Church, chapel and clergy in Margaret Oliphant's Chronicles of Carlingford

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CHURCH, CHAPEL AND CLERGY

IN

MARGARET OLIPHANT’S

CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD

By

Karen Ann King  B. A. (Hons).

A Thesis Submitted to Fulfil the requirements for the Award of

Doctor of Philosophy (English)

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Western Australia

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
This thesis examines the fictional works of Margaret Oliphant’s Chronicles of Carlingford in order to explain her understanding of the significance of Church and Chapel communities and their clergymen within an insular and atypical provincial community in mid-nineteenth-century England. By drawing on a variety of examples in the novels and in life, the thesis argues that Oliphant was a serious commentator on religious matters and controversies and not just a teller of tales. The thesis will address the significance of Oliphant’s engagement with a range of religious and social matters concerning the Church of England with a qualified reference to Nonconformity, given that Oliphant’s depiction of this group was limited to Congregationalists and did not portray other Nonconformist groups or their religious issues.

Recognising that religion was a pervasive presence for most of her contemporaries, Oliphant portrays, in the Chronicles of Carlingford, an awareness of the value of religious affiliation at the communal and individual levels. The thesis will explore this theme from a variety of perspectives. Oliphant, for example, presented her fictional characters with many of the personal and professional problems encountered by real-life contemporary clergymen. In addition, the sheer diversity and complexity of religious life in Victorian England produced a number of competing factions and parties, which had the potential to divide communities and test the religious resolve and friendship of clergymen and lay individuals. Oliphant’s concerns with the diversities of clerical life and religious communities provide evidence of her importance as a chronicler of religious events. The thesis addresses many of the concerns raised by Oliphant to claim her pre-eminence as a religious commentator of note.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
(iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signed ................

Date 7/1/03
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church and Chapel Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral and Secular Duties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Rank and Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Clerical Kin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

In her autobiography Margaret Oliphant outlined, in rather prosaic fashion, the circumstances that led to the creation of the seven novels known collectively as the Chronicles of Carlingford which she described as 'a series pretty well forgotten now, which made a considerable stir at the time, and almost made me one of the popularities of literature' (1990, p. 91). The success of the series, particularly Salem Chapel, was due, in no small part, Oliphant believed, to her depiction of 'the chapel atmosphere [which] was new and pleased people' (1990, p. 102). Oliphant's admission that she 'knew nothing about chapels, but took the sentiment and a few details from our old church in Liverpool, which was Free Church of Scotland' (1990, p. 102), is only partly true, for she was in fact well positioned, in terms of intellectual interest and personal preference, to depict the lives of contemporary church and chapel clergymen and their communities. The thesis will argue that Oliphant's strengths lie in her portrayal of the social consequences of religious affiliation of Anglicans and a group of Congregationalists, by exposing the vanities, frustrations and small pleasures of ordinary people in an insular and atypical provincial English community.

This thesis will investigate Oliphant's Chronicles of Carlingford in the context of mid-nineteenth century religion by examining the roles and duties of her clergymen and the Church of England and Congregational chapel communities they serve. The thesis aims to uncover and explain, in the light of contemporary and present-day religious and
historical sources, the significance of church, chapel and clergy in the *Chronicles of Carlingford* and in other fictional works by Oliphant. Whilst the *Chronicles of Carlingford* is the main focus of the thesis topic and mark, by Oliphant's own admission, the highpoint of her creative life in terms of contemporary critical acclaim and financial reward (1990, p. 102), the study will also consider some of the other novels from Oliphant's prolific output, particularly those which seem representative of the themes I wish to explore. The novels are: *Agnes* (1865/1866), *A Son of the Soil* (1865/1883), *At His Gates* (1872), *Innocent: A Tale of Modern Life* (1873), *For Love and Life* (1874), *A Rose in June* (1874), *The Curate in Charge* (1876/1987), *Within the Precincts* (1879/1885), *Caritas* (1885), *A Country Gentleman and His Family* (1887), *Cousin Mary* (1888), *Joyce* (1889) and *He That Will Not When He May* (1892).

Modern writers such as Wolff commend Oliphant as one of the first novelists to make the Dissenting way of life a major subject of fiction, and further endorse *Salem Chapel* for its 'pioneering sociological explorations' into a Dissenting congregation (1977, p. 333). Others, such as Q. D. Leavis, note that, as a Scot, Oliphant had the advantage of being able to view the Church of England from the outside, critically, without becoming embroiled in its factional politics (1969, p. 11). Certainly, as a woman and a Scot, Oliphant imagined herself outside the Church of England and found it and other Christian denominations sadly lacking in their capacity to tend to the spiritual needs of ordinary people in any way but the most superficial. This dismal state is not always the fault of the clergy but originates, according to Oliphant, in the vicissitudes of daily life, which force the earnest parish clergyman to surrender his ideals.
of 'schemes and dreams of national influence and world-amelioration', whilst the people of his district 'struggle for mere life' (1871a), and in the nature of Christianity itself where dogma often masquerades as truth. Oliphant found the clerical profession 'the most disheartening, the most depressing of professions', because it offers so little spiritual certitude, and does not offer, at the parish level at least, sufficient financial rewards for such strenuous effort (1871a). As the thesis will show, many of Oliphant's fictional clergymen must resolve, amongst other things, complications in their personal and professional lives that are the result of adherence to impossibly lofty and unsustainable ideals.

To date, the majority of critical works devoted to the fiction of Margaret Oliphant have been secular in focus. Apart from Colby (1966), Williams (1986), Rubik (1994), and Jay (1995), who devote sections of their work to a consideration of Oliphant's depiction of religion in her novels, including the Chronicles of Carlingford, this thesis is the first to present, in the light of contemporary religious and historical sources, a detailed investigation into Oliphant's depiction of contemporary Church and Chapel congregations, together with the duties and professional status of the clergymen who serve them. In so doing, the thesis departs from the thematic concerns of the above writers in its contextualisation of the religious concerns of the novels that form the Chronicles of Carlingford. The thesis argues that Oliphant's Chronicles of Carlingford are a useful source for understanding the dynamics of parochial level Church and Chapel. The novels contribute to our understanding about the character of men who seek a clerical career, and the professional and personal challenges they face in answer
to their calling. Furthermore, whilst the religious themes raised by Oliphant in the novels might have been familiar fare to her reading public, their significance would test the understanding of many twenty-first-century readers. The thesis will attempt to redress this situation by "reading" the Chronicles of Carlingford and other novels in Oliphant's oeuvre, in the context of mid-nineteenth century religion. The use of contemporary religious and historical resources in the study of literature, as Robert Hume explains, aims to 'reconstruct past events and viewpoints and to use our constructions in aid of contextual interpretation' (1999, p. 45). The thesis aims to demonstrate that Oliphant, who adopts an impressive objectivity toward the many contemporary religious issues and controversies depicted in the Chronicles of Carlingford, was a serious commentator on religion, not just a teller of provincial tales.

Oliphant's fiction is particularly relevant for such a study from a variety of perspectives. Oliphant's fictional and non-fictional output was prodigious and supplies ample evidence of her engagement with a variety of contemporary religious, social and cultural issues. Merryn Williams notes that, while 'still under thirty', Oliphant 'wrote competently, if not profoundly', on subjects as varied as 'theology, science, history, travel books, art and poetry' (1986, p. 23) for Blackwood's Magazine and other important nineteenth-century periodicals. During the thirteen years between the appearance of the first and last novels in the Chronicles of Carlingford, Oliphant wrote several other novels that focus on clerical lives and clerical matters, some of which are mentioned above, together with biographies of Edward Irving, published in 1862, and the Count de Montalembert, published in 1872. A further biography of her friend John
Tulloch appeared in 1888. Biographies of these contemporary religious figures are three of the eight biographies that Oliphant would write. Stock Clarke argues that all of Oliphant's eight biographical subjects are thematically related, that is, all are 'driven by powerful religious belief' and possessed of single-minded idealism and individuality that set them at odds with their society (1997, p. 4). Personality traits such as these, where adherence to outward stereotype masks an inner complexity, ambiguity, diversity, and ambivalence, interested Oliphant who, according to Stock Clarke, responded 'readily and creatively' to such character traits in her novels as well as in her biographies (1997, p. 5). These personality traits, I will argue, also help to locate Oliphant's critical responses to aspects of contemporary Christianity.

I will argue that Oliphant did not write from any particular religious persuasion; nor did she use her novels as vehicles for private preaching. Elaine Showalter has identified this latter point as a motive which inspired some of the fiction of contemporary novelists, such as Charlotte Yonge, Elizabeth Sewell and Felicia Skene, who used their fiction as a way of participating 'in the male monopoly on theological debate' (1977, p. 144). Oliphant did not feel the need to adopt a polemical stance in her approach to religious matters in the Chronicles of Carlingford and, as the thesis will show, she is inclined more toward exposing the effects of an unthinking adherence to doctrine.

Few works situate the fiction of nineteenth-century authors in their religious and historical contexts, but those that do acknowledge that the novels are legitimate
historical sources in their own right. Detecting a lack of critical assessment of the cleric in English literature, Oliver Lovesey in *The Clerical Character in George Eliot's Fiction* (1991), draws on 'reader-response and reception theory paradigms' (1991, p. 19), to examine Eliot’s fictional cleric against a backdrop of the prevailing 'religious climate... the historical position of clerics... the development of the literary representation of this figure, and the theoretical formulation of character' (1991, p. 7). Lovesey, however, does not distinguish between an ordained clergyman and a layman 'performing an advisory or sacerdotal function in secular life...' (p. 8), locating the clerical character instead, within 'the essence of the Christian heritage with science and humanistic philosophy' (p. 15). Lovesey considers each of Eliot’s novels in the light of Dissenting and Church of England religious history and ideology, noting that, 'like Austen’s and Trollope’s clerics, their doctrinal beliefs protrude less in their portrayal than their social dimensions' (p. 15). Lovesey regards Eliot, Austen and Trollope’s use of the clerical character in their novels as a kind of social barometer to measure the religious upheavals of the nineteenth century. Like his historical brothers, the fictional clergyman, as observed by the above authors, best illustrate change in response to theological, institutional, and political pressures in the nineteenth century (p. 11-15).

Barbara Dennis’s *Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901) Novelist of the Oxford Movement: A Literature of Victorian Culture and Society* (1992) unequivocally places Yonge alongside Keble, Pusey and Newman as a significant force in the dissemination of the religious and aesthetic ideals embraced by the Oxford Movement. Dennis records that, following Keble's death, Yonge's imposing reputation as a disseminator of
Tractarian ideals was such that she attracted the movement’s representatives (1992, p. 33). Yonge’s novels act as signposts for the movement whereby, according to Dennis, Yonge ‘documents every developing phase in the movement in her novels and draws on her own experience, or the experience of those close to her, to illustrate her themes’ (1992, p. 33). Dennis gives Yonge pre-eminence as a popular and important voice of the Oxford Movement, arguing that Yonge’s perception and recording of the Oxford Movement in her novels ‘becomes part of the fabric of society during the century and enters public consciousness at a level and to a degree unsuspected by the majority’ (p. 4). Through her novels, Yonge promotes the efforts of this particular faction within the Church of England in the areas of education, foreign missions, home missions, art and architecture (p. 160). Yonge’s novels, conclude Dennis, ‘provide a vivid and consistent picture’ of the Oxford Movement and its lasting effects on society (p. 160).

The historian Irene Collins, in *Jane Austen and the Clergy* (1994), gives equal value to Austen’s novels and letters as legitimate historical sources (1994, p. xi) to investigate Austen’s relationships with her clerical kin and ‘the extent to which she was involved with their situation and way of thinking’ (p. x). Commenting on the ‘paucity of source material’ in relation to mainstream Anglicanism during Austen’s lifetime, Collins argues that a ‘study of Jane Austen’s life and novels’ will help to ‘fill the gap’ in this area of scholarship (p. x). As stated, Collins draws on all of the above sources to pursue themes such as the clergyman’s education, income, patronage, and his relationships within the parish and with the wider society. That some of Austen’s clerical characters have been ‘ruthlessly pilloried for their faults ... by historians seeking to criticise
churchmen of the period' is evidence, claims Collins, of Austen's accurate portrayal of clerics and clerical life in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century England (p. xi).

Marianne Thormählen 'examines the treatment of religion in the Brontë novels from four fundamental perspectives: the denominational angle; the doctrinal dimensions; the ethical issues; and the roles and duties of clergymen' (1999, p. 4). Whilst drawing on contemporary religious and historical sources to investigate The Brontës and Religion (1999), Thormählen also relies on a large body of secondary source material in her examination of church and society, and church and reform (1999, p. 262), reminding the reader that her purpose is to reveal the 'religious dimensions in the fiction of the Brontës' without 'prescribing altered responses' (p. 6). Whilst noting the pitfalls associated when mapping religious associations in novels (p. 2), Thormählen is convinced that any analysis of the Brontë novels that does not consider the religious context is incomplete (p. 6).

Addressing a 'gap in recent critical literature on George Eliot' (2001, ix), Peter C. Hodgson's aim in Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot: The Mystery Beneath the Real is to identify the 'religious and theological elements' in 'her life and writings' (ix). Hodgson proposes that Eliot's 'life and literary career form a kind of religious pilgrimage' (p. 2), and that a theological reading of each novel presents 'compelling ideas' (p. 28) which reflect a 'multifaceted appreciation of religious life' (p. 29).
It is clear that the work of Lovesey, Dennis, Collins, Thormählen and Hodgson aim to ‘fill the gap’, to quote Collins, in an area of scholarship that has received little critical attention, by situating the work of important nineteenth-century novelists in their religious contexts, believing that the study of their fiction is enhanced thereby. This thesis argues that the same claims may be extended to some of Oliphant’s novels and the aim of this thesis is to ‘fill the gap’ further by situating Oliphant’s novels in their religious contexts. Collins counsels caution in using works of fiction to illustrate the religious and social conditions of earlier times, observing that narratorial polyvalence may cloud historical judgements but, nevertheless, extends the same reservations to the use of diary-entries, letters and biographies that form the mainstay of historical research (1994, p. xii).

With Collins’s cautionary coda in mind, the thesis topic will be approached in five chapters in order to situate Oliphant’s novels within their religious contexts. Chapter One will investigate Oliphant’s depiction of Anglican and Nonconformist services in her novels. Oliphant expressed caution towards clergymen who adopt unthinking doctrinal positions in religious belief, believing that an unquestioning adherence to such views encouraged schism. In parallel, Chapter One will also consider the conflict that arises between clergymen who operate from an embedded doctrinal position. The Chapter will highlight the ways in which the style and design of Anglican Churches and Nonconformist Chapels influenced the type of public worship and the form and content of the sermon, all of which received the imprimatur of influential groups and factions within Anglican and Nonconformist circles. Oliphant was also
aware that the content and delivery of the sermon was an important aspect of the clergyman's sacred duties which allowed the clergyman ample scope to expound, not only on matters religious but also to give vent to personal opinions. Recognising that the pulpit was an immensely powerful tool, Oliphant's depiction of the sermon and the preacher will be considered in detail.

Whilst Oliphant appreciated the paramount importance given to public worship, she was also aware that this was not the only way of disseminating the Christian message. A diligent and systematic approach towards visiting was one of the methods favoured by contemporary clergymen to ensure that their parishioners heeded the words of the sermon. Visiting was also a way of establishing and reinforcing social bonds. Chapter Two will examine Oliphant's depiction and understanding of the importance of pastoral duties in her fictional clergymen. Considered by many contemporaries to be broadly secular in scope, a clergymen's assiduous attention to visiting in particular was a requirement of the Prayer Book. The Chapter will consider three main aspects of pastoral duties: visiting, the supervision of lay agencies, the spiritual and moral counselling of parishioners, and the clergyman's role as educator. Oliphant was aware that the worldly aspects associated with parochial duties was sometimes an intellectual and emotional burden for some clergymen and tested their suitability to their calling. Oliphant was highly critical of clergymen who failed to perform adequately their pastoral duties, and linked their failure to a failure in the Church of England's inability to offer adequate pastoral training. There emerges, too, an awareness that, as pastoral duties, by definition, crossed gender boundaries there would be conflict between a
clergyman's parochial duties and his duties towards his family. The Chapter will investigate Oliphant's depiction of the clergyman's role in education, which ranged from his involvement in parochial schools for the poor, to his participation in public lectures, adult education and in the tutoring of private pupils to augment a meagre stipend. The complex nature of the clergyman's wide range of duties required him to juggle, with varying degrees of success, the duties of the secular with the imperatives of the sacred. Oliphant emphasised that assistance in the form of lay support was required and the influence of individual lay men and women and lay communities will be the focus of Chapter Three.

Lay men and women form the essential fabric of parochial life. The lay body forged social identity and allowed the individual right of expression through participation in a variety of Church and Chapel activities. Whilst many of Oliphant's lay men and women are devoted to their respective Church and Chapels and are willing to merge into the fictional background, many directly challenge the authority of clergymen and other members of the lay community, which point to a shift in relationships between clergyman and parishioner. Oliphant structured the Chronicles of Carlingford around the activities and social interrelationships of her lay characters. Chapter Three will consider Oliphant's depiction of Church and Chapel representatives such as the parish clerk, churchwarden, deacon, and parochial visitor. Oliphant was interested in the ways in which these roles offered some characters the opportunity to engage in power struggles with each other and with the clergy. Oliphant's depiction of the lay role also allows her to throw light onto the changing nature of the clerical role. Another area of
lay involvement was ecclesiastical patronage. Oliphant was well aware of the importance of patronage in the contemporary setting, as her own attempts to gain the attention of patrons for her sons attests. She was also aware of its potential to corrupt relationships between people, and nowhere is this more transparent than in the fraught area of ecclesiastical patronage. The Chapter will explore Oliphant’s response to aspects of ecclesiastical patronage in her fiction.

Whilst Chapter Three is concerned with the dynamics underwriting lay relationships, of equal and related importance is Oliphant’s response to the clergyman’s changing professional status. Chapter Four will consider Oliphant’s depiction of Nonconformist and Anglican clergymen by focussing on their rank and class. This is important because Oliphant was interested in the motives of clergymen who expressed a desire to rise personally and professionally. It also allows Oliphant to comment insightfully on their suitability to their calling. Oliphant was careful to compare the differences between Nonconformist societies, as depicted in Salem Chapel, with the later novel, Phoebe Junior, which, I argue, depict Nonconformity in terms of its exclusion and eventual inclusion into mainstream Christianity. The Chapter will show how the lives of prominent real-life Nonconformist clergymen and Nonconformist political agitators are depicted in her fiction. As clergymen in the Chronicles of Carlingford do not rise above the position of archdeacon, it is not unusual to find Oliphant critically engaged with the lot of those clergymen inhabiting the lowest rung of the ecclesiastical ladder, the curates. The second part of Chapter Four will explore Oliphant’s depiction of the curate in her fiction.
Finally, Chapter Five will chart Oliphant's depiction of female clerical kin in their varied roles of mother, wife, widow, sister, and daughter. Although mindful of prevailing social customs that largely determined the place of women in nineteenth-century England, Oliphant presents her female clerical relatives as active agents, not only in their practical supporting role in the parish, but also in their important roles as vectors of suitable clerical behaviour. In their varied relationships with their clergymen, Oliphant's female clerical kin may bask in the reflected glory of the clerical office as well as possessing the potential to dispense harmony or wreak discord, if they so desire. Oliphant implied that clergymen who, for reasons of temperament, found the duties of parochial life burdensome, found relief in the network of practical and emotional support supplied by female relatives. Oliphant demonstrates that, despite appearances to the contrary, domestic and public spheres overlapped rather more than most contemporaries cared to admit.

As Oliphant's clerical characters depict, for the most part, the ordinary men and women of an English parish and as her highest clerical rank is an archdeacon, the primary source material will focus on, as far as possible, clerical life below this rank. In addition, Oliphant does not nominate a geographical location for the town of Carlingford, stating only that its accessibility to London increases the numbers of 'good society' who are attracted by its 'mild, sheltered' reputation (The Rector, 1863/1986, p. 1). In her introduction to The Rector and The Doctor's Family, Penelope Fitzgerald suggests Aylesbury as a possible site because this is where 'Francis Oliphant designed
some windows for St Mary's Church' (1986, p. viii). In order to avoid eclecticism, but at the same time present the diversity of mid-nineteenth-century English religious life, primary source material is generally located within the middle and southern regions of England.

Modern scholarship provides a large and ever expanding variety of source materials with which to begin a study on the range of nineteenth-century religious practices represented in Oliphant's fiction. Owen Chadwick's two volume exploration into nineteenth-century religion, The Victorian Church (1971 and 1972), is notable for the broad scope of its subject matter and is therefore an important starting point to understanding religion in the nineteenth century. Since then, other works have appeared which have offered wide-ranging interpretations of Anglican and Nonconformist religious concerns. Hugh McLeod's Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914 (1996), examines religious and anti-religious communities in order to assess the extent to which the lives of ordinary people were affected by their religious or non-religious identity. Bernard M. G. Reardon, in Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: A survey from Coleridge to Gore (1971/1995), presents a comprehensive survey of the theological, intellectual and philosophical thought underpinning religious opinion in Victorian Britain.

In parallel with the focus of this thesis, I have attempted to select secondary sources that offer access to the roles and duties of clergymen at the parochial level. Frances Knight's The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society (1995) shifts the
focus of attention away from senior Anglican clergy, to an examination of the 'Church at
the parish level in order to reconstruct the religious world of the nineteenth-century
Anglican, and to examine the impact that the policies being formulated at the top of the
Peter Hanunond (1977), Anthony Russell (1980), and Alan Haig (1984) analyse, in
detail, the Anglican clergyman's professional status and duties, whilst Kenneth Brown
(1988), James Munson (1991) and David Bebbington (1992) and (1999) examine the
community of Dissent and its ministers. Although Munson (1991, p. 209-213) and
Bebbington (1992, p. 1) note that the nineteenth-century English novel was often used
by some contemporary novelists as a vehicle for promoting a negative stereotype of
Nonconformity, the place of the novel as a valid form of religious commentary has been
overlooked by the majority of modern writers of nineteenth-century religion. This thesis
is motivated, in part, by a desire to invest the novel as a valid source in the examination
of nineteenth-century English religion.

There is evidence in the Chronicles of Carlingford to suggest that, like many of
her contemporaries, Oliphant was overwhelmed by the sheer abundance and variety of
mid-Victorian religion. The Chronicles of Carlingford mark a watershed in the personal
and creative life of this author who began writing the series during a period of personal
tragedy and professional turmoil. I believe that the series, in part, enabled Oliphant, as
an outsider in terms of gender and nationality, to legitimise her explorations and
equivocal religious stance into the varieties existing within mid-nineteenth-century
English Christianity. Oliphant bore witness to the myriad changes that marked the
religious landscape of nineteenth-century England, yet her importance as a chronicler of these changes has never been adequately acknowledged. This thesis seeks to redress this situation by demonstrating Oliphant’s pre-eminence as a serious religious commentator.
CHAPTER ONE

CHURCH AND CHAPEL SERVICES

One of the most persistent and insistent themes emerging from the *Chronicles of Carlingford* is its endorsement of the idea that existing social disparities between Dissenters and Anglicans hindered religious amelioration between the two groups. This does not suggest that Oliphant considered seriously a programme of social amalgamation as a workable solution to the differences between Dissent and some factions within the Established Church. She did not. But the idealistic impulse, sometimes contrived, is apparent in her fiction and offers testimony to a varied chronicle of wrongs existing within English Dissent and Anglicanism. The ideal world of fiction offers a means by which heterogeneous religious parts may be fashioned into a homogeneous whole. In the *Chronicles of Carlingford*, Oliphant displays disappointment with the schisms afflicting Christian denominations in nineteenth-century England. With this in mind, the chapter will investigate Oliphant’s representation of church and chapel services, the design of churches and chapels, and the content and delivery of sermons, because these aspects of worship, together with the structure of one’s place of worship, be it church or chapel, revealed one’s religious viewpoint and were intimately associated with social hierarchies. The chapter will also examine a parallel theme explored by Oliphant that deals with clerical conflict occurring when individuals, operating from the purview of a faction within Anglicanism, threaten to widen the gap further between denominations. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate Oliphant’s awareness that the conduct of Anglican and Nonconformist
services received, in particular, the imprimatur of influential individuals and factions within the Church of England and Nonconformity.

In the fiction that deals with church and chapel issues, Oliphant tends to group her Anglican characters along party lines, that is, according to their allegiance with High, Broad, or Low Church positions. In contrast, Oliphant’s Nonconformist characters inhabit a separate social as well as religious sphere to her Anglicans. There are times, however, when these two groups intersect. It seems that Oliphant was uncomfortable with the religious and social divide separating Anglicanism and English Nonconformity and, according to Merryn Williams, Salem Chapel hints, in part, that what is needed is a different kind of Christianity (1986, p. 78). This idealistic impulse towards religious amelioration is most clearly outlined in A Son of the Soil (1865/1883), when the eponymous hero who, Oliphant cautions, is a ‘young man . . . still in the fantastic age’ (p. 370), expresses his vision for a universal Christianity:

Colin had derived from all the religious influences with which he had been brought in contact a character which was perhaps only possible to a young Scotchman and Presbyterian, strongly anchored to his hereditary creed, and yet feeling all its practical deficiencies. He was High Church, though he smiled at Apostolic succession; he was Catholic, though the most gorgeous High Mass that ever was celebrated would have moved him no more than one of Verdi’s operas. . . . What he meant to do was to untie the horrible bands of logic and knit fair links of devotion around that corner of the universe
which it has always seemed possible to Scotsmen to make into a Utopia; to persuade his nation to join hands again with Christendom, to take back again the festivals and memories of Christianity, to rejoice in Christmas and sing lauds at Easter, and say common prayers with a universal voice (1865/1883, p. 370-1).

Colin’s Utopian vision is mitigated by practical intrusions such as a presbytery that ‘might at any time prosecute, judge, and condemn him’, coupled with an overwhelming personal anxiety that he was ‘a very poor pretender’ as a ‘predestined reformer’ (1865/1883, p. 372). For Oliphant, the wider scope of the ideal vision of Christianity must always try to accommodate the individual’s practical concerns with belief.

