

'Anyone interested in women, religion, social action, biography, or history will find this book valuable. And if you perceive that that list includes just about everyone, you are correct.' - Ellen Miller Casey, *Best Sellers*

'As a theologian as well as a feminist Dr Boyd might have a double-edged axe to grind, but the grinding if any is quiet. She has written a thoughtful, sensible, non-propagandising and rather entertaining book, striking a good balance between factual narrative and interpretation' - Kathleen Nott, *Observer*

The three women who had the greatest effect on social policy in Britain in the nineteenth century were Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill and Florence Nightingale. In an era when most women were confined to the kitchen and the salon, these three moved confidently into positions of world leadership.

Josephine Butler raised opposition to the state regulation of prostitution and confronted the root issues of poverty and of civil rights for women. Octavia Hill - artist, teacher and great conservationist - enabled thousands of families to meet the dislocations of the industrial revolution and created a new profession, that of the social worker Florence Nightingale not only shattered precedent by establishing a training-school for nurses, she also pioneered work in the use of statistical analysis, and her practicality and passionate urgency effected radical reforms in medical practice and public health.

These women attributed their social vision and the impetus for their vocation to their religious faith. Rejecting the constraints on women's work imposed by conventional religion, they found in the gospels ground for radical action. As daughters and prophetesses of God they felt called to build the New Jerusalem.

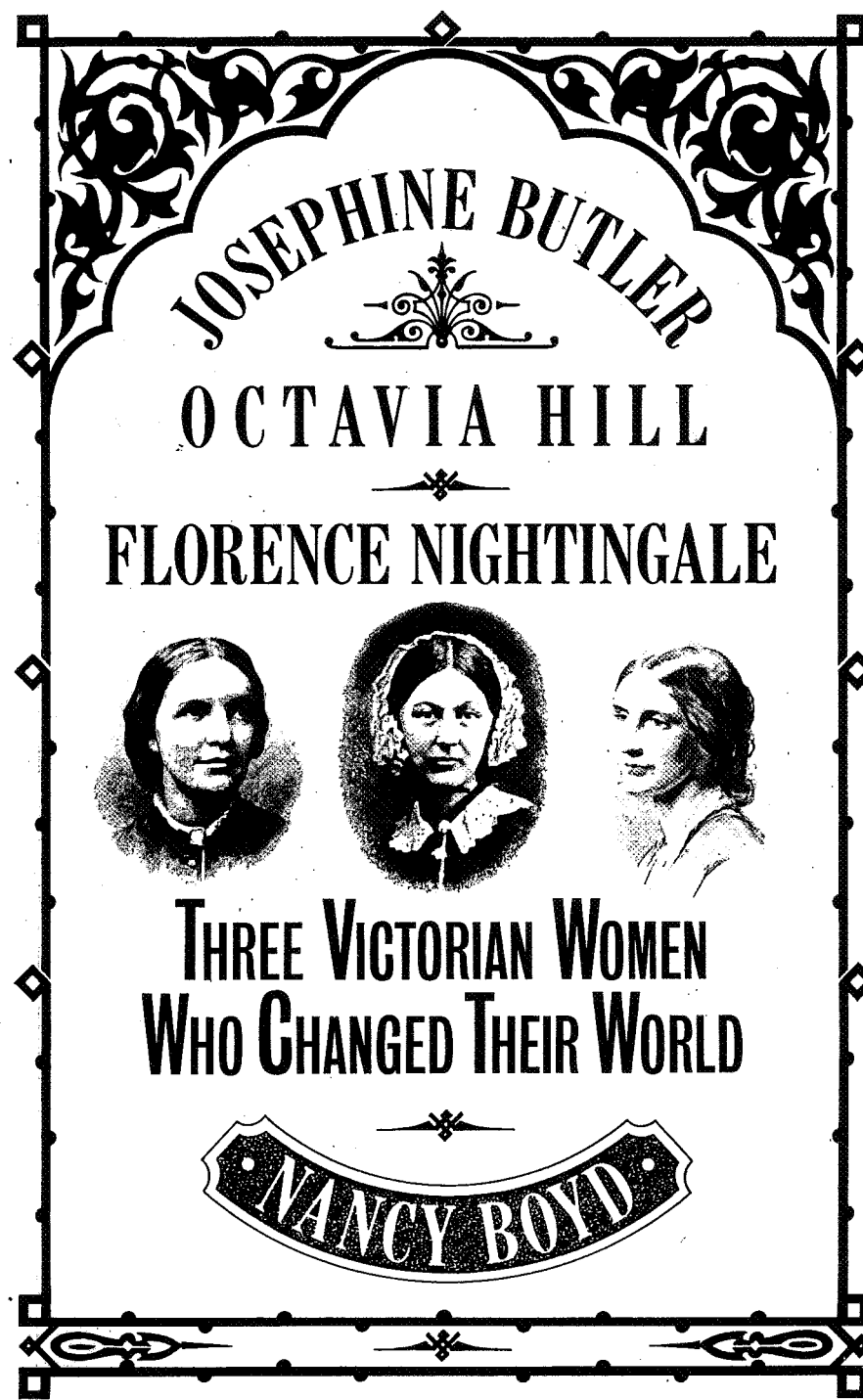
This book analyses their world view, both as a source of social policies and as a driving force. In addition it presents the factors of family, class, time and place that nurtured their vocation and those that impeded it. But the purpose of this study is wider than that. In incorporating the material of spiritual biography, Nancy Boyd works out the relation between the inner and the outer self, between vision and programme, between contemplation and action.

Nancy Boyd holds a doctorate from Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary, New York. She has taught at Northeastern University, Massachusetts, and lives in New York City.

The cover-design incorporates portraits of Octavia Hill and Florence Nightingale, both reproduced by permission of BBC Hulton Picture Library, and George Richmond's portrait of Josephine Butler, reproduced by permission of the Fawcett Library, City of London Polytechnic.

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JOSEPHINE BUTLER,
OCTAVIA HILL,
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

*Three Victorian Women Who
Changed Their World*

Nancy Boyd

M
MACMILLAN

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xviii
<i>Introduction — An Age in Need of Heroism: Great Britain, 1860</i>	1

JOSEPHINE BUTLER

1 A TOUCH OF GENIUS	23
1 Milfield and Dilston, 1828—52: Childhood and Adolescence	23
2 Oxford, Cheltenham, Liverpool, 1852—69: Marriage and Maturity	31
3 National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts 1869—1906: Commitment and Action	40
2 MOST TENACIOUS CHRISTIAN FAITH	53
1 Worldly Evangelical	53
2 Inclusive Not Exclusive	58
3 Seeking God's Thoughts	60
4 The Crusade: Inaugurated by Prayer	64
5 Christ: The Exponent of the Mind of God	68
3 A NEW DISPENSATION	71
1 Your Sons and Daughters Shall Prophesy	71
2 Our Enslaved Sisters	75
3 The Antidote to the Viper's Sting	82
4 Hell Hath Opened Her Mouth	88

OCTAVIA HILL

4 IMPRESSIVE STATURE AND FORMIDABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS	95
1 Finchley and Highgate, 1838—51: Daughter and Sister	95
2 London, 1851—55: Artist and Toymaker	98
3 Working Women's Classes, 1855—61: Teacher and Administrator	103
4 Nottingham Place, 1861—65: Schoolmistress	105
5 Paradise Place, 1865—69: Manager of Housing	107
6 Charity Organization Society, 1869—75: Policy-maker and Adviser	109
7 Kyrle Society and National Trust, 1875—84: Patron of the Arts and Conservationist	113
8 Royal Commission, 1884—1912: Celebrity	118
5 THE GROUND ON WHICH WE STAND	121
1 God in Turner and the Wheatfield	122
2 To Help Others Love Nature and Art	125
3 Providence: The Plot of a Book	126
4 God and the Rent	132
6 A UNIVERSAL FAMILY	143
1 The Prototype of Divine Love	143
2 Charity Begins at Home: Tenant and Manager	150
3 Believing and Doing: A Holy Society	160

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

7 EMINENT VICTORIAN	167
1 Lea Hurst and Embley, 1820—47: Rebel Daughter	168
2 London, Rome, and Greece, 1847—51: Pilgrim and Penitent	174
3 Kaiserswerth and Harley Street, 1851—54: Nurse and Administrator	179
4 The Crimea, 1854—56: Purveyor, <i>Dea Ex Machina</i> , and Legend	182
5 Little War Office, St Thomas's, and India, 1856—1910: Chief, Founder of Nursing, and Governess	192

8 HER STUFF: SUGGESTIONS FOR THOUGHT	197
1 A Critique of Contemporary Thought	199
2 The Plan of Almighty Perfection	205
3 Revealing the Plan	209
9 MANKIND MUST CREATE MANKIND	214
1 Called to Be Saviours	214
2 Having No Other Will But God's	223
3 The Eternal Becoming	232
CONCLUSION	235
1 What They Were Given: Family, Class, Place, and Time	237
2 What They Made of It: Feminism and Faith	244
<i>Notes</i>	252
<i>Bibliography</i>	263
<i>Index</i>	271

As he works, the reason for his attraction to Josephine emerges.

I don't know what he knows about the work I have done, but he spoke to me alone, in a curious, sad, self-reproachful tone. He said he had never been wakened up to try to do good to unhappy people till he was seventy; and he said 'What would I not give to be able to look back upon such a life as yours!' He does not flatter in the least; but he seemed troubled. I said I did not take it up willingly. I was *driven* into it by anger against injustice. He replied, 'Oh, yes, I know you were driven into it. You were destined for it. But some people refuse to be driven; and you did not refuse.'

A few days later Josephine, who must have been familiar with Watts's studies of aristocratic women and the skilled polish with which he displayed their elegantly clothed complacency, stood before her portrait.

I don't know what to think of it, [she remarked]. It is rather terrible. It bears the marks of storms and conflicts and sorrow so strongly. The eyes are certainly wonderfully done. You know I have no brightness in my eyes now. He said he wanted to make me looking into Eternity, looking at something no one else sees.

Later she confided to Watts:

When I looked at the portrait which you have just done, I felt inclined to burst into tears. I will tell you why. I felt so sorry for her. Your power has brought up out of the depths of the past, the record of a conflict which no one but God knows of. It is written in the eyes, and whole face. Your picture has brought back to me all that I suffered, and the sorrows through which the Angel of God's presence brought me out alive. I thank you that you have not made that poor woman look severe or bitter but only sad and purposeful. For with full purpose of heart she has borne and laboured, and she is ready to go down to Hades again, if it were necessary for the deliverance of her fellow-creatures. But God does not require that descent more than once.³⁴

Octavia Hill

4 Impressive Stature and Formidable Accomplishments

1 *Finchley and Highgate, 1838–51: Daughter and Sister*

In 1838 Louisa Hill wrote to congratulate her stepmother Caroline on the birth of a daughter.

I heartily rejoice that the baby is a girl; you will give her strength to endure and struggle with the evils which are the birthright of her sex. She will add to the number of well-educated women, who, I am afraid, form but a very small portion of humanity. But I forget the difference in age. This little baby belongs almost to the third generation. She will be in her bloom when we are old women, if not dead. Great changes may take place before she attains womanhood.¹

These expectations, filled with high hopes, yet with a trace of underlying gloom, were fulfilled in every way. The child Octavia grew up to be one of the very few women who had a hand in the 'great changes' that shaped the century.

Octavia Hill, like Josephine Butler, was fortunate in her parents. Her father, James Hill, a corn merchant in Peterborough, was an exceptional man. Civil rights and education were his passion; he was remembered as the man who rode fifty miles to secure the pardon of the last man sentenced to death for stealing a sheep. A liberal in politics and a supporter of the arts, he founded a newspaper and bought up the local theatre so that he could improve its offerings by importing productions from London. Feeling existing forms of education to be unnecessarily dry and tedious he began the Infant School in Wisbech, one of the first schools for young children. He took the motto for the school from Wordsworth:

Of old things all are oversold,
 Of good things none are good enough;
 We'll try if we can help to mould
 A world of better stuff.

It was through his interest in education that he met Caroline Southwood Smith. Widowed for a second time in 1832, and left with six children (five daughters and a son) to raise, he looked for help. Having been impressed by some articles on education that had appeared in *The Monthly Repository*, he sought out their author and invited her to take charge of his daughters' education. She came to the Hills as governess in 1832; in 1835 Caroline Southwood Smith and James Hill were married.

As James Hill had suspected from reading her work, Caroline was no ordinary governess. She came from a distinguished family known for its leadership in humanitarian causes. Her father was Southwood Smith, a medical practitioner and 'sanitary engineer'. Southwood Smith pressed for reform at a time when there was as yet no definite proof that overcrowding, polluted water supplies, and inadequate plumbing were causes of disease. He contributed to the 1842 Report of the Poor Law Board on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population and on the Means of its Improvement. Having amassed statistical evidence of the correlation between contaminated water and the 1837 and 1838 cholera and typhoid epidemics, Southwood Smith worked tirelessly to develop administrative machinery to regulate the building of sewers and the development of adequate water supplies. The Report was created over the furious opposition of the laissez-faire philosophy of classical economists and greedy landlords. It was a courageous assertion of the right of the State to interfere on behalf of its relatively powerless citizens. With Shaftesbury and Edwin Chadwick, Southwood Smith was among five men chosen as members of the first General Board of Health.

Southwood Smith's personality and lifelong interest would have an unusual importance for his grandchildren. James Hill suffered a series of financial difficulties. Only barely surviving the national banking crisis of 1832, he re-established himself and his family at Wisbech — only to be totally ruined by the depression of 1840. His bankruptcy brought on a severe depression from which he would never fully recover. Southwood Smith assumed

responsibility for the care of his daughter and her children.

In the Highgate house overlooking Lord Mansfield's Park and the Caen Woods, the Hill children heard their grandfather discussing politics, science and international affairs with his colleagues. Octavia, through copying and editing his reports, absorbed his ideas so thoroughly that she was able, thirty years later, to apply them to the current situation. The life was luxurious — 'breakfast in the summer-house, dinner in the garden, dessert in the field where the view was best'² — but through their grandfather and his friends the Hills learned that there was a world beyond the beech trees of Caen Woods and that not all of it was beautiful. Octavia was horrified by what she heard of the potato famine in Ireland. She came to feel an interest in, and a responsibility for, those who were suffering far beyond the perimeters of her own life. Once in the middle of the night her friend Margaret Howitt was startled to see her sitting bolt upright in bed. 'What are you about, Ockey?' she asked. 'Praying for Poland', was the matter-of-fact reply.³

As Southwood Smith's daughter, Caroline Hill had high ambitions for her children. Practical as well as idealistic, she brought up her daughters to accept domestic responsibilities and to welcome manual labour with no thought as to whether it was 'ladylike' or suitable to a middle-class station. Her 'work ethic' was but a small part of her creed. She believed that young children should be brought up in freedom. Unlike her father, however, she felt that they should be somewhat protected against a too early awareness of suffering and misery. 'A child should be placed in circumstances where it can neither do harm, nor suffer; then it should be left to its own devices.'⁴ The protection against suffering — their own and others' — would help them to grow up secure in the conviction that evil is contrary to the mind of God. Feeling that it had no power over them and should have no power over others, they would be strong enough to overcome it. Mrs Hill's Unitarian philosophy, and its benign and gentle rule, were imbued with a high sense of purpose. Her daughter Miranda summarizes it:

It is difficult to express to those who never knew Mrs. Hill what her influence was on those who came in contact with her. On her children it left an indelible impression as deep as life itself, and as lasting. From her book 'Notes on Education' it

will be seen how entirely she felt the *spirit* to be everything in education. She seldom gave a distinct order or made a rule; but her children felt that she lived continually in the presence of God. . . . Her children also learned from early infancy from her attitude of mind, that if a thing was right it must be done; there ceased to be any question about it.⁵

Given Mrs Hill's sunny temperament and the nature of her child-rearing philosophy, it is not surprising that the children (Miranda, Gertrude, Octavia, Emily, and Florence) should be 'noble savages'; they became known as 'the young ladies who are always up in the hedges'. A neighbour remembered that 'they know every boy and girl, cat, dog and donkey in the village by sight and a good many of them by name, and for those whose names they do not know they invent one'.⁶ Octavia worked in the garden, apprenticed herself to a carpenter to learn his trade, and led her sisters on forays into the countryside. At the age of six, when Emily had fallen into a well, Octavia pulled her to safety.

