst the fraternity and fellowship lasted however, the initial effect of escaping the narrow-mindedness of a conservative family or respectable suburban neighborhood, and joining like-minded individuals to herald in a new age could be exhilarating. There was an excitement and a novel unconventionality in sitting up ‘far into the night’ attempting to solve Edinburgh’s social problems; listening to Geddes unravel Scotland’s ancient Celtic past atop a moonlit Arthur’s Seat; discussing the ‘burning questions of the day’ with fellow comrades at a Women’s Labour Party ‘At Home’; or, indeed, hosting a notorious American mystic and hearing fairies speak over breakfast.¹⁶ Annand Taylor felt ‘re-charged’ by her visits to Edinburgh, whilst Bella clearly relished the energy of both the 1890s ethical socialist movement and the 1900s women’s suffrage campaigns.¹⁷

The danger, as Chris Nottingham has noted, is that by isolating themselves within rarified, protected subcultures, the progressives were in danger of narrowing their social horizons, eradicating any internal voices of dissent, and instead creating ‘the illusion that the part of society one knew was a perfect microcosm of the whole, and the world was waiting breathlessly for the latest formulation of woman’s true role, or whatever.’¹⁸ Despite his preference for practical action over political rhetoric, Geddes’s reputation amongst ‘the more frigid society of Edina’ as a ‘dreamer in stone and fresco’ was not entirely misplaced, especially when it came to his conceptualization of reformed sexual relations.¹⁹ His idealized notions of reinstating the love between Celtic heroes and their ladies, or poets and their muses, bore little relation to modern

¹⁵ Letter from May Nitchie to Patrick Geddes, Autumn 1896, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10528, fols 131-2; letter from ‘the Banabhard’ [Rachel Annand Taylor] to ‘Dearest Musicmaker’ [Anna Geddes], Friday 12.30 [undated, poss. 1910/11], Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10572, fol. 32.

¹⁶ Introduction to the letters of Patrick Geddes by Norah G. Mears, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508, fol. 186; Lizzie Glasier, ‘The Woman’s Labour Party, Glasgow’, *Labour Leader*, 25 May 1895, p. 5.

¹⁷ Postcard from Rachel Annand Taylor, 3 December 1907, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10572, fol. 3.

¹⁸ Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity*, p. 103.

¹⁹ Israel Zangwill, ‘Without Prejudice’, *Pall Mall Magazine*, 8:4 (February 1896), p. 329.

sexual behavior. When the scandal at the Ramsay Lodge forced Geddes to face the rather more prosaic realities of the sex lives of young male students, he was profoundly shocked, disquieting his colleague Thomas Whitsun with the intensity of his reaction, Whitsun commenting ‘I confess that I feel surprised that you let this be such a slap in the face to you & the idea of such a thing happening has all along been familiar to me & I thought to you also.’²⁰ Similarly, Bella Pearce’s initial hopes that the ‘new life’ of ethical socialism would encompass a more ‘natural relationship between the sexes’, one based on rationality and respect rather than misogyny or flirtation, were harder to achieve than she anticipated.²¹ Despite four years of educating socialist men in feminist sexual politics through her column in the *Labour Leader*, her male comrades remained doggedly unreceptive to her critique of oppressive masculine sexual behaviour. When a prostitution scandal broke in Glasgow, Keir Hardie chose to narrate it in the *Leader* as a story of class rather than gender exploitation, a tale of rich seducers leading the daughters of working men to their ruin, indicative of the wider elision of feminist issues within socialism. Furthermore, the condescension shown by ILP propagandists such as Jim Connell and George Samuel towards their female colleagues suggests the masculinized culture of socialism remained largely intact. As Seth Koven has commented with regard to the attempts by London progressives at social reform, the challenges confronted by such ‘energetic and compassionate men and women’ provide us with a cautionary tale, showing ‘just how difficult it was – and is – to translate the desire to be good into doing good for others.’²² In a similar way, it was far harder to realize a ‘more than earthly paradise of love’ in Scotland, than simply to conceive of it.²³