Dale Trela points out that Oliphant was greatly influenced by her early associations with the ‘Free Church that emerged from the Scottish Disruption’ and, although she eventually distanced herself ‘from the rigorous tenets of this Protestant sect’, came to occupy a ‘firm, if somewhat unorthodox theism throughout her life’ (1995, p. 18). This is an important point, for Oliphant’s religious explorations within the Chronicles of Carlingford, in particular, suggest a sincere engagement with questions of Christian amelioration. On occasions, though, the social divide that separated Dissenter and Anglican seemed too wide to permit any positive interaction between the two. In Phoebe Junior, however, Oliphant takes issue with the question of social difference between Anglicans and Dissenters to demonstrate just how much the social and, by implication, the religious landscapes had changed. This change, she notes, is reflected in
the way church and chapel services are conducted. When we delve beneath the comic surface of novels such as Salem Chapel and Phoebe Junior, where Nonconformity is foregrounded and, at times, unexpectedly juxtaposed with Anglicanism, there indeed emerges a desire to incorporate the best of both traditions into a workable whole. To this end, Oliphant devotes considerable time to examining the form and the content of Anglican and Nonconformist services. In so doing, she displays knowledge of varieties of worship within Anglicanism as well as Nonconformity that are not merely superficial.

Her knowledge of contemporary Christianity found favour with the reading public. A review of Phoebe Junior, which appeared in The Times, paid tribute to her ‘catholic comprehension of the feelings and opinions of people of other creeds’. The reviewer was impressed by the ‘lively fidelity’ of her characters that are sharpened by the ‘satire of an outsider’ (‘Recent Novels’, 1876). Much to Oliphant’s mingled delight and annoyance, critics writing for the Spectator (‘Books: Chronicles of Carlingford’, 1863) and The Saturday Review (‘Chronicles of Carlingford: Salem Chapel’, 1863) thought that George Eliot was the author of Salem Chapel. Eliot was quick to refute these claims, declaring that ‘I am NOT the author of the Chronicles of Carlingford . . . . from what Mr Lewes tells me, they must represent the Dissenters in a very different spirit from anything that has appeared in my books’ (Haight, 1954-6, p. 25).

Nineteenth-century Anglican worship was notable for its abundant variety. According to Reed, ‘an ecclesiastical Rip Van Winkle, roused from a seventy-year sleep in the 1890s’ and finding himself ‘in London, at Oxford Circus, on a Sunday morning’,
would be able to enjoy a variety of services, some 'almost identical to those he had known seventy years before [and] some that he would not recognise as Anglican at all' (1996, p. 4). Reed attributes this change to Anglo-Catholicism and the concomitant changes to Evangelical forms of worship, which 'adopted those practices in self-defence' (1996, p. 7). Oliphant, ever alert to ecclesiastical nuances and fashion, captures the changing natures of Anglican worship in her fiction and demonstrates how these changes affected relationships between clergymen and the communities they served.

The role that helped to define the nineteenth-century clergyman more than any other was his obligation to perform public worship. Recognizing the importance of the place of public worship as a defining characteristic of clerical duty, Bishop Blomfield (1863, p. 57) states that, whether the clergyman 'fifty years ago' was 'non-resident, a sportsman, a farmer, neglectful of all study, a violent politician, a bon vivant, or a courtier', or not, the performance of a 'decent and regular performance of Divine service on Sundays was almost all that any one looked for in a clergyman: if this were found, most people were satisfied'. The performance of public worship as a clearly definable characteristic of clerical life requires, as Oliphant notes, the reassuring presence of 'a man who is obliged to be somewhere at a certain hour, to do something at a certain time, and whose public duties are not volunteer proceedings, but indispensable work' (The Perpetual Curate 1864/1975, Vol I, p. 2). The clergyman could offer his parishioners, in his preferred form of public worship, either exciting possibilities for change or the safe passage of tradition. Oliphant's tongue-in-cheek tilt at a benign and inoffensive clerical presence at the beginning of The Perpetual Curate obscures, momentarily, the clerical squabbles that follow.
The public nature of the church service exposed the clergyman to public praise and, at times, to public condemnation. Consequently, his success or failure as a clergyman depended on the manner in which the services were conducted as well as the content of his sermons. In this the clergyman was very much at the mercy of human nature, there being no quantifiable way of measuring the efficacy of, say, a sermon. People liked, disliked, or were indifferent to what they heard from the pulpit. Oliphant recognized early in her literary career that 'the pulpit of itself, and by itself, possesses a power which it is impossible to over-estimate' (Oliphant, 1858). Oliphant's Free Church background was more than adequate preparation for her fictional recognition of the importance and power of the preacher. Her most memorable fictional preachers are Nonconformists. Similarly, her adherence to Anglicanism following her removal to England, and her sympathetic attitude toward Continental Roman Catholicism, impressed upon her the significance and beauty of the Anglican liturgy, particularly during the 1860s and 1870s when some notable Anglican figures were embroiled in the controversies surrounding Ritualism. Church of England and Nonconformist congregations alike underwent considerable upheavals to maintain their effectiveness and adherents during these times of transition.

**Church of England Services**

The architectural style of Anglican churches built in the last half of the nineteenth century was, in many instances, an accurate indication of the type of service
held within. In the *Chronicles of Carlingford*, Oliphant is careful to draw the reader’s attention to the layout and design of Carlingford’s two Anglican churches and the Congregational chapels located in Carlingford and in London. This information alerts the reader to the type of service likely to occur, the manner in which it is performed, as well as prefiguring possible areas of clerical tension. Oliphant tells us that Carlingford Parish church is ‘a building of the eighteenth century, of the churchwarden period of architecture’ (*Perpetual*, Vol I, p. 12-13), and later as ‘that building being of the Revolution or churchwarden epoch’ (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p, 3). It contains ‘high pews and stifling galleries’, a ‘three-storeyed pulpit’, and beneath this the reading desk and the clerk’s desk (*Perpetual*, Vol I, p. 13). It is likely that Oliphant is referring to the Evangelical influence in Anglicanism, and in particular, the teachings of the Wesley brothers and Whitefield in the first half of the eighteenth century. Many churches retained the style of the Augustan period in their architecture, that is, a style that emphasises the centrality of the preacher. This comment concurs with the popular Victorian belief that church building and restoration suffered neglect during the eighteenth century. There were reasons for this apparent neglect. Chadwick points out that the Church of England had operated without the central organising force of Convocation since 1717 (1966/1971, p. 309) and Convocation was not reinstated until 1855 (1966/1971, p. 324). Monies for repairs came out of the church rate levy, which was not always sufficient to support extensive repairs. Jacob, writing of the church during the first half of the eighteenth century, stresses that churchwardens would be hard pressed to raise funds for church maintenance during times of agricultural depression, in addition to the tithe paid to the incumbent (1996, p. 194). During the period that the
Established Church was without a central body to fund the building of churches, it was forced to rely on the generosity of patrons to supply money for building projects, especially in country towns and villages. For example, the inhabitants of the village of Long Crendon in Buckinghamshire were ordered to repair their parish church in 1827 following the Archdeacon’s visitation but, as Donald notes, with no resident lay patron, expenses were to be met by a church rate. As a result, few repairs were completed before 1889 (1979, p. viii-ix). The fictional town of Carlingford, too, is without a lay patron.

According to Oliphant, Carlingford church is a faithful representation of the ecclesiastical form of architecture favoured in the eighteenth century, which was very often a mixture of classical and Gothic. Wentworth’s description of the church as ‘a wretched old barn’ (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 13) is a pointed reference to the eighteenth-century practice, described by Hammond, of disguising, as far as possible, Gothic features such as a pitched roof by inserting a flat plaster ceiling, glazing the windows and adding curtains (1977, p. 72). For Wentworth, whose own church was recently built by Gilbert Scott, any attempt at restoration of Carlingford parish church ‘is beyond the imagination of man’ (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 13). Wentworth’s criticisms of his rival clergyman’s church, although harsh, may be justified in terms of practicality if not aesthetic appeal. In churches such as this, the congregation sat in enclosed pews with walls four to five feet in height so that they could see the officiating clergyman, but little else. Remembering the church of his childhood in Tasmania, Henry Phipps Denison recalled the box pews and the three decker pulpit. The design of the interior was such
that it allowed the family to enter or leave the church by a passage between vestry and pew, ‘without going into the body of the church’ (1925, p. 8-9). An interior such as the one described by Denison, with its multi-layered pulpit, was designed to accommodate the clerk, a desk for the clergyman for prayers, while the topmost part of this edifice was reserved for the officiating clergyman to deliver his sermon. Churches such as this were designed for a service that favoured the prayer and preaching style of the Evangelicals although, as Bradley observes, the Evangelicals did not alter the form of service prescribed by the Prayer Book, apart from emphasising the place of the ministry of the word in the service (1976, p. 64). It was the Evangelicals, notes Bradley, who introduced early morning communion and evensong (1976, p. 64). Oliphant describes the late Evangelical Rector Mr Bury, who was ‘profoundly Low - lost in the deepest abysses of Evangelicalism’, as a clergyman who exemplifies such a style of worship (The Rector 1863/1986, p. 1). It is Mr Bury’s ‘determined inclination to preach to everybody’ that ‘half emptied Salem Chapel’ (The Rector, p. 1-2). In many English parishes, at least until the early years of the nineteenth century, public worship was likely to comprise Morning and Evening Prayer on most Sundays, with a sermon preached on both occasions, although more usually at Morning Prayer. According to the Visitation returns of Archdeacon Butler of Derby, the majority of the parishes in the Derby deanery celebrated Holy Communion four times throughout the year, at Christmas, Easter, Whitsun, and Michaelmas, although in some parishes there was monthly Communion, including the great festivals (Austin, 1972, passim).
During the incumbency of the Rev. William Morgan, Carlingford church undergoes alterations in accordance with drawings devised by Morgan himself and supervised by the architect Folgate. Oliphant does not specify the type of work in progress at Carlingford church, although it is clear that the Rector’s remodelling of the church is a response to his anxieties concerning the activities of his rival, the perpetual curate, Wentworth. It is Wentworth who ministers to the spiritual needs of the poor of Carlingford in a consecrated schoolroom with a ‘carved reading-desk, and the table behind, contrived so as to look suspiciously like an altar’ (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 18-19). Morgan’s enthusiastic rebuilding program is not only a concession to fashion but also an attempt to accommodate the poor of Carlingford whose needs are not met within the parish of Carlingford (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 162-3). In so doing, Morgan attempts to redress a situation that is not of his making.

The antagonism that develops between Wentworth and Morgan has its origins in the disputed remodelling of Carlingford Church. This, in turn, develops into arguments about services and clerical authority, and reaches its apogee when Morgan and others accuse Wentworth of immoral behaviour. Furthermore, the argument between Wentworth and Morgan begins during the Lenten period, which introduces an unsavoury note into the comic warfare conducted by clergymen who, Oliphant believes, should know better.

Oliphant places the older clergyman, Morgan, within a church in need of renovation, whilst the younger cleric, Wentworth, is housed in a chapel of recent
vintage. This allows Oliphant to illustrate their differing attitudes towards their duties at the same time as exposing scenes of clerical conflict. Morgan is the third Rector of Carlingford to have found the perpetual curate of St Roque’s a formidable adversary. Morgan’s predecessors, Bury and Proctor, are old-fashioned clerics, who tend to approach their duties in the same way as the Rev Mr Stainforth approaches his in He That Will Not When He May. Oliphant tells us that the ‘amiable and inoffensive’ Stainforth has not been ‘particularly active in his parish’ and is content to tolerate ‘abuses which are venerable, while deprecat[ing] any great eagerness about the way to heaven’ (1892, p. 196). Stainforth, like Bury and Proctor, is ‘very reasonable’ about parochial difficulties, preferring to let his curates deal with them, even though one has tried to ‘set up confessions’ while the other ‘muscular young parson’ . . . instituted games’ (1892, p. 197). Both Bury and Proctor, who are unable to cope with the ‘difficult district about the canal’ known as Wharfside (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 3-5), come to rely on the active and innovative efforts of Wentworth, who soon becomes entrenched in the district. The future of the Anglican Church is assured, Oliphant reminds us, if it employs men with the pastoral vigour and spiritual commitment that Wentworth displays towards his parishioners. Even though present circumstances force him to operate under a professional cloud, Wentworth represents, for Oliphant, the future direction of a re-invigorated Anglican priesthood.

Clerical rivalry of a similar vein recurs in Joyce where Canon Jenkinson and the Rev Austin Sitwell exchange metaphorical blows over the building of a rectory. The plot of this novel resembles The Perpetual Curate with its scenes of clerical rivalry
beginning as a clash of personalities, which then becomes a battleground over a disputed ‘district’. This leads to personal attacks over matters of doctrine between the Broad Church outlook favoured by the Canon and the ‘High ritual’ endorsed by Sitwell (Joyce, 1889, p. 239). This situation is not satisfactorily resolved, unlike that of Wentworth and Morgan, whose mutual ill-feeling ends with Morgan’s voluntary removal to another living, whilst the perpetual curate is rewarded with the living of Carlingford.

Oliphant has little to say about Morgan’s ecclesiastical leanings. We learn of his dislike of sisterhoods (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 10) and of his small irritations with his Low Church curate who is known to associate with the town’s Dissenting minister (Perpetual Vol II, p. 155). In fact, his time at Carlingford is dominated by his almost obsessive attempts to curb the extent of Wentworth’s influence in the town, to the detriment of his own career. The antagonism between Morgan and Wentworth is a mixture of ill-matched personalities, combined with professional ambitions and rivalries disguised as altruism. Oliphant shows that any hopes for clerical compatibility are doomed almost from the beginning:

Mr Morgan talked rather big, when the ladies went away, of his plans for the reformation of Carlingford. He went into statistics about the poor, and the number of people who attended no church, without taking any notice of that ‘great work’ which Mr Wentworth knew to be going on at Wharfside. The Rector even talked of Wharfside, and of the necessity of exertion on behalf of that wretched
district, with a studious unconsciousness of Mr Wentworth; and all but declined to receive better information when Mr Wodehouse proffered it (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 31-32).

Oliphant’s pairing of older with younger clergymen, notably the ritualist clergyman Frank Wentworth, may be a reaction to a want of clear direction and authority that she perceived was lacking in the Established Church at the time. The disagreements between Morgan and Wentworth serve to highlight other points of conflict. With the vestments, floral arrangements, incense, and liturgical innovations that verged on the theatrical, this movement also produced, in its turn, a highly visible clergy, where the clergyman himself was often the focus of attention, rather than the Church itself. Oliphant was well aware of this aspect of ritualism and used it to good effect in her novels. Novels with a Tractarian theme, both for or against, were not new and had been in vogue since the 1840s. Baker notes that ‘[t]he new idea of using tales to advance the Oxford Movement is carefully defended in Paget’s St. Antholin’s (1841) and in Paley’s Church Restorers (1844)’ (1932, p. 11). The most popular author to champion the Oxford Movement was Charlotte Mary Yonge, whose manuscripts were delivered to Keble who suggested changes where necessary.

The epicentre of Ritualism in Carlingford is located within Wentworth’s unofficial ‘district’ of St Roque’s Chapel. Like Carlingford church, St Roque’s Chapel is located in ‘that genteel and quiet suburban road’ of Grange Lane (Phoebe Junior, 1876/1989, p. 60). The Chapel, of recent construction, ‘had been built by Gilbert Scott’
Oliphant does not give detailed descriptions of the Chapel but was familiar with trends in Gothic architecture and some of her novels betray an interest in, and fondness for, the style. For example, the Abbey Church of St Michael in *Within the Precincts* is ‘Late Gothic, perpendicular and magnificent’ (1885, p. 1). In *The Curate in Charge*, the parish Church of Brentburn is apologetically described as ‘new spick-and-span nineteenth-century Gothic, much more painfully correct than if it had been built in the fourteenth century, as it would fain, but for its newness, make believe to be’ (1876/1987, p. 1). In contrast, the rectory in this novel is an ‘ugly’, red bricked ‘Georgian house, built at the end of the last century’, which the previous incumbent had ‘tried hard to make his friends believe . . . was of Queen Anne’s time – that last distinctive age of domestic architecture’ (*The Curate in Charge*, p. 1). It is possible to read Oliphant’s readiness to dismiss lightly the architectural pretensions of Brentburn’s Gothic Church as a veiled criticism of the Tractarian tendency to seek inclusion within a historical heritage that both justifies and legitimates its position in the Anglican Church. Whilst the comment on the ‘new spick-and-span nineteenth-century Gothic’ might be lost on twenty-first century readers, Oliphant’s contemporary readers were aware of the fragility of a movement whose claims for legitimation rested largely on, as Burns has identified, ‘a highly selective appeal to the past in their resort to historical legitimation’ (1999, p. 265-6).

As well as facilitating a certain type of ecclesiology, a Church that was built or refurbished along Gothic lines also lent itself to a certain type of atmospheric pre-eminence. Churches such as St Roque’s Chapel, with its ‘carved oaken cross of the
reredos' and the line of choristers situated 'two deep, down each side of the chancel' (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 55), were designed to make an aesthetic statement. Oliphant, well aware of this point, suggests that Wentworth is a temporary, although willing aesthete. Furthermore, as Yates notes, this revived medievalism ‘appealed to the spirit of the age’ and encouraged other Anglicans ‘who in practice had no use for such buildings, felt obliged to copy them and, if necessary, to adapt them for less ritualistic worship’ (1991, p. 172). Morgan, suggests Oliphant, is the captive of a popular aesthetic movement, and resistance to it is quite beyond his control. One of the most popular exponents of Gothic architecture in nineteenth-century England was Gilbert Scott.

Gilbert, later Sir Gilbert, Scott was one of nineteenth-century England’s most famous and prolific architects. Scott was a follower of Augustus Welby Pugin who is largely attributed with popularising the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival in architecture. At one time Pugin employed Oliphant’s husband Francis as his second designer. Francis Oliphant considered himself a close friend of Pugin but Williams suggests that Pugin’s letters to Francis were in the manner of an employer to an employee and did not suggest any intimacy (1986, p. 17). Oliphant’s readers would have been aware of the reputation of Scott, who was well known in 1864 when The Perpetual Curate was published. Furthermore, Oliphant had personal knowledge of the leading figures of the Gothic Revival through access to her husband’s work. Both Scott and Pugin were the leading architects of the Gothic Revival style of architecture in

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1 According to Clark, a list published in 1878 accredited over 730 buildings to Scott after 1847, of which there were 39 cathedrals and minsters, 476 churches, 23 parsonages, and many public buildings, schools
nineteenth-century England, with Scott continuing as an exponent of Gothic following Pugin's death in 1852. Given Oliphant's knowledge of, and interest in, Gothic, there is every reason to suppose that Morgan's remodelling of Carlingford Church is in accordance with this very popular architectural style.

In May 1863, Oliphant wrote to her publisher, John Blackwood, expressing delight in his favourable opinion of his 'Reverence', as Oliphant had affectionately dubbed her 'favourite' clerical character, Frank Wentworth. Oliphant went on to assure Blackwood that 'I mean to bestow the very, greatest care upon him' (Oliphant, 1899/1974, p. 191). And care for him she did. Oliphant distinguished Frank Wentworth above her other fictional clergyman by allowing him the twin triumphs of overcoming his self-indulgent claims to domestic happiness by recognising its potential pitfalls and constraints, and by his willingness to discard some rather naïve attitudes to his professional responsibilities. Oliphant's ironic tone seldom deserts her in her characterisation of Wentworth, except towards the end of the novel when due allowances are made for the young cleric's growing maturity in the midst of a congregation who expect him to gloat in his moment of triumph. Oliphant reminds us that '[i]t was not the custom of the young Anglican to carry his personal feelings, either of one kind or another, into the pulpit with him, much less into the reading desk, where he was the interpreter not of his own sentiments or emotions, but of common prayer and universal worship' (Personal, Vol III, p. 282). Wentworth's deeper appreciation of his responsibilities towards his profession are far removed from the early description of him and colleges. Scott, continues Clark, 'must have changed the appearance of England considerably'
as a 'dilettante Anglican, given over to floral ornaments and ecclesiastical upholstery', a
description that is not a confident recommendation of a serious-minded clergyman
(Perpetual, Vol I, p. 17). Stock Clark notes that in some of her novels Oliphant’s irony
seems to take the form of ambivalence (1986, p. 13-14). Her treatment of Wentworth
confirms this viewpoint, making it difficult to decide with any certainty whether
Wentworth’s attraction to Ritualism remains theatrical, or whether he has found his
ecclesiastical niche. The narratorial comments at the end of the novel suggest that
Wentworth’s need for clerical authority is enhanced and encouraged within Anglo-
Catholicism:

He [Wentworth] was now in his own domains, an
independent monarch, as little inclined to divide his
power as any autocrat; and Mr Wentworth came into
his kingdom without any doubts of his success in it,
or of his capability for its government (Perpetual,
Vol III, p. 294).

The above passage, with its liberal use of regal metaphors, is a confident expression of
his present position, and tends to overshadow his earlier show of humility in the face of
victory (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 282). Whilst Oliphant hints at moments of insincerity that
may blemish Wentworth’s character, his devotion to his congregation, both wealthy and
poor, springs from genuine concern for their spiritual and physical welfare. Oliphant
stresses that Wentworth’s displays of parochial enthusiasm may be explained by his
adherence to Ritualism. Oliphant does not regard Wentworth’s stance within Ritualism
as an impediment to his progress, even though his aunts’ refusal to relinquish the family
(1928/1974, p. 175).
living to him are decided on the basis of his 'high' stance. Oliphant's depiction of Wentworth as the triumphant, although not entirely worthy, winner in this ecclesiastical lottery, reflects growing public awareness of the dynamic nature of Ritualism within the Anglican Church. Public awareness of Ritualism, as Chadwick observes, was due to the increased diversity of public worship in the parishes after 1865 (1970/1972, p. 308). These changes, Chadwick suggests, were the result of efforts by Evangelicals and Tractarians to elevate the Book of Common Prayer as a vehicle for worship by making it more accessible to the majority of congregations, thereby discouraging the type of service that consisted simply of 'a dialogue between parson and clerk' (1970/1972, p. 309).

From 1860 onwards, Ritualism was politicised so that it was always open to public support or condemnation. The English Church Union was formed in 1860 to defend those clergymen who were persecuted, whilst the Church Association was founded in 1865 to fight Ritualism. An example of such persecution concerned Henry Phipps Denison who was licensed to the curacy of East Brent due to the incumbent's illness. Denison continued with the Ritualist services inaugurated by his uncle, Archdeacon Denison, much to the irritation of some parishioners. According to Denison, some farmers living in a hamlet at the end of the parish had fallen under the influence of the rector of the neighbouring parish, 'who was a Low Churchman of the Church Association type; and, having been accustomed to take the lead, they thought that they would now be able to rouse the parish to opposition' (1925, p. 55-57). In the resulting furore, the bishop revoked Denison's licence. An appeal was lodged in the
Archbishop's Court, whereupon the licence was restored, owing to a legal flaw in the bishop's case. The bishop did not let matters rest there and refused to ordain Denison. He remained a deacon for four years (Denison, 1925, p. 58).

Feelings ran high on both sides of the Ritualist debate and culminated in the passing of the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874, which, in the words of Chadwick, sought to 'correct irregularity of ritual in the Church of England' (1970/1972, p. 348). At the parish level, although Ritualist and Evangelical clergymen and congregations might encourage diversity in religious observance, the Act had the effect of forcing allegiance to a particular party. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Anglican clergymen were mostly resident in their parishes, and, although this was considered desirable, it meant that it was all too easy for a clergyman to push a particular party line, sometimes to the detriment of the parish as a whole. At the national and political levels, Tractarianism and, to a lesser extent, Ritualism provoked and worried the notion of Englishness for many people because these terms were popularly associated with Popery. This anti-Romanist stance, as Reed observes, was more 'cultural than religious', and was linked with 'feelings toward the nation, toward honesty, loyalty, decency—toward 'commonsense' itself' (1996, p. 236). Oliphant may have had these values in mind in her depiction of Frank and Gerald Wentworth, particularly in view of Gerald Wentworth's Roman Catholic sympathies. Certainly, The Times, in a review of The Perpetual Curate, applauded Oliphant's 'commonsense' depiction of Gerald's plight, noting with admiration her 'charity' at the 'one-sided logic' displayed by him and others of his ilk ('Fiction', 1864). As if to defend Oliphant from
the stain of being pro-Catholic, The Times reviewer added that 'she herself does not show us much good in him; she is unable to believe in the much good of unmanly characters, but she is constantly, as the next best thing, making all her chief characters declare quite seriously that this Gerald Wentworth is the noblest and finest of men' ('Fiction', 1864). According to Reed, the general editorial thrust of The Times, from approximately 1844 onwards, was an intransigent anti-Tractarian stance that had its origins when the Berkshire parish of Hurst, which included the owner of The Times, began to collect a weekly offering. A confidential memorandum was prepared on ninety-nine London clergymen, ranking them from most to least Puseyite. The list was published and thereafter, continues Reed, the paper 'pursued and printed news of troubled parishes throughout England, and denounced sacerdotalism in leader after leader for years' (1996, p. 38).

Oliphant is clear about Frank Wentworth's position within Anglicanism. He is a Ritualist, not a Tractarian (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 101), who has toyed with the idea of Roman Catholicism (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 268-9). Moreover, Frank Wentworth's association with Ritualism is a recent development, and his decision to embrace it was influenced by his student days at Oxford (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 74). The latter position is reserved for Wentworth's brother, Gerald, who eventually leaves the Church to become a Roman Catholic priest. The distinction that Oliphant makes between Ritualism and Tractarianism is important, given the controversies surrounding both movements. The term Tractarian was sometimes used in a loose and pejorative sense, as Aunt Leonora demonstrates, forcing heated denials from Wentworth. "I don't preach the Tracts for
the Times. Let us always be particular, my dear aunt, as to points of fact" (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 101). For Oliphant, Tractarianism leads directly to Rome, while Ritualism is essentially a pastoral matter, best left to the discretion of the individual clergyman. According to Cobb, whilst the early Tractarians were liturgically conservative, 'the second generation began to introduce more ceremonial, to wear the traditional eucharistic vestments, to use lights and incense and to supplement the Book of Common Prayer with additional prayers usually taken from the Roman Missal' (1988, p. 3). Oliphant's exemplary Ritualist, Frank Wentworth, is placed most decidedly within the 'second generation' of the movement.