2 London, 1851—55: Artist and Toymaker

In 1851 Mrs Hill, not wishing to remain dependent on her far from affluent father, began to look for a job. She sought employment not only for herself but for her family. It was part of her philosophy that children, who were strengthened by a happy and carefree childhood, could at an early age move confidently into the responsibilities of adulthood. Along with other Victorians, she did not recognize a transitional stage of 'adolescence'. Her children would find their places in the world, she believed, not through introspection but through action. She hoped that proper employment would bring them companionship as well as financial independence. She sought work among like-minded liberals.

At that time a group of men calling themselves Christian Socialists⁷ had started small cooperatives with the object of circumventing the most apparent social liability of capitalism: the exploitation of labour. A manager, paid a small salary, would secure work for artisans. The profits were divided among the workers. A later generation of socialists would dismiss these efforts as amateurish and too limited in scope. The Webbs and

the Fabian Socialists were even more sharply critical. They charged the Christian Socialists with having put off the day of reckoning by holding out an illusory hope and thus delaying the millennium of State Socialism. Nevertheless, in their day these modest efforts rescued many from desperate poverty.

The Hills were enthusiastic supporters of the theology from which the cooperatives sprang. More Christian than Socialist, the leaders had little faith in programmes. They found little value in the architects' drawings of hospitals, prisons, and trade schools; the laws, statutes, and economic reports with which the Utilitarians hoped to bring in the secular kingdom. They were repelled by Benthamite psychology which was tied to the belief that a man is merely a bundle of stimulus—response mechanisms. They felt that no economic programme, no matter how altruistically conceived, could solve the most basic problems. The despair of the worker was not primarily due to his poverty, but to his loss of identity. They proposed to concern themselves not only with bread for the body but with food for the soul.

Accepting the position of manager of the Ladies' Cooperative Guild, Caroline Hill felt that she had found worthwhile work for herself and a congenial atmosphere for her family. Housed in the Guild quarters at Russell Place, an awkward but roomy house, the family made friends among both leaders and workers. Miranda joined her mother, helping instruct the workers in painting scenes on glass, which was reinforced and used on tables and decorative panels. Octavia did odd jobs — reading to the women as they worked, taking charge of the supplies, and acquiring some knowledge of the business. Vansittart Neale, noting her executive ability, gave her more responsibility. In 1852, when Octavia was only 14, he put her in charge of his new venture — toymaking.

The work demanded a certain skill in administration and arithmetic and called upon her ability to deal with a variety of people — the child workers, fellow managers, shopkeepers for whom she filled orders, the Christian Socialist leaders to whom she was responsible. She had to supervise the children's work, which was paid by the piece, to assign the various processes to each child, to choose the designs, to price the furniture and see that, when it was finished, it was packed and sent over to the showroom to be sold along with the women's glass work. In addition she kept the accounts and tried to turn a profit.

Although Octavia enjoyed book-keeping and the chance to use her carpentry, she found her friendships with the children particularly rewarding. When she had first come to London, she had been appalled by the poverty around her. Her own experience was reinforced by Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, a book given to her by a friend at the Guild. Some of her young companions looked as if they had stepped from Mayhew's pages. 'There was poor Denis whose face and neck were terribly disfigured with burns; there was Clara, a tall, over-grown girl from a dirty home, who was half-starved and cruelly treated.' Another child, when she was not at the Guild, 'lived in a dark cellar into which one descended by a ladder, where she sat all day to sell pennyworths of coal'.⁸

It was obvious that the children's needs could not be met by helping them to earn a few pennies, which would be taken home to often uncaring and wasteful families. Seeing the inadequacy of the scraps of food the children brought from home, she suggested that they pool their tiny resources, buy food and cook it themselves. With a white cloth on the dinner table, conversation ranged over a variety of subjects — family life, books, singing, animals, flowers. Once again Octavia found herself at the head of a group of admiring followers. She was distressed to discover that the children had no experience of the outdoors, indeed no recreation of any kind, and began to organize Sunday outings. Hampstead Heath and Bishop's Wood were favourite territories. Gertrude remembered walking there with an older friend, Professor Owen,

who was quietly explaining something about the mosses on Lord Mansfield's fence — all being very still — when to my surprise, the hedge was broken open, and, with a burst of joy, who should leap down from the bank with a staff in her hand and a straw hat torn by the thicket but Octavia followed by a troop of ragged toy-workers happy and flushed, each with a lap full of blue bells.⁹

After these outings the Hill girls would rise early Sunday morning and walk to the Chapel of Lincoln's Inn to hear F. D. Maurice preach. After a while Maurice noticed the young girls who attended daily and Sunday services so regularly, and sought them out. Often he would invite Emily and Octavia to walk

home with him after the service and inquire about their lives and discuss the work at the Guild. Octavia grew to love the services of the Anglican Church and to find in Maurice's theology confirming grounds for her feelings about people and her intuitions about God. She asked to join the Church and was baptised and confirmed at Lincoln's Inn.

When not working, she was caught up in the controversy and excitement surrounding the Christian Socialist leaders. Her letters bubble with adolescent excitement,

Mr. Furnivall [Frederick Jones Furnivall] I admire more and more, the more I know and read of him and, as to Mr. Ludlow [John Malcolm Ludlow], certainly there is not (excepting Mr. Furnivall) such a person in the whole world. He has the largest, clearest, best-balanced mind joined to the truest most earnest wish to help the working classes I ever met with (of course excepting Mr. Furnivall's).¹⁰

At Guild meetings she listened to addresses by Furnivall, Charles Kingsley, and Thomas Hughes. Thanking Miranda for having sent her Thomas Cooper's *History of the Working Tailors' Association* and Kingsley's *Cheap Clothes and Nasty*, she vowed that reading a Socialist book is 'one of the greatest happiness any one can have'.

While her social sense was being developed through her friendships with the Guild's leaders, her love of beauty and her artistic abilities had attracted the attention of John Ruskin. Her first mention of Ruskin in a letter of 1853, indicates that she was already familiar with his work (Furnivall had given her *Modern Painters*). Characteristically, she is wholehearted and impassioned in defence of her hero.

If, as I suppose, *The Times* accuses him of affectation of style and want of humility, I entirely deny the first charges; as I think there is never a single word he writes, which could have been left out without loss, or changed without spoiling the idea.¹¹

Ruskin paid a visit to the Guild in December 1853. He gave the women some advice about colour, reworking two of the designs and ordering five slabs of decorated glass. Attracted by the vigour and warmth of the Hills, he invited Miranda and Octavia

to visit him. Greeting them warmly, he showed the girls some of his manuscripts and sketches and praised their work. 'He evidently thought my designs well done, admired the fir and bramble, blamed my not knowing exactly what colours I should put elsewhere.' He then gave his impressionable young guests one of his whirlwind, somersaulting vaults through the history of civilization, touching on theories of light and colour, the grotesque nature of thirteenth-century art, the ambiguous relation between beauty and happiness. Octavia was dazzled.

This is not half the conversation and we had several others, to say nothing of illustrations and propositions. And now, M. [Emily], do you or do you not wish to hear what I think of it; that *that* which is asked for is given; that, well-used, this friendship, so happily begun, may be a long and growing one; that I have seen a world of beauty and that this might be the opening of a more glorious path.¹²

It is hard to know whether Ruskin's pleasure in the uncritical adulation of his young friends led him to overvalue Octavia's gifts or whether he genuinely believed in her artistic promise. In any case he encouraged her. Mrs Hill reported, 'Ruskin is delighted with Ockey's table, and means to give her employment in illumination. Is this not very good news?'¹³ He commissioned her to copy Dürer and Turner and assured her that her work would be used in future volumes of *Modern Painters*. In the companionship of her erudite host, she would forget for a few hours the oppression and misery of the lives of the people with whom she worked. Then left alone, she contentedly studied her surroundings and prepared herself to work. 'A gold frame with eight Turner sketches hung on a shutter before me, all my working things on a nice wide window ledge, and my little book on my knee.'¹⁴

Ruskin continued to urge her to paint, but he came to recognize that she lacked the artist's singleness of vision. She could not put herself first. He told her that she must paint the faces of the people she saw every day but he foresaw the result. 'If you devote yourself to human expression, I know how it will be, you will watch it more and more, and there will be an end to art for you. You will say, 'Hang drawing I must go to help people.'¹⁵

3 Working Women's Classes, 1855-61: Teacher and Administrator

The inner conflicts between Octavia's artistic and social interests were aggravated by severe external pressures. Maurice had offered to teach a class in the Bible to Octavia's toymakers; the year was 1855. Two years before, his *Theological Essays* had created a storm of controversy. It was violently attacked by the evangelical branch of the Anglican Church as possibly heretical and Maurice lost his post at King's College. The chief financial supporter of the toymakers' guild was a Mrs Chamberleyne, whom Octavia described as 'a strict low-church woman who enters a room talking about "the sinful carnal flesh, etc.," who wishes all children to rise and repeat a text whenever she enters a room'.¹⁶ Mrs Chamberlayne threatened to withdraw her support if Maurice were allowed to teach. Maurice accepted her prohibition. Caroline Hill was so angered by the evident relief with which Vansittart Neale and her Committee had received the Professor's withdrawal that she resigned in protest. She knew that this decision, taken as her daughter Octavia said, 'on very high grounds', would have unpleasant consequences for her and for her young daughters. It meant breaking up the family. The girls would be faced with taxing decisions and unless they wished to return to their grandfather's, they would have to learn to live in poverty.

Octavia did not wish to accept her grandfather's protection. 'I detest any sort of dependence. It is almost hard for me even to imagine a person of whom I could, for myself, ask any assistance.'¹⁷ She felt torn. She sided with her mother and Maurice, yet she could not give up her toymakers. In the middle of the crisis she wrote her friend Mary Harris,

I am working here, where I will continue, as long as ever I have any strength, or as long as I am permitted to do so. My whole life is bound with this Society. Every energy I possess belongs to it.¹⁸

Emily accompanied her mother to Southwood Smith's. The other girls stayed on. Octavia, then but 17, was placed in charge of the workroom. She handled all the finances and accounting; she ordered supplies and planned the work. Realizing the

limitations of toymaking as a career, she started to look ahead for the children, visiting their parents and suggesting vocational possibilities. 'One or two will train as teachers in Infant Schools; others I destine for printing. . . . One should learn some branch of needlework.'¹⁹

Maurice, though preoccupied with his own professional problems, had not forgotten the Hills. Barred from advancement in the great universities, he determined to build on his earlier success with adult education; he would add classes for working women to the Working Men's College. He offered to Octavia the post of Secretary, at a salary of £25 a year. Octavia accepted the position with the understanding that she would continue with her other work. She assumed responsibility for financial transactions and book-keeping and would step in if there were a problem between teacher and student.

For the first time the colleagues with whom she had to deal were 'ladies'. Many of the teachers were volunteers, educated upper-class women who, bored by the tedium of the parlour, and barred from seeking employment, wished to do something with their lives. It was from among women like these that, in later years, Octavia would draw her workers. But she would first have to overcome her prejudice against 'ladies'.

I don't know what there is in the word 'lady' which will connect itself with all kinds of things I despise and hate; first and most universally it suggests a want of perseverance, and bending before small obstacles, a continual, 'I would if . . .'²⁰

Characteristically, Octavia kept adding to her responsibilities without being willing to give anything up (though she did confess to her friend Mary Harris that she had to forgo her Latin studies). She spent several happy hours a day in the Dulwich Gallery, copying Turners; she taught drawing to children; she sought out buyers for her toys and negotiated for the best terms; she tracked down jobs for older workers who were beginning to find the work in the toy shop and the £6 weekly inadequate; she helped Miranda with her students; she taught an occasional class in the Working Woman's College and kept administrative order in the ranks. She voluntarily assumed her father's debts and took on extra tutoring to pay them off. Not surprisingly, she exhausted herself.

To her family and to her workers she presented herself as a commanding and fiercely independent person. They thought of her as indomitable, protected by a practicality that made her 'good only to do a sum, carry a weight, go for a long walk in the rain, or decide any difficult question about tangible things'. With Maurice — and occasionally with Ruskin — she allows herself to show her vulnerability, her need for protection, and her youth. Maurice, hearing that she was becoming ill, invited her to visit him after work. He spoke 'very kindly' to her, pointing out that 'it is very self-willed to try to do without rest'. Octavia struggled with her emotions:

I could not help the tears coming into my eyes, and my voice being choked at feeling so cared for by one so noble, so infinitely strong, so perfectly calm; and a strange sense of perfect peace, such as I have not felt since I saw you, stole over me. And yet I was so hard, so unconvinced, and so strangely bitter; bitter with myself in feeling how much of pride had made me think I could stand without help; and we sat quite silent for a few moments. At last Mr. Maurice spoke in a deep full voice, you felt with a depth of human sympathy in it: 'Will you think about it then, Miss Hill?'²¹

At his suggestion she reduced some of her activities, including church-going, and took extended holidays in Europe and at the country houses of friends. She was warmly welcomed by the George MacDonalds, whom she had met through poetry classes at the Working Men's College. She developed friendships with other members of the College faculty, particularly Jane Sterling, the daughter of the essayist John Sterling, and Sophia Jex-Blake whose wealthy family had permitted her to accept the post as mathematical tutor at Queen's College provided that she was paid no wages. From her Octavia learned that a 'lady' is not always a useless woman.

4 Nottingham Place, 1861—65: Schoolmistress

The entire Hill family was reunited in 1861 when they took possession of a large house in Nottingham Place off Marylebone Street. Octavia was asked to prepare two children for the entrance

exams at Queens; Emily and Octavia were hired as tutors by Thomas Hughes. Gradually, the need to combine these activities became clear. The Hill family found themselves running a school.

A delightfully informal group of teachers and scholars congregated in the old building that housed the Nottingham Place School. They turned a barn into a schoolroom, and in an atmosphere still redolent of horse and with only indirect light from the small, high windows, they conducted three or more classes simultaneously. The school offered the classical curriculum with some additions.

The subjects we teach are the English subjects, Latin, French, German, music (part-singing but not solo singing), drawing, the elements of Euclid and Algebra, also of botany, chemistry, and natural philosophy.²²

For the 'in corpore sano' aspects of their education, the girls rowed on the ornamental waters of Regent's Park and played croquet. In this school that was more like an extended family than an institution, the girls were expected to be self-reliant, punctual, neat, and to help maintain the building. In addition they were encouraged to get to know their neighbours, many of whom lived on the edge of poverty.

Once a week mothers of the toy workers gathered under the reproduction of 'The Last Supper' beneath which Octavia had written, 'These are the living men, we the passing shadows on the wall.' They joined in the singing, listened to Octavia read poetry, helped with the cooking, and ate dinner together. In exposing her well-bred young women students to some of the social realities of Victorian life, Octavia was training a future generation of workers, a generation that would combine the political power inherent in their social position with the intellectual qualifications and broad interests of the reformer. Freed by education from the constraints of their class — the snobbism, the materialism, the prohibitions against work — they would be uniquely equipped to become effective leaders.

5 *Paradise Place, 1865—69: Manager of Housing*

The early years of the Nottingham Place School marked a period of growth for Octavia as well as for the students. She saw that the poor women who came to visit the school were undernourished. Sometimes they fainted from exhaustion, and Octavia, escorting them home, found that they lived in damp and filthy cellars. She was faced with the inescapable conclusion that, even as she helped these families to achieve a measure of economic sufficiency and gave their children a glimpse of a more humane and joyful life, she must do more. As long as the poor had no access to the comforts of 'home life' they could not achieve the beginnings of human dignity.