In many ways, the utopian ideals of Scottish sexual progressives mirrored those held within comparable subcultures elsewhere in Britain. Like their English socialist and feminist counterparts, the Pearces and the Geddeses’ revolt against Victorian sexual morality was carefully delineated. Whilst Geddes was emphatic about the need to talk explicitly and openly about sex, eulogizing the lily as ‘the most frank and open Manifestation of Sex in all the organic world’, in his own intimate life he was resolutely respectable, remaining married, monogamous and heterosexual.²⁴ Whilst he may in his writing have critiqued marriages of convenience and tentatively sanctioned sex before marriage under certain circumstances, any actual pre-marital sexual encounters were emphatically proscribed. For all his scientific knowledge and expertise, Geddes’s conceptualization of sex was nebulous and inconsistent, a force to be simultaneously celebrated and controlled; admitted to and talked about yet cloaked in nature metaphors and romantic ideals. Whilst accepting lust as part of living nature, a story literally of the birds and bees, it was also something humans should aim to evolve out of, a staging post en route to the higher evolutionary goal of love. In a regendering of the evolutionary process, he accorded the dynamic of feminine altruism a greater significance than

²⁰ Letter from Thomas Whitsun to Patrick Geddes, 21 July 1897, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10529, fols 56-7.

²¹ Lily Bell, ‘Matrons and Maidens’, *Labour Leader*, 1 December 1894, p. 7.

²² Koven, *Slumming*, p. 22.

²³ Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 267.

²⁴ Geddes and Thomson, ‘The Moral Evolution of Sex’, p. 76.

masculine egotism. Life was no longer to be considered a gladiators' show, in which only the fittest survived, but rather a vast mothers' meeting of maternal love, reciprocity and self-sacrifice. 'Creation's final law', according to Geddes, was not man's struggle but woman's love.²⁵

A similar notion of the essential part to be played by women animated Bella and Charles Pearce's understanding of racial progress, although for them, the 'liberation of the feminine element in humanity' would precipitate not just an evolutionary 'ideal unity' between egotism and love, but ultimately, the Second Coming of Christ.²⁶ This element of their faith was largely compatible with contemporary feminism, the notion that women's expanded role in the state was justified by their inherent morality, commonplace in late-Victorian and Edwardian feminist discourse. What was far less acceptable was the philosophy of the Brotherhood of the New Life towards sex. According to Thomas Lake Harris, sex was the divine life-force that, correctly harnessed, would regenerate the world, Harris believing that his practices of 'internal respiration' and 'conjugal marriage' would allow his disciples to access a 'transcendent sexual realm' and achieve divine communion with God.²⁷ Yet despite being key British disciples of the Brotherhood, Bella and Charles excised all mention of sex's redemptive power from their discourse. This was not just an act of self-protective bowdlerism, both otherwise acknowledging openly their connection to Harris, but reveals a fundamental clash of ideologies over sex. In an era in which, despite some advances in women's legislative rights, the sexual double-standard endured, marital rape was still condoned, prostitutes were still threatened with harsh coercive measures and birth control methods were still unreliable, fighting for the right to sexual pleasure was simply not a feminist priority. To paraphrase Linda Gordon and Ellen DuBois, for the majority of feminists, the battlefield was still too dangerous an arena on which to seek ecstasy.²⁸ What the Pearces had far less trouble reconciling, was their faith and their politics, like many fin de siècle progressives finding an 'elective affinity' between their ethical socialism and their unorthodox religious beliefs.²⁹

However, despite the correlations between the discourse and behavior of Scotland's sexual progressives and the wider, British context, the Scottish anti-Victorian revolt was nonetheless distinctive, a movement inflected by Glasgow and Edinburgh's unique religious character, ideological traditions and geographical composition. Both cities were clearly on a considerably smaller scale to London, in 1901, approximately 300,000 people living in Edinburgh and just over 750,000 in Glasgow, compared to Greater London's population of six and a half million.³⁰ Furthermore, Scotland is a nation with a particular moral and religious identity, Lesley Orr commenting on the early-Victorian period, that 'There was an identifiable Scottish Presbyterian

²⁵ Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, pp. 311-2.

²⁶ Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens', *Labour Leader*, 8 February 1896, p. 45; Geddes and Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, p. 280.

²⁷ Letter from Thomas Lake Harris to Rev Dr ---, 18 January 1892, TLH Papers 9/238.

²⁸ Linda Gordon and Ellen DuBois, 'Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth-Century Feminist Thought', *Feminist Studies*, 9:1 (Spring, 1983), pp. 7-25.

²⁹ Beaumont, 'Socialism and Occultism at the Fin de Siècle', pp. 165-180.