A thematic thread emerging in The Perpetual Curate is concerned with how party differences affect the clergyman's family. When Wentworth is recalled to the family home in an attempt to convince his brother Gerald of the error of his ways, the arguments that ensue are concerned not so much with the strengths and weaknesses of theological positions, but with family honour, duty and responsibility. Gerald Wentworth mistakenly believes that, to become a Roman Catholic priest, he must discard his wife and children. As Jay explains, even before his brother's arrival, he has already mentally divorced his wife (1995, p. 85). Moreover, his flawed reasoning is at variance with his exalted reputation for intelligence and common sense:

When he recollected how he had himself dallied with the same thoughts, he grow angry with his brother's nobleness and purity, which never could see less than its highest ideal soul in anything, and with a certain fierce fit of truth, glanced back at his
own Easter lilies and choristers, feeling involuntarily that he would like to tear off the flowers and surplices and tread them under his feet. Why was it that he, an inferior man, should be able to confine himself to the mere accessories which pleased his fancy, and could judge and reject the dangerous principles beneath; while Gerald, the loftier, purer intelligence, should get so hopelessly lost in mazes of sophistry and false argument, to the peril of his work, his life, and all that he could ever know of happiness? (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 268-9).

For Oliphant, a man's foremost duty must be to his wife and family; theological positions, no matter how convincing, cannot replace the responsibilities of the family. Whilst Gerald Wentworth entertains no doubts about his decision, Oliphant shows that his brother possesses the 'commonsense' to doubt his position, especially when it is so closely linked to his future personal happiness. Wentworth's tenuous relationship with Ritualism is emphasised at times of personal crisis, suggesting that the external fortifications provided by Ritualism are indeed 'mere accessories' and are no substitute for an empty spirituality:

At that moment – the worst moment for such a thought – it suddenly flashed over him that, after all, a wreath of spring flowers or a chorister's surplice was scarcely worth suffering martyrdom for. This horrible suggestion, true essence of an unheroic age, which will not suffer a man to be absolutely sure of anything, disturbed his prayer as he knelt down in
silence to ask God's blessing (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 55-56).

Oliphant playfully parodies the extent to which personal honour, nationality, and religion are an integral part of the rhetoric surrounding Ritualism in the following passage:

It was Satan himself, surely, and no inferior imp, who shot that sudden arrow into the young man's heart as he tried to say his private prayer; for the Curate of St Roque's was not only a fervent Anglican, but also a young Englishman sans reproche, with all the sensitive, almost fantastic, delicacy of honour which belongs to that development of humanity; and not for a dozen worlds would he have sacrificed a lily or a surplice on this particular Easter, when all his worldly hopes hung in the balance. But to think at this crowning moment that a villainous doubt of the benefit of these surplices and lilies should seize his troubled heart! (Perpetual Vol I, p. 56)

Oliphant does not suggest that Wentworth's service deviates in any way from the format described in the Book of Common Prayer. Wentworth's emphasis, as a Ritualist, is on the sacraments. This is illustrated by Wentworth's haste in baptising Tom Burrows' six children, much to the annoyance of the Rector (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 80). The Rector's captious manner towards Wentworth extends in this instance, suggests Oliphant, beyond personal animosity and reflects the differences between factions within the Church of England. Jagger comments that for Ritualists and Tractarians alike, baptism, including
the baptism of infants, was the only means of entering the visible Church and the only assurance of salvation (1982, p. 44). For the High Churchman, continues Jagger, baptism was not confined to the children of believing parents, as some contemporary authorities maintained (1982, p. 44). This point is important in the context of The Perpetual Curate, as there is doubt whether or not Tom Burrows is a believer. Burrows and his family live in the poverty-stricken district of Wharfside, and although the women of the district support Wentworth and his efforts, it is the men, according to one female inhabitant, who require help (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 168). It is not until much later in the novel that Burrows ceases to doubt the character and theological stance of Wentworth (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 201). Furthermore, the question of infant baptism is relevant in the light of the Gorham\textsuperscript{2} judgement which provoked a theological crisis in the Church that reverberated throughout the following decades. The implications of the Gorham case would be familiar subject matter for many of Oliphant's readers. Oliphant is clear that Wentworth's efforts to baptise Tom Burrows' children are based on a commitment to Christian principles and a commitment to his people. The Rector's angry response to Wentworth's actions, on the other hand, is the result of personal pique and professional jealousy, and not a quarrel about doctrinal positions. Thus, Oliphant prevails upon the reader to question why the Rector has not taken steps to baptise the

\textsuperscript{2} George Cornelius Gorham (1787-1857) was an evangelical clergyman who held that 'infants were not worthy recipients of baptism and that an act of 'provenient grace' was required to make them worthy, otherwise no spiritual grace was conferred in the Sacrament' (Jagger, 1982, p. 3). On the grounds of Gorham's attitudes towards baptism, his bishop, the High Churchman Phillpotts, refused to institute him to his living. Gorham appealed to the Court of Arches, which found his views contrary to the doctrines of the Church. Unhappy with the Court's decision, Gorham appealed to the Privy Council, which decided that 'Gorham's doctrine was not contrary or repugnant to the declared doctrines of the Church of England' (Jagger, 1982, p. 2-3).
children himself. His failure to act decisively in this matter injures his credibility, while at the same time enhancing Wentworth's reputation.

Oliphant is cautious about the Ritualism promoted by Wentworth, suggesting that it invites a superficial sacerdotalism that will have little lasting effect on his parishioners. The first sentence in the passage below hints that Wentworth's Ritualism now bears the standard for an empty archetype, redolent in the wreaths of spring flowers and choristers' surplices and outward displays of piety that have been removed from the religious movement which brought them into being. As the passage shows, it is often the poor and dispossessed of Wharfside who are the most astute critics of Church factions but, at the same time, this group is the least likely to voice its opinions. Nevertheless, Oliphant clearly indicates that Wentworth's Easter Sunday sermon at Wharf side is accessible to this group of poor, theologically unsophisticated people. In the following passage, Oliphant rather triumphantly acknowledges the sacramentalism and liturgical richness of Ritualism and its success in conveying a meaningful spirituality to a group of urban poor, especially where, in her estimation, other branches of the established Church and Nonconformity had so often failed:

Some of them [the bargemen's wives and daughters] felt an inward conviction that their new ribbons were undoubtedly owing to the clergyman's influence, and that Tom and Jim would have bestowed the money otherwise before the Church planted her pickets in this corner of the enemy's camp; and the conviction, though not of an elevated description, was a great deal better than no conviction at all. Mr
Wentworth's little sermon to them was a great improvement upon his sermon at St Roque's. He told them about the empty grave of Christ, and how He called the weeping woman by her name, and showed her the earnest of the end of all sorrows. There were some people who cried, thinking of the dead who were still waiting for Easter, which was more than anybody did when Mr Wentworth discoursed upon the beautiful institutions of the Church's year... (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 70).

The description of the interior of St Roque's Chapel during the Easter service offers further evidence of Wentworth's Ritualist position. The communion table is bedecked with 'sacred vessels', while the 'carved oaken cross of the reredos' is adorned with lilies (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 55). Marsh reminds us that these practices were entirely in keeping with Ritualist practices where attention was focused on chancels and altars (1969, p. 113). Followers of ritualism, according to Marsh, 'wanted churches to be treated as shrines for prayer and sacraments (1969, p. 113). Wentworth wears a surplice and intones during his services, much to the disgust of his aunts (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 75), and the entire congregation is encouraged to say the responses, rather than leave that duty in the hands of the parish clerk, Elsworthy. St Roque's chapel has a surpliced choir that is involved in most services except Fridays, when their role is taken by the 'ladies, who chanted the responses a great deal more sweetly, and wore no surplices' (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 72). Chanting and intoning during services were Ritualist practices and not always well tolerated by some congregations. After assisting the Rev. Mr Rodwell of St. Ethelburga Bishopsgate, the real-life Rev. Benjamin Armstrong provided a checklist of
Rodwell's Ritualistic innovations, which included 'holy Communion every Sunday; a surpliced choir; intones the service; has nothing but Gregorian tones; rings the Sanctus bell in service; preaches in his surplice; kneels east and, in short, has adopted the whole feature of Catholicity of which our system is capable' 1963, p. 54). Innovations like these, he notes, were unlikely to be well received in his own parish and 'would set the place in an uproar and do a world of mischief' (1963, p. 54). With the exception of Wentworth's Evangelical aunts, the congregation of St Roque's has accepted, without complaint, Wentworth's methods of public worship. Oliphant hints that Carlingford's almost universal acceptance of Ritualism is due to general indifference and a reluctance to challenge directly the authority of Wentworth.

Wentworth's services in the district of Wharfside, conducted on Wednesday and Friday and Sunday evening, provoke more public comment and complaint than any of his Ritualist innovations at St Roque's. These services take place outside the church in a consecrated schoolroom, a practice more usually associated with Evangelical clergy. Russell points out that services held in schoolrooms and at other venues outside the church, although frowned on, were tolerated particularly in urban areas during the decade 1860-70, and were 'the hallmark of a zealous urban clergyman' (1980, p. 61). That Wentworth subscribes to this irregular practice is in keeping with his ardent nature and is not associated with any desire to inflame local opinion. Furthermore, Oliphant informs the reader that the schoolroom is consecrated, thereby endowing it with an air of legality and respectability. Consequently, there is little room for interference from Wentworth's critics. The reader is informed of Wentworth's activities by his most
enthusiastic critics, the Rev. Mr Morgan and Leonora Wentworth. This strategy allows Oliphant to reveal much about the critics themselves as well as the object of their scorn. Over a period of time, the 'iron-grey aunt' softens her opinions towards Wentworth, especially as her own London mission work bears uncomfortable similarities to Wentworth's work at Wharfside. Marsh confirms that 'Evangelical embarrassment in attempting to repress ritualism stemmed from the fact that some of its most notorious practitioners were honoured for their work in London slums' (1969, p. 89). Oliphant would have been well aware of this anomaly and drives the point home to her readers by frequent references to Leonora's exemplary mission work. The character Leonora Wentworth appears to function, at times, as an Evangelical choric voice, manifesting the fears and anxieties concerning Ritualism of a large section of the churchgoing population. This stance allows Oliphant to poke gentle fun at that group. As Leonora can hardly accuse her nephew of neglecting his duties, her attack must focus on Ritualism's more visible affronts to her beliefs as the following passage shows:

Arrived at the schoolroom, Miss Leonora found sundry written notices hung up in a little wooden frame inside the open door. All sorts of charitable businesses were carried on about the basement of the house; and a curt little notice about the Provident Society diversified the list of services, which was hung up for the advantage of the ignorant. Clearly the Curate of St Roque's meant it. "As well as he knows how", his aunt allowed to herself, with a softening sentiment; but, pushing her inquiries further, was shown up to the schoolroom, and stood pondering by the side of the reading-desk, looking at
the table which was contrived to be so like an altar. The Curate, who could not have dreamed of such a visit, and whose mind had been much occupied and indifferent to externals on the day before, had left various things lying about, which were carefully collected for him upon a bench. Among them was a little pocket copy of Thomas à Kempis, from which, when the jealous aunt opened it, certain little German prints, such as were to be had by the score at Masters's, dropped out. Some of them unobjectionable enough. But if the Good Shepherd could not be found fault with, the feelings of Miss Leonora may be imagined when the meek face of a monkish saint, inscribed with some villainous Latin inscription, a legend which began with the terrible words _Ora pro nobis_, became suddenly visible to her troubled eyes. She put away the book as if it had stung her, and made a precipitate retreat (_Perpetual_, Vol. 1, p. 86-87).

Leonora’s horrified reaction to the trappings of Ritualism is echoed in Mary Paley Marshall’s recollections of her childhood spent with a strictly Evangelical clergyman father. Marshall’s father substituted a table for an altar in his church ensuring that the table ‘was well removed from the east wall’ (1947, p. 9). Marshall adds that her ‘sister was once rebuked because she pulled down the cloth so as to cover the legs, for “legs showed that it was a table and not an altar”’ (1947, p. 9).
There is little that Wentworth's most trenchant critic, Mr Morgan, can do to subvert his colleague's activities, even though Wentworth's ecclesiastical position within Carlingford is an anomaly. As a Perpetual Curate, he attracts the same rights as a beneficed clergyman without its pecuniary benefits. A benefice, explains Marsh, is freehold property 'limited only by the obligation to conform to the liturgy, discipline and formularies of the established Church as they applied to the cure of souls' (1969, p. 123). Otherwise, continues Marsh, the beneficed clergyman could do 'what he liked, regardless of his parishioners' protests and his bishop's remonstrances' (1969, p. 123). Morgan, therefore, has no grounds to condemn Wentworth as this clergyman is fulfilling all of his ecclesiastical duties and has a loyal and substantial following in Carlingford. Morgan's only recourse is to find fault with Wentworth's morality, which is what he, and others, attempt to do. This matter is examined in detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Oliphant's representation of the types of services offered by the Church of England in her fiction reveals her willingness to engage with a wide range of contemporary ecclesiastical issues, including Ritualism. Oliphant recognised that the strength of the Anglican service lay with the high place it gave to the Sacraments and with the flexible nature of the Book of Common Prayer, which allowed each clergyman a degree of interpretation in his services whether High or Low. However, the degree of flexible interpretation allowed by the Prayer Book was limited by the hierarchical structure of the Church of England, together with the requirement that clergymen
subscribe\textsuperscript{3} to the Thirty-Nine Articles. These factors limited the proliferation of rampant individualism amongst its clergy.

The same strictures did not hold for Nonconformity. The overarching problem facing Nonconformity, as Oliphant recognised, was its social marginalisation within the nineteenth-century class system and in the autonomous structure of each chapel group. These problems will be considered in the next section.

Chapel Services

The architectural style adopted by most Nonconformist chapel builders was based on sound utilitarian principles and was a likely indication of the size and wealth, or lack of wealth, of the attending congregations, rather than reflecting the stylistic nuances of a particular ecclesiology. The exception was the wealthy, urban groups of Nonconformists. Until the 1830s, according to Watts, nearly all Nonconformist chapels were built in the style of contemporary domestic architecture or on the model of a Greek temple (1995, p. 605). After that time, explains Watts, Nonconformist architecture was caught up in the popularity of the Gothic revival that had influenced the building and restoration of so many Anglican churches (1995, p. 605). In the main, the popularity of the Gothic revival amongst Nonconformists was shaped and limited by financial constraints. The cost of building in Gothic brick, continues Watts, had attractive

\textsuperscript{3} The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church states that 'since 1865 the clergy have been required to affirm only a general assent; a more particular subscription was previously required (Livingstone, 1974, p. 511).
financial advantages over Greek stone, 'which explains the surprising fact that some of the earliest manifestations of the Gothic revival among Nonconformists were found not in the meeting-houses of wealthy urban congregations but in the humble chapels of Primitive Methodists and rural Congregationalists' (1995, p. 605). Moreover, unlike the Anglicans who were assisted by the efforts of the Ecclesiastical Commission for monies to finance church building and restoration projects, the Nonconformists were reliant on the efforts of a few influential and wealthy members, especially in poorer congregations, for the funds to build chapels. Therefore, most Nonconformist chapel building was limited in its scope by its ability to attract building funds. In the novels that deal mainly with Nonconformity, Salem Chapel and Phoebe Junior, Oliphant describes two very different chapels and their congregations; the former is in the provincial town of Carlingford, while the latter is located in London 'near Regent's Park' (Phoebe Junior, 1876/1989, p. 3).

Oliphant's description of the chapel in Carlingford, in the following passage, would have immediately alerted her contemporary readership to the religious and social positions of Dissent in a provincial town. It conveys a stark, utilitarian aspect of the Carlingford Congregationalists, labouring under an unwanted social stigma. The conspiratorial tone of the passage, underscored by its repeated use of the epithet 'little', contrives to adopt a shared understanding between reader and narrator by reinforcing the middle class, church-going prejudices of her readership in a way that admits familiar

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*As Jay notes, John Blackwood took issue with Oliphant over her repeated use of the epithet 'little'. In a letter sent to Oliphant after he had received an instalment of The Perpetual Curate, he asked her to...*
stereotypes. The abruptness of the last sentence finally denies the reader the easy security and singularity of shared values by introducing another position into the argument:

Towards the west end of Grove Street, in Carlingford, on the shabby side of the street, stood a red brick building, presenting a pinched gable terminated by a curious little belfry, not intended for any bell, and looking not unlike a handle to lift up the edifice by to the public observation. This was Salem Chapel, the only Dissenting place of worship in Carlingford. It stood in a narrow strip of ground, just as the little houses which flanked it on either side stood in their gardens, except that the enclosure of the chapel was flowerless and sombre, and showed at the farther end of a few sparsely-scattered tombstones - unmeaning slabs, such as the English mourner loves to inscribe his sorrow on. On either side of this little tabernacle were the humble houses - little detached boxes, each two storeys high, each fronted by a little flower-plot - clean, respectable, meagre, little habitations, which contributed most largely to the ranks of the congregation in the chapel. The big houses opposite, which turned their backs and staircase windows to the street, took little notice of the humble Dissenting community (Salem Chapel, p. 1).

‘observe the repetition of your favourite words, “perplexed”, “troubled”, “little”, “poor”... and strike them out as often as you can’ (1995, p. 300).
There is no doubt, Oliphant shows, that the social divisions between Church and Chapel people in Carlingford are well entrenched. Oliphant's fictional account of religious apartheid in a small provincial town had its precedents in contemporary society. Donald reports that the village of Long Crendon had 'Church shops and Chapel shops, and people buying groceries would go out of their way to patronise one from their own religion', adding that at 'Sunday school outings there were Church waggonettes and Chapel waggonettes drawn by Church horses and Chapel horses' (1979, p. x). Donald points out that much of the tension that existed in Long Crendon between Church and Chapel people was due, in part, to the irascible temperament of the Anglican clergyman, Hayton, who did nothing to allay tensions when he published a pamphlet describing the Dissenters of Long Crendon as 'Men of corrupt minds; Prating puppies ... Fanatical brains ... Patentee Gospel expounders ... Moon-struck bigots ... Wolves by nature' and many more equally derogatory epithets (1979, p. 29).

In Salem Chapel, the social divide between Church and Chapel people is clearly represented in the prominent position given to the chapel itself. The chapel forms the focus of the Congregationalists' abbreviated social world which is illustrated by the number of secular activities offered, such as 'tea-meetings' and 'singing-class, at which [the young people] practised hymns, and did not despise a little flirtation ... charitable societies, and missionary auxiliaries' (Salem Chapel, p. 2). Such activities, shows Oliphant, both encourage and promote social unity amongst the Chapel people as well as providing services that would later become the province of specialised secular agencies. This type of social cohesion did tend to produce, however, an inward-looking mentality,
tinged with a moral superiority that is gently ridiculed by Oliphant in the form of petty jealousies amongst the Chapel people, which produces much of the comedy in *Salem Chapel*. On the other hand, Oliphant recognised that, behind the comically of Nonconformist matrons attempting to outbid each other in matters of social decorum, there lies a genuine concern for the perceived needs of the wider community. Mrs Brown, for example, considers it her moral and social duty to prevail upon the new minister of Salem Chapel to call on 'that poor creature in Back Grove Street' who is a 'stranger here, and not a joined member; and she ain't ill either, as I can see — only something on her mind' (*Salem Chapel*, p. 11). Chapel people, observes Oliphant, were willing to adopt the pastoral concerns that Church people had deemed to be the exclusive domain of their clergyman.

When Oliphant published *Phoebe Junior* in 1876, the Congregational chapel landscape described in *Salem Chapel* had undergone a significant social shift. Nonconformity in the larger towns, and especially in London, now enjoyed the status formerly reserved for the Established Church, 'and the difference was almost equally marked between such a place of worship as the Crescent Chapel and the parish churches, which are like the nets in the Gospel, and take in all kinds of fish, bad and good' (*Phoebe Junior*, 1876/1989, p. 4). The erstwhile Phoebe Tozer, mother of the eponymous heroine, is now married to the Rev. Henry Beecham who has gained notoriety as a popular preacher. An element of neighbourly envy, however, has soured relationships between the Beechams and other members of Carlingford's Congregationalists. To escape petty jealousies the Beechams have moved from the
provinces to the splendour of the Crescent Chapel in London, where the society that supports Nonconformity there is quite different from the Nonconformist society of Carlingford, whose ‘little Salems and Bethesdas with their humble flocks, could not be supposed to belong to the same species’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 4). Even though it plays no major role in the novel, apart from representing the seat of Mr Beecham’s ‘final apotheosis’, the London chapel is mentioned as a type of inter denominational tour de force that illustrates the heights of social and religious acceptance that Nonconformity has attained in the intervening thirteen years. Oliphant gives no clue to the age or history of the Crescent Chapel; the only description of its exterior is that it was ‘built of the whitest stone’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 3), which suggests that Oliphant might have envisaged an edifice built after the classical style. One of Oliphant’s obituarists, R W Nicoll, who incidentally cites Phoebe Junior as the best of her works, maintains that Regent’s Park Baptist Chapel is the model for the fictional Crescent Chapel (1897). In the majority of Congregational chapels in England, where preaching the Word of God was a major feature of the service, most chapels were designed to accommodate as many of the faithful as possible. This led to rather unfair accusations from some quarters that chapels were ‘barn-like’ in appearance. This accusation did not take into account the diverse histories of Congregational chapels, some of which, as Chadwick explains, were once Wesleyan or Presbyterian chapels, or Anglican proprietary chapels, while still others were ‘founded to belong to no named denomination (1966/1971, p. 400). The popular stereotype endured. Paying a visit to a London Congregational Church in September 1874, the Anglican clergyman, the Rev. Benjamin Armstrong, was relieved
to note that 'the interior is contrived to look as little like a conventicle as possible' (Armstrong, 1963, p. 140).

In terms of wealth, the people of the Crescent Chapel are now 'much better off than the people at St. Paul's, more universally prosperous and well-to-do', and their material abundance is matched by their willingness to participate in the contemporary political and cultural milieu (Phoebe Junior, p. 5). In Phoebe Junior, the adherents of Nonconformity and Anglicanism have acquired a degree of intimacy and social interdependency that are absent in the earlier novel. Whereas the description of Salem chapel in the above passage relies on stylistic devices that emphasise architectural containment, suggesting an oppressive spirituality, the following passage which describes the Crescent Chapel relies on a confident ironic distance between narrator and subject, and conveys an assurance about Nonconformity that Munson describes as a 'refusal... to forever live in the shop's back parlour when progress had converted the shop into a multi-million pound industry' (1991, p. 15). The theme of this passage suggests that one of Nonconformity's advantages was the social mobility it conferred on its ministers and their families, especially since the majority of its ministers came from humble backgrounds. Mr Beecham is from such a background. The passage also supplies the reader with the social background of the eponymous heroine who will, in time, befriend and infiltrate the respectable, if impoverished Anglican society of the Rev. Mr May and his family:
It was the most comfortable chapel in the whole connection. The seats were arranged like those of an amphitheatre, each line on a slightly higher level than the one in front of it, so that everybody saw everything that was going on. No dimness or mystery was wanted there; everything was bright daylight, bright paint, red cushions, comfort and respectability. It might not be a place very well adapted for saying your prayers in, but then you could say your prayers at home — and it was a place admirably adapted for hearing sermons in, which you could not do at home; and all the arrangements were such that you could hear in the greatest comfort, not to say luxury. The pew-holders in the Crescent Chapel were universally well off; they subscribed liberally to missionary societies, far more liberally than the people in St. Paul's close by did to the S. P. G. They had everything of the best in the chapel, as they had in their houses. They no more economized on their minister than they did on their pew-cushions, and they spent an amount of money on their choir which made the singing-people at St. Paul's gnash their teeth (Phoebe Junior, p. 4).

Oliphant's reference to the 'bright daylight' infiltrating the interior of the chapel that invited '[n]o dimness or mystery' and its abundant material comforts, draws attention to the differences in Church and Chapel forms of worship, not only in terms of architectural styles, but also where Ritualism's influence is evident in the sense of mystery surrounding the Eucharist.
As the above passage shows, Oliphant was ready to admit that urban Nonconformity had, in many instances, far outstripped the Established Church in terms of wealth and that its adherents were anxious to attain the social respectability more usually enjoyed by Church people. The parameters of what constitutes Nonconformist 'respectability' for Oliphant are conveyed through a laconic checklist of secular activities. Nonconformists are 'well-informed people — people who read the newspapers, and sometimes the magazines, and knew what was going on. The men were almost all liberal in politics, and believed in Mr Gladstone with enthusiasm; the women often 'took an interest' in public movements, especially of a charitable character. There was less mental stagnation among them probably than among many of their neighbours. Their life was not profound nor high, but still it was life after a sort' (Phoebe Junior, p. 5). As Davies notes, 'many of the merchant princes of the Victorian age were more likely to be Congregationalists than Baptists' because the more sober, intellectual service of the former coincided with their notion of respectability, while the more emotionally charged service of the latter might have undesirable associations with lower class religious fervour (1962/1996, p. 213). The wealthy and vulgar Nonconformist, Mr Copperhead, in Phoebe Junior is an extreme example of a Victorian 'merchant prince'. Copperhead is the 'leading member' of the Crescent Chapel congregation and has amassed a fortune as a railway contractor. His vulgar displays of wealth, where 'it swelled his importance to think that he was able to hang up thousands of pounds, so to speak, on his walls' (Phoebe Junior, p. 12), arises from a sense of social inferiority brought about by a 'very ordinary education' that he attempts to conceal with
a 'jeering cynicism' and a pursuit 'for that something above wealth' (Phoebe Junior, p. 21). That Nonconformity was willing to 'embrace the cult of respectability' is confirmed by Watts who maintains that this movement towards social acceptability manifested itself in their decorous chapels, dignified services, educated ministers and the social standing of their congregations (1995, p. 601). The pitfalls of seeking religious and social respectability equal to that enjoyed by the Established Church risked, as Watts observes, a social dislocation between the manufacturer and the industrial community which produced his profits, as well as 'enticing the working man into the ranks of the petite bourgeoisie' (1995, p. 60!). Oliphant shows this social dislocation at work in Phoebe Junior where the Tozer family has now entered the ranks of the petite bourgeoisie. The Tozers have retired to the leafy gentility of Grange Lane but have not acquired the social graces and habits associated with people, mostly Anglicans, who live in this district. Hence Phoebe's reunion with her grandfather precipitates a feeling that 'he would call her "Ma'am," if she went up to him, and think her one of the quality' (Phoebe Junior, p. 83). Phoebe has now moved so far away from the humble backgrounds of her parents and grandparents that she is able to take an objective view of Nonconformists. 'Dissenters', as Phoebe explains to Clarence Copperhead, son of the railway magnate, 'are looked down upon in society ... but of course you must be aware that the prejudice exists' (Phoebe Junior, p. 77). Oliphant, who more thoroughly than most, understood English class distinctions, realised that wealth and education alone were not enough to erode social distinctions and in the following passage she manages to touch a sensitive nerve for some of her contemporaries:
Clarence did know, and with some bitterness; for Mr Copperhead, though he did not care much, perhaps, about religion, cared for his chapel, and stood by it with an unswerving strictness. His son, who was an Oxford man, and respectful of all the prejudices of society, did not like this. But what could he do against the obstinate dissentership of his father? This, as much as anything else, had acted upon the crowd the night of the ball, and made them all nobodies. He hesitated to make any reply, and his face flushed with shame and displeasure. Phoebe felt that she had avenged upon Clarence his mother's haughty politeness. She had brought home to him a sense of the social inferiority which was common to them both (Phoebe Junior, p. 77).