Private enterprise had failed to provide decent housing for the poor who were flocking to the city in search of employment. To increase his profit, the owner squeezed whole families into single rooms. For the sake of additional rental property, he closed in the courtyards. Cynical and shiftless, he had no interest in his tenants beyond their ability to pay. One unabashedly admitted to Octavia that his deficiencies as manager of housing actually improved his primary business as funeral director. When asked what he did when rents were not paid, he cheerfully replied, 'Yes, Miss, of course there are plenty of bad debts. It's not the rents I look to, but the deaths I get out of the houses.'²³

If decent housing was to be found and maintained, landlords must be able to put the well-being of the tenants and the upkeep of the houses first and the profits second. Octavia Hill proposed that she be put in charge of such housing and that John Ruskin provide the initial investment.

It was a natural suggestion, one that she and Ruskin had arrived at together. In 1864 Ruskin's father died, leaving him a considerable sum of money. John's literalist faith had been badly shaken by biblical criticism, but his evangelical sense of duty burned more fervently than ever. In the next decade he was to develop his economic ideas, sharpening his attack on the callousness of classical economists and the brutal effects of unbridled capitalism. Meanwhile he wished to do something useful. Because he was temperamentally unable to deal personally with poor people,²⁴ he wished to help them indirectly. He sought Octavia Hill's advice. Finally conceding that her social

interests should take precedence over her art, he urged her to 'get [her] ideas clear'.

On 19 April 1864 Octavia wrote to Mrs Shaen, the wife of her friend William Shaen who would become the legal adviser to the housing scheme:

I have long been wanting to gather near us our friends among the poor, in some house arranged for their health and convenience, in fact, a small private model lodging-house, where I may know everyone, and do something towards making their lives healthier and happier; and to my intense joy Ruskin has promised to help me to work the plan. You see he feels his father's property implies an additional duty to help to alleviate the misery around him; and he seems to trust us with this work. He writes 'Believe me, you will give me one of the greatest pleasures yet possible to me by enabling me to be of use in this particular manner and to these ends.' So we are to collect materials to form our plans more definitely; and tho' we shall begin very quietly, and I never wish the house to be very large, yet I see no end to what may grow out of it.²⁵

In the spring of 1865 three houses were purchased. To judge from Octavia's description the name of the court in which the houses were located, Paradise Place, was ironic at best.

The plaster was dropping from the walls; on one staircase a pail was placed to catch the rain that fell through the roof. All the staircases were perfectly dark, the bannisters were gone, having been used as firewood by the tenants. . . . The dust-bin, standing in front of the houses, was accessible to the whole neighbourhood, and boys often dragged from it quantities of unseemly objects and spread them over the Court. The state of the drainage was in keeping with everything else. The pavement of the back yard was all broken up, and great puddles stood in it, so that the damp crept up the outer walls. One large but dirty water-butt received the water laid on for the houses; it leaked, and for such as did not fill their jugs when the water came in, or had no jugs to fill, there was no water.²⁶

A year later the walls had been whitewashed, a community laundry had been established, the water supply was clean,

and the sewage system had been brought up to the standards of Southwood Smith. Moreover, the houses were bringing in more than the 5 per cent interest that Ruskin had suggested as appropriate. The profit was spent on improvements suggested by the tenants — cupboards and laundry equipment. Some of the men kept up with minor general repairs. The older girls were hired at 6 pence a week to scrub the hallways. On Monday nights Octavia, the landlady, made her weekly visits, collecting her rent, and inquiring 'with perfect respectfulness' about their week.

In the decade following the purchase of Ruskin's houses Octavia found herself increasingly burdened with administrative work and relinquished her responsibilities at the Nottingham Place School to Miranda. Furthermore, the range of her endeavours began to extend beyond the confines of Paradise Place. She recognized that her individual attempts to help a few families could only evolve into a sound basis for national policy if placed in the context of the larger issues. How could one be generous to the poor without making them into paupers? What was the proper relation between classes, between private enterprise and state initiative? In 1869 she read a paper to the London Association for the Prevention of Pauperization and Crime entitled, 'The Importance of Aiding the Poor without Almsgiving'. Her ideas were sought by the framers of the Artisans' Dwelling Act of 1875. In that year her essays on housing were brought together by Louisa Schuyler, President of the State Charity Aid Association, and published under the title *Homes of the London Poor*. HRH Princess Alice, who had visited Paradise Place in 1866, translated the work into German. Octavia had become an important and powerful figure.

6 *Charity Organization Society, 1869—75: Policy-maker and Adviser*

While she continued to maintain that the poor must be dealt with individually, and was always wary of legislative 'solutions' to poverty, Octavia found herself increasingly drawn into politics. She campaigned for her old friend and employer, Thomas Hughes when he stood for parliament. (He lost.) She fought to have the licence of a public house near one of her tenements withdrawn. (She won.)

With a hindsight that sees as inevitable the accelerating momentum of Octavia Hill's career, one forgets that the degree of responsibility given to this woman was unique. She, herself, however, did not forget. She speaks of her apprehension before attending the meeting which led to the formation of the first local committee of the Charity Organization Society.

We are having a large meeting in the parish this week to try to organize the relief given; very opposite creeds will be represented — Archbishop Manning, Mr. Llewellyn Davies, Mr. Fremantle, Mr. Fardley Wilmot, and others. . . . Mr. Fremantle, the Rector of our district, and the main mover in the matter, is to call on me to-day. May some power inspire me with intellect and speech; I have hardly a hope that they will place me on the Committee. I shall try boldly, but I think no ladies will be admitted.²⁷

Her apprehension was unfounded. She was not only placed on the committee but invited to take charge of the Marylebone District. This appointment confirmed her as a leading member of what we would call the Establishment. It brought her in touch with policy-makers of national importance and deepened her friendships with a coming generation of Anglican workers in the slums of East London, most especially with Henrietta Rowland Barnett, one of her former managers, and her husband, Samuel Barnett, the founder of Toynbee Hall.

The Barnetts left several impressions of Octavia Hill whom they considered a 'noble influence' and whose philosophy they promoted. Henrietta admitted to occasional exasperation with Octavia's seriousness; she said that some of her husband's best stories had collapsed in the telling 'before her close but irresponsive attention, especially if it occurred to him in the middle that the tale would not be up to her moral standard, for she expected high ethics even in a joke'. The following verbal picture of Octavia given by Henrietta Barnett tallies with the bright, birdlike expression of the woman in the Sargent portrait.

She was small in stature with a long body and short legs. She did not dress, she only wore clothes, which were often unnecessarily unbecoming. She had soft and abundant hair and regular features, but the beauty of her face lay in her

brown and very luminous eyes, which quite unconsciously she lifted upwards as she spoke on any matter for which she cared. Her mouth was large and mobile, but not improved by laughter. Indeed Miss Octavia was nicest when she was made passionate by her earnestness.²⁸

After Octavia Hill's appointment to the Central Commission of the Charity Organization Society in 1875, her advice began to be sought on national issues. Many of the charities had been brought to the edge of bankruptcy by the depression of the 1870s and the policy of giving to all who asked without any thought of their needs and capacities. The C.O.S., as it was called, sought to link the efforts of all the relieving societies in London by establishing a common standard. Octavia was among those who insisted that the giving of charity must be preceded by some sort of investigation, it must be accompanied by supervision, and it must always take into account its goal: increased self-reliance on the part of the recipient. The Central Committee looked beyond London. It investigated the relation of housing and state support in Glasgow and Liverpool and other municipalities that had already committed themselves to housing. It became a clearing house for ideas. With the encouragement of members Shaftesbury and Stansfeld, President of the Poor Law Board, it became politically active. It gave the City Council the power to buy land for housing and to offer loans at advantageous interest rates; it recommended a more centralized form of government for London, giving the richer parishes the responsibility of helping the poor and establishing the principle of city involvement in low-cost housing; it insisted that the Railway Extension Act of 1885 contain a clause requiring that the company replace all the housing destroyed by the railways' expansion. (It was calculated that between 1883 and 1901, 76,000 people were evicted by the building of railway lines.)²⁹

In these deliberations, the lines of division in the Central Committee were often drawn between the clergy who felt that the Society had become heartless and bureaucratic, more concerned with maintaining itself than with ministering to the poor, and the administrators who accused the clergy of sentimentality and reminded them of the near bankruptcy created by the unbusinesslike openhandedness of a previous decade. Octavia found herself in a mediating position, reminding her colleagues

of the imperative need to consider the poor as people, yet advocating fiscal responsibility and warning against the danger that the Society, which was originally designed to seek out the root causes of poverty and advise agencies, would become merely one more charitable society.

It is of the deepest importance that the C.O.S. should not become a fresh relieving society, for added societies are an evil, and besides it can never investigate cases and organize charities as it ought, if it becomes a relief society. But the C.O.S. must score abundant and wise relief where needed, and it must stop that which is injurious. To accomplish these two ends it must win the confidence of private donors and agencies. Besides this, if its investigations are to be trustworthy and effectual and gently conducted, they must be watched over by people of education, with deep sympathy for the poor. You cannot learn how to help a man nor even get him to tell you what ails him, till you care for him. For these reasons volunteers must rally round the C.O.S. and prevent it from becoming a dry, and because dry, ineffectual machinery for enquiring about people; volunteers must win the support of local clergy and support them in the reform of their charities.³⁰

Octavia maintained the pose of one temperamentally unsuited to politics, tripping herself up and sometimes impeding others through her impetuosity and unsparing frankness. Yet during this period her family came to see her as a person who not only had power but the capacity to develop the wiles and subtleties of the politician. Miranda writes:

I think all went very well; and the deep purpose of Octavia's statesmanship — for which the party was given, that of uniting St. Mary's people somewhat — seemed to have succeeded. I feel frightened when I discover what deep reasons of state Octavia has for her actions. I am afraid of spoiling some political combination (parochial rather than political) by some awkwardness of mine, from being wholly incapable of telling what it all means. I feel as if Octavia were a kind of Cecil in her sphere.³¹

This was the period leading up to the Artisans' Dwelling Bill of 1875 (Cross Act), a bill whose provisions reflected Octavia Hill's

work and concerns. She had overcome her antipathy to state control on the grounds that in this case it was needed to do away with the evil of the capitalist landlord. Unlike an earlier bill, it dealt, not with individual houses, but with large areas. It gave the Metropolitan Board of Works and the City Commissioners of the Sewers (London) the authority to make a plan for improvement. (This plan had to make provisions for replacing as many dwellings as it destroyed.) After a long process of confirmation, involving local bodies and even Parliament, the land would be acquired and offered for sale with rigid obligation to rebuild. It is not difficult to imagine the problems arising from this clumsy and impractical act. It did, however, establish a principle — if private enterprise could not house the poor the state must be empowered to do it — and it led to further legislation that more effectively promoted its goal.

Octavia gives a moving account of listening to the Second Reading from the Speaker's Gallery. She was

leaning back, thinking, when suddenly my own name caught my ear. Mr. Shuttleworth was speaking of the Macmillan article . . . and he read aloud from it the description of the wonderful delight it gave me to see the courts laid out to the light and air. . . . The words recalled vividly the intensity of the longing, and the wonderfully swift realization; a great gush of joy rushed over me. . . . I can't tell how tiny it made me feel.³²

Her family saw Octavia as continuing Southwood Smith's career and work. As her mother put it, 'the mantle has fallen on her'.³³

7 *Kyrle Society and National Trust, 1875—84; Patron of the Arts and Conservationist*

It had always been the Hill family's belief that people needed more than food and drains. In 1875 Miranda read a paper to her girls at the Nottingham School giving her views on art. She proposed to start a society which should be called 'The Society for the Diffusion of Beauty'. The title actually adopted was the Kyrle Society, after Pope's 'Man of Ross', John Kyrle, who embellished his native town with a public park and an alley of elm trees. Within the decade enthusiastic members of the Socie-

ty, some of them England's leading intellectuals, were rushing about London setting out window-boxes, painting pictures on blank walls, and teaching slum children to play the violin. Emma Cons, aunt of Lillian Baylis, the founder of the Old Vic Theatre, trained actors; George MacDonald wrote plays and supervised rehearsals; Arthur Rackham painted the sets for Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. Octavia eagerly took part. She handled the Society's finances. Under George MacDonald's direction, she appeared as Piety in 'Everyman'. She offered her advice as an artist to those who were trying to redeem London from the sooty conglomerate of brick and stone that it had become. (One of her ideas — not acted on — was the suggestion that Kingsley's words, 'Do Noble Deeds', be painted in huge letters on the wall next to Waterloo Station.)

The Kyrle Society's purpose was not merely to add man-made decorations to the London scene, but to preserve the beauty that was already there. Octavia was the most powerful and knowledgeable member of the committee concerned with open space. It was a natural appointment; she had always fought for the preservation of space, starting with her own courtyards in Paradise Place. She believed that they were imperative to her tenants' well-being, not only because they provided clean air, but because people might occasionally glimpse a star or the rough arm of a tree. To the irritation of Emma Cons and some of her executive-minded friends, even — indeed, especially — in middle age and from her position of leadership, Octavia spent many hours trudging about in heavy galoshes, trowel in hand, transplanting daisies which she had brought in from the country and formulating carefully detailed plans for the further improvement of her courts. She wished to cover the blank walls with graffiti of an inspirational nature. Glazed tiles in rich colours would spell out high-minded sayings in letters a foot high. Though losing out on Waterloo Station, she was able to put her idea into execution in two courts. In Freshwater Place the purple, blue and green tiles spelled out the passage, 'Every house is builded by some man but He that built all things is God.' Along the wall next to Red Cross Hall ran the slogan, etched in red and white ceramic, 'The Wilderness shall blossom as the rose.' She spoke of the 'healing gifts' of space and called her courts 'open air sitting rooms for the poor'. They were the smallest unit in a conception of space as 'places to sit in, places to

play in, places to stroll in, and space and place to spend a day in'.

The members of the subcommittee on open spaces worked at first with immediate problems. Looking at a map, they pinpointed the obvious targets: gardens of the rich, disused graveyards, abandoned ground left over after a subdivision, school playgrounds. They asked the Corporations, City Companies, and the Metropolitan Board of Works, whether in planning for new buildings, they would set aside a certain portion as public land. Most of these excellent suggestions were rejected. When Octavia heard that the Swiss Cottage Fields, one of her favourite spots for day excursions for her tenants at Marlyebone, was to be built on, she tried to raise money to save them. She could not save the Fields but she did become a member of the Executive Board of the Commons and Footpath Association where she continued to press for land reform. 'We tried, oh how we tried, to get the Quakers to devote to the service of the poor their disused burial grounds.'³⁴

Always preferring private initiative to state control, the Kyrle Society and the Commons Preservation Society continued to search for land in London. In 1883 Octavia wrote bitterly,

It is strange to notice that though other towns in numbers have had Parks given to them the thousands of rich people who owe their wealth to London, or who avail themselves of its advantages, have not, as far as I know, given one single acre of ground that could have been sold for building over, to Londoners for recreation ground or Park, if we except Leicester Square.³⁵

Unable to enlist the support of the rich, the Kyrle Society placed the issue before the people. Octavia trenchantly summarized the situation.

The question before the country, and it is well we should realize its magnitude before important decisions are made, is whether consistently with all private rights there is still any land in England which can be preserved for the common good. . . . Are we, as a nation, to have any flower garden at all? Can we afford it, or will we have beet-root and cabbages only? In other words, is all the land as far as the people are concerned, from sea to sea to be used for corn growing or building over only?

In an age which feels that it has lost not only flower gardens but beet-root and cabbages as well, her words have the sad ring of wasted opportunity.