³⁰ Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh*, p. 4.

ethos which seemed to give the nation its distinctive character'.³¹ What is less understood, is how this national identity may have influenced sexual behavior at the fin de siècle, although Siân Reynolds' research on the Edinburgh New Woman suggests it may have resulted in greater freedoms for women, one Parisian female traveler to the city in 1898 writing that 'in this country, there is such respect for women ... that even very young girls travel alone, under the safeguards of the moral code.'³² What is perhaps more relevant here anyway, is how Scotland's moral character was invoked by the progressives themselves. From the Pearces we have no comment, but for Geddes, Edinburgh's morality was less a blessing than a curse, the city an enclave of conventionality and respectability that nurtured a 'soul-deep hypocrisy', along with a 'routine-fixed intellect and frozen heart'.³³

Exactly how Scotland's moral character and the size of its cities affected the nature of progressivism is hard to ascertain. Geddes's perception of Edinburgh's hypocrisy may have prompted him to pursue with greater vigor his reinterpretation of Celtic sexual morality. However, it could also have been the case that the anonymity which Chris Nottingham argues was crucial for the progressive reinvention of the self was much more difficult to accomplish in Scotland's cities than in London, making the generational rupture with Victorianism harder to enact with conviction. This lack of anonymity could also explain why a prominent subculture based around homosocial desire did not flourish in fin de siècle Scotland. In England, the period saw the emergence of two broadly distinctive discourses focusing on same-sex male love: the decadent aestheticism espoused by Oscar Wilde and the Whitmanesque comradeship followed by Edward Carpenter. Whilst Scotland's archives yield tantalizing hints that both discourses did permeate north of the border, inspiring small, low-profile networks, their Scots protagonists were neither prominent nor vocal enough to attract more than the bemused comment of the Scottish newspapers. The first example centres around Bob Muirhead, a Glasgow mathematician and member of the Scottish Socialist League, who formed a long-term friendship with both Carpenter and Olive Schreiner. Between 1889 and 1890, the 'wonderfully handsome and athletic' Muirhead stayed with Carpenter at Millthorpe, enjoying what Carpenter termed a 'romance of affection' with James Brown, a tailor, poet and fellow member of the Scottish Socialist League, as well as sleeping with Carpenter, before three years later marrying and settling down in Glasgow.³⁴ That such notions of male comradeship may also have been circulating in Edinburgh, is suggested by the 1895 letter from H. Lowerison to Patrick Geddes, in which he quotes a poem from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.³⁵ With regard to the alternative homosocial discourse of decadence, an aesthetic movement referred to as the 'too too business' appears to have surfaced in Edinburgh and Glasgow in the 1880s. Its only reported

³¹ Orr Macdonald, *A Unique and Glorious Mission*, p. 17.

³² Mme Edgar Quinet, *De Paris à Edimbourg* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1898), p. 16, quoted in Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh*, p. 168.

³³ Patrick Geddes, 'The Scots Renaissance', *Evergreen* (Spring 1895), pp. 133-4.

³⁴ Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, pp. 130-3.

³⁵ Correspondence between Patrick Geddes and Mr. H. Lowerison, 2 April 1895, Geddes Papers, NLS, MS 10508A, fol.100.

manifestation however, was a football team known as ‘The Aesthetics’, in an idiosyncratic fusion of iconic Scottish masculinity and effete London decadence, the players sporting sunflower-embazoned football strips, to the obvious bewilderment of the *Bailie* reporter:

“Too Too!” – It would not be easy to think of any two subjects more incongruous than “aestheticism” and football. One has considerable difficulty in conceiving of the die-away disciples of Mr Oscar Wilde plunging through the mud in pursuit of an inflated bladder, and exposing their slender shins to the mercy of their opponents’ heavy boots. It remains for young Glasgow to reconcile the hostile ideas, and the other day “The Aesthetics” made their appearance at Kinning Park, in “new dresses decorated with immense sunflowers,” and “played a creditable game” at football against a veteran team. What will be the next development of the “too too” business?³⁶

The longer-term impact of the ideas of Scotland’s sexual progressives on Scottish society and culture is hard to evaluate. This difficulty is due in part to the fragmented nature of the research on sexuality and gender in interwar Scotland, with work to date focused on specific subject-matter, such as Annmarie Hughes’ analysis of the ‘rough kind of feminism’ of working-class women, Neil Rafeek’s study of the contribution of communist women and Roger Davidson’s social history of venereal disease.³⁷ The reflections that follow must therefore be regarded as preliminary; nonetheless, broad trends can be traced and avenues for further research identified.