Other contemporaries who expressed similar sentiments did not ignore Nonconformity's social dislocation. A writer for the Church Quarterly Review noted that 'Nonconformity has become a religion of the middle classes. It includes wealth but not aristocracy, and for the most part, it excludes the poor. It has proved utterly incapable of abolishing caste distinctions' (in Munson, 1991, p. 35).

In Salem Chapel Oliphant shows that Vincent's popularity as a preacher is exploited by the chapel deacons who rely on pew-renting as a standard practice for raising money. Whereas Anglicans were assisted by parliamentary grants, church rates and endowments to build and maintain their churches, the Nonconformists, as Watts observes, paid for their minister's salaries and chapel maintenance out of their own
pockets. Charging pew-rent was, therefore, a justifiable financial imposition on Dissenting congregations (1995, p. 230) although Oliphant is suspicious of Nonconformity’s readiness to link the dissemination of Christian values with material gain. Arthur Vincent is a skilful and entertaining preacher who enjoys an enthusiastic following in Carlingford and, buoyed by the popularity of his sermons, is urged by his deacons to conduct a series of lectures. Tozer manages chapel affairs rather as he does his shop, informing the minister that ‘[t]hree more pews [were] applied for this week—fifteen sittings in all, . . . that’s what I call satisfactory, that is. We mustn’t let the steam go down—not on no account. You keep well at them of Sundays, Mr Vincent, and trust to the managers, sir, to keep ‘em up to their dooty’ (Salem Chapel, p. 38). Oliphant shows that a minister’s success or failure in a Nonconformist chapel is directly dependent on his relationship with his deacons. In Congregational chapels, the men had the right to participate in regular chapel meetings where ministers were nominated and elected, where chapel finances were controlled and where discipline was enforced. In Salem Chapel, the families of Brown, Pigeon and Tozer form the majority of the congregation in terms of wealth and numbers. Regarding themselves as their minister’s benefactors and employers, they feel within their rights to express censorious disapproval when necessary, much to Vincent’s chagrin. ‘If a minister ain’t a servant, we pays him his salary at the least, and expects him to please us’, said Tozer, sulkily. ‘If it weren’t for that, I don’t give a sixpence for the Dissenting connection. Them as likes to please themselves would be far better in a State Church, where it wouldn’t disappoint nobody’ (Salem Chapel, p. 174). Before Vincent’s arrival in Carlingford, Tozer is shown to be plotting for Mr Tufton’s removal from office ‘before gentle sickness did it
for him' (Salem Chapel, p. 29). Oliphant thus not only questions the efficacy of autonomous chapel management but also shows how rude and dominant personalities may control a small religious community.

Apart from preaching, which could be lively or dull, depending on the talents of individual ministers, Congregational services tended to be solemn affairs. According to Watts, although many Congregationalists refused to countenance a formal liturgy such as that based on the Anglican Prayer Book, some were willing to endorse the type of service paralleled in Dissenting worship by the hymn-book (1995, p. 180). Johnson cautiously concurs, noting that the Congregational pursuit of religious and social respectability which resulted in that denomination's widespread adoption of Gothic architecture in chapel building, also found expression in a movement towards the adoption of a formal liturgy (1999, p. 176-179). The real-life Rev. Benjamin Armstrong recorded his surprise, in 1874, on discovering that a new Congregational church in London deviated from its 'usual extempore character' to include 'selections from the Book of Common Prayer'. Armstrong saluted this innovation, declaring that '[it] certainly does credit to the liberality and taste of our Dissenters' (1963, p. 140). Most Dissenting services tended to be long and included Bible readings, prayers, and the singing of hymns. Congregationalists observed the sacraments of baptism, including the infants of believers, and the Lord's Supper, which was usually observed quarterly. In contrast with the Anglican Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which was an act of saving grace, the celebration of the Lord's Supper in Congregationalism, as outlined in the Congregational Declaration of Faith and Order, is 'a token of faith in the Saviour, and of
brotherly love' (Peel, 1931, p. 72). The Nonconformist service was, above all, an expression of religious faith as well as a communal act of devotion.

There are hints, in Salem Chapel, that Mr Tufton's prolixity of prayer, amongst other things, was trying the patience of his deacons enough for them to arrange for his removal (p. 24-32). The independent management of each chapel did ensure, however, a degree of variety in services. In general, the Congregational service tended towards aridity, which was a result, suggests Davies, of that denomination's tradition of a 'learned ministry' (1996, p. 213). An unsophisticated congregation, such as the one encountered by Arthur Vincent value, above all, the performative aspect of a service that delivers a simple message. Part of Vincent's sense of isolation from his congregation stems from his education at Homerton College, which equips him with the power of 'close reasoning and Homerton eloquence', but has left him bereft of an ability to cope with 'any world but that contracted one in which he had been brought up' (Salem Chapel, p. 4-5). Vincent's hard-won 'Homerton eloquence' is all but lost on his unsophisticated congregation who declare that '[h]e's too high, he is, for us plain Salem folks; what we want is a man as preaches gospel sermons -- real rousing-up discourses -- and sits down pleasant to his tea, and makes hiself friendly' (Salem Chapel, p. 240). On the other hand, Oliphant shows that not all congregations were as unsophisticated as the Salem congregation. Colin Campbell must face the daunting prospect of ministering to a Scottish congregation whose extensive knowledge of Christian theology threatens to expose his youthful pastoral inadequacies as, at best, empty rhetoric and, at worst, prideful posturing (A Son of the Soil, 1865/1883, p. 372).
As Oliphant’s carefully constructed and informed view of urban and rural chapels suggests, Nonconformist chapel building and forms of worship were undergoing changes which, in many important ways, narrowed the doctrinal gaps between Nonconformity and Anglicanism. The building styles of Nonconformist chapels, for example, were influenced by the revival of Gothic architecture in the Church of England. For Oliphant, the most significant changes in Nonconformity were social ones. Encouraged by Nonconformity’s social mobility, congregations could enjoy the benefits of a better educated ministry, together with subtle changes to services that sought to meet the expectations of wealthier and more genteel congregations.

On the other hand, Morgan’s enthusiastic programme of re-building Carlingford Church serves manifold purposes. By removing the high pews and the three-tiered pulpit, reading-desk and clerk’s desk that once separated social groups, Morgan hopes to stamp his authority on the church and bring together Carlingford’s Anglicans. Morgan’s obsessive quarrelling with Wentworth encourages further division within the parish and undermines his ambitious plans to effect unity by re-building Carlingford Church. Oliphant’s repeated references to Carlingford Church as being of ‘the Churchwarden period of architecture’ (Perpetual, Vol I, p 12-13) reminds the reader that, whilst an earlier period encouraged the participation of lay officials such as the clerk, the design of mid-century churches preferred a style of worship that emphasised the importance of the clergyman.
Secure within his Gilbert Scott-designed neo-Gothic Chapel of St Roque's, Frank Wentworth reigns supreme as one of Oliphant's most innovative clergyman and is far removed in style, presence and status from his predecessors, Bury and Proctor. Reflecting contemporary concerns with Ritualism, Oliphant has Wentworth establish Ritualism as the preferred form of public worship in Carlingford, whilst showing that Ritualism's overt concern with the aesthetics of worship is a trap for the unwary. Oliphant cautions that Wentworth's attraction to Ritualism must not override a sound and reasoned approach to Christianity.

The part of the service, be it Anglican or Nonconformist, that engaged Victorian interests more than any other was the content and manner of delivery of the sermon. The sermon was one area of a clergyman's duties that was particularly exposed to public scrutiny and criticism. The sermon, as most clergymen and contemporary commentators realised, was a powerful tool and the manner of its delivery could leave a lasting impression on a congregation. From his pulpit, a clergyman might stamp his clerical and personal authority, expound his ecclesiastical and theological views, disseminate general parish information, proffer criticism, and, above all, shape souls in a fashion acceptable to his Church or Chapel. The place of the sermon in Oliphant's fiction and in Anglican and Nonconformist worship in general, is considered in the next section.
Sermons

Oliphant identified her generation as 'sermon-loving' and ranked sermons alongside the novel in terms of popularity, declaring sermons 'a notable and abundant branch of English literature - perhaps the most paradoxical and contradictory branch of that great tree' (1858). Dinah Mulock, writing for The Cornhill Magazine, wondered if it was 'allowable' for sermons 'to be judged as we judge any other discourse on any other subject, literary, scientific, or political' (1864). It was, perhaps, the sermon's 'mystic virtue and force', identified by Canon Robinson, that made some critics hesitate (Robinson, 1863). Oliphant, too, identified this 'force', suggesting that when a critic complains about a sermon he or she does so at the risk of being labelled 'a godless and profane person' (1862). Oliphant recognized that an injudicious swipe at the pulpit was publicly indefensible and verged on iconoclasm. Therefore, her 1862 article for Blackwood's Magazine on sermons, while acknowledging the difficulties faced by the preacher, also identifies with the church-going populace who are 'compelled for the sake of the public worship of God to go through this tedious mockery Sunday after Sunday, and make a public pretence of receiving instruction where we know perfectly well none is to be had' (1862).

Other contemporaries shared Oliphant's view of preachers and sermons. The Rev. Edward Boys Ellman, commented in 1889 on some of the preachers he had listened to and those who had influenced him during the course of his life. Ellman was 'delighted' with Newman's sermons, and made a point of attending St Mary's at Oxford.
when Newman was the incumbent. He ‘always liked’ the preaching of Edward Denison and Hamilton, Denison’s successor, despite the latter’s speech impediment that made his preaching ‘for a time most painful’. Ellman assessed that many of the sermons preached at Oxford University were ‘far above my understanding’, adding that some of the University preachers ‘thought more of seizing the opportunity of preaching a learned sermon than they did of preaching one suitable to a congregation composed principally of undergraduates’. Dr Pusey’s sermons he found ‘mystical’, and rather tellingly admitted: ‘I never carried anything away from them but a feeling that I was mystified’.

‘Of the Wilberforces’ Ellman ‘decidedly preferred the sermons of Robert Isaac Wilberforce to those of the future Bishop (Samuel); and Edward Dension’s sermons to those of his brother George, afterwards Archdeacon’. (1912, p. 127-8). Ellman’s responses to these well-known preachers are unexpectedly revealing in their artlessness, preferring the standpoint of the common listener to the critical awareness of a fellow clergyman. For Ellman, and many other common listeners, the content and delivery of the sermon was a subject that generated a great deal of interest in mid nineteenth-century English church and chapel-going populations. The merits of many published sermons and the style of popular preachers were subject to scrutiny in contemporary journals and magazines, and volumes of sermons were obtainable from lending libraries such as Mudies.

The most common complaint made against sermons was that they were dull. This was not always the fault of the preacher but, more often, stemmed from the peculiar nature of the ecclesiastical office, that demanded at least one, often more than one,
sermon per week. Dinah Mulock was appalled at these demands and estimated that almost every clergyman in the United Kingdom would produce at least 'one hundred and four sermons a year' (1864). 'One hundred and four discourses on one subject to be extracted from one human brain in the course of a twelvemonth!' 'Why', she continues, 'if the same were demanded of any other literary worker' they would find it impossible (1864). Oliphant, too, complained about the demands of the pulpit, declaring that public expectations of a sermon, 'with something worthy of being presented', were 'an utterly inhuman and inconceivable fallacy' (1862). In her fiction, Oliphant shows herself to be sympathetically disposed toward clergymen whose profession requires polished literary skills, a sympathetic personal and professional demeanour, coupled with an almost uncanny ability for their words to touch the spiritual recesses of a critical audience:

Sunday! It came again, the inevitable morning. There are pathetic stories current in the world about most of the other professions that claim the ear of the public: how lawyers prepare great speeches, which are to open for them the gates of the future, in the midst of killing anxieties of life and poverty – how mimes and players of all descriptions keep the world in laughter while their hearts are breaking. But few people think of the sufferings of the priest, whom, let trouble or anxiety come as they please, necessity will have in the inexorable pulpit Sunday after Sunday. So Vincent thought as he put on his Geneva gown in his little vestry, with the raw February air coming in at the open window, and his
Young clergymen, such as Oliphant's Arthur Vincent and Frank Wentworth who lack life experiences, soon learn that 'a little learning, a knowledge of disputed passages' offer small currency against a knowledge of life gained 'as yet only by hearsay' (Oliphant, 1862). The difficulties encountered by youthful, inexperienced clergymen attempting to compose sermons emerges again when Oliphant depicts the careers of Colin Campbell in A Son of the Soil and the curate, Mr Asquith, in Cousin Mary, who admits that his recent sermon 'was a poor performance off the book, when I had no experience . . .' (Cousin Mary, 1888, p. 61). The real-life clergyman, the Rev. John Coker Egerton, recorded in 1858, while still a curate, his indebtedness to Newman in the composition of his own sermons, noting that Newman's 'sermons are remarkable productions, pregnant to a degree; there is not a needless sentence in a volume & they are extremely suggestive' (Wells, 1992, p. 34). The writers of pastoral handbooks for the clergy were aware of the problems likely to impede the preparation and delivery of sermons and attempted to address them in their writings. For John Gott, the clergyman need look no further for his subject matter than the 'streets and homes of a great town [which] are the bookshelves for the knowledge of man, [whilst] the people are our living volumes' (1889, p. 87). An insight into the lives of his parishioners, writes Gott, where 'sin, conscience, temptation, energy and grace' combine in a lively farrago to yield more raw material for the clergyman and render the contents of a 'sensational novel insipid beside the romance, heroism, and sufferings of your parishioners' (1889, p. 86). Gott's pairing of a fictional genre with words written for public edification is not unusual,
considering the tendentious possibilities inherent in both forms. In a tacit acknowledgement of the alluring force of sensation, Oliphant shows the ever-resourceful Tozer, well aware of the public appetite for vicarious pleasures and misfortunes, ready to convince his minister to divulge personal matters for public effect:

"If you'll take my advice, you'll begin your coarse all the same", said Tozer; "it would have a good effect, that would. When folks are in a state of excitement, and a-looking for something, to come down upon them as before, and accordin' to intimation, would have a wonderful effect, Mr Vincent. You take my word, sir, it would be very telling — would that. Don't lose no time, but begin your coarse as was intimated. It's a providence, is the intimation. I wouldn't say nothing about what's happended — not plain out; but if you could bring in a kind of an inference like, nothing as had anything to do with the story in the papers, but just as might be understood — " (Salem Chapel, p. 303).

Soon after this haranguing, Vincent, in the aftermath of personal and public humiliations, delivers one of his most memorable sermons, captivating his congregation with a powerful and compelling elision of faith and life which, Oliphant tells us, strips his parishioners 'of everything but passion and consciousness and immortality' (Salem Chapel, p. 306). Similarly, Herbert James assures the clergyman that all he needs to produce a memorable sermon are 'the Book of His Word, the Book of His Works, and the Book of the human heart' (1890, p. 61). With these tools at his disposal, the clergyman 'need never be at a loss in [his] choice of subjects' (1890, p. 61).
Canon Robinson suggested that a 'division of labour' be imposed upon clergymen of the Church of England so that those with some aptitude for 'original composition' might devote their time to sermon writing (1863). Oliphant's fictional clergymen sometimes labour over their weekly deliveries, producing some of their best work in the midst of personal 'trouble' and 'anxiety', rather like the author herself who laboured under similar restraints and personal difficulties. Stephen Haldane, the Dissenting minister in At His Gates, must forego 'the luxury of a private study in which to write his sermons, but had his writing-table in the common sitting room, in order that his womankind might preserve the cold fiction of a "best room" in which to receive visitors' (Oliphant, 1872/1888, p. 31), just as Oliphant 'had no table . . . much less a room to work in, but sat at the corner of the family table with my writing-book, with everything going on as if I had been making a shirt instead of writing a book' (Oliphant, 1990, p. 30). Although Oliphant's fictional clergymen are sometimes deprived of personal space in which to compose their sermons, they are afforded time to study and to write. In The Perpetual Curate, Wentworth after '[sitting] for about an hour over his text before [writing] a single syllable', manages to produce a sermon that contains the added 'thrill of human feeling' and this gives warmth to his otherwise 'short and succinct sermon' (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 193-4). On the other hand, some clergymen such as Arthur Vincent, waste their time in reverie whilst giving the outward appearance of industry. Consequently, Vincent whose sermon was 'no better than usual, and in reality dashed off at the last moment in sheer desperation, when necessity momentarily thrust
the dreams away, was listened to with a certain awe and devout attention, solely due to the toil it was reported to have cost' (Salem Chapel, p. 68).

Oliphant was amongst many contemporaries who were critical of the form and content of sermons and the men who delivered them. The mid-nineteenth-century English Church and Chapel-going population was developing a sophisticated and highly critical stance towards the sermons served up to it. It would no longer submit to a hectoring censoriousness from the pulpit, neither was it satisfied with repressive theological and moral asseverations, particularly if delivered by men who did not live by the doctrines they preached. Oliphant recognised the tendency towards dissimulation in preachers, stating that 'the pulpit will always retain those peculiar temptations to self-importance, and a pernicious kind of vanity, which does so much harm to its utterance now' (1858). No doubt it was for the above reasons that Oliphant identified a growing public 'clamour against sermons' (1862) that was echoed in remarks made by Canon Robinson who noted that 'the sermon was no longer the sole 'instrument of public instruction' but must now compete with the daily papers, serial publications, public lectures and even parliamentary speeches as sources of information (Robinson, 1863). Even the Rev. Frederick Robertson (1816-1853), who enjoyed, mainly posthumous, national fame as a preacher and whom Oliphant praised for his 'singularly pure and lucid style' (1862), was willing to acknowledge that 'the pulpit has lost its place' and its influence is now circumscribed so that it 'is no more the pulpit of three centuries back, than the authority of a master of a household is that of Abraham, who was soldier, butcher, sacrificer, shepherd, and emir in one person' (Brooke, 1865, p. 60). The
contemporary complaint that 'the pulpit had lost its place' is, more than likely, a clerical reaction to a perceived want of strong religious authority, coupled with the anxiety presented by public access to secular sources of information. It also hints that religious doubt was now a commonplace of contemporary society. The place of the sermon in the lives of church-goers was competing with varied forms of modern leisure that George Eliot in *Adam Bede* identifies as 'excursion trains, art museums, periodical literature, and exciting novels: prone even to scientific theorizing, and cursory peeps through microscopes' (1859/1985, p. 557). In composing his sermon, the modern cleric did not always appreciate the degree of sophistication attained and enjoyed by his congregation. The clergyman who believed that his congregation behaved like Eliot's 'Old Leisure', who 'knew nothing of week-day services, and thought none the worst of the Sunday sermon' and was innocent of 'Exeter Hall', popular preachers, 'Tracts for the Times' or 'Sartor Resartus', was naively optimistic (1859/1985, p. 557-8). It is not enough, illustrates Oliphant, for a clergyman to preach simple platitudes to his congregation as does the English curate in *A Son of the Soil* who leaves his parishioners to reflect on 'how wonderfully their beloved Church had provided for all their wants; how sweet it was to recollect that this was the day which had been appointed the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity—and how it was their duty to meditate a fact so touching and so important' (1865/1883, p. 107). When the Scottish born and Oxford educated 'Son of the Soil', Colin Campbell, returns, newly ordained and licensed, to his native parish, he realises that such preaching strategies would fail in the parish of Afton where he would be 'inspected, watched, [and] judged', particularly as he 'had not found Scotch education good enough for him, but had gone to England for at least part of his training' (*A Son of*
the Soil, p. 363). Relying instead on the 'Book of the human heart', Colin Campbell ‘deserted doctrinal ground altogether as often as he could, and took refuge in life and its necessities in a way which, doubtless, had its effect on the uninstructed multitude, but was felt to be meagre and unsatisfactory by the theologians of the parish' (A Son of the Soil, p. 364).

Arthur Vincent is Oliphant’s most popular preacher, superior to Frank Wentworth, due to his gifts as a ‘natural orator’ and ‘eloquence’ of style (Perennial, Vol II, p. 194). Wentworth, on the other hand, has a reputation for terseness in his method of delivery, due to his ‘Anglican dislike for pulpit exaggeration in all forms’, nevertheless his perspicacity allows him to convey ‘ideas which were always individual, and often of distinct originality — a kind of utterance which is very dear to the English mind’ (Perennial, Vol II, p. 194). Oliphant’s fictional Dissenting minister, Arthur Vincent, bears some similarities with the real-life Edward Irving who was founder of the Catholic Apostolic Church. V. & R. A. Colby (1966, p. 47) and Cunningham (1975, p. 246) have identified Irving (1792-1834) as Oliphant’s real-life model for Arthur Vincent. In her biography on Irving, Oliphant discovered in Irving a charismatic man and a spellbinding preacher capable of attracting crowds as large as ten thousand (1862/1873, p. 265). Oliphant reports that at one of these open air gatherings, Irving’s voice ‘was heard distinctly by a lady seated at her own window a quarter of a mile off; and his voice was audible, though not distinctly, at double that distance’ (1862/1873, p. 265). As a preacher, Irving could deliver a passionate force of emotion that was not always accompanied by the check of the intellect. In his pulpit Edward Irving was not,
according to Oliphant, 'a mere preacher... he was himself, disclosing with a noble unconscious simplicity how himself stood before his God...' (1858, p. 578). Oliphant bestows on Arthur Vincent a similar capacity to captivate an audience with the emotional force of his words, showing that Vincent's best sermons are those that are 'disrobed of everything but passion and consciousness and immortality' (Salem Chapel, p. 306). Moreover, Irving is possessed of an egoism and an unwavering ability; comments Oliphant, to 'elevate everything he clearly perceived entirely out of the region of compromise into that of verity', that it was only a matter of time before his methods met with resistance (1862/1873, p. 274). Similarly, Arthur Vincent shares Irving's egoism, believing that his 'own youthful eloquence' would more than compensate for 'the ecclesiastical advantages on the other side, and make for himself a position of the highest influence in his new sphere' (Salem Chapel, p. 5). It is inevitable, suggests Oliphant, that a character such as Vincent, who is presented in the novel with a surfeit of self-regard, who undervalues self-knowledge and repudiates advice, will eventually experience disenchantment and rejection.

Oliphant openly acknowledged that the gift of oratory was only part of the qualities required of the successful preacher. As an added attraction, many of the most popular contemporary preachers possessed memorable physical characteristics. According to Munson, Joseph Parker, the Congregationalist minister and well-known contemporary preacher, was noteworthy for his 'rough looks and leonine hair-style' as well as for his 'dramatic preaching and rounded oratory' (1991, p. 101). The Rev. J. W. Taylor's description of Edward Irving is extravagant. Taylor encountered a man with
'raven locks flowing down to his broad shoulders, his magnificent erect figure, the cloak thrown over his arm, and the giant air with which he marched, are ineffaceably present to my mind (in Oliphant, 1862/1873, p. 236). Clearly, a pleasing personal appearance, combined with the intangible element of charisma was a powerful amalgam. Oliphant was also aware that some clerical careers were tainted by charges of effeminacy. As Reed relates, accusations of effeminacy were more often directed towards Ritualist clergymen who, according to one contemporary commentator, appealed to 'sentimental ladies and womanish men – youths of a lachrymose turn of mind' (in Reed, 1996, p. 211). Furthermore, it was popularly believed that Anglo-Catholicism encouraged and endorsed clerical celibacy, thereby adding fuel to a tainted public image. Byerley Thomson cautioned young men planning a clerical career to remember that '[s]ociety and the dictates of morality enjoin the English clergyman to marry; and as that, therefore, becomes part of his duty, it is but right that he should look forward before he undertakes to encounter the difficulties of the position' (1857, p. 70). Aware of the importance of female approval in ensuring a minister's success, Oliphant illustrates that Vincent's first appearance in the pulpit, 'white-browed, white-handed, in snowy linen and glossy clerical apparel', elicits a 'rustle of expectation' in his congregation (Salem Chapel, p. 3). As the following passage shows, however, Vincent's Christianity is sufficiently 'muscular' to counterbalance any tendency towards aestheticism in his appearance. Oliphant is careful to ensure that Vincent's appeal in the pulpit finds favour with both sexes:

What a sermon it was! Not much in it about the beloved brethren; nothing very stimulating, indeed, to the sentiments and affections, except in the youth
and good looks of tho preacher, which naturally made a more distinct impression upon the female portion of his hearers than on the stronger sex. But then what eloquence! what an amount of thought! what an honest entrance into all the difficulties of the subject! Mr Tozer remarked afterwards that such preaching was food for men. It was too closely reasoned out, said the excellent butternian, to please women or weak-minded persons; but he did not doubt, for his part, that soon the young men of Carlingford, the hope of the country, would find their way to Salem. Under such prognostications, it was fortunate that the young minister possessed something else besides close reasoning and Homerton eloquence to propitiate the women too (Salem Chapel, p.4).

It is not surprising that Oliphant presents her young, inexperienced clergymen such as Vincent and Wentworth with endearing physical qualities; for although their calling and studied virtuousness places them above sexual congress, they possess 'something else besides close reasoning' that invites female interest. Not only was an attractive clergyman a bonus, and an engaging sermon part of the appeal of Church and Chapel services, services also formed an important social role.