Although habitually standing for individual rights and limited governmental powers, in this case Octavia Hill speaks like a socialist.

It must be observed that the nation, as a nation, is not held to possess the open uncultivated unappropriated land of England. True, generation after generation has passed over much of it freely, but it seems that the people are not thereby held to have acquired a right to do so. Perhaps this is because such right has no money value; for rights of way, rights of light, rights of possession of soil, even rights on these very open spaces of pasturing cattle, cutting furze and of playing games are recognized by law where they have long been enjoyed. Had the right to wander freely, and to enjoy the beauty of earth and sky been felt to be a more distinct possession, it may be that these rights also would have been legally recognized.³⁶

Octavia and her friends found themselves looking beyond London to the entire map of Britain. There must be an overall plan.

I was impressed with the fact that unless some very much larger view of the quantity of open space needed should be taken by the authorities, and some really great scheme be adopted for purchasing important land *at once*, the time would go past very rapidly when it would be possible to save what in the future would be felt to be almost essential to the health and well-being of Londoners. To secure the support of the public in pressing forwards large schemes, and that at once, I must use all ways open to me.³⁷

The group advocated an approach tailored to the particular political realities of each situation. They sought support from governing bodies and investigated the legal possibilities. The publication of a hard-hitting letter over Octavia Hill's signature was usually enough to arouse public opinion and put pressure on governing bodies. The final move was to appeal to private funds. Some land was saved entirely through private funds,

others through matching funds, a combination of private and public money. The tracts of land saved by these efforts include Hampstead Heath, Parliament Hill, Hilly Fields, Vauxhall Park, and sections of Kent and Surrey.

It soon became evident that the effort of dealing with each property on an individual basis would quickly exhaust the energies of the conservationists. They must organize ongoing private support. In 1884 Octavia's friend Sir Robert Hunter read a paper in Birmingham suggesting the establishment of a corporation which would hold land and buildings in trust for the people. Octavia began thinking about a name:

A short expressive name is difficult to find for the new Company. What do you think of the Commons and Gardens Trust? . . . You will do better, I believe, to put forward its benevolent than its commercial character. People don't like unsuccessful business, but do like charity when a little money goes a long way because of good commercial management.³⁸

Sir Robert's choice of name, National Trust, was adopted. Canon H. D. Rawnsey, with his love for the Lake Country, was drawn into the scheme. The Duke of Westminster was named the first President and the new society moved quickly to assume wide responsibilities. Octavia wrote of her happiness at procuring Barras Head at Tintagel. 'It is not quite the first, nor will it, I hope, be the last of such places which shall thus become in a new and very real sense the Common Land of England.' She was particularly pleased that this gift of property had come through the cooperative efforts of rich and poor, American and English.

Bound up with noble thoughts of British history, of British legend, it seems a fitting first fruits of the combined gifts of members and friends of the National Trust which has been founded to keep for her people for ever, in their beauty, accessible to all, some of England's fairest, most memorable places.³⁹

8 *Royal Commission, 1884–1912, Celebrity*

In 1884 Miranda wrote,

It has come to a point when two peers and a cabinet minister call and consult her in one week. She had Fawcett here yesterday, Lord Wemyss the day before to ask what he should say in the House of Lords, and the Duke of Westminster on Wednesday to ask what the Prince of Wales could do in the matter.⁴⁰

She was offered a seat in the Abbey for Queen Victoria's Jubilee. Her friends got together and commissioned Sargent to paint her portrait.

While Octavia enjoyed some of the prerogatives of fame and rejoiced that her work had received national recognition, she never fully accepted the transition from social worker to administrator and adviser to governments. She was also in these years oppressed by personal difficulties. Ruskin, who was now struggling against impending madness, had turned against her. In 1877 she was briefly engaged to marry one of her workers, Edward Bond. When he seemed unable to break his ties to his mother, Octavia saw him in a different light and broke the engagement. Finally, overwork led to a breakdown. Through an extended European trip with a new friend, Harriet Yorke, who was to become her lifelong companion and helper, her health was restored.

Upon her return Octavia managed to achieve a balance between her love of working directly with her tenants and the increasing demands of executive responsibilities. As representative of the Ecclesiastical Commission she was placed in charge of housing in Deptford and Waltham, bringing the total number of houses under her care to between three and four thousand.⁴¹ Some of this responsibility she of course delegated to other women. For Southwark she reserved her more personal attentions, building a central hall and supervising its use as reading room, music studio, theatre, and men's club.

In 1884 she was asked to give evidence before the Royal Commission on Housing. She testified against the encouragement of state-supported housing, predicting that it would paralyse private initiative and that subsidizing rents would deter

employers from paying proper wages and would add to London's problems by attracting the indigent poor from all over Britain. She warned against surrendering responsibility to government officials whose self-interest in political promotion might take precedence over interest in the poor, and who were already overburdened with other County Council business.

Octavia Hill's career as an adviser to government was advanced by her appointment to the Royal Commission on the Poor Law (1905). This Commission had the job of revising the Poor Law of 1834, whose policies had patently failed. The Majority Report, which Octavia signed, reflected her conservative economic policies: it re-established the principle of outdoor relief, but only on a limited, temporary basis, and it further stipulated that 'the conditions of the able-bodied pauper should be less eligible than that of the lowest class of independent labourer'.⁴² That is, the pauper's wages should be lower. She disassociated herself from the Majority Report on the question of work, pointing out that work that is given special economic protection is merely a form of relief. Here she found herself at odds with Beatrice Webb, the only other woman on the Commission and a former student of the Hill system of housing management.

The conclusion of the work of the Royal Commission marks the beginning of the end of Octavia's career as a public servant on the national scale. With increasing age she focused on the job at hand: if England's future depended upon 'faithful servants', she would help find and train them. Her British students included not only Kate and Beatrice Potter (Webb), but Ella Pycroft, who managed the East End Dwelling Company, and Lily Walker, a founder of the Dundee Social Union. Ellen Chase and Jane Addams came from the United States, and Fr Ter Meulen from Amsterdam. At first doubtful of the utility of and need for Settlement Houses, Octavia came to rejoice at their contribution of dedicated, trained workers. She even achieved a kind of respectability among academics when students were sent her from the London School of Sociology. Like Florence Nightingale, she became a model for, and a mentor to, a whole generation of workers.

She spent an increasing amount of time with her family; she was particularly fond of her nieces and she enjoyed digging in the garden with her friend Harriet Yorke. Keeping herself somewhat removed from the administration of the National

Trust, she was thankful for its growing success. Stoically accepting the death of her sister Miranda, she began quietly and deliberately to prepare herself and her workers for her own approaching death. Her last letter is concerned with the planting of the trust property Mariner's Hill. 'Capell met us, and we arranged about various short dwarf-stone walls, curved, and with ivy in the interstices, here and there, to keep up the bank near the lane and preserve trees thereon.'⁴³ She died on 12 August 1912, and was buried beside Miranda at Brockham on the hillside with the view that had given her 'such a delicious sense of space'.

5 The Ground on Which We Stand

The spirituality which directed this life of great activity and its almost incredible record of accomplishments was deep and, though free from inner conflicts, highly complex.

Octavia Hill was a born pantheist. In the beauty of the countryside at Finchley, she saw the spirit of God: flowers, trees, and other objects of the created world she perceived as tokens of a transcendent reality. At the same time her affections taught her that spiritual reality is conveyed as authentically through human relationships as in the mystic's vision. When she and her family moved to London and undertook the responsibility of working with and for the poor, she found in the Anglicanism of F. D. Maurice a theology that gave concrete form to her strongly felt but dimly articulated views on the value of community and service. Mutual service, the sanctity of personal relationships were given spiritual significance by the sacrificial life of Christ. This vision of Christian community together with her artist's joy in the created world informed her actions as she moved through her life as teacher, artist, manager, and environmentalist.

While Octavia Hill explicitly states her theological views, their fullest expression appears not on the printed page but in her life's work.

Divorced from this theological and spiritual background her accomplishments are something of an anomaly. David Owen admits his puzzlement.

The only enterprise that deliberately sought a less respectable class were those identified with Octavia Hill, a name of immense prestige in the world of philanthropy. Of all the late Victorians few are more baffling to the twentieth-century interpreter. Her achievements were formidable Though her contemporaries regarded her as an oracle on working-class housing and her accomplishments in the field were, in fact, staggering they no longer command unquestioning

admiration. If they were the achievements of a woman of impressive stature, they were also expressions of a social outlook that today is almost incomprehensible and even in the 1880s and 90s was being vigorously challenged. Her own work, placed Octavia Hill not in the vanguard of the main army but, one might almost say, in charge of a diversionary operation.¹

One could excerpt passages from her essays and letters that would show her to be alternately hard and loving, realistic and idealistic, capitalistic and socialistic, naive and sophisticated, forward-looking and bound to outdated theories. The key to her consistencies, and the explanation of her inconsistencies can only be found by analysing her theology and following each strand — her views of God, Providence, good and evil, Christian sociology — to its place in her vocation.

Determined to create a society that would acknowledge the spiritual meaning of family life and neighbourhood and respect the aesthetic and social potential of all people, she ran up against the conservative implications of her view of Providence. Convinced that God is bringing good out of evil, she minimized the interim suffering caused by the relentless pressures of economic law. Her belief that one is required by God to 'cultivate one's own garden' led to an uncritical acceptance of the status quo. Against a loving, idealistic, forward-looking, sophisticated, and socialist view of society Octavia Hill placed an economics which in its social implications was hard, practical, regressive, naive, and capitalist.

1 *God in Turner and the Wheatfield*

At the age of 4, Octavia writes, 'I gave Miranda a beautiful piece; it was velvet and the colours were black, purple, yellow, white and green.'²

At the age of 14, while confessing to Gertrude her disappointment in her own artistic development, she urges her sister forward. The stumbling haste of her letter, the liberal use of the vibrant exclamation point, reflect her excitement.

Do you go on with your drawing? I hope you do. Oh, Gertrude; is it not a glorious thing to think that a divine thought should descend for ages and ages? Think of Raphael and Michael

Angelo! (though I know but little of them), — To think that every grand feeling they had they could preserve for centuries! . . . To think of the thousands of great thoughts they must have created in people's minds; the millions of sorrows that one great picture (one truly great picture) would calm and comfort. Will that never be painted again? Do you think there will? And when? I am going to see the Dulwich Gallery soon. Is it not glorious? I wish you could see a bit of hawthorn I have here, such colours! I am writing a curious letter just what comes foremost in my mind.³

In her opinion Ruskin was not only a great artist, he was, in a profound sense, a theologian, because he understood the nature of reality. To those critics who had found him to be 'mad, presumptuous, conceited, and prejudiced', Octavia indignantly replies,

if it be prejudiced to love right and beauty, if it be conceited to declare that God had revealed them to you, to endeavour to make your voice heard in their defence, if it be mad to believe in their triumph, and that we must work to make them triumph, then he is all four, and may God make us all!⁴

In an era dominated by the heavy hand of Victorian moralism, it is a relief to hear joy described as a theological virtue, a 'great gift' that 'never changes or grows dim'. Like C. S. Lewis she felt caught unawares, surprised to be 'surprised by joy'.

And when I speak of simple joy I mean a feeling, not a thought, a spontaneous gust of delight, which may indeed be the result of a hard long life, which has trained us to see greatly, but which is, at the moment, no effort, not the result of definite thought, but a natural gladness of heart. I felt this joy strongly called up by one or two landscapes by Linnell. One called the 'Wheatfield'. It is a bright day in late summer, and over a gentle swell and hollow, the corn grows; the reapers are already at work, and some of the corn is cut and the gleaners are there.⁵

In her thinking, as in that of many of the English Romantics, there is an implicit Platonism. Temporal events point to the eternal.

It has seemed to me that it is an often forgotten truth, and not a superstition that outward objects and events are all connected with it, that they are meant to be illustrations, and even interpreters of it.⁶

Human nature cannot grasp abstract truths unless they are made incarnate in physical form. With considerable psychological acumen she speaks of the dullness of abstractions, their inability to create emotion. The words 'love', 'gentle', and 'sympathetic' remain inert; yet the word 'mother' conjures up all those feelings, infusing them with life.⁷

This apprehension of the power of the physical has two important corollaries. First, the viewer is constantly reminded of the reality of the unchanging God behind his subjective and changing experience. Octavia contrasts objectivity and the 'God of Truth' with the 'imagination of men's hearts'. In her struggle to observe more accurately, to translate what she saw into the precision and clarity of drawing, she had felt relief. Confronted with outlines and colours and sizes 'which don't change when we change, nor depend for their power or beauty on our thoughts about them' she felt exhilarated, momentarily rescued from the succession of emotions that buffeted her about.⁸

Second, it provides a balance between materialism on the one hand and asceticism on the other. Octavia acknowledges the pleasure brought by personal possessions. 'I think one is meant to use all the blessings that come to one, not to reject them, but to make them one's own in the sense of their being part of one's life, even after they are gone.'⁹ Her own possessions were few. She apparently cared nothing for clothes and her worldly goods consisted mostly of some books, a few paintings, and the crimson curtains that went with her from house to house, yet she did not criticize her more wealthy friends. The rich were blessed; in books, pictures, music they possess the means to read the 'lessons written into the world itself', lessons that 'pour themselves forth to ever fresh forms'. Granted that attachment to possessions may become self-serving and idolatrous, it need not. Ideally, one should prize, even 'cling to', possessions yet at the same time be able to throw them away. The artist and the saint are alike in having this perfectly balanced appreciation of possessions.

I think Gringoire very wonderful. The artist's nature, *alive* from head to heels; that exquisite appreciation of life full of

joy, with the utter readiness to lay it down, which comes from holding things, as it were, loosely, because so much by the heart. It gave me a little of the same feeling as St. Francis, against whom everything was powerless, because he was above pain, or loss, or death, or exile, or fear, and yet to whom every bird was a brother. The utter unselfishness and dignity of Gringoire was wonderful.¹⁰

Events, like possessions, stand outside of time, evoking the eternal. Memory carries the past with us into the present where it continues to shape, not only the present, but our expectations of the future. Anniversaries and birthdays struck Octavia with particular force and poignancy.

'How strangely memories of past years rise in connections with anniversaries, suggesting all the changes that passing time has brought, and all that it cannot bring. The eternal things all safe from power of destruction, seem sometimes the most precious of all.'¹¹

In the eternal present of the Kingdom memory and aspiration, past and future, find a meeting point. As an old woman, after attending a party at one of the playgrounds, she writes of 'both [Presences], those who are to be, and to inherit the world we are trying to make fitter for them as well as the "wonderful dead who have passed Thro' the body and gone".¹² All are drawn towards the Kingdom in which after physical death the 'wonderful dead' strengthened and purified, will assume their spiritual identity.

2 To Help Others Love Nature and Art

The careful attention that she gave to the choice of the right colour for decorative tiles, the white-washing of wall, the planting of daisies, the painting of props for a theatrical venture, and most especially her attempts to save the English countryside and the English past for its people — originated in her desire to make available to all the divine joy in nature and in art.

I have tried, as far as opportunity has permitted, to develop the love of beauty among my tenants. The poor of London

need joy and beauty in their lives. There is no more true and eternal law to be recognized about them than that which Mr. Dickens shows in *Hard Times* — the fact that every man has an imagination which needs development and satisfaction. Mr. Slearey's speech 'People muht be amoothed, Thquire', is often recalled in my mind in dealing with the poor.¹³

Her conversion, like Josephine Butler's, came out of her search for a cause that would place her gifts at the service of humankind and God, thus bringing fulfilment. The conflict between her social and aesthetic natures was harmonized, releasing new energies: it was to this that God had been leading her.