The specific religious beliefs of Bella and Charles Pearce do not appear to have endured. Widespread public interest in Thomas Lake Harris’s sexual mysticism, always more prurient than sincere, dwindled on his death in 1906, with the subsequent passing of key followers Arthur Cuthbert in 1911 and Edward Berridge in c.1923 further eroding the Brotherhood of the New Life’s British support-base. In Glasgow, whilst Bella claimed to be asked ‘frequently’ in 1923 for news of the release of Edwin Markham’s much-anticipated official biography of Harris, the failure of this volume to materialize undoubtedly damaged the chances of a twentieth-century legacy for the Brotherhood.³⁸ By the time of Bella’s death in 1929, the Glasgow network of followers had dissipated entirely, Bella’s housekeeper Annie Wood dissuading the American scholars Herbert Schneider and George Lawton from visiting Scotland, for ‘there are now no publishers of Harris books & no library have his books.’³⁹ The subsequent publication of Schneider and Lawton’s exhaustive joint biography of Harris and Laurence Oliphant in 1942 did little to revive interest in Brotherhood theology, with reviews in Britain treating Harris as a curiosity from history, one of many ‘cranks and zealots’, ‘bred a century ago in the fertile American soil’.⁴⁰

³⁶ *Bailie*, 11 January 1882, p. 11.

³⁷ Annmarie Hughes, *Gender and Political Identities in Scotland, 1919-1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Neil C. Rafeek, *Communist Women in Scotland: Red Clydeside from the Russian Revolution to the end of the Soviet Union* (London: Tauris, 2008); Roger Davidson, *Dangerous Liaisons: A Social History of Venereal Disease in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000).

³⁸ Letter from Bella Pearce to Edwin Markham, 1 June 1923, TLH Papers 13/307.

³⁹ Letter from Annie Wood to George Lawton, 15 July 1930, TLH Papers 13/308.

⁴⁰ D. W. Brogan, ‘Odd Bodies’, *Manchester Guardian*, 16 June 1943.

The Brotherhood belief in the compatibility of religion and sexuality may conceivably have intersected with the convictions of other alternative religious practices in Scotland. However, very little research has been conducted into their history, although according to Steven Sutcliffe such 'post-Presbyterian' traditions as spiritualism and theosophy did play 'significant roles as religious resources for lower middle and middle social groups' in twentieth-century Scotland.⁴¹ The continued survival of organizations such as the Theosophical Society of Scotland (the first Lodge was founded in Edinburgh in 1884) and the Glasgow Association of Spiritualists (founded in 1871) suggests that a groundswell of interest and support was retained in alternative religion during the interwar years, with a renewed enthusiasm for new age ideas emerging in the 1960s and '70s. In 1962, the Findhorn colony was established on the Moray Firth coast, by the mid-1970s becoming an internationally recognized centre for the promotion and practice of alternative religious and spiritual ideas. For Sutcliffe, this demonstrates the importance of acknowledging the plurality of the religious landscape in modern Scotland, with communities such as Findhorn providing an important corrective to the narrative of pervasive secularization.⁴² To what extent alternative religion provided a space for unconventional sexual and gender expression is unclear however. H. G. Cocks has argued that overall, the last hundred years has witnessed a 'general decoupling of the link between religious-spirituality and sexuality', with psychotherapeutic discourse replacing religion in the structuring of sexual desire, and religious morals increasingly posited as the enemy of sexual 'liberation'.⁴³ One suspects, however, that this does not necessarily apply to alternative religion, with recent sociological research on the experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual residents at Findhorn suggesting a supportive if still heteronormative environment for 'deviant' sexualities.⁴⁴

What should also be considered is the long-term impact of the Pearces' feminism within socialist politics. Bella as 'Lily Bell' was undoubtedly a pioneer, the first editor of a feminist column in a socialist newspaper, and one who espoused radical sexual politics. Yet whilst she therefore set an important precedent, in the interwar years, the desire to follow both a socialist and feminist agenda continued to implicate women in a complex process of negotiation. Many socialists persisted in their assumption that feminism was a bourgeois preoccupation, labour men in particular retaining 'an abiding suspicion of all women's organizations as inherently middle class and divisive'.⁴⁵ Whilst the ILP may have envisaged itself as the 'Real Women's Party', promoting policies such as equal pay for equal work and the unionization of female workers, in reality a gap between its

⁴¹ Steven Sutcliffe, 'The Quest for Composure in the "Post-Presbyterian" Self', in Callum Brown and Lynn Abrams (eds), *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 185.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ H. G. Cocks, 'Religion and Spirituality', in H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds), *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 175.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Dinnie and Kath Browne, 'Creating a Sexual Self in Heteronormative Space: Integrations and Imperatives Amongst Spiritual Seekers at the Findhorn Community', *Sociological Research Online*, 16:1 (2011), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/16/1/7.html> [accessed 23 January 2014].