Oliphant realised that, for many earnest Church and Chapelgoers, sermon hearing, although a solemn duty, was a duty that was tinged with delight. Attendance at Church or Chapel provided opportunities for social interaction, particularly in the
smaller towns and villages that afforded few, if any, secular opportunities for social intercourse. Families with impeccable chapel credentials, such as the Tozers, Browns and Pigeons, are not above commenting on each other’s appearance, disputing seating arrangements and using their chapel’s sacred space as a venue to expose their daughters to the glances of potential suitors:

The leading families came out *en masse* to see and to be seen. It would be wrong to say that they did not enter into all the arguments and recognise the intellectual feast set before them; no doubt they did this just as well as if they had come in their commonest attire; but still the seriousness of the occasion was, no doubt, modified by being thus made into a dissipation* (Phoebe Junior, p. 122).

Oliphant drives this latter point home in *Salem Chapel* when Vincent is assailed by the alarming Adelaide Tufton, invalid daughter of the erstwhile minister, whose physical disability has prevented her attendance at chapel for many years. Adelaide’s enforced isolation has encouraged an avaricious appetite for chapel gossip that has continued unimpeded, despite the mildly voiced concerns for propriety from her family. Her interests in chapel life are confined to fashion and flirtation: “Exactly what I told you, mamma,” said Adelaide, from her chair. “Mrs Tozer doesn’t mean Phoebe to make tea this many a year. I daresay she wants her to marry somebody, the little flirting thing. I suppose she wore her pink, Mr Vincent—and Mrs Brown that dreadful red-and-green silk of hers”* (Salem Chapel, p. 27). As we have seen, the interior design of chapels as large, airy and comfortable spaces, invited a multiplicity of uses besides the sacred. Salem
Chapel, as Oliphant shows, is home to a multitude of innocent social diversions, regulated and authorized by the chapel deacons and its minister.

The performance of public worship was the defining character of a clergyman's duties but, as Oliphant shows, it was played out against a backdrop of change. Originating, in part, from an appreciation of her husband's involvement in church architecture, Oliphant was well positioned to comment authoritatively on the stylistic devices that influenced the manner in which Church and Chapel services were conducted. Oliphant was impressed by the diversity of nineteenth-century English ecclesiastical architecture and makes liberal use of it in her fiction to impress upon the reader the types of services conducted therein. It is also a subtle and clever way of introducing into the narrative the clerics who inhabit these Churches and Chapels and how their services, which differ along party lines, often lead to unfortunate and, in Oliphant's view, unnecessary and destructive doctrinal differences.

Besides focusing on the potentially divisive aspects associated with doctrine, Oliphant demonstrates the power and influence of the pulpit as a uniting force within Christianity. Recognising that the performative aspect of the sermon is as important as its content, Oliphant's preachers are stirring orators and men possessed of an attractive appearance. Her most successful preachers abandon careful reasoning and over-worked idioms and speak, instead, from the heart.
Oliphant also highlights how the differences between Anglican and Nonconformist styles of worship reflect social differences and suggests that they might be more fluid than rigid. For Nonconformists in particular, Oliphant stresses that the independent nature of chapel culture provided a haven whereby secular, as well as sacred interests, were pursued and developed. Oliphant reminds the reader that the strength of social cohesions may be perceived as an inward-looking mentality, although the depiction of chapel services in Phoebe Junior offers a picture of Nonconformity expanding to embrace the mainstream of culture. Whilst the performance of public worship formed an important part of a clergyman's duties, his attention to his pastoral and secular duties was of equal importance. Oliphant's depiction of these areas is investigated in the next chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

PASTORAL AND SECULAR DUTIES

In her novels Oliphant does not shrink from voicing serious concerns about religion in general and the state of English churches and their clergymen in particular. Therefore, it should not surprise readers of the Chronicles of Carlingford if they detect a note of authorial dissatisfaction and irritation when the author presents and describes her Anglican and Nonconformist clergymen in their pastoral roles. Oliphant felt strongly enough to devote a short novel, The Rector, to an examination of this issue and the consequences of his failure to adequately perform his pastoral duties. The point of this chapter is to assess the validity of Oliphant’s complaint by examining the pastoral and secular duties of Nonconformist and Church of England clergyman, as described in her fiction and in several contemporary sources. According to Russell, the clergy of the mid-nineteenth century would have regarded pastoral, liturgical and educational duties as separate categories (1980, p. 113). Oliphant refers in her novels to three broad areas of pastoral duties, which accord with Russell’s schema: visiting; the supervision of lay activities; and the spiritual and moral counselling of parishioners. The first part of the chapter will examine Oliphant’s depiction of pastoral duties, whilst the second part will focus on the clergyman’s secular duties by considering his role as educator.
Oliphant's interest in a clergyman's parochial duties originates, in part, from the nature of the clergyman's role incorporating, as it does, duties both worldly and other worldly, as well as masculine and feminine ones. It is more than likely that Oliphant's own status as widow, and sole financial provider for her sons and other relatives throughout her life, heightened her interest in the problematic nature of masculine and feminine "work" in her fiction, particularly when the characters are clergymen, and present the novelist with a problematic series of seemingly irreconcilable opposites. These issues frequently emerge as conflicts between the clergyman's public role as a cure of souls and his personal relationships with his family and his community. A clergyman's pastoral success depended largely on the health of his character, Oliphant recognised that '[t]he character of a clergyman is almost as susceptible as that of a woman' (*The Perpetual Curate*, 1864/1975, Vol II, p. 129), and, like women, clergymen were encouraged and expected to inhabit a high moral ground and were subject to public censure if they strayed. Oliphant's clergymen wrestle with the equally compelling desires for personal autonomy and professional recognition, which for Oliphant cannot be reconciled outside the domestic circle and domestic affections. Unless her clergymen gain the respect of their immediate families and closest neighbours, there is little chance of them performing their duties, establishing, and maintaining a respected position within the wider parish. Most of her fictional clergymen, and many of her other male characters, operate within the innumerable constraints and small felicities of domestic life that largely determine the fate of the women in their lives. Furthermore, as Oliphant
recognised that clerical training often fell far short of the rigorous demands of parochial
life, many of her more prudent clergymen realise that pastoral duties, by their very
nature, resist the application of a formulaic remedy espoused in the colleges of Oxford
and Cambridge.

In a highly critical article, Oliphant railed against those who, she believed, gave
credence to a naïve assumption that the Church of England had at its ready command 'a
trained body of educated men' to combat 'Misery and Ignorance' in the parishes of
England (1871a). If this is the case, why, argues Oliphant, does 'the character of the
country' remain unchanged when 'every parish' has at its disposal 'its general, its cadre
... its captains to the manor born' who are 'trained and maintained for no other purpose'
(1871a). A clerical contemporary, the Rev. J. J. Halcombe, concurs, but adds that the
Church of England was failing in its mission 'from sheer lack of men' and, consequently,
'she is fast losing her hold upon the national mind' (1874, p. 5). Oliphant urged her
readers to dismiss the 'pretty pictures' they may have about the idyllic work of the
clergyman. The reality, she argued, was one of hard and unremitting labour against
spiritual and social degradation and want, and the clergyman who hopes to 'preach well'
against 'idleness and vice' must remain guarded that his 'whole life and powers' are not
'swept away in the whirl of parochial management' (1871a). Oliphant's fiction seeks to
create a bridge between the popularly idealised and elevated clerical image and the real
clergyman, frequently overworked, underpaid and subject to the wearisome drag of
parochial routine (Oliphant, 1871a), who inhabits the parishes of England. Oliphant chose to set the Chronicles within the 'pretty ... mild, sheltered' (The Rector 1863/1986, p. 1) aspects of Carlingford but its very mildness, stresses Oliphant, is no guarantee of a safe haven for disaffected clergymen.

Visiting

By the middle decades of the nineteenth century with the Pluralities Acts of 1838 and 1850 imposing a gradual reduction of the number of non-resident-incumbents, public perceptions and expectations about the clergymen's functions in the parish changed in favour of a more active, personal approach. Fuelled by public expectations, commentators such as Archdeacon Sandford, envisioned the resident parochial clergymen as an essential countervailing force to resist vice and irreligion, especially within the 'untutored and uncured-for multitudes' (1861, p. 89). For Clement Rogers, the clergymen was the 'moral policeman' of the times, equally qualified as 'our "men in blue"' to help and to 'guide his people' (1912, p. 83) and by 'diligent "house-to-house" visiting' engage in edifying 'propaganda' to 'break down prejudice' against the institution he represents' (p. 90-1). The Quarterly Review also recognized that the importance of a clerical presence within the parishes and districts of England acted as an essential bulwark against moral degradation. The clergymen's moral influence, it stated, was highly valued, particularly when 'the social system of England' depended on the maintenance of a 'purified and elevated' family life ('Training of the Clergy', 1862).
These contemporary commentators sought to ensure the primacy of the Church in the hearts and minds of the populace, probably as a response to long held public criticisms of pastoral inactivity. As Anthony Russell notes, there were a large number of popular clerical handbooks published during the mid-nineteenth-century that advocated a 'threelfold division of the clergyman's day', with the morning devoted to study and the afternoons for visiting, whilst the evenings could be spent with family and friends (1980, p. 117). The work of visiting involved an engagement of the self and a personal commitment to parishioners, to an extent hitherto unknown amongst the majority of clergymen. It demanded the sacrifice of one's leisure time, together with a commitment to develop expertise in parochial work. For many clergymen, notes Russell, visiting remained a popular parochial activity, although detractors complained that general visiting produced no results for the clergyman, except 'entries in his journal' (1980, p. 117-8). Some clergymen, such as the Rev. Boys Ellman, revelled in visiting his parishioners, believing 'that a house-going parson makes a church-going people' (1912, p. 139), while the Rev. Benjamin Armstrong recorded in his diary early in 1854 that an 'ordinary day' consisted of '[c]orrespondence about a new curate -- visiting five sick people -- an hour's gallop for recreation -- sermon writing and evensong' (1963, p. 46). According to Blunt, the visitation of the sick by the clergyman was a requirement of Church Law, and a canon directed the clergyman to seek out sick parishioners in his parish (1873, p. 162-3). Earlier in the nineteenth century, an anonymous clergyman
wrote a volume dedicated to assisting the clergyman in his visits to the sick covering, he hoped, the full range of moral conditions he might encounter in his visits, ranging from a stern reprimand addressed to a ‘Dissipated, Thoughtless Young Man’, to the more soothing ‘Address to a Person Who Desponds and Wants Comfort’ (1818, passim). The popularity of self-help manuals offered the nineteenth-century clergyman a range of printed source material designed to aid him in his pastoral tasks.

Therefore, when the Rev. Mr Morley Proctor, newly appointed Rector of Carlingford in The Rector, is unable to provide spiritual and moral guidance and emotional support to a dying woman, he fails to administer one of the more basic pastoral duties expected of a clergyman. Oliphant informs us by way of an ironic aside, which also doubles as internal dialogue for this character, that such obvious dereliction of duty cannot be tolerated (The Rector 1863/1986, p. 27). This revelation is followed by a series of rhetorical questions, designed to tease out and lay bare the Rector’s temperamental unsuitability for basic pastoral work: ‘As soon as he became aware of what was included in the duties of his office, he must perform them, or quit his post. But how to perform them? Can one learn to convey consolation to the dying, to teach the ignorant, to comfort the sorrowful? Are these matters to be acquired by study, like Greek verbs or intricate measures? The Rector’s heart said No’ (The Rector, p. 27). Before the Rector’s actions invoke the moral opprobrium of the reader, Oliphant reminds us that Proctor’s reasons for accepting the living in the first place were made with filial
this he is not alone, as according to the slightly later contemporary commentator Herbert James, there are men whose 'nervous constitution' is such that it would not allow them to face the 'Dirt, Disorder, Disease, which must, they think, inevitably meet them in the Cottage-home' (1890, p. 76). The men that James refers to would rather discuss, like Proctor, 'a disputed translation, or a disused idiom' than deal with 'all manner of human vicissitudes' (Reector, p. 26-7). Both James and the astute contemporary commentator, W. J. Conybeare, corroborate Oliphant's criticisms. For example, Conybeare recognised that the clerical profession attracted men of certain 'types'. Writing in 1854, Conybeare names five types of 'clerical adventurer' that he believes typify the 'inferior class' of mid-Victorian clergyman (Conybeare, 1854). Although Conybeare's article defends the motives of the man who chooses the clerical life, he is aware that popular public perception of the clergy is quite different and fits into types that he names the 'Irish Fortune-hunter', the 'Creeping Climber', the 'Renegade Dissenter', 'Society's Agent', and the 'Safe Man' (1854). Whilst none of Oliphant's clergymen fits Conybeare's schema of low clerical types, both Proctor and Cecil St John, in The Curate in Charge, parallel Conybeare's 'Safe Man'. According to Conybeare, the 'Safe Man' is a product peculiar to the State Church and the 'least offensive' of all the clerical types. The 'Safe Man', as described by Conybeare, walks the middle line in all things, is 'usually distinguished in early life by academical success', he shuns the violence of partisanship; his publications, if any, avoid controversy and are 'polished in style, and neutral in sentiment'; he rises in reputation through the clerical ranks, performing his duty 'well,
duties uppermost in his mind, and his failure to attend to the spiritual needs of a dying woman are the result of gaucheness and not want of feeling. The Rector is not only bound by duty to his parishioners, he is also duty bound to his mother and it is his mother who enjoys first allegiance. Immured within the ivory tower of All Souls for fifteen years, devoted to intellectual pursuits, and awkward in female company, Proctor is entirely unprepared for the society awaiting him at Curlingford, which can boast only of 'very pleasant parties and a superior class of people' (The Perpetual Curate 1864/1975, Vol I p. 1-2). Oliphant is clear that Proctor is unequal to the demands of pastoral work, because of personal inclination and inadequate clerical training, whilst '[h]is young brother [Wentworth] - young enough to have been his son - not half nor a quarter part so learned as he, but a world further on in that profession which they shared - the art of winning souls' (The Rector, p. 25). Furthermore, Proctor cannot claim differences of class as an extenuating factor for his failure as he is equally farouche amongst members of his own class, such as the Wodehouses, as he is with the working class people of Curlingford.

For Oliphant, the manner in which a clergyman conducted himself in his parish was an accurate indication of his suitability of calling. In an alien and sometimes hostile environment, without the props of pulpit or Prayer Book, the clergyman relied on his own resources and the force of his personality. For reasons of temperament, Morley Proctor is unable to combine the two roles, that is, the spiritual and the practical, and in
but not too well', marries well and, at the end of his career, has the satisfaction of
knowing that, "[i]f he has done hann, it is by the omission of good, not by the
perpetration of mischief" (1854). In the absence of the Rector, who is the non-resident
incumbent, the Rev. Cecil St. John in The Curate in Charge is the curate of the parish of
Brentburn. St John is a 'man of great tranquillity of mind, and with little energy of
disposition', dutifully 'taking all that Providence sent him', and taking the 'initiative' in
nothing but 'kindness' (The Curate in Charge, 1876/1987, p. 4-5). Such is St John's
torpor that he appears more as 'an object in nature' rather 'than a suffering and rejoicing
human creature' (Curate, p. 5). St. John's inability to respond to the needs of his
children and to the changing circumstances of his life causes his dependants much
frustration and unnecessary anxieties. Although not entirely neglectful of his parochial
responsibilities, there is sufficient ambivalence in St John's attitudes towards his family
that implies otherwise. Whilst Oliphant was aware that inadequate training caused
clergymen and the people they served all manner of unnecessary suffering, she was a
trenchant critic of the clergyman who, by design or ignorance, refused to consider
adequately the needs of his family. The rather ludicrous outpourings of Louisa
Wentworth who fears she will be left 'a widow' or 'worse than a widow' (Perpetual, Vol
1, p. 260) following her husband's defection to the Roman Catholic church, has serious
undertones that are voiced by the errant clergyman's brother, who points out that 'he
was a man before he was a priest... he can no more, give up his duty to Louisa than he
can give up his own life' (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 277). For Oliphant, there is no doubt
where Gerald Wentworth's priorities lie. Duty to family must always precede duty to God.

Some contemporary writers opined that visiting was an important adjunct to preaching; the former provided an opportunity to ascertain how the latter was understood (James, 1890, p. 81). Still others believed that the timing and frequency of visits was the key to success. For example, the Evangelical pastor, Henry Venn Elliott, cautioned against too frequent visiting of the poor, believing that such behaviour would result in a loss of respect and sense of importance that his visits ordinarily occasioned (Bateman, 1872, p. 195). On the other hand, writers of popular handbooks, such as Blunt (1865, p. 85) and Burgon (1864, p. 239), expressed anxiety about visiting the middle classes, noting a sense of alienation arising from the pride of social position. Nevertheless, a timely visit to a parishioner was one way of forging deeper and more satisfying parochial relationships, as well as affording the clergyman an opportunity to see if anyone attended to the words of his sermon. Contemporary commentators such as the High Churchman Burgon recognised the importance of visiting - especially a well-timed visit to the sick. A visit paid to a sick parishioner was, according to Burgon, a perfect opportunity for taking advantage of the sufferer's weakened physical condition and perceived spiritual readiness for repentance. Burgon's gleeful enthusiasm is barely contained in the following passage:
You have lost no time then in obtaining access to the narrow chamber; and your promptitude is taken in good part by all.... But your main business is with the sufferer: and how rare an opportunity has God thrown in your way! Confined to that bed; enfeebled by suffering; humbled by the sense of need; awestruck, it may be, by the conviction that life itself is held on a most frail tenure: how open becomes the heart to discourse which in days of health would have not been tolerated! (1864, p. 211).

Although many people welcomed the clergyman as a symbol of moral order, others were suspicious of his visits, feeling they were an intrusive way of gaining access to a family’s religious practices and moral state. In The Rector, Proctor’s elderly mother roundly criticises Wentworth’s practice of frequent visiting, denouncing it as ‘interference’: “His interference among your parishioners, Morley, is really more than I should be inclined to bear” (Rector, p. 31). Mrs Proctor’s implied criticism is directed towards Wentworth’s Ritualist practices. For Ritualist clergymen such as Wentworth, a dominant priestly presence was an essential part of Ritualism’s clerical character, which in Wentworth’s case, manifests as moral superiority. Therefore, Wentworth’s frequent appearances in the homes of his parishioners is not extraordinary but an affirmation of the ongoing nature of sanctification through worship, prayer and the Sacraments of
Baptism and the Eucharist. His actions would be clearly apparent to Oliphant’s contemporary audience. For example, the real-life Rev. Frederick Thornton, a Ritualist, noted proudly that the number of communicants in his parish had increased to 450 from two in 1879, which was the result, he stressed, of ‘ceaseless house-to-house visitation, and work on strictly parochial lines’ (Hatley, 1992, p. xxi-xxii). Wentworth’s haste to attend to the dying woman in *The Rector* was motivated, no doubt, by the opportunity it afforded to hear her (private) confession and to offer absolution. There is a direct reference to confession in *The Perpetual Curate*, when Lucy Wodehouse, speaking to Wentworth, mentions that the dying woman in Prickett’s Lane ‘has been a great deal better since she confessed’, adding that ‘the absolution was such a comfort’ (*Perpetual*, Vol I, p. 135). The ameliorative effect of such action is readily endorsed by her interlocutor, who declares that he ‘would not be a priest if [he was] debarred from the power of delivering such a poor soul’ (*Perpetual*, Vol I, p. 135). This aspect of the Visitation of the Sick service in the Prayer Book was something that Ritualists were keen to uphold, but was anathema to Evangelicals and Low Churchmen, although, as Russell notes, ‘there was little practical difference between the Evangelical clergyman treating a case of conscience and a . . . Tractarian clergyman hearing a confession; both placed themselves in the role of spiritual director’ (1980, p. 124). According to Jasper, a movement began in 1859 to have the offending Absolution and its preceding Rubrics removed from the Prayer Book as part of the movement to put down Ritualism but were ultimately unsuccessful (1954, p. 50-1). The Rubric remained. Furthermore, an
unchanged and unchanging Prayer Book was the cornerstone of the Oxford Movement, conveying the continuity of sacred and ecclesiastical tradition that formed the basis of Newman's first Tract (1833-4/1969).

There was widespread public debate regarding the Ritualist endorsement of confession, although the debate was concerned usually with the moral and physical safety of female confessors. The intimate nature of the act of confession transgressed acceptable codes of male/female sexual behaviour, but just as important was its association with Roman Catholicism. According to Conybeare, visits to parishioners, unless they are sick, have little place in the parochial duties of a Tractarian clergyman, because 'the Church has appointed no special office for that purpose' (1853). This is, perhaps, not quite an accurate picture. As we have seen, there is little to separate the parochial activities, especially in terms of the importance given to visiting, between Evangelical and High Churchmen. The Evangelical clergyman Anthony Thorold who, according to Hylson-Smith, was well regarded for 'his pastoral care and his extensive visiting' (1989, p. 164), duly acknowledged the impetus provided by the Evangelical revival 'of thirty years ago', which recognized 'the pressing duty of pastoral visitation' in forging the revived 'parochial machinery' of the present (Thorold, 1868). Russell notes that the diffuse nature of the clergyman's role in the eighteenth-century English parish, where he would perform the duties of magistrate, Poor Law administrator, teacher, and doctor, would change during the nineteenth century, in response to
industrialisation and urbanisation becoming 'more sharply defined' and 'focused on those 'charter' elements authorised by the Ordinal' (1980, p. 38). The days of the old style parson, described by Armstrong writing in 1853, were of a parson who 'plays cricket with the village lads on Sunday evenings; cuts off his own meat at the butcher's; imbibes any quantity of port and, service over, descends from the pulpit; opens the pew door; offers his arm to his wife and marches out of church before any of the congregation thinks of moving'. Such characters, continues Armstrong, 'are now almost subjects of history' (1963, p. 43). The renewed focus on the sacerdotal nature of the ministry was, according to Russell, a result of the activities of the Evangelical and Tractarian Parties within the Church (1980, p. 39). Maintaining close personal contact with individuals was a vital part of both factions of Christian ministry and was endorsed and encouraged by many diocesan bishops in their charges to the clergy. In his charge of 1866, the Bishop of London prevailed upon his clergy to 'use all the means already provided for securing your people's affections, by diligent pastoral visitation, by helping all efforts to educate your people and raise their social condition, by faithful preaching of the real Gospel of Christ' (Tait, 1866, p. 81).

There were other influences at work that, in due course, altered the structure of the parish and the central importance of the Anglican Church and clergy. Throughout the nineteenth century, the State, through successive Acts of parliament, recognised the legal equality of non-Anglicans. One of the most important of these Acts was the abolition of
Church rates in 1868. After 1868, payment of the Church rate was voluntary, thereby freeing Dissenters from supporting a system they did not endorse. In Phoebe Junior, two Dissenting matrons, Mrs Brown and Mrs Pigeon, discussing the shortcomings of their minister, complain: "I wish he [Northcote] was gone from here, that's what I wish, and our old pastor (if we can't get none better) back again. He was one as knew his place, and wouldn't have set his foot inside one of them Parsonages. Parsonages indeed! kept up with our money." 1876/1989, p. 229). When Oliphant completed Phoebe Junior in 1876, the payment of Church rates had been voluntary for some years although, as Knight explains, some Nonconformists were willing to continue paying the rate, as long as it offered 'some form of practical assistance to all members of the community' (1995, p. 74). The divisions between Nonconformists and Anglicans were not quite so deep and entrenched as the above passage suggests. In many parishes relationships between Nonconformist and Anglican worshippers depended on the existence of cordial relations between opposing clergymen. The Rev. John Coker Egerton seems to have established and maintained a good professional relationship with Burwash's Congregational minister Buss, noting appreciatively that he had 'some conversation with a master [William] Buss [agricultural labourer, aged forty-three]. What a satisfactory sight a really religious & humble minded poor-person is; thanks be to God' (Wells, 1992, p. 28). Egerton was not enamoured by Buss's replacement, Mr Temple, Temple, whom he found to be 'a quiet average sort of man... ' (Wells, 1992, p. 196). The brevity of Egerton's summation is a telling indictment.
In Phoebe Junior, the Anglican clergyman Reginald May challenges the visiting Dissenting minister Horace Northcote about the latter’s lack of commitment to the poor in Carlingford (p. 194). In an earlier encounter with Reginald May and his father, the eponymous heroine turns this argument on the Anglicans, suggesting that the care of the elderly and needy occurs only because the Church provides the enticement of sinecures to assure clerical attendance: "'It would not answer any good purpose,' she said, administering a little sting scientifically, "if all clergymen held sinecures'" (p. 158). The rather polite and restrained altercation that takes place between Northcote and May hinges on the distinctions between each man’s religious affiliations. As Knight explains, many fraught battles and unsubstantiated assertions erupted between Nonconformist and Anglican clergymen over distinctions ‘between parishioner and non-parishioner, respectable and non-respectable, Anglican and non-Anglican’ (1995, p. 70). Only when denominational differences are put to one side, suggests Oliphant, can positive progress be made towards addressing the pressing issues of the time.

Moreover, the independent nature and organisation of Congregational Chapels with their elected ministers and locally elected deacons tended to encourage, rather than hinder, close allegiances between families and individuals, so that souls thought to be in spiritual or moral peril could find succour with elected chapel officials, as well as with their minister. Chapel deacons were well positioned within the chapel hierarchy to catch
backsliders and to assist with other parochial problems. In Salem Chapel, Mrs Brown seeks out Arthur Vincent to tell him that Mrs Hilyard requires his attention (p. 11), but Vincent interprets her actions as interference and a challenge to his ministerial authority. Davidoff and Hall mention that disputes between ministers, deacons, and their congregations were almost inevitable in a religious grouping that was closely allied in structure to the family, 'yet was voluntaristic' (1987, p. 101).