If, as now I think, He has been preparing me by multitudes of things, childhood in the country, girlhood in town, hard work, most precious and direct teaching of drawing, sympathy with people round, affection for and gratitude to Ruskin, and an ever deepening admiration for him, and knowledge of his plans — if, I say, God has been preparing me by this, and much more, first to love Nature and Art, second to care that all should love Nature and Art, and third to see how to help them to do so, will He not give me too humility to take the place he ordained for me in this great work, tho' it be lowest of all, — faith to believe I can help, and oh such energy and earnestness.¹⁴

In creating the National Trust, in helping to preserve the architectural heritage and the beauty of the English countryside, she reflected this world-view that bound together past, present and future, 'clinging to' possessions yet making them available to all.

3 Providence: The Plot of a Book

In the teachings of F. D. Maurice she found a faith that gave new scope to her own views. Affirming the God of nature, he rooted creation in a specifically Christian theology. Like her, Maurice believed that the spirit of God is universal; but he further believed that the source of the 'Light that lighteth everyman' is particular; it is the 'Light of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. He, too, believed in eternal life but he founded his belief, not in a

vague intuition, but in the reality of the Resurrection. The Resurrection as the ultimate statement of the bringing of life from death, of good from evil, showed that the God of the hawthorn, the wheatfields, and the Turner landscape is also the God of history, bringing order from chaos, giving meaning to the human struggle for justice. Furthermore, the sacrificial life of Christ, ending in the ultimate self-giving of death on the Cross, has created the model for human life. The life of the 'joyful creature' who worships beauty is enlarged and deepened through the acknowledgement of the God of society. Life in community — the community of the family and of the nation — is the heart of Maurice's Christian Socialist gospel.

In the evenings the Hill girls, exhausted from work, read aloud from Maurice's *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy*, a history of ideas couched in two volumes each of which is over 700 pages. Octavia read and re-read the *Theological Essays*, particularly the essay on eternal life that had been responsible for Maurice's dismissal from King's College. She reported that during 1851 and 1854 she had attended all but four of Maurice's sermons, staying in the city even on holidays to hear the renowned preacher. (Many have ranked Maurice with Newman as one of the two greatest preachers of the nineteenth century.) Several of Maurice's sermons appear in condensed form in her letters: the young girl is eager to impart the new faith she has discovered to her family and friends. She speaks with the excitement of one who has found, not a new point of view, but the ordering and articulation of principles which had been the basis of her own beliefs. To Emma Cons, who had some reservations about Maurice, she responds with the indignation of one betrayed; her retort is a capsule summary of Maurice's theology.

I told her I would never tell her anything again; however, instead of that, I told her a great deal more than I ever did before. I told her that it was he who had led me to the Church, who had shown me a life in the creeds, the services and the Bible; who had interpreted for me much that was dark and puzzling in life; how the belief in a Father, a Son, and a Holy Ghost might be the most real faith, not a dead notion; that I might believe not only that God was manifesting himself to each man in the inward consciousness of light and beauty in himself and all around; that those had led to infinite perplexi-

ties and doubts, but that a real person had come among us, who had known the Father, whose will had been brought into harmony with His; that He was stronger than doubts and sorrow and had overcome them; that He had declared that we might have life, that life was knowledge of God. From this conversation came a determination that Miss Cons and I should read the *Theological Essays* together.¹⁵

In a letter to Mary Harrison she describes Maurice as the man who rescued her from 'speculations' and showed her the basis for faith. She enclosed two of Maurice's addresses. She asked rhetorically whether in view of his accomplishments

you could not fail to respect him. But if to this was added the consciousness that he had been the agent of showing you the ground on which you were standing, the sun by whose light alone you could work. . . .¹⁶

Though Maurice, like Octavia, held that the light is universal, he believed that its source is specific. Christ the source transforms an ideal into reality. Since truth was perfectly realized, not in the formulations of the philosophers or even in the artist's vision, but in a God who became human, the lives of all human beings have been redeemed. As a Christian she commended Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, describing it as 'one of the noblest books I have read', because it is uniquely qualified to counter the 'evil of the day, sadness'.

I speak of that sorrow which eats into the warmest heart, and fights ever against their energy, urging them to hopelessness and despair, the selfish sadness that asks itself continually, 'What have I of joy?' I speak of the sadness pervading all classes, which rushes with sickening force on the young lady who has danced most gaily at the ball, when she begins to unfasten her sash in her own room; which weighs heavily on the comfortable old lady as she sits in her drawing room, to receive guests; which makes the worker gaze in gloomy despondency on the long long wearying days of toil, and makes the poor man say, 'Nothing but care and trouble, and hard work and the workhouse at last', — each and all saying, 'What is the end and purpose of all this?' I feel the book is a healthy blow at all this way of looking at things.¹⁷

Christianity, placing human relationships at the heart of the divine economy, had found 'joy' in the human face. 'What is great enough for joy? Not the earth, nor the sea, nor the sky . . . I think Heaven and people's eyes must be alike . . . for there is room for any amount of joy in them.'¹⁸

Belief in a central meaning bound together the events of life. She compares providence to the plot of a book.

Is there not a strange binding up of first and last in life which gives one a sense of government in it, not of warning, not of chance, but of distinct plan, as when in a noble book the beginning explains the end, and the end gathers up the beginning . . . There is a certain height of noble passionate enthusiasm, a grasp of a grand ideal, a faith in the possibility of even here attaining to it, which ought to accompany us through life, like a scale at the side of a picture by which we may measure things later on.¹⁹

Providence, however, is more than an ideal and a scale of measurement; it is also the means by which the ideal is realized. The circumstances and events of life, properly understood, are the means by which God educates the human race. To a God who, though all powerful, has chosen the path of humility, suffering an ignominious death, we can trust ourselves, our lives and the lives of those we love.

What one would desire for those one loves would be as much knowledge as can be obtained to the right rules of life, and such entire trust in God that all outward things may be felt to be in His keeping, so that we may be content in whatever state we are, and walk calmly above all loss.²⁰

In the context of this absolute trust in God and the assurance of the Resurrection, the problem of evil is greatly reduced. Josephine Butler had wrestled with the powers of darkness, 'shrieking aloud to God'. Only after this long and painful struggle had she reached her conclusion that evil is necessary for a greater good, part of the drama of light and shade that gives life a spiritual dimension. Octavia's latent Platonism and confident nature, nurtured by a mother who believed in protecting young children from the knowledge of the world's tragedies and sor-

rows, provided her with a ready answer. Like her teacher Maurice who had been charged with a superficial and un-Christian understanding of the problem of evil, she believed primarily that evil is an absence of good; it is equated with ignorance and has no independent ontological life of its own.

When she arrived in London as a young girl she had been appalled by her first experience of poverty.

There where the Christmas tree stood, I had sat and watched, through the great window, the London poor pass in rain and fog. There I sat and cried thirteen years ago at the remembrance of Tottenham Court Road on Saturday night with its haggard faces. There the first awful wonder about why evil was permitted came to me, and I remember well saying, 'Miranda, I don't believe in a resurrection, or that if there were one it would be a blessing, because a little rest for one's brain would be the best thing. It would be very hard to get up and begin questioning and wondering again.'²¹

This shock, however, was mitigated by her emerging faith. The evolution of her views is apparent in her conversations with Ruskin. In 1858 Ruskin, despondent over his failed marriage, his strained relationship with his parents, and his growing religious scepticism, sought out the Hills. He confessed his difficulties with Christian doctrine. He claimed that when he did what he believed to be right, it turned out badly; God did not bring good from evil. The Hills asked for an example.

Well, I will give you a small crumb of an instance. When I was traveling a great many years ago, at a time my father was ill, I met with a picture of Turner's, one of the finest he ever did. I did not quite know the value of it myself; and I knew that it would vex my father if I bought it without his leave; so I wrote back to him.

While he waited for his father's reply the Turner was sold to someone who later allowed it to be destroyed.

It is always the way when I do right. Miss Edgeworth [Maria Edgeworth] would have made the picture go to a round of people, converting them to Turner, and come back to be

crowned with laurel. I was brought up on Miss Edgeworth's principles but I have not found them at all true in my case.

The girls seemed momentarily daunted by this story, but Mrs Hill, whose optimism matched that of her daughters, suggested that good had come from Ruskin's life. Ignoring his Turner story, she pointed out that Ruskin's views on art had been misunderstood, he had suffered; yet in the end he had achieved the power of 'exciting noble and beautiful emotions'. She concluded by saying

that she thought when people did right, the good they expected often did *not* come . . . but that, tho' they had to suffer for want of judgment, in the end they were always blessed; but in different ways from those that they had expected; that, as long as people calculated results, they could not do right; they must do right for right's sake.

The conversation turned to other matters. Ruskin listened to a letter from Miranda in Florence. He showed them some of his sketches. Once more the subject of suffering was broached. Emily said that it was comforting to look back 'and see how things which had seemed so sad turned out as blessings'. Ruskin said, 'It may be so with you good people, but if I look back it is to find blunders. To remember the past is like Purgatory.'²²

Five years later the debate took a somewhat different form. Ruskin, his energies further depleted by the collapse of his faith, had spoken despairingly of being abandoned by God. Octavia's answer described suffering as one of the means by which we know God; since Jesus experienced loneliness and abandonment, by identifying our isolation with His we can also participate in His love and its triumph in the Resurrection. Paradoxically, experience of the loss of God attests to the existence of God.

I said the sense, of course, was most terrible, most real, but that I could not believe that any one was ever really left. I spoke of the cry on the Cross: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' of the certainty we all have that God was near then, that, whoever was or was not left, one was quite sure that the imperfect and weak would be the last to be left; of the

sufficiency for all purposes of life of perfect trust in God, of our power to live in that when all other faiths shook and crumbled.

Ruskin presses her further, speaking of all the doctrines that 'may be shaken' and asking for 'all the help you can give me'. Octavia, using not only the arguments of her teacher Maurice but even his patterns of speech, acknowledges the validity of Ruskin's doubts while she searches out the truth which lies beneath them.

Doubt immortality if you can. Dare you not trust yourself, and even all men, to Him who made and taught them? Doubt the Old Testament, and does not life remain? I cannot interpret mine, or those I watch, without such a God as it shows. Doubt even the Gospels and what remains? I cannot lose from out of me the knowledge of the supreme sufferer and His infinite love; no other character can be that of the Father, Whose love is near us.²³

These two themes — God bringing good out of evil, and human suffering as sanctified by the suffering of Christ — remained of central importance to Octavia. As an old woman, after the death of her beloved sister and companion Miranda, she wrote,

In every deed there is a fellowship of suffering. Our modern way of looking upon suffering as a thing which by good arrangement, we can get rid of, misses often that solemn sense of its holiness, which those who live in constant memory of our Lord's suffering, enter into.²⁴

4 *God and the Rent*

Her friends compared her to Hercules; Octavia's hero was St Christopher, the man who carries the Christ child and his burden, the sins of the world. While her work did not involve her in the soul-searing confrontations with desperate misery and the acrimonious political conflicts that so taxed Josephine Butler, the scope of her interests placed a heavy responsibility

upon her — the saving of open space and historic monuments all over England, the management of thousands of homes. Alongside these far-reaching and endlessly demanding professional concerns, she maintained close relationships with family and friends, co-workers and tenants, carrying on a voluminous correspondence.

The disciplined zeal with which she went about her daily tasks (albeit punctuated by bouts of prolonged illness), her fearlessness in attacking the highly placed and powerful, she attributed to her faith in providence. It sustained daily life, making it possible for her to find satisfaction in unpleasant circumstances and work that went against her temperament. Essentially a country woman, she was never reconciled to the ugliness and barrenness of London. Yet on her nineteenth birthday, she had written to Minnie:

It is good to be *here*, good to learn to love the beating heart of London life, that throbs with vast desire, and great purposes — good to learn to turn our looks above all beauty and comfort, while our feet are upon stones; good above all to learn to say 'That Thou hast placed me here, Lord', implies that I have a work to do here.²⁵

The conviction that she was acting as an agent for God gave her not only energy but authority.

'Break out a window there in that dark corner; let God's light and air in' or, 'Trap that foul drain, and shut the poisonous miasma out'; and one has the moral power to say, by deeds, which speak louder than words, 'Where God gives me authority, this, which you in your own hearts know to be wrong, shall not go on. I would not set my conviction, however strong it might be, against your judgment of right but when you are doing what I know your own conscience condemns, I, now that I have the power, will enforce right!²⁶

Social critics have differed in their responses to this confidence. Enid Gaudie finds it on the whole beneficent.

This enviable Victorian certainty about what was right gave Miss Hill and others like her the strength to go among the poor without being discouraged, to display her own behaviour,

with the whole back-ground of culture which induced it, as undoubtedly right, undoubtedly superior.²⁷

Beatrice Webb understood it as a negative; she found Hill's legislation of morals to be arrogant and hypocritically self-serving. Henrietta Barnett admired Octavia Hill, yet she criticized her 'exaggerated cordiality'. It was, she believed, an out-growth of the false relationship implicit in any form of *noblesse oblige*.

There is another side, however, to Octavia's faith in God's plan. While on the one hand God was 'directing' her work and supporting her efforts, He was also teaching her that she was a means to a greater end. Since her authority was derived, it was not unbounded. Speaking to her friend Janey Senior, the first woman to be appointed as inspector of schools, she describes their work as the 'out-of-sight piers driven deep into the marsh, on which the visible ones are carried, that support the bridge'.²⁸ There were times when she drew back from asserting her presence and her ideas. Although her friends tried to persuade her to move from Marylebone and take up the larger responsibilities of running the newly established settlement houses, she declined.

I can't help thinking it would be turning my back on the principles of a life-time. My sister and two of my friends here have all their work in this neighbourhood; it has gathered around this home and will continue centred round the new one. . . . So, if we moved, I should uproot and alter the whole character of three people's work. . . . It would not all be gain. . . . For, I ask myself, is not this work a new one? Is it not right that it should develop much in accordance with the aspirations of a younger generation? . . . Will not this very limitation of not living there keep my rather over-powering presence just far enough away to foster native growth?²⁹

The picture evoked by some of Octavia's critics of the strong-jawed insensitive woman bent on getting her way at any price, is not confirmed by a close reading of the letters. Her system, far from being the rigid programme of a dictatorial nature, gave scope and flexibility to her fellow-workers. 'I have therefore usually said, "Look for yourself, but look with the sound of my words ringing in your ears".'³⁰

She belittled her accomplishments; her ideals, however, she hoped would live on. The words with which she thanked her friends for the portrait presented to her in 1898 serve as a fitting testament to her modesty and the grandeur of her vision.

When I am gone, I hope my friends will not try to carry out any special system, or to follow blindly in the track which I have trodden. New circumstances require various efforts; and it is the spirit, not the dead form that should be perpetuated. When the time comes that we slip from our places, and they are called to the front as workers, what should they inherit from us? Not a system, not an association, not dead formulas. We shall leave them a few houses, purified and improved, a few new and better ones built, a certain record of thoughtful and loving management, a few open spaces, some of which will be more beautiful than they would have been but what we care most to leave them is not any tangible thing, however great, not any memory, however good, but the quick eye to see, the true soul to measure, the large hope to grasp the mighty issues of the new and better days to come — greater ideals, greater hope, and patience to realize both.³¹

Octavia Hill's management may not have been a 'special system'; it was, however, based on specific principles. Convinced that there was no situation 'in this, God's earth' where right is impossible, believing that mundane 'circumstances' are vehicles through which the love of God is conveyed, she urged her people to 'cultivate their own gardens'. She exalted the value of work and condemned the almsgiving of well-meaning philanthropists which, she believed, destroyed the very order it was trying to create. She accepted the ruthless pressure of economic law as part of the created order. In addition, she advised women to keep their place, at least in the realm of politics.