⁴⁵ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain: 1914-1999* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 134, quoted in Hughes, *Gender and Political Identities in Scotland*, p. 4.

rhetoric and practice remained. Helen Gault, who as the women's columnist for the Glasgow socialist paper *Forward* was a direct inheritor of Bella's earlier pioneering journalism, commented archly that 'among socialists the belief in equality is only skin deep', a view shared by many women within the ILP.⁴⁶ Despite this, however, Annmarie Hughes believes the party compared favourably to European and other British socialist organizations, with by 1921 women constituting up to twenty-five per cent of the total membership of some branches, and the Pearces' early contribution towards achieving this integration should not be overlooked.⁴⁷

Yet whilst the ILP may have acknowledged its commitment to women, it was another matter entirely to embrace radical sexual ideas, especially in a climate of intense political electioneering. This reluctance can be seen in the response of the party leadership to the Workers' Birth Control Group [WBCG], which formed in 1924 to campaign for the administration of birth control advice through government-funded welfare centres.⁴⁸ Despite the group's emphasis on the economic benefits to working-class women of the limitation of family size, and their emphatic rejection of free love ideas, the male-dominated Labour Party leadership still believed the proposals too controversial to be adopted. The response from the WBCG's president, Dorothy Jewson, one of the Labour Party's first Members of Parliament, was one of resignation, in 1925 commenting that 'It is no new thing for the women of the Labour Party to find questions of particular interest to themselves placed at the end of a long agenda'.⁴⁹ Women may have won the vote, first partially in 1918 and then fully in 1928, yet enfranchisement did not bring the power to transform the political system, which continued to be structured by conventional gendered assumptions.

In some respects, the legacy of Patrick Geddes's ideas is more obviously apparent. He continued to publish on sex during the 1910s, in 1912 writing a 6d pamphlet on 'Problems of Sex' with John Arthur Thomson for the National Council of Public Morals, and in 1914 writing *Sex*, another book for a popular audience, this time for the 'Home University Library of Modern Knowledge'.⁵⁰ Twenty-five years had passed since the publication of the *Evolution of Sex* and Geddes and Thomson acknowledged and incorporated new advances in the natural and social sciences, drawing on Sigmund Freud's psycho-analytic discourse on the significance of childhood sexuality and Stanley Hall's 'discovery' of adolescence as a discreet and significant phase of childhood. *Sex* was also more explicit in tone than the *Evolution of Sex*, and included a lengthy treatise on the need for sex education, as well as a whole chapter on 'sexual vice', although kept its title in Latin and concluded somewhat banally that 'From all such anomalies one turns with relief to the opinion of

⁴⁶ *Forward*, 7 December 1919 and 1 July 1922, quoted in Hughes, *Gender and Political Identities in Scotland*, p. 39.

⁴⁷ Hughes, *Gender and Political Identities in Scotland*, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁸ See Lesley Hoggart, 'The Campaign for Birth Control in Britain in the 1920s', in Anne Digby and John Stewart (eds), *Gender, Health and Welfare* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 143-166.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Hoggart, 'The Campaign for Birth Control in Britain in the 1920s', p. 155.

⁵⁰ J. Arthur Thomson and Patrick Geddes, *Problems of Sex* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co., 1912); Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *Sex* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914).