Clearly, frequent visiting did not appeal to the clergyman whose interests were divided between secular and ecclesiastical matters. Oliphant had little patience with the activities of dilettante clerics who neglect their parishes and families in the pursuit of intellectual ephemera, finding their behaviour hard to excuse. The Rev. Herbert Damerel, in A Rose In June (1874), is content to indulge his passion for poetry, leaving the more irksome domestic tasks to his harassed wife, and the day-to-day running of the parish to his curate, who, despite his energetic activities in the parish, is resented by some of the poorer parishioners who, in keeping with the vagaries of human behaviour, are 'more deeply honoured by a chance word from the Rector than they [are] by his constant ministrations and kindness' (1874, p. 31). While an enthusiastic supporter of the 'earnest clergyman', who sacrificed his life to 'scanty means and an unimprovable position', Oliphant was a critic of the other clerical extreme, that 'race of gay rectors and croquet-playing curates', who are an 'inevitable reaction' against the hopeless labours of the dedicated parochial clergyman (1871a). These comments, made in a Blackwood's
Magazine article, challenge the Church’s position that it provided ‘a trained body of educated men spread over the kingdom, placed exactly in the most suitable positions for guiding and influencing the mind of the country’ (Oliphant, 1871a). This point is driven home in Cousin Mary, when Oliphant makes a pointed reference to a croquet-playing curate, but exonerates such behaviour because the events of the novel take place at an earlier period of time, when ‘[t]he High Church development was only in its beginning . . . and curates made little or no pretensions to sacerdotal superiority’ (Cousin Mary, 1888, p. 47). This narratorial aside only serves to highlight the superior qualities of the new curate, Mr Asquith, who is unique amongst the curates serving the parish of Horton for his dedication to his pastoral duties and refusal to partake of frivolous pleasures. Instead, he devotes his time to visiting the sick in their cottages and taking special care of those in the almshouse (Cousin Mary, 1888, p. 49). Oliphant charts a serious, professional course for the curate who is an earnest exemplar of clerical devotion. Following his marriage to the eponymous heroine, the young couple embark on an ambitious programme of parish reform to banish ‘wickedness’, ‘disorder’, ‘disease’, ‘waste’, ‘dirt’, and ‘drink’. The Rector, while noting their early enthusiasm, predicts that the arrival of babies and shortage of funds will compel Asquith to ‘seek another curacy with a little more money, and when Mary, instead of being the good angel of the parish, would have to be nurse and superior servant-of-all-work at home’ (Cousin Mary, 1888, p. 128).
Whilst recognizing the importance of scholarship, Oliphant suggests that the Established Church does not adequately assist its clergymen in fulfilling their pastoral duties, due to its method of training. Dull preaching by 'a man of ordinary endowments' achieves little, says Oliphant, and, if the Church of England were 'wise enough to follow the example of wise Rome in her great ages, and establish a distinct class or order of preachers', it would liberate the clergy for other pressing parochial matters (1871a). Oliphant's position is endorsed by the contemporary clergyman John Sandford, himself an examining chaplain of candidates, who found that Universities 'inadequately furnished' ordinands 'for the Christian ministry', noting that their knowledge of theology, Church history and doctrines and even the Holy Scriptures were deficient (1862, p. 129). Nevertheless, Sandford was loathe to promote theological colleges as a superior alternative to the training of clergymen noting, instead, that most clergymen would benefit from 'a course of teaching and training supplemental to the Universities', which might 'be furnished in a well-ordered parish, under the supervision of an incumbent of adequate ability and experience' (1862, p. 137).

According to Oliphant, when a clergyman elevates scholarship above the concerns of the parish, it nearly always results in a sense of personal unhappiness, because it is a refusal to engage with the everyday trials of life. In *The Curate in Charge*, Roger Mildmay faces this question when offered the living of Brentburn. Until this point in his life, Mildmay has led the life of a dedicated dilettante, committed to
surrounding himself 'with all the last fantastical delights of the day', so that his rooms resemble 'a museum of china and knick-knacks than rooms to live in' (Curate, 1987/1876, p. 70). As he tires of his intellectual and artistic pursuits, he considers the possibilities of a life devoted to philanthropy, but finds himself

in such a self-discussion as many women are. If he works, what is the good of it? It is to occupy, to please himself, not because the work is necessary to others; indeed, it is taking bread out of the mouths of others to do badly himself that which another man, probably lounging sadly out of work, and seeing his children starve, would do well. Let him, then, go back to his own profession; and what was he to do? A clergyman must preach, and he did not feel at all at his ease in the pulpit. A clergyman must teach, and his prevailing mood was a desire to learn. A clergyman must care for the poor, and he knew nothing about the poor (Curate, p. 74-5).

This critical point in Mildmay's career is characterised in the above passage by an explosion of emotion and depth of feeling, hitherto unknown to this young man. The emphatically repeated phrases, beginning with ' [a] clergyman must . . . ' delivered in three sentences of equal length and similar structure, preceded by a sentence that insists on Mildmay's complicity with the female lot, together with the use of indirect speech which allows Mildmay to condemn himself, are uttered with a precise syntactic
patterning that cannot be disputed. Thus Oliphant shows that, whilst Mildmay is conscience-driven to live up to his ordination vows, he feels unprepared to meet the demands of his profession. Confirming Oliphant’s views, a writer for the Quarterly Review notes that abstract theological learning did not always sit easily with the practicalities of parochial life, and was viewed as a potential problem for clergymen because, very often, ‘active communication with other men’ would not suit ‘the recluse student and the spiritualised ascetic’ (‘Training of the Clergy’, 1862). Examining the church as a profession for young men, The Times despaired at the squandered intellectual life of a ‘high wrangler, or a first-class man’ who, after ordination, is sent to a remote country parish. After ‘twenty years’ in this environment, the article continues, ‘[h]is whole manner and mind will have become so assimilated to the homely sphere of his duties’, making him ‘unfit not only for any dignity, for any living in a good quarter, but even for good clerical company’ (‘The Church as a Profession’, 1863). Oliphant recognised that intellectual isolation was one of the hazards of clerical life in a small parish. Arthur Vincent, for example, is unable to share his plans for Salem Chapel with his deacons, who are ‘humble in their pretensions’; neither can he bring himself to participate in the drear social activities provided by Carlingford’s Dissenting interest (Salem Chapel, p. 5). Oliphant shows how inexperience, unreasonable expectations, and thwarted intellectual ambitions combine to curtail a promising clerical career.
Byerley Thomson reminds young men considering the church as a profession that it is 'absurd not to regard the church in one aspect as an earthly profession, demanding considerations similar to those claimed for law, arms, or medicine' (1857, p. 69). Writing with admirable candour, Byerley Thomson assumes that, although 'an exalted piety, and anxiety for God's service' should be the prime considerations for the man about to enter the clergy, they are not the only ones, and that, once he has entered this sacred calling, 'there is as much desire for increased emolument, reputation, and advancement, as in any other calling' (1857, p. 69-70). Lest his remarks appear to be insensitive, Byerley Thomson tempers his position somewhat by reminding his readers that, since clergymen of the Church of England are permitted to marry, it is right and just that 'temporal ambition' on the part of the clergyman should be viewed in this light (1857, p. 70).

Mildmay's combination of 'temporal ambition' and 'exalted piety' allows him to enjoy limited success in his transition from bachelor don to dedicated pastoral worker, visiting the sick, offering words of comfort and, to the consternation of his churchwardens, recklessly handing out his own money 'to anyone who told him a pitiful story' (The Curate in Charge, p. 199). For Oliphant, Mildmay's moral transformation is complete when he proposes to one of the daughters of the now deceased curate, St John. Cicely St John is aware of Mildmay's lofty idealism and equally aware that such notions will not sit well with the realities of parish life. Furthermore, she has suffered a loss of social status since her father's death, forced by family responsibilities to accept the
position of schoolmistress and suffering from the knowledge that ‘her old acquaintances were much embarrassed to know how to behave to her’ (Curtate, p. 197). Mildmay’s proposal offers her a welcome escape from penury and the chance to re-establish her social position within the parish, but there is a caveat attached to such a course of action.

A hastily arranged marriage to appease the expectations of her readers is a dilemma into which Oliphant does not wish to enter, and, in a lengthy aside to the reader, in particular the young woman reader, warns that ‘the sudden “good marriage”, which is the one remaining way in which a god out of the machinery can change wrong into right at any moment in the modern world, . . . comes dreadfully in the way of heroic story’ (Curtate, p. 193). In the case of her heroine, Cicely St John, such an arrangement would undermine her efforts in establishing the school, ‘making all her noble intention unnecessary’, and ‘is simply a contemptible expedient’ (Curtate, p. 193). Within the domestic realm, Cicely reigns supreme and the position of schoolmistress, with its accompanying lure of independence promising ‘a place of my own’, and ‘a home to put the children in’, offers further enticement to refuse the match (p. 191). This would account for the novel’s ambiguous conclusion, for even though the offer of marriage is made, doubt remains as to whether Cicely will accept with a clear conscience, as neither party is in love with the other. The ending is unsatisfying because, according to Oliphant, it requires a great deal of unjustifiable self-sacrifice on the part of her heroine, together with the unpalatable realisation that her sacrifices are the normal lot of womankind. Temporalities, notes
Oliphant, are those inescapable factors of clerical life and a prudent clergyman will bestow on them the same care that he takes with his sacred duties.

Morley Proctor's moral evolution is completed in the same manner as Mildmay's, with his marriage to the 'elderly' Miss Wodehouse. The difference between the two characters is that, while Mildmay is on a quest to discover 'life', Proctor, on the other hand, seeks to avoid it as much as possible and eventually returns to the safe haven of All Souls. Oliphant does, however, project the reader into the future at the end of this short novel by hinting at a union between 'an elderly embarrassed Rector' and his 'mild wife in dove-coloured dresses' (The Rector, p. 35), which is realised in the later novel, The Perpetual Curate. Unlike Mildmay, who refuses to see the realities of his situation, Proctor is aware that marriage will entail the added burden of the younger unmarried sister, Lucy Wodehouse (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 27-8).

Learning to deal with the personal trials and demands of one's parishioners, stresses Oliphant, is a worthwhile pursuit for a clergyman and is a valuable asset in dealing with the many problems that assail the clergyman, both in his personal and professional capacities. The answer lies with the clergyman's ability to reconcile the personal and the private. As the above examples show, Oliphant's clergymen must present themselves as worthy suitors, and respond sensitively to the needs of their immediate families before they can properly meet the needs of the parish. Oliphant's
most successful clergyman, at least in terms of his duty to his parishioners, is the Ritualist clergyman, Frank Wentworth. It is Wentworth, young, energetic and possessed of a certain kind of spiritual arrogance, who rescues the floundering Proctor at the bedside of the dying woman (The Rector, p. 25), and it is Wentworth, now well established in Carlingford, who gains the confidence and trust of his parishioners by his dutiful attendance at their homes and sick-beds. Wentworth’s willingness to take charge of the situation is aided by his youth. The roles of Wentworth and Lucy Wodehouse in the parish are contrasted with the ‘elderly’ coupling of Mary Wodehouse and Morley Proctor. Unable to account for his failure in pastoral duties, Morley Proctor takes refuge from his failings in the commodious clichés of advancing years, which Oliphant gently ridicules: “It did not use to be so when you and I were young,... I sometimes take a little comfort from that; but no doubt, if it had been in me, it would have shown itself somehow... what a blessing things are so changed; and these blessed young creatures,” she added softly, with tears falling out of her gentle old eyes – “these blessed young creatures are near the Fountainhead” (The Rector, p. 26). Morley Proctor’s self-effacing character does not inspire confidence in his parishioners or social equals, whereas Frank Wentworth possesses a clerical and personal authority that is unencumbered by professional or personal doubts.

Wentworth successfully combines the status of gentleman with his clerical profession, and unlike the unfortunate Proctor, refuses to sacrifice the needs of his
parishioners to the more nebulous status of gentleman. Wentworth differs markedly from Oliphant’s other gentleman/clergy, such as the Rev. Herbert Damerel in *A Rose in June*, who enjoys high status in his parish by dint of name and occupation alone. Oliphant denies that Damerel’s illness and subsequent death are related to his visit to a poor woman dying of fever; ‘that he should fall under such a disease - that the plaque which is born of squalor, and dirt; and ill-nourishment, and bad air, should seize upon him, the very impersonation of everything that was opposite and antagonistic to those causes which brought it forth!’ (*Rose*, 1874, p. 89). The real-life gentleman/clergyman Benjamin Armstrong did not scruple in attributing the entertainments of a set of local grandees a waste of time: ‘People have no right to twaddle a precious morning away at bagatelle or in insipid and profitless conversation. Abominably stupid such gatherings must be’. Feeling the ‘oppression’ of this social gathering, he was relieved to quit it after ‘two hours’ and ‘was glad to get away and have an afternoon among the sick, as they were beginning to debate whether or not the weather was fitting for a drive’ (1963, p. 69). This outburst was a departure for this clergyman who extolled the virtues of ‘vagabondizing’, explaining that ‘[y]ou take your wife and child, a telescope and a county map in your phaeton – start where you please, go where you please, return when you please’ (1963, p. 32). The above examples support Oliphant’s claim that a clergyman should not use scholarship or the press of social engagements as a convenient diversion from the important practical concerns of the parish.
Clergymen could claim membership, in the words of Haig, to 'a common background' at least until 1860, as most of them graduated at one of the ancient universities (1984, p. 27). The commonality of their educational origins also implied membership of a genteel social order, as Haig (1984, p. 27) acknowledges, and, no matter how disparate their social milieux, the bonds of these prestigious universities provided an added fillip in the pursuit of a clerical career. The Rev. J H Blunt observes that the 'social and educational position of the pastor is a most important element in the pursuit and development of his proper work' (1865, p. 7). Blunt's book is a manual for the clergyman in his parochial duties and, although it contains a comprehensive 'guide' to practical pastoral concerns, such as hints for visiting the sick, to the proper content of sermons, it is implied, throughout, that the clergyman, as a gentleman, already possesses the skills to deal with any human crisis, spiritual or otherwise. Clearly, Oliphant's fiction speaks otherwise. A comfortable haven in a provincial backwater was no safe place for a "gentleman" clergyman to spend his days, as Oliphant attests in her depiction of the careers of Proctor and Damerel. Blunt's 'handbook' was one of many published throughout the nineteenth century to augment the practical training that many commentators felt was lacking at Oxford and Cambridge which, until the 1840s, as Haig notes, provided over half of the ordinands for the Established Church (1984, p. 30). The large numbers of books and pamphlets published to aid the clergy at the parochial level gives some indication of the perceived need of the clergy. Oliphant's fiction is a creative recognition of this need. The concerns, which she voices in the pages of Blackwood's
about clerical shortcomings, receive heraldic positioning in her fiction. Russell
notes that, during the period 1750 to 1875, at least one hundred of these 'handbooks'
were published, with many running to several editions, providing evidence of the need
for practical parochial instruction of clergymen (1980, p. 7). The handbooks addressed a
perceived gap in clerical education and were an attempt to provide the clergyman with a
comprehensive working manual to consult when the need arose. Oliphant was well
aware that clergymen and their parishioners very often suffered, due to inadequate
practical training to fit them for day-to-day life in the parish, as illustrated in the careers
of Proctor and Mildmay, both late fellows of All Souls, whose restricted contact with
the world outside university affects their ability to minister to their people. Sometimes
the most unsuitable candidates for the demands of pastoral life, stresses Oliphant, are
men who have led a sheltered University existence. The Oxford and Cambridge colleges
provided scant opportunities for ordinands to develop, according to Dowland, 'the
devotional lives or the theological skills of ordinands' (1997, p. 184). The real-life Rev.
Edward Boys Ellman, for example, felt hampered by his lack of practical training,
commenting that 'it is not good for a young man to have to begin as I did, Curate in sole
charge'. Ellman began his curacy with 'two sermons to prepare and preach each week',
noting that help, in the form of Commentaries, was unavailable to him, due to his
impecunious state (1912, p. 138). As well as offering glimpses into parochial
management, the handbooks also indicate how clergymen coped with change in their

For example, an anonymous collection of tracts was published in Oxford in 1807, entitled The
Clergyman's Instructor or a Collection of Tracts on the Ministerial Duties. Its popularity was such that
profession, whilst at the same time upholding tradition. The abundance of pastoral handbooks, published during the nineteenth century, betray anxieties about the redefinition of clerical roles and the clergyman's relationship with the wider community.

The plethora of clerical handbooks may be seen as an attempt to assist clergymen deal with the stresses of parochial life. Frances Knight suggests that clerical stress was experienced in the 'structure of the Church and the parish' as well as 'inner struggles and uncertainties' (1995, p. 106). 'Evidence in the latter category', continues Knight, 'is harder to extract than in the former, where it is relatively plentiful' (1995, p. 106). The creative output of novelists such as Oliphant seeks to fill the 'evidence' gap noted by Knight. Oliphant's fictional response to the effects of clerical change and reform emerges when her clergymen experience periods of self-doubt, isolation or dislocation within the community they serve. Arthur Vincent is Oliphant's most psychologically fragile young clergyman, whose pride in his social and intellectual accomplishments is quickly dispelled following his immersion in parochial life. His nervous arrival into Lady Western's Anglican social set is uneventful and is summarised by Miss Wodehouse, who uncharacteristically shows a superior level of psychological acumen as she inwardly observes 'that perhaps it might be dangerous for the young man, who knew no better, and that Lady Western always looked well in a blue dress. Such was the outside world's interpretation of that triumphant hour of Vincent's life' (Salem Chapel, p. 148).

Oliphant had personal knowledge of clergymen, such as Principal Tulloch, who experienced psychological problems that affected his ability to perform his duties. Tulloch's difficulties were not necessarily the result of inadequate training, but had more to do with questions of temperament. Principal Tulloch suffered throughout his life from a depressive disorder which Oliphant, rather unsympathetically, measured against her own troubles. Oliphant wrote to Tulloch in September 1881:

> But think, please, if it had been me who had been ill, what would have become of me? - no income going on whether one could work or not - no wife to take care of me. You are far better off than I am in these respects, and, to tell the truth, I am often tired to death of work and care - always work, work, whether one likes or not. But I am wicked to complain (Oliphant, 1899/1974, p. 300).

The Principal's repeated breakdowns tried her patience, particularly as Oliphant believed that his disorder arose from a minor incident over a disputed translation (Jay, 1995, p. 231-2). According to Jay, Tulloch's sometimes fragile mental state and the incident that allegedly precipitated it is recognisable in the character of Ernest Ashford, a minor canon in the novel, *Within the Precincts* (1995, p. 232). Ashford's troubles begin with 'a wrong accent upon a Greek word', which 'five years after' still 'coloured his life. He went in mourning for it all his days' (*Precincts*, 1885, p. 97). Here the similarities with
Tulloch end, but, for the fictional Ashford, this incident hindered his advancement in the Church. ‘He tried a curacy or two’ and ministered to the poor, but ‘their misery appalled his gentle soul’ (Precincts, 1885, p. 97-8); his physical and emotional flights from his troubles ‘were not a brave thing to do, and proved the weakness of his character’ (Precincts, 1885, p. 97-8). Oliphant was aware that for some clergymen, no amount of training and preparation could adequately equip them to deal with the extreme material want and spiritual impoverishment that many encountered in their parishes. A clergyman’s inability to respond to the needs of his parishioners is highly suspect because, for Oliphant, his suitability of calling could be measured, to some extent, by his responses to the spiritual and material needs of those he served. As we shall see, this question would occupy Oliphant in many novels.

Oliphant’s concern to present the realities of parish life in her fiction is at odds with the idealized portrait drawn by her friend Tulloch. Tulloch’s version of the ideal English parish is unabashedly romantic in its scope and heavily didactic in its symbolism. For Tulloch, the clergyman enjoys a multifaceted role as the people’s ‘companion and friend’, guiding them through every stage of their lives from ‘the instructor of their youth’ to ‘the ministrant of their declining years’, and the parish church, ‘with its simple spire or tower pointing heavenwards, giving a moral as well as scenic effect to the village or hamlet clustered about it’ (Oliphant, 1888, p. 469). Tulloch made these remarks in a lecture delivered towards the end of his life, and his backward-
looking description of English parish life might have been plucked directly from the eighteenth century instead of the last decade of the nineteenth. Religious discord in Tulloch's ideal parish appears only through the efforts of those demanding religious equality, or when a 'Nonconformist zealot . . . with a Gospel of zeal rather than of peace' threatens the religious and cultural ambience of the parish (Oliphant 1888, p. 469). Tulloch's idyllic schema does not recognise any conflict between the clergymen's spiritual role and his duty of care to his parishioners and his family. For him, one role glides effortlessly into the other. In contrast, Oliphant's clergymen and the parishes they serve are not quite so spotless in character or as benign in intent as Tulloch would have us believe. Her novels repeatedly give the lie to this ideal. Oliphant's fiction shows that the Church of England had greatly hindered its clergy in the performance of their duties, due to inadequate pastoral training. This criticism is particularly transparent in the careers of her University fellows, Proctor and Mildmay, who struggle physically and mentally to cope with the rigours of parochial life, while men such as St John, Ashford, and Asquith are either temperamentally unsuited to parish life or, in Asquith's case, resign themselves to lives of unrelenting hardship. Clerical life, insists Oliphant, involves a large amount of unavoidable drudgery and, although the assistance of a sympathetic wife is a hoon, a clergymen was often forced to look to other ways to ease the burdens of his pastoral duties.
Supervisor of Lay Activities

One of the most efficient ways of enlisting outside help was through visiting societies. A well-organised district visiting society could do much to establish bridges of communication between the clergy and their parishioners, and was an important secular adjunct to the sacred roles of the clergy. Visiting societies, as Prochaska claims, were a fixture in the English landscape by the end of the eighteenth century (1980, p. 98), with many becoming institutionalised by the middle decades of the nineteenth century (1980, p. 104-6). In the Carlingford series of novels, the only district organisation mentioned by Oliphant is the Sisters of Mercy, who are drawn from the upper échelons of Carlingford society. The activities of Oliphant's fictional Sisters of Mercy, is examined in detail in Chapter Three, which deals with lay involvement in the Church.

In the popular spirit of self-help and under the direction of the clergyman, parochial organisations such as coal and clothing clubs and savings banks were often an essential part of the business of the parish. For example, the real-life Rector of Burwash, John Coker Egerton, presided over meetings of Burwash's Friendly Society, which numbered '188 or thereabouts' in 1867 (1992, p. 68). Burwash also supported a Provident Society and the club's anniversary was marked by a long letter, probably Egerton's, which reported amongst other things 'that club members were healthy as only
nine of the seventy-two had drawn on the funds, and that there were 'no skulkers', no members pretending to be ill' (Wells, 1992, p. 80). In *Cousin Mary*, the hard-working curate, Mr Asquith, is responsible for a 'penny-bank and clothing club' and organizes a 'lending library', at times furnishing the meager accounts with money taken out of his own 'poor pocket' (1888, p. 63). The parish of Carlingford, Oliphant informs us, boasts a Provident Society, run by Wentworth, while his Evangelical Aunt Leonora is occupied with her 'favourite district' in London that involves her 'missionary, and her Scripture-readers, and her colporteur' (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 10, 177). Leonora's active involvement in missionary and visiting societies is typical of her Evangelical stance which, as Bebbington notes, 'did not wait for people to come to their places of worship; Evangelicals went to the people' (1989, p. 118). Acknowledging the impact of Evangelicals in parish management, Oliphant's Aunt Leonora is a positive and practical exemplar of Evangelical interests. Although Leonora might frown on the theological notion of Sisterhoods as suitable channels for district visiting, she has, nevertheless established her own visiting societies and missions independent of the clergy. Leonora's independent stance in matters parochial parallels her forthright approach to moral issues and her allegiance to Evangelical beliefs that emphasise the importance of one's relationship with God, over and above one's relationship with one's fellows. Her forthrightness should not be confused with rudeness, although to the modern reader this appears so, but as a manifestation of her Evangelical mission to spread God's word. Oliphant demonstrates that, even though Leonora's energetic efforts to install an
Evangelical conscience wherever she goes constantly stretch the boundaries of polite and acceptable behaviour, her uncompromising character, fed by Evangelical tenets, succeeds where others fail.

Recognising the common ground that she shares with her nephew in respect to parochial duties, Leonora's attitude towards him softens, allowing her to appreciate him as a 'true . . . priest of God's appointing' (Perpetual, Vol I p. 233). Leonora's faith in Wentworth's character is vindicated when he later asks for her assistance in times of trouble. Clergymen, such as Wentworth, welcome active lay involvement, while others, such as Morgan, are suspicious of Wentworth and his Sisterhoods, as they encroach upon his sphere of authority. Given her emphatic comments on the plight of the overburdened clergymen in the Blackwood's Magazine article, it is not surprising that Oliphant's fictional clergymen actively pursue lay help wherever possible.

Spiritual and Moral Adviser

In an ideal English parish, such as the one described by Tulloch, souls in spiritual turmoil do not hesitate to unload their burdens onto their clergymen. A clergyman's ability to establish and sustain a meaningful spiritual rapport with his parishioners was one of his most challenging tasks. Therefore, careful canvassing of parishioners was an important part of the clergyman's parochial duties, as it helped to cement relationships
between parishioner and clergyman. As John Gott observed, there 'is no substitute for personal dealing with individual souls' (1889, p. 40-1). Relationships with parishioners demanded more from the clergyman than the formalised obligations of a pastoral visit or the passing intimacies occasioned by a social gathering. More often, it required a gritty emotional and spiritual stamina to deal with a range of compelling issues, which clergymen such as Morley Proctor lack. Oliphant recognised that, in times of extreme emotional distress, such as bereavement, when words of support and direction were most welcome, many clergymen were unable to assist, due to an unhelpful reticence, either as the result of inadequate training or a personal inability to grapple with emotionally and spiritually charged situations. For example, the Rev. Mr Freke in Agnes can utter only commonplaces to the recently bereaved eponymous heroine:

When Mr Freke came to see her - as it was his duty to do - the vicar was in great confusion of mind, and did not know what to say; and, indeed, except that it was mysterious and inscrutable, and beyond all explanation, what could one say? He confused her more and more - or at least, did all he could to do so - with his own bewilderments and perplexities (1866, p. 317)

Freke offers condescending sentimentalities when he 'ought to have strengthened her faith and her courage' (1866, p. 148). According to Oliphant, Freke's difficulties in this situation arise, because he is 'one of the men of the present generation who do not
pretend to a very clear faith' and, when pressed, questions rather than justifies the ways of God (1866, p. 148). Agnes had been comforted by belief in a providential order and Freke's questioning of the ways of God offers her no consolation:

"I won't say it is for your good, as so many people say", the vicar explained; "for I cannot see how it can be for your good; but perhaps it is for his good, poor dear child! And I cannot tell you that it is to show God's love to you, for, God knows, I cannot feel that myself. I think he will explain it, if you can but wait; and, so far as I can see, that's all. It is your fellowship in the sufferings of Christ." (1966, p. 317).