The 'quiet, regular, orderly management of affairs; the habitual obedience to the right rules of life', which she enjoined upon herself, she believed should be made possible for her tenants:

A practical woman, she found spiritual meaning in plumbing and the coin tucked under the mattress. The cause-and-effect relation between dirt, over-crowding, a contaminated water supply and death and disease was a God-given reality. She required that her tenants maintain a modicum of cleanliness and

order. Financial obligations were equally exact; the work for pay that would be spent on food, clothing and rent was required as a moral duty. It ensured the independence and self-respect of the tenant as well as the acceptance of obligation, the acknowledgement of dependence upon economic laws which, as much as physical, govern the world. Octavia Hill offered no apology. She made her housing available to the 'respectable', that is the working poor,³² because she felt that only those who had shown themselves capable of holding a steady job could begin to understand the 'circumstances' of God's plan. The man who worked, supported his family, put aside a portion of his earnings to tide him over, was already on his way.

Financial accountability was important even in the initial selection process. Ellen Chase, one of the managers, expressed the Hill philosophy when she advised other workers to be tough-minded in their scrutiny of applicants for tenancy. With a realism born of experience and a remarkable degree of psychological insight, she offers the following suggestions:

Learn what is necessary as incidentally as you can. Note what furniture they have, how the home is kept, how the neighbours appear. It is best to see both man and wife, the more presentable of the two is apt to apply An offer to pay a month does not especially recommend an applicant, as a man in constant work would fall into the usage he found without question, one to whom a half-sovereign is more of a rarity, feeling uncertain of his next, or too weak to trust himself, urges it on one.³³

The new tenant was required to pay the rent on a weekly basis.

There is firstly, the simple fulfilment of a landlady's bounden duties and the uniform demand of the fulfilment of those with the tenants. We have felt ourselves bound by laws which must be obeyed, however hard obedience might often be.

Though this system, as we will see, was tempered by 'individual friendship' between tenant and landlady which sometimes deferred — or even excused — the payment of the rent, financial accountability remained the linchpin of the Hill management. If the tenant failed to meet his obligation he was eventually evicted. (Miss Chase is explicit in describing the means of

extracting rent from a reluctant tenant before going on to furnish the process and details for eviction: the first notice, the second notice, the role of the broker, the legal rights of the tenant and the owner, etc.)

Octavia contrasts the anarchy of the pauper to the ordered life of the working poor. Drifting on the surface of society, without direction, without the means of sustaining his family, the pauper has been cast outside the cause-and-effect relationships that hold the universe together.

A man accepts underpaid work; a little is scraped up by one child, a little begged by another; a gigantic machinery of complicated charities relieves a man of half his responsibilities; not once and for all clearly and definitely, but — probably or possibly he gets help here and there. There is no certainty, no quiet, no order in his way of subsisting. And he has an innate sense that his most natural wants ought to be supplied if he works; so he takes our gifts thanklessly and then we blame him or despise him for alternate servility and ingratitude; and we dare not use his large desires to urge him to effort; and, if he will make none, let him suffer; but please God one day we shall arrange to be ready with work for every man, and give him nothing if he will not work; we cannot do the latter without the former, I believe.³⁴

Octavia Hill's system provided no place for the disordered and the desperate, not because she felt that they were 'unworthy' but because she could think of no way to reach them.

Her attitude towards the almsgiving that helped create pauperism is implicit in her description of the pauper himself. Her objections were both practical and theological. She realized early that if she offered housing without ensuring adequate returns she would soon lose her business, and hence her ability to serve the poor; the open fist would become the empty hand. (While this might seem an obvious point, there were philanthropists who did not recognize it. In the 1880s there was a series of bankruptcies among large charitable organizations; some found themselves the first among paupers.) Octavia meant to hold her returns to a low rate, but one that would make a small profit, most of which would be put into improvements decided on by the tenants. The figure she arrived at was 5 per cent, a good

7 to 10 per cent lower than that required by the profiteering capitalist landlords.

Octavia Hill's theological objections to almsgiving, shared with most Victorian philanthropists, are complex. Given the role that almsgiving had played in Christianity, they seem astonishing. The Early and Medieval Church had blessed both begger and giver. The mendicant, in renouncing possessions and casting himself utterly on the providence of God, displayed an enviable depth of faith. In addition he had opened an opportunity to his neighbour: the passer-by fulfilled the cardinal duty of charity in dropping a coin into the cup. Yet beginning in the sixteenth century the practice was discouraged. By the end of the nineteenth it was passionately condemned. Kindly Samuel Barnett, who did as much for the poor of London as any man, said, 'Indiscriminate charity is among the curse of London.' 'Nothing was more difficult to deal with than the soft-heartedness which could see nothing but hard-heartedness in the refusal to give', wrote Henrietta Barnett.³⁵ She reported that Samuel had caught an old gentleman red-handed in the act of dispensing charity. The guilty party had been sitting at the end of the table next to an applicant. While appearing to listen with close attention as Octavia Hill explained to the woman that the C.O.S. could not give her money, he had slipped her six-pence under the table. Canon Barnett gave him a dressing down that reduced the old gentleman to tears.³⁶

The explanations for the reversal in attitude, as presented in the classic studies of R. H. Tawney and Max Weber, depend upon the convergence of Protestantism and capitalism on two points: the importance of the individual and the evidence for sanctity to be found in the life of the successful worker. Octavia Hill did not share the Puritan suspicion that poverty is, if not actually a sin, at least a mark of God's disfavour. She did, however, believe that work — with or without pay — is a virtue, a 'joyful occupation' which must be made available to all. It is a protection against chaos and anarchy, the acknowledgement of human dependence on economic law and since most work is done in company, the context of the mutuality and self-giving that are at the heart of the Gospel. She hated almsgiving because she felt that it perpetuated unemployment and encouraged passivity and dependence.

Octavia Hill opposed almsgiving: she did not oppose philanthropy. She suggested that the old forms of charity, suitable to a

feudal and agricultural society, had been rendered obsolete by the Industrial Revolution. Society has a duty to create new forms.

Never let us excuse ourselves from seeking the best form in the indolent belief that no good form is possible and things are better left alone nor, on the other hand, weakly pleading that what we do is *benevolent*. We must ascertain that it is really beneficent too.³⁷

She suggested that in the nineteenth century work in society and gifts of land would have been more effective than the handout.

Octavia Hill's philanthropy was not *laissez faire*; her economics was. She accepted uncritically the conventional economic wisdom, which probably reached her through Jane Hughes Senior and the Nassau Senior family. Almsgiving or any other tampering with a part of the economic system would have immediate and disastrous effects on every other part of the system. The poor would be the first to be hurt; if rents were subsidized, wages would drop. Almsgiving would lead to increasing unemployment and 'demoralization'. Yet she must have placed her own experience against these theories. She had known first-hand the destructiveness of financial failure. Her father, a 'deserving' man, had been devastated by a bankruptcy brought on through no fault of his own; it had destroyed his health and broken up his family. Octavia felt his unhappiness deeply and after each visit admitted to feeling severely depressed.³⁸ She herself had been forced to give up her venture in toymaking. Though well-managed and filling an important social need, it did not pay.

One might wonder why, believing capitalism to be a fragile mechanism and knowing the damaging effects of its failures, she did not consider the alternatives. Where was the eager girl who spoke of reading a socialist book as 'one of the greatest happiness any one can have'? Did she not read Ruskin's 'Unto This Last'? She seems, however, to have had little interest in the later developments of socialism. She considered William Morris to be an appealing but impractical man. Her early social ideals had been eroded by the growing left and right wings of anarchism and state socialism. Anarchism held no attraction for this woman who hated bloodshed and had given her life to creating harmony

and order; state socialism went against her belief in freedom and individualism. Deploring Beatrice Webb's faith in science, objectivity, and programmes, she foresaw a nation in which the ideals of socialism would be destroyed by bureaucratic power, greed, and sloth. In her view, 'state' and 'socialism' were opposed concepts. Socialism would never be brought about through legislation and social engineering; true socialism was life in a community that respected the individuality of its members and acknowledged its dependence on God — its basis was spiritual, not economic. Government by its very nature lives by the manipulation of power and the jockeying for position of different interest groups. It could in no way embody the 'self-giving' which was the basis of Octavia Hill's Christian Socialism. In choosing to accept an unbridled capitalism Octavia Hill found herself 'in charge of a diversionary operation'. As David Owen says, she placed herself outside of the mainstream of history. Looking at England today, however, and at the competing forces that have brought it to a standstill, who can say that she placed herself outside the mainstream of truth?

Having noted her conservatism in economic matters, we are not surprised to find it in the social sphere — not surprised, but nevertheless, disappointed. After all Octavia Hill was a fore-runner of the women's movement, stepping off the pedestal to become a national leader, a leader who, not disdaining to roll up her sleeves and scrub floors, went on to initiate policies that affected the lives of thousands. Yet in words that seemed to belie her actions, she cautioned women to limit their goals. She wrote *The Times* in 1910, urging her opposition to women's suffrage.

I feel I must say how profoundly sorry I shall be if women's suffrage in any form is introduced into England. I believe men and women help one another because they are different, have different gifts and different spheres, one is the complement of the other; and it is because they have different power and qualities that they become one in marriage, and one also in friendship and in fellow work.³⁹

The traditional views on the different spheres of men and women had never prevented Octavia from stepping across the prescribed limits for 'ladylike' behaviour. It seems more likely that her real objections are expressed in the following paragraph.

I think, also, that political power would militate against their usefulness in the large field of public service. This service is, to my mind, far more valuable now than any voting power could possibly be. If you add two million voters, unless you secure thereby better members of Parliament, you have not achieved anything, but you have used up in achieving nothing whatever thought and time your women voters have given to such duties. Whereas if they have spent this time and heart and thought in the care of the sick, the old, the young, and the erring, as guardians of the poor, as nurses, as teachers, as visitors, if they have sought for and respected the out of sight silent work which really achieved something, a great blessing is conferred on our country.⁴⁰

Once again, she employs the idea of being placed by God in a small corner of the world and of being asked to 'cultivate one's own garden' as an argument against seeking change.

Her biographer, E. Moberly Bell, further suggests that she cared little about extending the franchise because she had no confidence in the political process. Here again, as with state socialism, fear of centralized government influenced her most. An effective strategist in promoting private philanthropy, she was always suspicious of national politics and state interference. She favoured reform on the local level; she hated bureaucracy with its inhumanity and inefficiency. Perhaps disillusioned by her experience in the unsuccessful campaign of Thomas Hughes, she tended to regard the activities of Members of Parliament as relatively unimportant. It is true that she had seen the need for state involvement in housing and stood behind the Artisans' Dwelling Act. Yet she had had second thoughts. Did not the dismal edifices created by it bear witness to the inability of legislation, blueprints, and the paper schemes of planners to meet the real needs of people?

She justified her conservatism in political and economic matters by enshrining the status quo as providential, the expression of God's will. She seems to have been unaware that she was arbitrary in applying this justification. Why legislate for sewers but not for state-supported housing? If the poor were required to bear the inequities of an economic system that could not provide for them, why were they not also required to endure dysentery and cholera? Similarly, why say that a nurse or a

housing estate manager is 'cultivating her own garden' but a female voter or politician is trespassing upon someone else's? She herself had difficulty in deciding upon the size of her personal garden. In the matter of housing it confined her to the perimeters of the property she controlled; the political dimension she tried to ignore. When it came to open space, however, the whole of England became her garden.

Revolutionaries have evoked the name of God. Joan of Arc, Florence Nightingale, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Josephine Butler, like Octavia Hill, believed that 'circumstances' of the world are agents of God. Yet using those 'circumstances' they fought not for the status quo but against it.

Accordingly, Octavia Hill's conservatism, her avoidance of controversy, cannot be completely explained by her doctrine of providence. Its roots lie deeper. Her belief in the critical importance of family and neighbourhood drew her attention away from the problems of a larger society. She held to this belief with the tenacity of one who acts out of a deeply felt early experience. With her father's illness she had lost the steadying comfort and support of a 'home' life that had been unusually happy. Throughout the rest of her long life she helped create homes and gardens for others, in this repeated and tireless endeavour recreating the home she had lost. Perhaps she cultivated her own garden and did not look over the wall towards the wasteland of indigent London because she was afraid that she would find the view too appalling.

6 A Universal Family

1 *The Prototype of Divine Love*

Charles Kingsley, whom Octavia greatly admired, had attacked the celibacy advocated by many High Churchmen on the grounds that it implicitly denied the importance of family relationships undercutting an essential insight into the divine. He felt that his ability to respond to God the Father was deepened by his own human experience of fatherhood. Octavia's other Broad Church friends, Thomas Hughes and F. D. Maurice, were devoted fathers and endowed family relationships with spiritual significance.

Octavia Hill shares this view. Though she herself never married, she rejoiced in the marriage of her sisters Emily and Gertrude. Throughout her professional career she maintained a home for herself, her mother, and her unmarried sisters. She looked to family relationships for the understanding and affection that would sustain her in her work.

What we all need most, is to be able to enter into the hearts of others. If we see here love, truth, strength, we can realize a Father of love, truth, strength. I am sure there is no other way. . . . Therefore, I believe that one must always work from the known and strong up to the unknown and weak. We must seize as most precious the vague memories of loved ones, the feelings that have bound us in families, and strive to strengthen them, and then work upwards.¹

Observing a friend who from the balcony had watched the confirmation service for his daughter, she felt that she saw in his intent look a 'type' of the loving concern of God who watches over human persons, however unaware they may be.²

The nuclear family is the smallest circle in the ever-enlarging pool of relationships that widens towards universality. Next

comes the class, then the nation. Each unit has a particular character, fitted for its work in the world. Each builds on the smaller, the nation standing midway between the family and universal society.

In defending what might seem to be a parochial nationalism Octavia points out that our experience is perforce limited by time and space. We experience the universal only through the circumstances of our particular life. National life, in spite of its obvious limitations, serves a purpose. At least it calls people out of their own individual selfishness and their family-centredness; at best it helps them understand the patriotism of other nationalists. It leads to a respect for the differences of national character, those 'fragments that make up the mighty humanity which [is] Christ Himself'.

In the context of family and national life there is little that distinguishes the role of women from that of men. Granted that women as wives and mothers and keepers of the Lares and Penates have special responsibilities; yet men as well as women are called to be cultivators of the domestic virtues. The assuming of family responsibilities, the care of children and the elderly, are incumbent upon all.

While Octavia gave lip service to the conventional belief in the 'complementary' natures of men and women, more often she showed herself unwilling to divide psychological characteristics into groupings marked 'feminine' and 'masculine'. Like most women of her period, she knew that intelligence and strength were thought to be male prerogatives. Flouting the risk of being labelled masculine, she went her way, speaking her mind freely, accosting the highly placed. Shaftesbury and the clerical members of the C.O.S. recalled that they quailed before her attacks. While she gives a lukewarm tribute to the 'silent self-control and sweet temper' enjoined upon the female, she describes with enthusiasm her growing involvement:

I used to think that time would soften passionate engrossment, and leave me leisure to perceive the little wants of others, but I think I pant with almost increasing passionate longing for the small things that I see before me.³

Lacking empathy with the more passive martyrs of the Church, she admired the activists: St Christopher and St Michael; their

maleness did not hinder her from identifying with them. She claimed for herself the name 'Loke'. '“Loke” is my name with which is associated all my strength; it is Florence's own invention; whenever my sisters call me their brother then I am “Loke”'.⁴

In a sparring match with a wealthy and opinionated Captain, exasperation gets the better of Octavia's caution.