Sancho Panza the wise, who liked a man to be a man and a woman a woman'.⁵¹ Geddes and Thomson also revised their earlier prescriptions on the psychological differences between the sexes, stating simply that the day of such assumptions was over, dismissing them as 'guesses at truth without scientific precision'.⁵² Overall however, *Sex* constituted a restatement rather than a reappraisal of their theories, the natural scientists reiterating their belief in the anabolic and katabolic origin of sexual difference, the importance of the maternal feelings in social evolution and the need for sexual self-control to achieve the 'poetic and spiritual possibilities' of the evolution of love.⁵³

By 1914, the scientific study of sex was accepted as a legitimate field of study, although it wasn't until the 1930s that sexological ideas gained a broader currency in popular discourse, informing the newly available sexual advice literature. Geddes and Thomson's contribution towards this field deserves to be better recognized. Yet considering Geddes's consistent emphasis on learning through practical experience rather than academic scholarship, it is also important to consider his continued influence in Edinburgh, through the cultural organizations he instigated and social networks he helped foster. Geddes left the city with his wife Anna in 1917, living in India, Palestine and finally Montpellier in France, where he died in 1932. Deprived of the force of his charismatic personality, several of his projects foundered. Whilst one of his halls of residence is still lived in by University of Edinburgh postgraduate students to this day, his Celtic journal, the *Evergreen*, intentionally ran to just four issues, his final Summer School took place in 1903, and the Outlook Tower, his sociological museum, closed its doors in 1905.⁵⁴ However, a number of his inner circle remained in Scotland, and whilst a detailed analysis of their gendered and sexual attitudes is outside the scope of this study, a general assumption of their emotional and intellectual debt to Geddes can be made. The painter John Duncan, after a brief period teaching art in Chicago, settled permanently in Edinburgh, continuing to paint subjects from Celtic myth and legend and in 1909 joining the Edinburgh Theosophical Society.⁵⁵ Both Patrick and Anna's surviving children also settled in Edinburgh, their daughter Norah becoming a landscape architect and marrying the urban planner Frank Mears, and their youngest son Arthur marrying a relative of the anarchist Elisée Reclus and teaching geography at the University of Edinburgh. Other disciples moved away however, the poet Rachel Annand Taylor relocating to London, where after her husband's breakdown she appears to have begun an intense relationship with a twenty-three year old man called Adrian, who 'burns his youthful time and devotion before me with all the passion of youth and the tenderness of an archangel.'⁵⁶

⁵¹ Geddes and Thomson, *Sex*, p. 146.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 8. Indeed, a large section from their 1896 essay, 'The Moral Evolution of Love' is simply restated, with little modification. See *Sex*, pp. 193- 203.

⁵⁴ Postgraduates at Edinburgh University can stay in Patrick Geddes Hall at Mylne's Court.

⁵⁵ Clara Young, 'John Duncan (1866-1945)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [accessed 23 January 2014].

⁵⁶ Letter from Rachel Annand Taylor to Anna Geddes, NLS, MS 10572, fols 33-7.

The interwar period in Scotland undoubtedly had its own generation of sexual progressives. The anarchist and free lover Guy Aldred lived in a free union with the socialist-anarchist and feminist Rose Witcop between 1908 and 1921, although it is not clear exactly when the couple settled permanently in Glasgow. Aldred held strong convictions regarding marriage, dismissing it as ‘serfdom’ and ‘rape by contract’, although like most free lovers, was not in favour of promiscuity, believing like Geddes that as civilization evolved, men and women would become more rather than less monogamous.⁵⁷ According to Leah Leneman, when the birth control campaigner Margaret Sanger visited Glasgow in 1922 to speak at a public meeting on Glasgow Green, Aldred and Witcop hosted Sanger, subsequently publishing her pamphlet *Family Limitation*.⁵⁸

Another group who could be considered sexual progressives were the cohort of female modernist writers now considered important contributors to the interwar literary revival known as the ‘Scottish Renaissance’. They include Catherine Carswell, Willa Muir, Nan Shepherd, Lorna Moon and Naomi Mitchison, who in their novels and essays explored themes of female sexuality, of the changing relationships between women and men, and of women’s roles in modern Scotland. Catherine Carswell’s first novel, *Open the Door!* (1920), depicts the quest of its protagonist Joanna to find sexual and emotional fulfillment, and according to Margery Palmer McCulloch is ‘iconoclastic in the way female sexuality is foregrounded in the narrative’, whilst her second novel *The Camomile* (1922) is similarly unconventional, arguing implicitly for ‘a lack of hypocrisy, for openness with regard to sexual desire, and for a more equal partnership between men and women.’⁵⁹ Willa Muir, the writer, translator and wife of the Scottish poet and socialist Edwin Muir, wrote novels and essays which critiqued the limited roles accorded women in Scottish society, including *Imagined Corners* (1931), *Women: An Inquiry* (1925), *Mrs Grundy in Scotland* (1936) and ‘Women in Scotland’ (1936), whilst Naomi Mitchison often placed women at the heart of her historical fiction, exploring issues around sexual desire, childbearing and female autonomy.⁶⁰ Whilst none of these authors acknowledged a direct link to Geddes’s ‘Celtic Renaissance’, his earlier insistence on the cultural legitimacy of the Scottish voice, of the need for ‘Iona to educate London’ not London to educate Iona, was clearly significant, Murray Pittcock and Isla Jack