Similarly, clergymen such as the imperious English Anglo-Catholic curate in A Son of the Soil, who insist on subscribing to 'that pious unbelief which is the favourite of modern theology', are a matter of concern to Oliphant, who shows Colin Campbell unable to tolerate the curate's ill-informed and shallow references to Scottish Presbyterianism (1883, p. 120-1). In an early article in Blackwood's Magazine, Oliphant took issue with those members of the Church 'who have entered upon the dangerous experiment of accommodating and reconciling the gospel to the theories of their neighbours who have passed the rubicon'. These divines', continues Oliphant, 'are no longer contented with justifying the ways of God to man' (1855b). Another Blackwood's article, written just two years before her death, shows Oliphant ruminating over the 'inexorable certainty' of death (1895), and casting a critical eye over
contemporaries who adopt a naïve optimism in their attempts to comfort the bereaved with 'sacred words', 'which tell us that whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and that all things work together for good to those who believe' (1895). These words have become, suggests Oliphant, nothing more than airy platitudes, 'said to people in this condition which do them very little good' (1895). Oliphant confessed that she had 'taken refuge', in the belief that 'every incident of life', including 'the great question of death', is captured in a secret dialogue between 'the Godhead and the man, the Saviour and the saved, the Father and the child' (1895), in the same way that the fictional Agnes finds comfort in 'a kind of mass being always said in the world . . . a kind of repetition every day of His sacrifice . . . Sometimes it comforts me a little; I think He would have raised them all, like Lazarus, if it had been possible; and it was not possible; and now we have all to put on our priest's garments, and hold up the host, that all the world may see' (1866, p. 317-8). Jay notes that this last sentence 'reveals Oliphant's fear that this doctrine of repeated sacrifice comes dangerously near an understanding of the sacrament at odds with Protestant teaching' (1995, p. 155). Oliphant's theological speculations are a way of coping with her own bereavements.

When Oliphant's daughter Maggie died of gastric flu in Rome in 1864, she looked to her clergyman friend, Principal Tulloch, for solace. In her Autobiography, Oliphant describes how Tulloch recommends 'In Memoriam', not as a source of comfort in bereavement but as a way of approaching religious doubt when one's faith is rocked
because of bereavement. Oliphant records that Tulloch describes ‘In Memoriam’ as ‘an embodiment of the spirit of the age, which he says does not know what to think, yet thinks and wonders and stops itself, and thinks again; which believes and does not believe, and perhaps, I think, carries the human yearning and longing farther than it was ever carried before’ (Oliphant, 1990, p. 6). Oliphant expresses no surprise at Tulloch’s choice of a secular work at a time of grief, commenting only that ‘my own thoughts are much of the same kind’ (Oliphant, 1990, p. 6). Perhaps, too, Tulloch recognised intuitively that his friend would not respond kindly to biblical words of comfort, when she admitted to ‘always upbraiding and reproaching God’ for her loss (Oliphant, 1990, p. 9). ‘In Memoriam’ is read by Lucy Wodehouse during her period of mourning after the death of her father (The Perpetual Curate, Vol II, p. 248-9) in a grief coloured by regret, rather than any deep sense of loss. She consults it again later with a more detached air that ‘vexed her to feel how inevitably good sense came in and interfered with the enthusiasm of her grief’, with the knowledge ‘that to apply to her fond old father all the lofty lauds which were appropriate to the poet’s hero would be folly indeed’ (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 41). Similarly, young Alice Meredith’s mourning is alleviated when Colin Campbell reads the poem to her ‘till her heart melted and relieved itself in sweet abundant tears’ (A Son of the Soil, 1883, p. 295). ‘In Memoriam’ made a lasting impression on Oliphant who, according to Mrs Coghill, requested permission from Tennyson to have some verses set to music ‘by Mr Bridge, then organist of Holy Trinity, Windsor’. Tennyson declined the offer (Oliphant, 1899/1974, p. 224).
Oliphant was aware that words offer only partial deliverance from emotional suffering and no one, apart from the bereaved person, can enter 'into the sacred innermost chamber of sorrow' (*Ages*, 1866, p. 303). So difficult is the task of comforting the bereaved that Oliphant is prepared to absolve clergymen such as Mr Freke from blame: 'But Mr Freke could not tell any more than most people can tell what is the meaning of the divine words which they snatch up at random, with but a vague general sense of their powers of healing, to staunch the wounds, for which human art has no remedy . . .' (*Ages*, p. 317).

Whilst Freke's attempt to comfort the bereaved Agnes is limited by his unorthodox religious approach, Oliphant shows that clergymen who admit to unbending theological positions may hinder rather than assist their appreciation of the divine will. Gerald Wentworth has become a Roman Catholic because he believes that Catholicism offers 'a rock of authority, or certainty - one holds in one's hand at last the interpretation of the enigma' (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p. 112). Towards the end of *The Perpetual Curate*, as Frank Wentworth muses over the difficulties of human existence with Gerald, he realises that an unquestioning acceptance of Church doctrine does not explain 'a world in which every event is an enigma, where nothing that comes offers any explanation of itself; where God does not show Himself always kind, but by times awful, terrible - a God who smites and does not spare' (*Perpetual*, Vol III p. 113-4). An iron-clad reliance on doctrine at the expense of a healthy regard for the ineffable, hints
Oliphant, cannot explain to a mother why her children die and another's live or 'why one man is happy and another miserable' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 113). Oliphant recognised that the clergyman's ability to offer comfort and counselling to souls in spiritual turmoil relied less on training than on a firm bedrock of faith that must override doctrinal differences. This is an important moment in the development of Frank Wentworth as pastor and marks his maturation as a spiritual counsellor.

Frank Wentworth's success as a spiritual adviser may also be understood in terms of his affiliation with Tractarianism and its legitimization of priestly authority. As the perpetual curate for an unofficial district, Wentworth's claims to success rest, surely, on his ability to increase his congregation, therefore his frequent appearance in the homes of Carlingford's parishioners is an effort to forge close bonds between himself and his people. Oliphant stresses that his familiarity with parishioners is also the result of certain practical difficulties. Wentworth does not live in a parsonage; he lodges, instead, with the respectable widow Hadwin. Apart from the church of St Roque's, he lacks a private area in which to receive parishioners. Consequently, most of his parochial work is carried out in public view and interviews of a private nature are conducted in public places and on the thresholds of shops. A heated debate occurs between Morgan, Wentworth and a parishioner in a public area, and Wentworth's appeals that they retire 'to a fitter place to discuss the matter' are angrily refused (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 165). Wentworth's later misunderstandings with his parish clerk Elsworthy are, in part,
attributable to the public nature of their interviews, which occur in the distracting atmosphere of Elsworthy's shop. Nevertheless, his success in breaking down some of the social barriers between himself and the 'difficult' Wharfside inhabitants and his attempts to acknowledge the source of many of the problems in the district are applauded by one matron who says: "There ain't no doubt as he sets our duty before us clear, . . . he don't leave the men no excuse for their goings-on. He all but named the Bargeman's Arms out plain, as it was the place all the mischief came from" (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 201). Wentworth is respected and admired for his diligence and willingness to deal with difficult parochial social problems that other clergy, such as Proctor and Morgan, often ignore, but his sometimes difficult personal manner does not allow him to develop and maintain close relationships with his parishioners, particularly his middle-class parishioners. This aspect of Wentworth's parochial demeanour, which manifests as terseness of manner, equates with the Tractarian suspicion of the worldly and profane, and the movement's endorsement of an unimpeachable clergy. As Reed notes, Tractarian clergymen responded to a spiritual 'power' that was 'lofty and exhilarating' and, more importantly, offered the young man intent on a clerical career the irresistible lure of 'an occupational self-image worthy of a life's devotion' (1996, p. 129). After all, continues Reed, 'the authority of the confessional [and] the expertise of spiritual direction', must countervail 'the greatly increased professional prestige of . . . the doctor, the surgeon, the teacher, the scientist and so on' (1996, p. 129).
Oliphant was well aware that a clergyman's professional status, and even his party allegiance, were visible in the manner of his dress and physical bearing. In *Salem Chapel* (p. 4) and *Phoebe Junior* (p. 113-4), the Dissenting ministers, Vincent and Northcote respectively, harbour desires to emulate the dress of their Anglican counterpart. Northcote's dress, like Wentworth's, 'was one of the signs of his character and meaning', and while Northcote denies the 'folly which stigmatised an M.B. waistcoat', yet he scorned to copy. Accordingly, his frock coat was not long, but of the extremest [sic] solemnity of cut and hue, his white tie was of the stiffest, his tall hat of the most uncompromising character' (*Phoebe Junior*, p. 113-4), making him as distinct as any Ritualist. The real-life Rev. Benjamin Armstrong, himself a Ritualist, was alert to the significance of clerical costume, noting on a visit to a new church in Doncaster in February 1864, that the 'vicar is 'Broad Church', which his secular cut in the photographs in the Doncaster shops fully confirms – double-breasted frock coat and high shirt collar. But he has a daily service and a surpliced choir' (1963, p. 105).

A clergyman's professional standing did not exempt him from charges of improper behaviour, as the Rev. John Coker Egerton discovered to his irritation, when

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1 Kathleen Watson points out that Oliphant's reference to the wearing of M.B. waistcoats by Ritualists had 'topical significance.' 'M.B. indicated 'Mark of the Beast', Rome typifying the Beast of the Apocalypse – and this high straight waistcoat a sort of badge of the men presumed to be on the road to Rome' (Watson, 1969, p. 415). Oliphant's interest in how men define themselves professionally emerges in *The Doctor's Family*, when the young Dr Rider, a physician, surreptitiously adorns his shingle with the letters M.R.C.S., having been 'advised that in such districts [a new quarter of Carlingford] people were afraid of physicians, associating only with dread adumbrations of a guinea a visit that miscomprehended name; so, with a pang, the young surgeon had put his degree in his pocket, and put up with the inferior distinction' (1863, p. 39). As Corfield points out, by 1773 the term doctor 'included
his 'act of kindness' in allowing one 'Sally Isted to sleep at ye Rectory, seeing how small & close their house is ...' was misunderstood by some parishioners (Wells, 1992, p. 138-9). Despite warnings from his Aunt Dora that 'there are a great many things that are wrong in a clergyman that would not matter in another man' (Perpetual Vol II, p. 85), Wentworth believes that he is merely doing his duty as a priest and gentleman by admonishing Elsworthy's niece, Rosa, when he finds her walking unaccompanied in the lanes of Carlingford at night. Elsworthy and others misinterpret Wentworth's paternal concerns for Rosa's moral and physical welfare and choose to ignore Wentworth's repeated warnings to Elsworthy that the girl's reputation will be compromised if the situation remains unchanged. Further damage to Wentworth's reputation occurs when he agrees to Mary Wodehouse's requests not to divulge to anyone the identity of her wastrel brother, who has recently arrived in Carlingford. Oliphant hints that many of Wentworth's parochial and personal problems occur because there is no clear delineation between his secular and sacred duties. Oliphant shows that Wentworth's status as gentleman is sometimes at odds with his clerical status, and, although Wentworth himself is unaware of this duality, his parishioners express frustration and confusion in their dealings with him. Elsworthy attacks Wentworth, because he views his behaviour as ungentlemanly, but not because he doubts his abilities as a clergyman (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 9). Clement Rogers notes that, as an 'official representative of the Church', it is quite

Physicians, Surgeons, and Apothecaries' (1995, p. 140) and of these physicians were the 'grandest in the tripartite model' (1995, p. 149). This incident occurred in 1873. Egerton was married on 1 January 1875, an event that would have silenced wagging tongues, had it occurred two years earlier (Wells, 1992, p. 156).
in order for the clergyman 'to be considered a sort of moral policeman', as his duty is 'to see and to point out the Christian issues in all questions' (1912, p. 82-3). As Oliphant shows, confusion abounds in Carlingford as to the level of moral control Frank Wentworth should exercise.

Oliphant's depiction of the kinds of pastoral work undertaken by earnest clergymen whose training is unequal to the demands of parochial experience, together with her comments on the personal qualities required by these men to fulfill their pastoral duties, is a telling statement of the Established Church's failure to support its clergymen. Another area of clerical influence that required commitment, personal integrity, energy, and fully stretched the clergyman's claims as 'moral policeman' was the parish schoolroom. This aspect of his duties is considered in the next section.

Secular Duties - Education

According to Russell, the Church of England's system of education was 'one of the cheapest and most efficient agents of social control which the nation possessed' (1980, p. 191), and the clergyman who did not provide schools for the poor 'was seriously failing in his duty' (p. 193). Virtues and values such as 'contentment, thrift, and respect for property, authority and law' were essential elements, continues Russell, in the fashioning of a 'well-disciplined work force', imbued 'with a proper moral sense'
who could take their places in the factories and farming properties of England (1980, p. 191-2). It is not surprising, therefore, that clergymen accepted their roles as educators as seriously as any other aspect of their parochial duties. Schlossberg reminds us that, with the exception of the ‘Benthamites and other radicals, almost all educational thinking was bound up with religious issues’ (2000, p. 260), whilst Heeney agrees that parish schooling was primarily viewed as a religious enterprise (1976, p. 91). One pastoral hand book writer was adamant that '[t]he doctrines of the Church of England, and none other, must be taught within our walls; and all who come to School must also come to Church (Burgon, 1864, p. 251) [original emphasis]. Oliphant captures the contemporary clergyman’s moral and religious influence in parochial education in the career of Frank Wentworth, whose exemplary parochial performance is enhanced by his efforts in the schools he runs for the poor children and adults of Wharfside. As part of Wentworth’s character tends towards self-aggrandisement, Oliphant hints that his strenuous efforts in the Wharfside community allow those who ‘recognised him’ to acknowledge, ‘in a lesser or greater degree, the sway of his bishopric’ (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 167).

Oliphant tells us that Wentworth runs a school for girls who are taught by Lucy Wodehouse, while a school for boys and adult men operates in the afternoons to coincide with periods of leisure in the working day of the bargemen and boys. Oliphant’s depiction of a school operating around the employment requirements of its pupils has currency in the contemporary setting, as child employment was a frequent and recurring
problem of non-attendance. An Oxfordshire schoolmistress noted in her log book of 19 June: 'This afternoon and the remaining afternoons of this week the registers will be closed at 1 o'clock to allow the children to leave at 3 o'clock as they are needed in the hay fields' (in Hom, 1979, p. xxxvi). The pressing requirements of labour were not the only reason for poor attendance or non-attendance at day schools. During the mid-Victorian period under investigation, the 'majority of children left day school at the age of eleven and 95% by the age of thirteen' (Jagger, 1982, p. 121). Therefore a clergyman's enthusiasm to promote education and undertake the task himself when required was a constant test of his resolve.

Although the boys' school employs a master to conduct lessons, it is visited by Wentworth, who presumably uses his frequent appearances in the schoolroom to catechise, to teach and to deal with problems of discipline (Pepetual, Vol III, p. 270-1). Wentworth's schoolroom also functions as a place of worship, thereby establishing inextricable links between sacred and secular lessons. Russell notes that, although the 59th Canon (1980, p. 130) instructed the clergyman to instruct the youth of the parish in the catechism every Sunday, many clergymen found it more convenient and expedient to use the schoolroom for this purpose, or they assembled pupils in the church during the week (1980, p. 137). Throughout most of the nineteenth century, explains Knight, a high church organisation, the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in

*In 1875, even the highly motivated Rev. John Coker Egerton admitted to being very disheartened at the small numbers of children in his parish who could read or write (Wells, 1992, p. 165).*
the Principles of the Established Church, was the major provider of elementary education for the poor (1995, p. 191). The education that it offered, stresses Knight, ‘was strongly Anglican in character’ (1995, p. 191). Oliphant, then, by emphasising Wentworth’s Ritualist stance in relation to his pastoral duties, demonstrates the power and influence available to clergymen within the community, particularly those clergymen harbouring a party stance. When the Rev. William Henry Fairfax Robson of St Giles Northampton was required to respond to a Visitation question of whether he accepted diocesan inspection of his schools, he answered ‘yes’, but with an emphatic coda that ‘the inspector shall not obtrude teaching distinctly contrary to that which I, as a clergyman holding evangelical opinions, every week try to instill into the minds of the children’ (Halley, 1992, p. 13). Robson’s outburst, recorded in 1872 two years after the passing of Forster’s Education Act of 1870, is a reaction to that part of the Act known as the ‘Conscience Clause’, which required separation between the delivery of religious and secular education. Jagger notes that non-adherence could threaten a school’s receipt of State aid (1982, p. 131). Religious education, continues Jagger, now ‘had to compete for a place on the time-table’ (1982, p. 131). Heeney notes that the 1870 Act marked the beginning of a decline in which religious bodies played a central part in primary education, adding, however, that decline was gradual, given that ‘the burden of planning, financing, and managing... schools rested on the shoulders of the parish clergy’ (1976, p. 87). Evangelicals were not the only interested party of the Church of England who opposed State intervention in education. Schlossberg reminds us that ‘Tractarians were
most adamantly opposed to state funding of education if the control were to be placed anywhere but in the hands of the Anglican clergy' (2000, p. 265). Clearly, the clergyman, no matter where his party allegiances fell, often had the final word in the composition of the school curriculum. Thus Oliphant's depiction of Wentworth, as a vigorous clerical champion of parish education, is an astute commentary on a controversial issue and one of which her contemporary readers would be aware.

Wentworth's reputation as an enforcer of school discipline is emphasised when Lucy Wodehouse is required, in Wentworth's absence, to oversee the boys' school, where 'the lads' and 'some men, were so much used to his [Wentworth's] presence as to get restless at their work on this unprecedented emergency' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 270). The presence of the clergyman in the schoolroom was an important way of enforcing discipline and encouraging due deference to figures of authority. The real-life clergyman, John Coker Egerton, regularly attended the schoolroom in his parish and, according to Wells, largely took over the running of the school from the 1860s, when the regular National Schoolmaster Cox 'succumbed to alcoholism' (1992, p. 18). Egerton's diary shows him pursuing truants, boxing the cars of recalcitrant pupils and punishing boys with the cane when necessary (Wells, 1992, passim).

The highlight of the school year was the school feast and, in Joyce, Oliphant shows the Rev. Austin Sitwell and his wife presiding over a gathering in a large field
replete with a tent, from which ten is dispensed, games organised for the children, and the event patronised by the local gentry and Sir Samuel Thompson who, as a school benefactor, is the subject of intense clerical rivalry between the Sitwells and Canon Jenkinson (1889, p. 193). Oliphant describes a similar gathering in *He That Will Not When He May*, when the Rector's daughter, Dolly Stainforth, is required to superintend the school-feast in lieu of her father, whose age prevents his active involvement (1892, p. 182-3). Beneath the humour of the clerical jousting for this wealthy man's subscriptions, Oliphant highlights just how dependent clergymen were on the favourable opinions and large pockets of the wealthy to fund school building projects and inject capital into the ongoing expenses associated with running them. The real-life Rev. Benjamin Armstrong recorded in 1854, with a degree of amused delight, the fuss provoked by his 'Tractarian' stance: 'I had ridden over to Toftwood Common to present some books to the two dames who keep school there. During my visit it came out that certain Indies who are fearful of my Tractarian influence said that they would withdraw their patronage if the vicar were allowed to catechise' (1963, p. 47). On the other hand, some clergymen used the occasion of the annual school outing as a way of exerting their will in the parish. The Rev. John Coker Egerton put his parish on notice that the 'Xmas treat' would apply only to 'Sunday scholars, either Ch. or Chapel, & that my minimum of attendance wd. be 40 Sundays.' Egerton reported his wife Ellen 'much discomposed by this rule', but he was adamant that he would 'try it for a year at any rate . . .' (Wells, 1992, p. 106).
Many clergymen supplemented their stipend by tutoring the sons of middle and upper class families. The Rev. Mr May’s impecunious state is relieved when he accepts the son of the wealthy Dissenter as a pupil to prepare him for university. May is offered the handsome sum of ‘three hundred pounds for the year of Copperhead’s residence with him’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 191) to ‘get him up in a little history and geography . . . and in so much Horace as may furnish him with a few stock quotations . . . ’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 170). Although Clarence Copperhead is a mediocre student, it is hoped that his association with the Anglican May and his family might encourage cultivated thought and behaviour, particularly as his father possesses neither. In a letter written to a friend in 1824, the newly ordained Rev. Henry Venn Elliott announced that, due to the ‘great diminution of our Fellowships’, he was obliged to take pupils. Venn Elliott supervised the education of two pupils and received a generous £300 for each boy, leading him to note wryly ‘the main profession of life brings me about £100 per annum, and the corollary six times that sum’ (Bateman, 1872, p. 92). Hart and Carpenter describe how the real-life Rev. Richard Seymour ‘was compelled to take pupils in order to supplement his income, and promised a certain Mr Drake, ‘to instruct his two sons for three hours every day. A tax on my time, but poverty demands it . . . ’ (1954, p. 80). Tutoring also allowed clergymen, particularly those starved of intellectual stimulation in the parochial setting, to maintain their connections with scholarship but, more importantly, it was a source of extra income. Haig notes that it is difficult to comprehend how ‘any but the
most dazzlingly fortunate of Victorian clergymen made much money from the Church';
most had to rely on private means to support a 'respectable independent life' (1984, p. 316). The contemporary commentator, Byerley Thomson, suggested several ways in which a clergyman might increase his income, noting 'that a very large portion of the English clergy, even after they have acquired benefices, are employed in the actual detail and drudgery of tuition. The married clergy increase their incomes by the reception of private pupils into their homes. The unmarried are often teachers in private families, and both are not seldom masters of endowed grammar schools in various parts of the country, or are public tutors in collegiate institutions' (1857, p. 75). Oliphant's Oxford Fellows suffer from want of intellectual company. The reader is left in no doubt that the Rev. Roger Mildmay's appointment to the country parish of Brentburn from Oxford, where 'the excellent young Fellow' was 'one of the advanced rank of young Oxford men' (The Curate in Charge, p. 69-70), will disappoint him intellectually, because this young clergyman tends to view pastoral life as another amusing pastime that can be examined and then discarded, rather in the manner in which he collects his 'objets d'art' (Curate, p. 71). Similarly, the Rev. Morley Proctor's well-intentioned forays into the minutiae of pastoral life are unsuccessful when faced with its grim realities. Morley Proctor's 'supposed business in this world' is well suited to a 'treatise on the Greek verb' and a 'new edition of Sophocles', but how relevant is scholarship, asks Oliphant, to the duties required of 'the Rector of Carlingford?' (The Rector, 1863/1986, p. 26). Clergymen such as Mildmay and Proctor, hints Oliphant, would serve the Church better as scholars than
as pastoral workers. The young Scottish cleric in *A Son of the Soil* becomes tutor to the sons of a wealthy man, before accepting a scholarship to study at an Oxford college. A potential patron warns him that ‘the reputation . . . and *prestige*’ of an Oxford education ‘would be altogether lost in Scotland’ and he should aim, instead, for a career in the Church of England (1865/1883, p. 136), implying that the cultural shock of encountering rude parochial life, particularly rude Scottish parochial life, following the cultural and educational attainments of Oxford was too great to countenance. The young Colin Campbell, however, as the title of the novel suggests, nurtured in a sturdy and honest farming family, possesses an enviable capacity to combine the practicalities of parochial life without completely sacrificing scholarship. Following his marriage and settlement in a Scottish parish, where he once preached ‘the strangest sort of baffling, unorthodox sermons’ (1865/1883, p. 376) and held ambitions to publish his own ‘Tracts for the Times’, he is now ‘subdued’, and sublimates his intellectual interests to more pressing matters, and ‘has resisted the urgent appeals of a younger brotherhood, who have arisen since these events, to continue the publication of the ‘Tracts for the Times’ (p. 429). Colin Campbell’s success in his ministry, suggests Oliphant, is due, in part, to a pleasing balance between his pastoral duties and personal needs but, more importantly, his success and long-term survival within a parish notoriously critical of clergymen is due to his wife:

A man who has given hostages to society, who has married a wife – and especially a wife who does not know anything about his crotchets, and
never can clearly understand why the bishop . . .
does not come to Afton and confirm the
catechumens – is scarcely in a position to throw
himself headlong upon the established order of
things and prove its futility (A Son of the Soil,
1865/1883, p. 429).

The influence of this clerical wife, who can claim neither education nor depth of
understanding in ordinary human relationships, nevertheless assumes a mantle of
authority in her husband’s parish because her artless character counterbalances her
husband’s seriousness of purpose:

She [Alice Campbell] had undoubted Low Church
tendencies, which helped her on with many of the
people; and in conjunction with these she had
little High Church habits, which were very quaint
and captivating in their way; and, all unconscious
as she was of Colin’s views in respect to Church
reformation, Alice was ‘the means’, as she herself
would have said, of introducing some edifying
customs among the young people of the parish,
which she and they were equally unaware were
capable of having been interpreted to savour of
papistry, had the power and inclinations of the
Presbytery been in good exercise as of old (A Son
of the Soil, p. 428).
There is no doubt, Oliphant shows, that a university education and claims to intellectual superiority are not the only ways of impressing one’s beliefs onto a reluctant parish.

Another important aspect of parochial education and one endorsed by the clergy was adult education. According to Heeney, many clergymen became involved in providing and promoting adult education for parishioners and organised evening classes and popular lectures in an effort to counter vice, encourage sobriety and to build and improve relationships between themselves and their working-class people (1976, p. 82). Oliphant took advantage of this popular trend to promote the career of her Dissenting minister, Arthur Vincent, whose anti-State Church lectures are not only well received within Carlingford, but also provide a source of additional income for the chapel (Salem Chapel, p. 78). The irony is obvious. Rather than encouraging further religious divisions within an already divided community, Vincent’s lectures bring together people with opposing viewpoints, acting as a point of cohesion for Dissenters and Anglicans alike. Oliphant stresses that Vincent’s series of lectures establish and reinforce his reputation within Carlingford and beyond, reaching the ‘metropolis’ and ‘gladden[ing] his Alma Mata at Homerton’ (Salem Chapel, p. 75). This theme is re-examined by Oliphant in Phoebe Junior, when the Rev. Horace Northcote’s reputation as a political activist precedes him to Carlingford, where all ranks of its society assemble to attend his ‘Diss-establishment Society’ lectures, including the Anglican clergyman, Mr May. The clergyman’s ability to promote education for the poor in his parish, provide adult
education classes and edifying lectures for parishioners, interested Oliphant, who was aware that religion comprehended a variety of opportunities for establishing and improving social relationships in small communities, far more, in fact, than many contemporaries cared to admit. By throwing into relief Carlingford's religious differences, Oliphant also hints at the possibilities available for closer religious, social and cultural exchanges between Nonconformists and Anglicans.