First the man talked such intolerable complimentary stuff, and hardly more interesting boasted of his own performances. And then suddenly he became serious and interesting. He defined a woman's duties, with which I did not dare to quarrel, but threw out half scornful suggestions as to her gentleness and amiability, etc. He patronizingly enumerated little offices she might fulfil if she could find suitable objects. 'Oh, certainly', I said, 'if the real, solemn, large business of life does not demand too much of her thought and strength.' 'What should I point out and suggest?' 'Oh, nothing certainly for other people, but to keep their eyes open, and do bravely what they saw was wanted. I knew nothing of other people's duties, only I thought, God having made them, He had meant them to be of some use at all times of their life.' 'Then if I couldn't tell him about other people's work would I tell him about my own. I had spoken of the homes of the poor. Had I a district? because he supposed there was work to be done if people knew how to do it.' So I told him a little about the houses, rather ashamed of having got so deep as to talk of personal work. He had found fault with women speaking in public, and I told him that 'I thought he would not at all approve of my work, for certainly there was much in the business and in the stern determination required, which might really make a woman mean, ungenerous, and hard, but if the work is at all worth doing we must fairly estimate and bravely meet the risk.'⁵

The responsibility of human beings to concern themselves with the 'real, solemn, large business' of life was as incumbent upon women as upon men. The temperament, the psychological characteristics of women, were formed in part by their response to the call to service. Before such a challenge the feminine virtues of 'gentleness and amiability' were not only irrelevant; they were downright demonic, standing in the way of commitment and action. Octavia had no sympathy with the

self-protective ideals and limited scope accepted by aristocratic women. Like Mary Wollstonecraft, Josephine Butler, Florence Nightingale, and many others she deplored the superficiality and selfishness of such lives. Brought up by a mother who had welcomed her need to work outside the home, Octavia had at an early age affirmed its value. She saw work as a right, not a need. In the tradition of her mother, her father, and her grandfather, she hoped to take part in the affairs of the world. Scrubbing courtyards, pulling out weeds, importuning Cabinet Ministers and heads of Royal Commissions, making speeches at testimonial banquets was 'women's work' when it was undertaken in joyful response to God.

This call to service helped resolve the confusion about woman's nature by shifting the emphasis to woman's role. Admittedly there is some tension between her belief in self-development and self-sacrifice, partly because we tend to see them as opposites. On the one hand she stressed the importance of self-expression and self-development — physical and aesthetic — and on the other the more essential value of self-giving. The ambiguity is resolved when one recognizes that one has first to develop a 'self' — and to recognize it as an important self — before one can offer it to others. Octavia called for self-giving, not for self-denial or self-effacement. Giving and receiving are united, two faces of the single coin of self-esteem.

As young children Octavia and her sisters were taught this lesson by their mother in an unforgettable way. On their birthdays each girl not only received gifts but was expected to give gifts to every member of the family. This mutuality, acknowledged between members of a family, should also, according to Octavia, be recognized as the foundation of marriage. To a friend who is engaged Octavia writes in congratulation:

I cannot defer writing to tell you how entirely and heartily I hope that a very happy and full and whole life may be opening for you both. . . . As to sacrifice, I don't know; perhaps there is a great good possible without it; but what one feels is the immensely deeper meaning and joy which comes when, as Ruskin says, one gets the equality, 'not of likeness', but of giving and receiving. . . . And of such interchange all noble life has much.⁶

Like many strong-willed people she was often painfully aware of her tendency to take credit for her own gifts and of the spiritual sin which accompanies the self-congratulation of the giver.

Have I often fancied that I alone was the giver? I believe I often have. Oh, how false, how blind, how ungrateful! I remember Mamma as she nursed me when I was ill. I remember all the little things she does daily, weeks of momentary self-sacrifice that make up a life of devotion, that I with all my boasted strength and generosity never live for a day. I remember Minnie's intense gentleness, Miranda's determined self-sacrifice and feel with bowed spirit that they have done infinitely more for me than I have ever done for them, because the gifts are of a nobler kind. Oh, it is easy to work early and late, to keep accounts, and manage housekeeping, etc., but the gentle voice, the loving word, the ministry, the true, tender spirit, these are great gifts, and will endure when the others have perished. The first are the works of strength, the others of goodness. If I had used that strength always nobly, if I had recognized the goodness as divine, if I had been ready to be made in Christ's likeness, then I should have no cause to bow my head, as I do now.⁷

If the tendency, born of selfishness, to become aware of and take pride in one's 'unselfishness' undercuts the purity of intent, does this mean that sacrificial giving is impossible? Is what Octavia calls 'unselfishness' merely a kind of enlightened self-interest?

Octavia does not admit this: self-giving, she claims is opposed to selfishness. She faulted Guinevere for having been unwilling to put aside her self-interest; a purer love would have enabled her to help Arthur achieve his ambitions for the Round Table. She faulted a friend who described love as an extended form of selfishness. She argued that true love cannot be selfish since it is willing to give up the loved one.

The self-sacrifice here enjoined, however, is based on self-esteem: it is, though generously given, a last resort. In Octavia's Christian humanism, masochism, which is based on self-hatred, a self-serving though pathological impulse, is not a spiritual virtue. There may be occasions, however, when self-sacrifice

must be offered even when it brings harm to self. If one must make a choice between 'self-fulfilment' and 'self-deterioration' for the sake of others, one must choose the latter.

Sometimes among the crowd of small cares and worries here I feel the old fear that they may make me small and mean Of course, I believe that neither angels nor principalities nor powers can separate us from the love of God, neither can small annoyances or intercourse with people of low standards of morality. But, were it possible, I suppose one would unhesitatingly choose self-deterioration for the sake of raising others. I suppose such experience throws light on the words, 'He who will lose his life will save it.'⁸

A theology that on the one hand stresses the importance of self-expression and on the other asserts the greater value of self-sacrifice, necessarily raises some difficult questions. How is one to know whether one is acting from selfishness or in self-sacrifice? Octavia herself admits the dilemma. In 1869 she expressed her confusion to Maurice.

I must not mistake self-will for conscience, nor impatience for honesty. No one on earth can distinguish them for me; but He will. It so often seems to me as if two different courses of action were right or might be right; and this is what puzzles me, even tho' it is a blessing as binding me to people of different opinions.⁹

The answer can only be reached when one takes the question out of the merely psychological and puts it where Octavia believed it belonged, in the theological. She resolved the problem not through introspection but by looking away from the self towards God. Since sacrifice ultimately concerns not the isolated self but the self united with God and with other selves, she could put aside her confusion.

Mr. Maurice has been speaking today of sacrifice as the link between man and man, and man and God. It was such a sermon! One feels as if all peace and quiet holiness were around one; everything appears to have a beauty and calm in it; to which we can turn back in times of storms and wild noisy

rivalries, as to the memory of sunny days, and to shed a light on all dark and difficult things, on sorrow and loneliness.¹⁰

Through Christ, sacrifice has become more than a moral pronouncement concerning the way people should — but do not — behave; it has become a living principle, the proclamation of what in fact *is*. In the Incarnation God has given His life for man and so established a model of reality. Since the God-man Jesus Christ comprehends not only the historical Jesus but the Christ of eternal life, His sacrifice is the foundation of all other sacrifices throughout history. Pagan, Jewish, and Greek sacrifices are anticipations, imperfect and partial, yet important, of the atoning ('at-one-ing') sacrifice of Christ; they are, accordingly, linked with eternity and through this link unite men with each other.

It is the end of all God's acts and dispensations towards men, to make them righteous; to bring them out of that condition which they have chosen for themselves, — the condition of distrust, alienation, sin.

Like Josephine Butler, Octavia felt that the disorders of society were caused by blindness. Refusing to recognize redemption, mankind had rejected the reality of the Kingdom. In the 1880s she expressed her discouragement.

The days are full of difficulty, the temper of the poor is difficult, the old submissive patience is passing away, and no sense of duty has taken its place; the talk is of rights, not right. The ideal the poor form for themselves is low, and the rich support them in it. The rich, on the other hand, while they are continually coming forward more and more to help the poor, are thoroughly cowardly about telling them any truth that is unpalatable, and know too little of them to meet them as friends, and learn to be natural and brave with them. We have great relief funds, and little manly friendships, idleness above and below an admiration for what is pleasant, which degrades all life. This temper makes work difficult and sometimes fills me with wondering awe about the future of rich and poor.¹¹

This 'temper' will be transformed when people acknowledge that through the Resurrection they have been brought 'into that

state for which He has created them, of dependence, trust, union with Him'. Along with other Christian Socialists she envisioned a society in which the uniqueness of the individual would be respected, while the unity of the family of man would be restored through work — the great equalizer — and mutual self-giving. She set herself to bring it about.

2 *Charity Begins at Home: Tenant and Manager*

Octavia Hill said that the purpose of her system of management is to 'make individual life noble, homes happy, and family life good'.

In view of the complexity of the economic and social problems now afflicting the Western world, such faith in the redeeming power of home life seems naive — at once too idealistic and too limited in scope. Nevertheless, in advising planners and architects to forget their own need for artistic aggrandizement and to study carefully the needs of those for whom they built, Octavia Hill's common sense spoke prophetically. As she warned, large schemes of state planning and philanthropy would fail; they had ignored the essential nature, which is social, of their clients.

Today the terms are new. No one wants to be called, or to call others, 'poor'; 'low-income' is the preferred euphemism. Those architects who sculpt concrete and steel to their vision, revealing the ganglia of heating ducts and pipes, are labelled, somewhat unfairly, 'New Brutalists'. Those who muddle along, making do with a Neo-Georgian arcade here and there, accommodating the wishes of the shop-keepers, the lorry driver, and the gardener, call themselves 'New Empiricists'. The debate is often conducted in twentieth-century jargon and stupefying abstractions; yet the issues are the same, proceeding from differing views of human nature.

The Utilitarians had said that man is a rational creature with physical needs; conditioned by pain and pleasure, he could be taught to accept simple accommodations. The apartments built by their descendants, the Radicals — Early Brutalists, if you like — were tough, relentlessly antiseptic, designed to render misuse difficult. The water supply, the sewers and the ventilation were adequate; there were no courtyards, no gardens. The flats had separate entrances for each family; often the only public space

was the latrine. Nicholas Pevsner, describing them as the 'grim and grimy barracks of the poor' credits them with having destroyed any chance of the block of flats becoming popular with the class that needed housing most desperately.

In contrast Octavia Hill, Ebenezer Howard, and the philanthropists gave less importance to man's rationality and physical needs; they believed that man is essentially a spiritual, aesthetic and social creature. Octavia Hill's recommendations for water, sewer, and ventilation were restricted to the minimal needs of hygiene. She shocked some of her supporters by suggesting to the Royal Commission in 1885 that water and drains for individual families were not necessary; it was enough to make clean facilities available for the use of the whole building. She placed the need for community at the centre of her architectural plans. For this reason she generally preferred to work, not with new buildings, but with old houses that already had a garden or a courtyard. These she would renovate around two public centres, one indoors and one out-of-doors.

Today's visitor who walks past the dilapidated warehouses, picking his way over gritty heaps of trash, past empty pubs and parish halls, will recognize the Hill houses in Southwark before he reads the street sign. In this industrial wasteland seven or eight small houses with irregular gables and gingerbread roofing lean towards each other for comfort. Their children's book-illustration Victorian-Gothic eyes look out over a small park. Now sparsely planted, it contains a bench where a few old women sit talking. It is easy to imagine the spread of laundry, the animated exchange of small-talk and gossip, the shouted warnings to children, the heckling of a stranger, of 80 years ago. Octavia's description of the property which housed 500 families shows the care and attention to detail that went into her planning. The ruins of a paper factory that stood on the land were cleared by burning. A low wall was placed around the property and a covered playground was built. She paved part of the clearing with red bricks

set diagonally as a pattern. At one end a drinking fountain of plain grey granite. Immediately in front of this arcade is a space of gravel, in the centre of which an octagonal bandstand is being created. Walks wind about between lawns and flower beds. Two plane trees are planted on the larger space and a

small pond has been made, crossed by a little bridge. We have planted bulbs in plenty, and 1,000 yellow crocus, which thrive better than most flowers in London.¹²

On the edge of the park, right next to the houses, stands Red Cross Hall, until recently occupied by the Society for Liturgical Drama. The Walter Crane murals have been painted over but the inscription of dedication to the young servant girl who gave her life to rescue two children remains. From its pleasant proportions, the pitched roof and high windows, which give it both intimacy and spaciousness, one can catch glimpses of its former use. Serving alternately as library, gymnasium, school-room, art centre, dining hall, music studio, and theatre, it was once a community centre not only for Octavia Hill's tenants but for much of Southwark.

On Sunday afternoons we have opened the Hall free to all grown-up people who like to come; by the great kindness of friends we have been able to provide really beautiful music, Sunday after Sunday. . . . Always we have been supplied with flowers and the Hall looks really lovely all lighted up, with its three great cheerful fires, which are a great attraction, especially when one turns in from the mud, fog, and general dinginess of Southwark.¹³

In the context of Octavia's views on community her fondness for parties takes on a different light. On the surface there is something a little absurd in the child-like zest that this woman of affairs brought to a party. In 1886, when she was 48, she describes a 'triumphantly successful party at Southwark'. Fifteen years later she writes to her mother at length about another Southwark fete.

At the end it was really most impressive, to stand on the balcony and see the great group of children fall into line, and march singing to the accompaniment of the band, three times round the garden, making lovely curves over the bridge, and the bandstand, the sunlight streaming on them, till they filed into the Hall, where each received a bunch of flowers and a bun.¹⁴

These parties were more than diversions and entertainments. Just as in the services at the Chapel at Lincoln's Inn the choir, the

stained-glass windows, the flowers on the altar, and the procession of priests honoured God, so at Red Cross Hall, the singing, the marching of cadets, the giving of prizes, the crowning of child-kings and queens on floral thrones, were religious ceremonies, paying homage to God the Father of mankind. One can hardly fault Octavia Hill, who stood looking out across this animated scene, if she felt some pride. She had after all helped bring to life the inscription she had placed on the wall; in bold red and white letters it read, 'The Wilderness Shall Blossom as the Rose'.

The blossoming of this community in the desert of Southwark was husbanded by Octavia Hill's managers. The ideals by which she trained them were lofty, their responsibilities heavy.

You have taken on yourself the wants, longings, desires of people, you are bound not only to let them live, but to let them live happily; you must throw open to them stores of amusement, especially if they work hard, you must give them the power of learning; they must see friends, make presents, have holidays, and they will have the right to look to you for the power to do all these things; and if you do your duty, you will give it them, without their seeing it is any trouble.¹⁵

The ideal manager combines two principles: she is to participate as 'a volunteer', that is 'a spontaneous undertaker of tasks' (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and she is to be trained as a 'professional', a worker whose knowledge of hygiene, sociology, and economics enables her to reconcile the care of individual tenants with the needs of the community.

In her *Letters to Her Fellow Workers*, Octavia Hill speaks of the growing recognition among landlords of the need for trained estate managers.

There is growing up a certain number of ladies capable of representing them and possessing certain knowledge. So that in the years to come, as they will have lawyers to do legal business, surveyors and architects to see to the fabric of their houses, so they will have managers to supervise in detail the comfort and health of their tenants, so far as these depend on proper conditions in the houses in which they live, managers who will be interested in the people and will have time to see thoroughly to the numerous details involved in management.¹⁶

Unlike the lawyer, architect, and surveyor, however, the manager's competence depends not merely on her ability to master and apply technical details of special knowledge; she must also be raised to be a volunteer. This can best be done at home.

In later life Octavia Hill expressed reservations about the division of workers on the basis of age and sex in the settlement houses; it seemed to stifle the diversity that she found so rewarding in family life. She also deplored the increasing tendency of social workers to specialize. The worker who concentrated on one thing — trips to art museums for the elderly, the schooling of young children, or the engineering aspects of sanitation — was in danger of losing her sense of purpose. Emphasis must remain on 'knowing people with whom you work' not on exercising skills.