⁵⁷ Guy Aldred, ‘Socialism, women, and the suffrage’, *Voice of Labour* 1 (1907), pp. 146, 150, quoted in Frost, *Living in Sin*, pp. 214-5.

⁵⁸ Leah Leneman, *The Hidden History of Glasgow’s Women: The Thenew Factor* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1993), pp. 144-5.

⁵⁹ Margery Palmer McCulloch, ‘Fictions of Development 1920-1970’, in Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (eds), *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 361 and ‘Interwar Literature’, in Glenda Norquay (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women’s Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 106.

⁶⁰ For extracts from Willa Muir, *Women: An Inquiry* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925) and ‘Women in Scotland’ (*Left Review* 2:14, November 1936, pp. 768-70), see Margery Palmer McCulloch (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland, 1918-1939. Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), pp. 193–219.

referring to the movement in Edinburgh during the 1890s as the ‘neglected root’ of the 1920s Scots Renaissance.⁶¹

Whilst the social change precipitated by the First World War and female enfranchisement undoubtedly had some impact on attitudes towards women, the sexual and gendered norms challenged by the interwar progressives appear strikingly familiar. Social taboos on sexual activity outside marriage remained strong, as did the sexual double-standard that Bella and her feminist colleagues had campaigned so vigorously against. As Roger Davidson’s work on the moral agenda behind the provision of treatment for venereal disease has shown, women in the interwar period were persistently viewed as constituting the principal source of venereal infection in Scottish society, with the period witnessing the identification of a new female stereotype of social deviance, the ‘problem girl’ or ‘amateur prostitute’. She consisted of a young, working-class woman who through her unpaid, casual sex and supposedly cavalier attitude towards taking precautions or seeking treatment, was understood to represent an even bigger threat to the nation’s racial health than the seasoned prostitute. As in pre-war Scotland, women were offered a choice between ‘the passive sexuality of the wife and mother, or, as sexual initiator, be stigmatized as a prostitute and the reservoir of disease.’⁶²

Yet despite the relative stasis in Scotland with regard to hegemonic sexual and gender norms, the efforts of Bella and Charles Pearce and Patrick and Anna Geddes in the period 1880 to 1914 to realize a ‘more than earthly paradise of love’ should neither be diminished nor ignored. Whilst their ideas were often more utopian than practical, and were sometimes marked by inconsistencies and contradictions, Scotland’s late-Victorian and Edwardian sexual progressives nonetheless assisted a generation to imagine an alternative model for sexual relations, one based on equality, altruism and fraternity. Whilst they may have been thwarted along the way by a combination of their own and others’ very human failings, as well as by the differing agendas of other political constituencies, that their attempts were conducted with conviction, earnestness and passion cannot be denied.

⁶¹ Murray Pittock and Isla Jack, ‘Patrick Geddes and the Celtic Revival’, in Susan Manning, Ian Brown, Thomas Owen Clancy and Murray Pittock (eds), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, vol. 2: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire (1707-1918)*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 341, 346.

⁶² Roger Davidson, *Dangerous Liaisons: A Social History of Venereal Disease in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), p. 149.

Appendix

Writing and Lectures of Bella and Charles Pearce

Bella Pearce

Ruskin Society of Glasgow

'Duality in Development' (30 January 1899) [lecture]

Labour Leader

Lily Bell, 'Matrons and Maidens' (31 March 1894 – 17 December 1898) [editor of weekly column]

Forward

Lily Bell, 'The Lesson of Cockermonth', 1:3 (27 October 1906), p. 2 [article]

Lily Bell, 'Women's View. "The Strike of a Sex"', 1:4 (3 November 1906), p. 4 [article]

Lily Bell, 'The Women's Movement. News and Reviews', 1:5 (10 November 1906), p. 8 [article]

Lily Bell, 'The Women's Fight for Freedom', 1: 6 (17 November 1906), p. 7 [article]