It is but a feeble effort to bring, according to the special need of the moment, one human being into near touch with others in their homes; to lead the new and wiser thinkers of today to occupy themselves not with the problems pondered in the study, but with individuals in their homes and daily life. What the result of such intercourse will be must depend solely on what our visitors are and what their flocks are, and this must vary infinitely.¹⁷

The professional status of the visitors might be considered to make them superior to their clients, yet as volunteers they can be equals. Octavia Hill's great abilities, her forcefulness, and her commanding position set her apart. Occasional references to 'my own dear poor' have an unpleasantly condescending ring. Yet she never thought of herself as a superior. Here her anomalous social position was an advantage. As a single woman of competence, authority and considerable education, she held her own with aristocrats and Members of Parliament. Yet her own background was middle-class: she had known poverty; all her life she had worked, receiving a salary as a teacher. (For her work in housing she took no pay.) Like her tenants she had repeatedly moved her belongings — the Turkish rug, the family pictures — from place to place. She knew the merciless exhaustion, the tension and tedium of the daily routine. 'It is with me here almost as with the poor themselves, a kind of fight for mere existence — references, notices, rents, the dry necessary matters

of business, take up almost all time and thought.'¹⁸ She felt that she had got back more than she had given, and thanked her tenants for the help they gave her.

In short when the equality of all and the common responsibility of work are recognized, both rich and poor benefit.

Because her tenants were working people, independent, they would not be corrupted by receiving gifts; they would not succumb to the 'helpless indolence of expectant selfishness' that demoralized the pauper. In the last analysis the Octavia Hill of mercy took precedence over the Octavia Hill of law and order. She urged her managers to see people as individuals, rather than as cases or as members of a class.

For the rich as well, egalitarianism and work brought its rewards. In Octavia Hill's view, as in that of Josephine Butler and Florence Nightingale, the lives of aristocratic women were as demeaning, as restricted, as those of the pauper poor. She accused the rich of shutting up their hearts 'in cold dignified independence'. In creating a profession for women, Octavia Hill felt that she had done more than find them employment; she had given them a sense of themselves.

Octavia Hill would be the first to admit that a theory is only as good as its practice. Studying her complex ideal, one constantly has to push aside a rising murmur of unanswered questions. How did the tenants really feel about the Monday evening visit with its settling of accounts and inquiries about the health of the children? Did they believe that the manager's friendship was limited by the notice for dismissal, which lay concealed in her pocket? How did the manager decide whether to apply the requirements of justice or of mercy? Were some relieved of their duties because they were too generous in forgiving debts — or not generous enough? Did Octavia Hill wake up in the middle of the night, stricken with a vision etched for her by Gustav Doré and George Frederick Watts of bodies huddled together in the mud with the underside of a bridge for a roof? Did she wonder whether among the bodies there were some whom she had turned out of her houses?

Most of these questions cannot be answered. The tenants left no accounts. Many of Octavia's co-workers' comments, both the critical and the adulatory, were based more on philosophical differences and affinities than on the specific merits of the Hill system. Beatrice Webb's Fabian Socialism led her to criticize the

Hill method as superficial and too individualistic to deal effectively with national problems. The Barnetts, on the other hand, thought Octavia Hill's way of dealing with people extremely impressive.

One volume is invaluable, however, because it is unique. Ellen Chase came from Boston to London to work as a manager for Octavia Hill. She returned in 1891 after five years and wrote an account of her apprenticeship, *Tenant Friends in Old Deptford*. It is a delightful book and of special importance to any student of the Hill system. Not only is it the only record we have of the system, but its point of view is particularly revealing. By Octavia Hill's own acknowledgement it describes her management, not at its best, but at its worst.

Among the various sections administered by the Ecclesiastical Commission of the C.O.S., Deptford was notorious. Year after year Octavia Hill's annual charge to her workers and her report on progress contains lengthy scoldings, admonitions, and exhortations concerning 'poor Deptford, our black sheep'. In her introduction to Ellen Chase's book she apologizes for Deptford, adding that only Miss Chase's 'deep human sympathy enabled her to see all that lay below the squalor and violence of the inhabitants, and to realize how much family life redeemed even the most degraded'.¹⁹

Exactly how 'low' was the Deptford level? To what extent did Deptford incorporate the caring community, the mutually sympathetic relationship between worker and tenant prescribed by Miss Hill?

The community which Miss Hill had described with such evident distress emerges from these pages as far from squalid. There is poverty — the 'furnishings' which the tenants bring are often no more than packing crates and a couple of mouldy mattresses; the week's pay is hardly enough to buy food for the children. There is tragedy — women die in childbirth; consumption and cholera take a heavy toll; men responsible for supporting large families are fired without notice; the old are carted off to die in London hospitals; adolescents disappear into the low life of London. There is crime — the fighting among the tenants over the stealing of laundry and the more brutal Saturday-night brawling and wife-beating.

On the whole, however, the reader is left with the impression that the Deptford people are individuals with a good sense of

self-respect, supported by a strong commitment to each other. The women, as they hang out the wash and weed the flower-beds, keep an eye on the children playing in the court. Their solicitude includes not only their own children but those of the women who are absent because they are working or ill — or in a few instances, drunk. (One old woman observed to Miss Chase that 'God made the babies, and the Devil their mothers'.) They break up fights, listen to the old people's complaints and run errands for them. In a community in which everyone is known they are quick to spot an intruder. Near the Foreign Cattle Market, Deptford was frequented by peddlars and the petty thieves that dog large crowds. Established by Henry VIII as a royal dockyard, it continued to attract those who made their living by the sea. To create a stable community, an oasis for English family life, out of this great flowing procession was no easy achievement. Ellen Chase gives her people credit.

Our people, sadly thwarted as they were in many ways, we saw could still claim freely the great possessions, the spiritual qualities of courage, patience, and faith, wherever they please to lift up their souls and desire them. And hence it was not the bareness of living, but the richness of life, that struck me most in Green St., since what really matters was there as everywhere else, within the reach of all.²⁰

Her tenants' feisty optimism is evidently contagious and Miss Chase describes daily events with relish. She was less interested in having her people moral than in having them in high spirits.

Another day, toward noon we were startled by a series of sharp cries, 'Ow! Ow! Ow!' resounding from Vicarage Lane, and rushed out to find the Bottom filled with men, women, and children surging toward Creek Road, and in the midst a woman under arrest for breaking a publichouse window after having been locked out. . . . Green Street was always unexpected in its revelations, and I remember Mrs. Coster, a much respected tenant, said to us proudly in the heat of the moment, 'Oh, it used to take eight or nine to lock up my man.'²¹

If relations among the tenants were quite open and, in a rough and ready way, caring, tenant and manager seem to have had an

equally constructive association. Ellen Chase, along with the Barnetts and Beatrice Webb, believed that the mutual respect created by a businesslike relationship was the proper foundation for charity.

The embarrassing sense of intrusion which sometimes accompanies the other forms of visiting is escaped by a collector who goes naturally as agent for the landlord into the homes of all the families in her charge. Then, too, the tenant has for his part a helpful sense of self-respect, when he turns to his collector, assured that having fulfilled his duty to her he has a right to expect that she will do her duty by him.²²

Her relationship with her tenants is not unlike that between tenant and tenant. She visits the elderly in hospitals, settles arguments in and out of court, finds jobs in service for adolescent children, provides work (some of it improvements on the property in response to suggestions from the tenants) for those temporarily unemployed. She arranges holidays for old pensioners and fetches them at the station. To some, perhaps, Miss Chase was a rather formidable mother figure — oppressive in her demands for cleanliness and financial rectitude. To many of the older people she was a daughter figure. They petted her and fussed over her. They asked to have their pictures taken with her, and in a caricature of Victorian domesticity with her in their midst, they sat, stiffly holding buns, behind a row of cups and saucers placed with military precision.

Others regarded her as someone to be got around, an attractive challenge to their highly skilled abilities at evading responsibilities. (Miss Chase writes feelingly on the subject of forged testimonials, the prevalence of piously respectable — and false — identities, and clothes and furnishings hired by the hour to impress a prospective landlady.)

Miss Chase brought energy and good humour to her specific tasks as rent collector. She seems appreciative even of the tenants' forthright attempts to hang on to their rent money. These were, after all, indications, if negative ones, of the independence of spirit she hoped to develop.

A little farther on I met old Egan taking a circuitous route toward the Top. Generally speaking, he was in constant work

and a credit to the 'property'. Just now he was much the worse for celebrating, and stopped me to remark with a confident smile, 'The world is full of temptation. Everywhere you turn a public-house!' So far I could assent but I was utterly taken aback by his ending, 'A man would need the "res-olution" of a carthorse to pass by, and, thank God, I am a man and not a beast!' Certainly Deptford has a logic all its own! With entire self-approval, he continued, 'I have three times the rent in my pocket, but you shan't have a farthing of it. I am going to be happy to-day and to-morrow and drink it all. And I shan't have a poor time to-morrow because I could not say "no" to you to-day. I give you my best compliments. May you soon have a handsome husband, and a happy married life; but as for giving you my rent, that I shall not do!'²³

The following week his rent was collected — by another collector.

The intimate knowledge of the family gained through the Monday visits could be put to use when they were beset by special difficulties. Tenants who owed rent were in fact kept on for months beyond the traditional 'warning' period, while attempts were made to tide them over through loans, the procuring of temporary work, and negotiations with the pawnshop. Countless families in financial trouble were held together and given hope through the encouragement, the suggestions, the 'sympathetic entering into of circumstances' enjoined by the Hill theory of management.

It is of course true that not all were amenable to Miss Chase's influence. She is not afraid to face her failures. She entitles chapter four of her book with the telling phrase, 'Go She Must.' Her failures were not the victims of unemployment, disease, and bad luck — these she could help. They were the habitually and competently manipulative, those who refused to accept the 'middle-class morality' inveighed against by Eliza Doolittle's father and upheld by Miss Chase, those who insisted upon their own irresponsible way. Miss Chase felt no compunction about evicting these determined transgressors of the financial law. She knew that the same energy and imagination that went into the successful attempts to evade the Hill management would be used with equal success in finding new housing — and in getting around the new manager. This 'middle man' of capitalist housing was, in the Hill estimation, a worse villain than the landlord.

No one would feel sorry that he would have to deal with the forged testimonials, the furniture-by-the-hour, the broken promises, and all of the complicated shenanigans of Miss Chase's ex-tenant.

Here one must admit that special circumstances protected Miss Chase against one of the limitations of her system — its inability to provide housing for the destitute poor. While the general population was increasing, the distribution was uneven. Many sections in the south and east, among them Southwark and Deptford, were actually losing population. A clever vagrant would be able to keep some sort of roof over his head indefinitely.

To those who wondered whether eviction had not pushed families from the 'respectable' into the 'outcast' category and who criticized a system that turned people out at the point when they most needed help. Deptford offered no answer. To those who valued housing for the working classes, Deptford provided evidence of a system that for many had prevented the desperate slide into General Booth's 'darkest England'.

3 *Believing and Doing: A Holy Society*

Octavia Hill, like Josephine Butler, believed that she lived in a divided world. In one sense church and society are co-inherent, one and the same, since Christ, 'the Light of every man', is the head of that body which is the community of mankind. Yet in another sense the church is a spiritual outpost. Through refusing his spiritual citizenship man has made of society a wilderness; the church has become a tiny gathering of believers, men and women who recognize and claim their birthright, opening the gates of their city to those beyond the walls.

Nor is this process of fragmentation simply a division between church and society. The church has itself become a victim, cut off from its true nature. Churches — prideful, self-centred groups of people — war with each other, each setting up a particular idea of truth in place of the universal truth of God. Octavia claimed her citizenship in both churches. She remained an Anglican because she believed that only by belonging to a particular sect could she witness to the universal Church. Her artist's nature was drawn by the power and beauty of the Book of Common Prayer. Unlike many who shared her latitudinarian

views, she was not frightened by the liturgical elaborations of the High Church party. In 1857 she wrote excitedly of attending an evening service in a house chapel located in a very poor part of London. She described, appreciatively, the stained-glass windows, the singers, the organ played by their host, a wealthy printer, the blue and gold gas lamps.

The congregation consisted of workmen and their families, the employers and theirs, the clerks and servants. I should guess about 70 in all. The clergyman who intoned the service, was evidently a Puseyite, which Miranda in her bigotry had been mourning ever since I came in, but I saw too much in the large, sad, earnest eyes to care whether he preached in black or white, or to doubt that in more important points, he, too, is being led home. See him, then, a pattern Puseyite, a pale worn face (wasted with fasting), evidently with fears and sorrow about the intense wickedness of the world and its ways, probably a believer in the superior righteousness of celibacy. Great dark eyes, large forehead, very small chin, smooth short black hair parted in the middle, and so smoothed and pressed that evidently no hair could have a will of its own. Strange type was it of the complete subjection of the man's spirit, all human nature, good and bad alike, subdued and kept in order, and still his great dark eyes saying how wicked he thought himself.²⁴

Speaking warmly of her acquaintance with the Watsons, she describes them as 'very High Church, but not foolishly so', adding that it is undoubtedly 'the refinement and beauty which attract them'.²⁵

She sympathized with those who were repelled by the narrowness and conservatism of the Anglican Church, and its identification of sanctification with doctrinal conformity and intellectual consent. But to her friend Janey Hughes Senior who is considering leaving the Church she makes a case for reform from within.

As to the points on which you and I equally differ from so many clergymen and churchmen, if we think Maurice's interpretation of the creeds the true and simple one, is it not doubly incumbent upon us to uphold it in the Church? Leaving it would be like saying we could not honestly stay in

it. Then does not all the best, most thorough, most convincing, most peaceful reform of any body come from within? in family, in business, in nation, in Church?

In the spirit of F. D. Maurice, she points to the truth of the things which unite, rather than those which divide, as the springs of action.

Is there not almost always a right at the root of the relationship, which may be asserted and vindicated, and on the recognition of which reform depends? *That* body must be corrupt indeed, which must be left by earnest members of it. Surely there are abundant signs of growing healthy life and reform in the Church; all the vigorous and new things nearly are signs of good. Why should you set up the decidedly old fashioned interpretation of doctrine, and *that* held by a certainly decreasing number in the Church, and feel hardly honest in differing from it and remaining in the Church?²⁶

As an Anglican she did not feel separated from her fellow-Christians. When Margaret Howitt asked her to join the Society of Friends Octavia replied simply that she already felt herself to be a member.

It feels to me that all people who are obeying the best part of the nature that has been given them, more or less belong to it — that those who know from Whom the light proceeds 'that lightest every man that cometh into the world', know themselves to be bound into a society by that gift, by being children of God and heirs of Christ.²⁷

She sometimes expressed herself in ringingly evangelical terms. Addressing the children at the Nottingham Place School, she surprised herself.

They ask me questions that make me feel, in answering, as if I were speaking almost like a prophet of the things that are and will be The old fire, that is gone for action, often flames in me. I can feel it almost burning my eyes, when I speak to them of the faith in God that may be a sure rock to them from the shame and sins of this age. And . . . sometimes . . . when I sit

there all wearied and worn, and they tell me of their day's doings, and we fall on some great subject of principle or spiritual fact, I wonder at the might of this strange, spiritual life we lead that can glow and burn, while the face grows paler, and the frame weaker.²⁸

Generally, however, she refrained from preaching. She disliked those who 'try to *force* their notions, their *faith* on everyone; who decidedly set to work to convert people'. She was exasperated by those who regard a person with greater affection when they learn he is a member of the Church. When the question arose as to whether it was proper for a Christian to teach in a school based on agnostic principles, she replied in the affirmative.

I never have stopped, I hope I never shall stop, to consider what sect or sects of people are at work, if I thoroughly and entirely approve of the work. I may think the work incomplete; but, if it comes in my way, and I think it good, as far as it goes, I will help it with the power I have.

In a profound sense the goal of her system of management was religious. But because faith grew primarily out of experience, it could not be communicated by merely didactic exposition. 'One fact about God well burnt into a heart with life's fires, and pressed into it with life's pain, conforms a child more to His likeness than colder acceptance of facts'.²⁹ She wanted to show that 'we care for men as men, we care for good as good'. She was awed by the mystery of faith and the complexity of human nature and she believed that no person should pass judgement on another's faith or lack of it. She steered away from talk.

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