Lily Bell, 'Christ's "Second Coming"', 1:7 (24 November 1906), p. 5 [article]

Lily Bell, 'The Strike of a Sex' (*Forward* articles 3, 10 and 17 November 1906) [1d pamphlet]

Westminster Review

I. D. Pearce, 'The Enfranchisement of Women', 168:1 (July 1907), p. 17 [article].

I. D. Pearce, 'Women and Sweated Industries', 168:6 (December 1907), p. 622 [article].

I. D. Pearce, 'An Awakening Womanhood', 169:4 (April 1908), p. 444 [article].

Freewoman

I. D. Pearce, 'Marriage and Motherhood', 1:2 (30 November 1911), pp. 31-2 [letter]

I. D. Pearce, 'Marriage and Motherhood', 1:4 (14 December 1911), p. 71 [letter]

I. D. Pearce, [on WSPU and militancy], 1: 6 (28 December 1911), p. 112 [letter]

I. D. Pearce, "'The Freewoman" and Social Movements', 1:19 (28 March 1912), p. 375 [letter]

I. D. Pearce, 'Sex-Equality and the Conciliation Bill', 1:20 (4 April 1912), p. 395 [letter]

Miscellaneous

'Work as an Expression of Life', The Educational Institute of Scotland (January 1900) [lecture]

'Women and Factory Legislation', (1896) [paper delivered at WEU conference]

Charles Pearce

Evening Citizen

'T. L. Harris' (29 December 1891) [letter]

Ruskin Society of Glasgow

'The Relation of Woman to the New Age' (20 March 1893) [lecture]

'The Evolution of the Ideal Life' (18 December 1893) [lecture]

'Arts and Industries of the Russian Peasantry' (27 November 1897) [lecture]

'The Phantom of Wealth' (31 January 1898) [lecture]

'Light in its Relation to Life' (19 February 1900) [lecture]

Glasgow Christian Socialist League

'God and His Social Christ for Glasgow' (October 1894) [lecture]

Glasgow Women's Labour Party

'Marriage True and False: Its Social Effect' (16 January 1896) [lecture]

Glasgow Herald

'The Independent Labour Party' (10 April 1896) [letter]

Labour Leader

'Sophia', 'Matrons and Maidens' (24 July 1897) [column]

'Sophia', 'Matrons and Maidens' (31 July 1897) [column]

'Sophia', 'Matrons and Maidens' (7 August 1897) [column]

'Sophia', 'Matrons and Maidens: The Sexes, what they are and their relationship to each other. In Three Parts. – Part I.' (14 August 1897) [column]

'Sophia', 'Matrons and Maidens: The Sexes, what they are and their relationship to each other. In Three Parts. – Part II.' (21 August 1897) [column]

'Sophia', 'Matrons and Maidens: The Sexes, what they are and their relationship to each other. In Three Parts. – Part II. (Concluded.)' (28 August 1897) [column]

'Sophia', 'Matrons and Maidens: The Sexes, what they are and their relationship to each other. In Three Parts. – Part III.' (4 September 1897) [column]

'Sophia', 'Matrons and Maidens: The Sexes, what they are and their relationship to each other. In Three Parts. – Part III. (Continued.)' (11 September 1897) [column]

'Sophia', 'Matrons and Maidens: The Sexes, what they are and their relationship to each other. In Three Parts. – Part III. (Concluded.)' (25 September 1897) [column]

'Window Bill for *the Marriage of Heaven and Earth* and *The Triumph of Life*' (November 1903) [publishers advertisement]

C. W. Pearce & Co (publishers)

Thomas Lake Harris, *The Song of Theos. A Trilogy. Part I. Easter. Part II.-Emancipations. Part III.-Avatar.* (1903)

Thomas Lake Harris, *The Marriage of Heaven and Earth* (1903).

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Thomas Lake Harris, *White Roses for the Pall*

Thomas Lake Harris, *Hours with Destiny*

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Fortnightly Review

Forward

Freewoman

Glasgow Evening News

Glasgow Herald

Labour Leader

Light and Life

Longman's Magazine

Lucifer

Manchester Guardian

Medium and Daybreak

Nature

New Church Life

Nineteenth Century
Pall Mall Gazette
Pall Mall Magazine
Path
Popular Science Monthly
Punch
Scotsman
Scots Observer
Scottish Geographical Magazine
Scottish Leader
Sociological Review
Spiritual Magazine
Westminster Review

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