Oliphant shows that the clergyman's pastoral and secular roles in the parish are vitally important factors in the maintenance of positive and productive social relations with all of its members. The diurnal routine of visiting the well and the sick, proffering spiritual and moral guidance and participating in the activities of the schoolroom, amongst other things, offered the clergyman a unique and privileged place in the lives of his people. For this reason, stresses Oliphant, a clergyman's training must equip him with the practical, social and emotional skills to meet the needs of the communities he serves. Mostly, however, clerical training failed to meet the basic demands of parochial life, as witnessed in Oliphant's depiction of Morley Proctor, whose muddled and embarrassed attempts at dispensing spiritual succour and practical aid are a withering indictment of institutional neglect. Oliphant is equally damning in her assessment of clergymen who favour scholarship above the needs of parishioners and family, and suggests that they must reassess their suitability to their calling. It is more than likely that Oliphant's own experience as a widowed mother with sole financial responsibility
for her sons and a growing body of retainers encouraged a belief that one's family responsibilities must always override one's desire for professional attainments.

The responsibility of managing a 'large parish', noted an exasperated Rev. Benjamin Armstrong, 'is as difficult as that of a kingdom' (1963, p. 47). As clerical roles were closely defined, explains Knight, the 'imperative of maintaining his position as a gentleman' was not an easy one for the clergyman to reconcile with the 'poverty and simplicity' of parochial life (1995, p. 145). The clergyman was required to juggle secular needs with the imperative of the sacred, which sometimes tested his temperamental suitability as a cure of souls. To assist him in the management of the parish, the clergyman required the help of lay workers and it is Oliphant's depiction of lay workers and lay communities that will be investigated in the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

LAY COMMUNITIES

While the focus of Oliphant's *Chronicles of Carlingford* series is with clerical characters and clerical matters, the concerns of its laity are treated as sufficiently important to grant them positions of influence in the series. This chapter will explore the place of the Church of England and Nonconformity in the lives of the laity in Oliphant's Carlingford series of novels and in some of her other fiction. The social and cultural implications of church and chapel life, as opposed to its theological meanings, were of interest to Oliphant, who structured the *Chronicles of Carlingford* around the social relationships and occupations of her Church and Chapel clergy and laity. The prominence that Oliphant gives to social groups within her fictional religious communities suggests that she regarded social identity as a dominant force in the forging of an individual's religious preferences. Of equal importance is Oliphant's awareness of the extent to which the individual's sense of identity is expressed through their involvement with church and chapel activities. Within the *Chronicles of Carlingford* and in some of her other fiction, Oliphant explores a variety of sensitive contemporary Church and Chapel issues that affect the lives of her lay characters.

Within Oliphant's lay communities some individuals performed specialised tasks such as parish clerk, churchwarden, deacon, patron, and parochial visitor that gave them varying degrees of influence within their church and chapel communities. Oliphant
recognised that some lay positions presented opportunities for individuals to challenge clerical authority and to engage in petty power struggles between clergy and other laity. This is a prominent and somewhat subversive theme in Oliphant's fiction, and is intended to demonstrate how relationships between the clergy and the communities they represent can be corrupted. This does not suggest, however, that all lay involvement as represented by Oliphant in her fiction is confined to overt power struggles. Many of her lay characters are deeply attached to their church and chapel and its clergy, and wish to demonstrate their concern by their display of the philanthropy, charity, personal piety and morality expected of a middle-class Christian community. Displays of piety and interest in parish affairs are important for Oliphant's characters, who live their outward lives through involvement with church and chapel; their innermost lives, their spirituality, are seldom discussed or examined. This approach is perfectly suited to a town caught up in middle-class values and appearances.

It seems that Oliphant herself did not value greatly identity with any particular religious denomination; her religious tastes were eclectic and, as V. & R. A. Colby point out, a lifetime of research into religious matters and important religious figures produced a 'deeply personal and emotional faith' (1966, p. 80) and one which expressed 'affirmation of the existence of an immanent and transcendental Creator . . .' (1966, p. 88). I believe that the Chronicles of Carlingford owes much of its popularity to Oliphant's stance as an outsider and spectator of the contemporary English religious scene. Oliphant expresses a degree of disillusionment in an overworked dualism between clerical authority and lay involvement in the Church. In the Chronicles of
Carlingford, Oliphant suggests that lay agency should be a continuation of the clergyman's role, whilst aware that the success or failure of the lay/clerical relationship depended on the flexible character of the clergyman. This was a view not readily endorsed by some contemporary commentators.

Carlingford is a predominantly feminine society, with a large proportion of its women engaged in lay roles, which suggests that, not only was Oliphant supportive of women's involvement in lay religion, at least in the idealised world of fiction, but was also prepared to use their involvement as a subtle way of challenging women's place and role within the family and the community. Oliphant's positive attitude towards the contributions made by lay women mirrors the increasing opportunities available to women to participate in religion at a formal level. Conversely, this was also a "safe" position for Oliphant to assume because, for many contemporaries, a woman's lay role was simply a continuation of the domestic duties she performed in the home and did not pose a threat to the Church hierarchy. The influence of female clerical kin in Oliphant's novels is examined in chapter five.

It is difficult to identify with any accuracy just who was a lay Anglican in nineteenth-century England. Roberts argues that, at some period during the nineteenth century the term came to be identified with those who positively assented to the beliefs of the Established Church and who were voluntarily committed to the activities of the Church (1974, p. 1-2). Similarly, Frances Knight notes that the term underwent several important shifts throughout the century, 'until by the 1870s the definition had become
increasingly narrow and exclusive', resulting in a 'narrow sectarianism' that 'narrow[ed] the base of lay support for the Church of England' (1996, p. 377). Prior to this period, the eighteenth-century Church was, as Peter Virgin explains, part of a complex legal apparatus that was part financial, upheld by the payment of church rate, irrespective of religious affiliation; part sacramental, baptism, marriage and burial could occur only in Anglican churches and churchyards and the services were conducted only by Anglican clergymen; and part educational – Dissenters and Roman Catholics were excluded from taking degrees at Oxford and Cambridge (1989, pp. 15-16). In other words, until the parliamentary reforms of the nineteenth century, every citizen could claim to be an involuntary member of the Church of England. Thereafter, one's affinity with a religious community depended on one's voluntary commitment to it. Although it is easy to overstate the case, it is, nevertheless, a useful starting point in understanding Oliphant's attitudes towards lay Anglicans, particularly as she tends to group the inhabitants of Carlingford according to their religious denomination.

Community attitudes to the distribution and receipt of charity provide examples of the way in which lay Anglicans viewed their relationships with each other, with the Church and its clergy. In the eighteenth century, according to Jacob, charity was not considered a voluntary activity, but was interpreted 'as mandatory justice entailed on the enjoyment of any form of property' (1996, p. 4). Therefore, lay activity was likely to be closely associated with social duty and not necessarily the result of religious zeal alone. Charity was not the sole responsibility of the incumbent clergyman, although he would certainly play an active role in its distribution, but was a duty to be borne by all
members of the parish. Parliamentary reforms, such as the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, dismantled parochial autonomy, which must have affected parish stability. The Rev. William Marriott Smith Marriott was a vociferous opponent of the new Law and wrote to the Poor Law Commissioners in London, suggesting that Guardians or Overseers should have discretionary powers to administer 'outdoor relief to the able-bodied with large families' (Cronk, 1975, p. 83). According to Cronk, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 abolished parish poor-houses, and discouraged outdoor relief. Conditions within the workhouses were deliberately harsh, with married couples separated and parents unable to see their children (1975, p. 82). Knight notes that a stable parish was intimately associated in the eighteenth-century mind with a stable society, particularly when social order was threatened by the Napoleonic wars and agrarian and industrial revolutions (1995, p. 68). Parochial stability, continues Knight, depended on the extent to which the clergy was actively involved in local secular affairs, 'as well as pastoral support and religious instruction' (1995, p. 68). In the eighteenth century, charity reinforced communal solidarity. It was the duty of the wealthy to see to the material needs of the poor of their parish; in turn, the wealthy received the deference of those they assisted. With the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, responsibility for the distribution of charity moved from the parish poor-house and took on a more structured, systematic approach outside the framework of the parish, in the form of the notorious union and workhouse with its elected Board of Guardians. Poor relief was no longer a legal obligation of the parish and was more likely to be received by the so-called 'deserving poor' and more likely to be distributed by those people who were voluntarily and ideologically committed to do so. This latter point is illustrated in
Miss Marjoribanks, when the enterprising Lucilla Marjoribanks, well schooled in the 'principles of political economy', refuses to give money to a beggar woman and her children, but agrees to inquire into her case, reminding her that, 'if you are honest and want to work', help will be forthcoming (1866/1988, p. 75). As Lucilla Marjoribanks demonstrates, the distribution of charity was now often delivered with a tone of condescending sentimentality, which reflects the underlying obduracy of nineteenth-century charitable relief.

Until the arrival of the Rev. Frank Wentworth and his Sisters of Mercy, Anglicans and Dissenters alike have overlooked the poor of Carlingford: 'The minister of Salem Chapel was in a state of complete ignorance on the subject', while the late Rector Mr Bury, 'who was Evangelical, had the credit of disinterring the buried creatures there about thirty years ago' (The Perpetual Curate, 1864/1975, Vol I p. 16). Further relief, in the spirit of self-help, is provided by a Provident Fund that is also organised by Wentworth. In The Perpetual Curate, Oliphant shows that charity is delivered by a small group of committed volunteers, consisting of 'overseers' and 'guardians of the public peace', the 'Perpetual Curate of St. Roque's', and 'some half-dozen people of the very élite of society, principally ladies residing in Grange Lane' (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 17). Even Frank Wentworth's contributions are regarded, in some quarters, as a suspiciously shallow display of charity. In spite of the misgivings of some, Wentworth's attitudes towards the poor appear to be sincere and he has introduced weekday and Sunday evening services for the poor of Carlingford in a
schoolroom given over for the purpose. The inference is that, if the Curate failed in this
duty, then this portion of Calingford society would become miscreant.

Throughout the period that Oliphant wrote the *Chronicles of Calingford*, the
receipt of charity was heavily overlaid by the ideologies of self-help and thrift. This, in
turn, required special vigilance on the part of the givers of charity to be alert to
fraudulent claims. Prochaska notes that many visiting societies were obsessed with
detecting cases of feigned distress, because of the widespread belief that 'charity itself
bred deception' (1980, p. 116). Oliphant shows this hardening attitude towards the
recipients of charity amongst lay workers such as the district visitor, Lucy Wodehouse,
in *The Doctor's Family*, who, although tender hearted, is equipped with sufficient
perspicacity to discern 'the pretences of beggary' by means of 'natural insight', whereas
her sister welcomes all cases of charity without discrimination (1863/1986, p. 144). As
Diana McClatchey remarks: 'If we hear less about the administration of parochial
charities in the mid-nineteenth century, it may be that thrift and not charity was
becoming the more fashionable parochial virtue, to be invoked from the pulpit and given
expression in the numerous clothing clubs, rent and shoe clubs and provident societies
which were such a feature of the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s' (1960, p. 133). Seen in this
light, Lucilla Marjoribank's attitude to the poor woman and her children is not unusual
for someone who has been instructed in the finer points of 'political economy' and
means to implement its tenets during her reign as social benefactress in Carlingford
(Miss Marjoribanks, 1866/1988, p. 33). Oliphant took exception to 'systematic charity',
arly dismissing the 'machinery' of charitable concerns with their 'polling tickets,
placards, canvassing ladies... middle-men and middle-women', as courting a 'rightful artificial trade aspect' (1860). As Jay points out, 'it would be hard to find a more systematic opponent of organised charities' than Oliphant (1995, p. 207), adding that Oliphant's attitudes towards organised philanthropy had its origins in the teaching of the Scottish clergyman and writer on economics, Thomas Chalmers (Jay, 1995, p. 208). Chalmers believed that governmental measures to alleviate the effects of poverty were unlikely to succeed, unless people received adequate 'moral and religious education' (Chalmers, 1832/1968, p. iii-iv). Whilst not objecting to personal acts of charity, Oliphant did oppose 'the middlemen' who 'interpose... between the helped and the helpers' and turn giving into an act devoid of 'human warmth' (1860). The complex and unwieldy structure of organised charities, argued Oliphant, undermined the sense of communal Christian social responsibility that was at the heart of parish life and from which all charity should spring. Organised charities excluded the majority of people within the parish who were best placed to help the poor. Oliphant's objections to organised charities found popular support in The Times. There was a perception amongst some contemporary commentators that the Church lacked the ability to organise men and women to its best advantage. The Times, for example, refers to the laity as a vast and rarely utilised resource, whose rightful place and role in the life of the parish are usurped by a variety of voluntary agencies:

There are on all sides men who want to assist the Church by their personal services, and still more to see their sons and daughters employed, as all good books tell us they ought to employ part of their time in visiting the sick and distressed and
teaching the ignorant . . . . But good works, whether in the Bible, or the Papist, or the Puritan or the old Church-of-England sense, are daily more impossible, and practically all but forbidden. And what is the substitute? The incessant collector, with his card of charities, his ink-bottle, his steel pen, and his receipt book, demanding money to be paid to institutions and hirelings to do the things which Christians ought to do themselves, ought to be allowed to do, ought to be invited to do (The Times May 5, 1863).

Several years later in 1870, a writer for the Contemporary Review echoed the same sentiments, noting that the laity required something more than 'gratuitous support' which 'partakes too much of the character of charity or of individual feeling' to enlist its full incorporation within the Church's system (Anonymous, 1870). Charity was now the concern of several secular societies, some operating outside parish boundaries, together with a small but influential middle-class coterie acting more in the interests of fashion than beneficence.

On the other hand, incidents of clerical apathy in the face of parochial need were frowned on in many quarters. For example, the real-life Rev John Coker Egerton roused the ire of his parishioners when rumour circulated of his supposed frugality in the distribution of charity. Egerton defends himself to his diary in an entry dated 5 December 1871 that bristles with indignation and wounded pride:
There is a great talk about how somebody sent me half a bushel of ground oats with a spoon in it a propos to my notice about the use of oatmeal & water as a drink in hot weather in the Burwash Magazine for August. Of course it is a myth, but it seems to please the people with whom it appears that I am ceasing to be popular, in as much as I do not give much away. I really think that the imputation is unfair, as my account book will shew (Wells, 1992, p. 118).

Egerton’s anxious tone betrays the difficulty experienced by the clergy in discerning the indigent from those suspected of exploiting the system of parish relief. A further diary entry on dole day 21 December 1871 shows him agonising over the eligibility of various dole claimants and those who are able to contribute but will not (1992, p. 118). This clergyman found his pool of willing charitable donors shrinking in size, as poor relief depended increasingly on the generosity of a few within the parish. Similarly, in the fictional world of Anglican Carlingford, Oliphant shows that charity is a highly organised parochial activity limited to the upper échelons of its society.

While attitudes towards charity are a tangible way of measuring lay involvement, other less quantifiable aspects of lay activity deserve attention. Personal piety is such an area and one that is easily overlooked when we seek evidence of lay participation. Those who rarely attended church services, but were devout within the domestic circle, would still consider themselves lay men and women of the Church of England. Oliphant’s own religious stance provides an example of changing religious allegiance.
Brought up as a Free Church woman in Scotland, Oliphant later adopted Anglicanism because, as Jay suggests, she was not a supporter of English Dissent and expressed dismay that the English versions did not display the more tolerant attitudes of Scotland (1995, p. 147). Although Jay cautions against regarding Oliphant’s changed religious affiliations as social climbing (1995, p. 145), it is possible that social respectability and acceptability were equally valid reasons for her shift in religious allegiance, particularly when her boys began their studies at Eton. Oliphant’s own religious fluidity did not translate readily into her fiction, however, as most of her characters, with a few exceptions, tend to maintain social and religious distinctions between Dissenters and Anglicans. In Carlingford, for example, Dissent is confined to a narrow stratum of its society, namely, the local shopkeepers. Piety is sometimes equated with strong religious views but, more often, it is expressed through social affiliations. The Miss Hemmings are the only representatives of ‘[s]ociety, who ever patronised the Dissenting interest’ (Salem Chapel 1863/1986, p. 1-2), and Lucilla Marjoribanks, the doyenne of Carlingford society, is known to entertain those of a low church persuasion, but remains throughout an orthodox churchwoman (Miss Marjoribanks, p. 79). Lady Western, who appears in Salem Chapel, is the only ‘society’ lady known to have entertained a Dissenter and then only because, as Lucilla Marjoribanks remarks, ‘her introductions were not in the least to be depended upon. She was indeed quite capable of inviting a family of retired drapers to meet the best people in Grange Lane, for no better reason than to gratify her protégés’ (Miss Marjoribanks, p. 41). On the other hand, Frank Wentworth’s Evangelical aunt Leonora expresses her disgust towards her nephew’s high church ways by attending service at Salem Chapel (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 290), while the low church
Rector, Mr Bury is known to entertain Mr Tufbon of Salem Chapel, ‘(who sometimes drank tea at the Rectory, and thus had a kind of clandestine entrance into the dim outskirts of that chaos which was then called society)’ (Miss Marjoribanks, p. 41). Oliphant shows that, although Dissent made sporadic forays into the heartland of Carlingford’s Establishment, it did not take up permanent residence therein, but only as much as fashionable benevolence would allow.

The laity, it would seem, straddle the space between the secular and the spiritual, and the extent to which they were active within the parish depended very much on the attitudes of the clergyman. A clergyman, once beneficed, occupied the living freehold and had considerable influence in the affairs of the parish. It was the clergyman who decided the type and amount of lay involvement, or, indeed, if there was to be any lay activity at all. Edward Browne, Bishop of Ely, was a keen supporter of active lay involvement at all levels of church management and urged the clergymen in his diocese to support lay involvement, arguing that ‘a clergyman who stands alone may perhaps have more his own way, but he will surely do less to lead others in the way to God’ (1869, p. 21). A counter claim to clerical authority within the parish is voiced by Burns, who notes that the printing of Episcopal Visitations encouraged and endorsed the diaconal viewpoint, allowing the bishop to introduce topical and controversial material into these addresses (1999, p. 28-31). Indeed, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, organised lay activities appear to be a normal part of parish life. For example, throughout the period 1872 to 1886, the Visitation Returns of the diocese of Northampton identify only three parishes, incidentally the same three but with different incumbents,
which did not enjoy the services of a scripture reader, lay reader, parochial association or council, or other forms of lay agency (Hatley, 1992, passim). The majority of clergymen in this large diocese welcomed lay support and direct lay involvement in parochial management.

The lay role bears many similarities with the clergyman's role which, according to Russell, underwent many changes throughout the course of the nineteenth century (1980, p. 233-239). Russell emphasises that the process of clerical professionalisation highlighted the charter elements of the clerical role and 'contracted the range of the clergyman's functions' which were now undertaken by a range of secular organizations (1980, p. 233-234). Roberts, on the other hand, identifies how, at various times in the nineteenth century, interest groups such as the parliament, the bishops, Convocations of Clergy, owners of private patronage, the press and the diocesan conferences, all claimed authority to impose their particular conception of the lay role on the Church (1974, p. 10). The resulting shifts and fluxes in clerical and lay roles and relationships did not further parochial stability, a point that Oliphant cleverly exploits in The Perpetual Curate.

In this novel, the ambience of its community is upset by the presence of the chapel of St Roque's. The problem with St Roque's, and the status of its Perpetual Curate Frank Wentworth, is complicated because the chapel lacks an accompanying district. An early letter from Oliphant to her publisher John Blackwood foreshadows its inclusion in the novel as an important example of clerical conflict.
A Perpetual Curate is independent, but it is because Mr Wentworth is working in the parish with which he has nothing to do and which it is in reality high treason for any man even the Bishop to interfere that he comes under the Rector's displeasure. So good an Anglican would not have taken such a step but for the sanction of the late Rector which I think may be held to justify Mr Wentworth for carrying on his work until he is absolutely interdicted by the new incumbent (Shatlock, 1995, p. 116).

Frank Wentworth has enjoyed an uninterrupted run of clerical authority in Carlingford for some years and his influence in the district is well entrenched, spanning the incumbencies of Mr Bury and the present incumbent of Carlingford, Mr Morgan. Ecclesiastical confusion abounds as to the extent of clerical authority in the parish, as technically, without a district, Wentworth could not chair a vestry or oversee the election of parish officials. This confusion is felt by the laity of Carlingford and especially by those who are lay officials of the church such as the parish clerk, Elsworthy. As much of the clerical/lay conflict in The Perpetual Curate involves Elsworthy and Wentworth, it is worthwhile examining their situation in detail as the trial of the curate is not only an important comment on the dynamics of lay power, and the influence and prerogatives of class, but also provides some insight into the question of clerical discipline and Oliphant's critique of it.

A contemporary reviewer of *The Perpetual Curate*, writing for *The Athenaeum*, was not impressed with Oliphant's handling of the fictional trial, dismissing it as absurdly improbable, and could only be imagined by one quite ignorant of the usual course of proceedings in the Church of England* (*Chronicles of Carlingford. The Perpetual Curate*, 1864). As we will see, however, Oliphant's representation of the trial of Frank Wentworth could have indeed occurred in the manner she describes. Furthermore, her use of the controversial issue of clergy discipline reveals an author acutely attuned to contemporary issues and willing to make full use of them in her fiction and not merely as part of a sensational sub-plot. Oliphant was aware that her reading public were well informed regarding the errant activities of some clergymen; what they lacked, she realised, was a detailed description of the ways in which this matter would be approached within the confines of a small provincial town.

For example, one of the most scandalous contemporary cases of an errant clergyman, and one of which Oliphant almost certainly would have been aware, concerned the Rev. Henry Prince, curate of Charlinch, Somerset, who ran a licentious 'abode of love', and was defrocked 'after he claimed to be the Son of God' (Gledhill, 1997). Although Prince's case is an extreme example of scandalous clerical behaviour, his story and others of a less inflammatory nature were the subject of topical

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1 Gledhill reports that, despite Prince's scandalous behaviour, he was a popular clergyman who 'often ventured out in a coach and four, with outrides blowing trumpets to proclaim the messiah's approach' (1997).
Oliphant's publisher, John Blackwood, who was familiar with similar disciplinary proceedings taken against a clergyman known to his family, on reading the number which contained the trial of Frank Wentworth, was moved to applaud Oliphant's handling of the subject, commenting that her 'description of the proceedings was "as like us possible" to the real thing' (Shattock, 1995, p. 118).

Oliphant's approach to the influence generated by Elsworthy is unusual, given the diminishing importance of the parish clerk whose office, as James Obelkevich observes, was nearly obsolete by the 1860s in all but a few parishes (1976, p. 148). Parish clerks were usually paid officers of the parish but the salary they received varied greatly according to the parish in which they served. For example, the visitation returns for the Archdeaconry of Stafford in 1829 recorded large variations in the monies paid to clerks in different parishes. The parish of Kinver paid its clerk eight pounds and eight shillings per annum, while the parish of Stowe paid its clerk no salary, apart from the '3d he received for each sitting at Christmas, for Sunday duty, and cleaning the church' (Robinson, 1980, pp. 15, 130). The clerk's duties were many and varied, from reading the responses during the service, cleaning the church, and leading the music in worship. Their duties were not of an onerous nature and many were able to combine their parish duties with their secular duties and occupations. Oliphant's fictional parish clerk manages to combine the duties of his lay office with those of his trade. According to Shaw, the only stipulation was that clerks were able to read and write, have knowledge of the psalmody and be at least twenty years of age (1831, p. 217).
In an artful inversion of roles, Oliphant invests the parish clerk Elsworthy with power and influence in the parish, far beyond his social standing. It is he and not the churchwarden, Wodehouse, who brings the matter of Wentworth’s behaviour to the attention of the Rector. In the small town of Carlingford, an inhabitant’s location is an accurate indication of social status. Oliphant ensures that Elsworthy’s location in the parish is ambiguous, by locating him ‘at the end of Grange Lane, just in the little unsettled transition interval [italics added] which interposed between its aristocratic calm and the bustle of George Street’ (*Perpetual*, Vol I, p. 90). Of the two official officers of the parish, Elsworthy is the most principled and responsible, yet his actions in charging Wentworth are viewed by Carlingford society as foolish. The tension that arises between Elsworthy and Wentworth erupts into a parish scandal. Wentworth’s mistake is that he too readily disregards the warnings of his parishioners, who recognize, and are quite ready to believe, that his innocent relationship with Rosa Elsworthy betrays their image of clerical professionalism.

The perpetual curate of St Roque’s is charged by his clerk, Elsworthy, of abducting his niece, Rosa, a girl of seventeen, whose mysterious disappearance from Carlingford is erroneously associated with Frank Wentworth. Wentworth’s quasi-paternal inquiries into the welfare of Rosa over a period of several weeks are taken as signs of romantic interest, first by Rosa and then, at a later stage, by Elsworthy when Rosa fails to return home. Frank Wentworth’s lodgings are located, like Elsworthy’s shop, at the end of Grange Lane so that Wentworth often has occasion to pass the shop on his way to St Roque’s on parish business. While most of Carlingford has condemned
Wentworth as 'a seducer and a villain,' Wentworth himself dismisses the innuendo and rumour about his conduct as mere gossip and fails to take action to clear his name (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 199).

Elsworthy mentions his concerns regarding Wentworth to the Rector of Carlingford, Mr William Morgan. Morgan is unwilling at first to commit to any action against Wentworth, not only because he is a fellow clergyman and a gentleman but also because Morgan has no legal authority over Wentworth. This latter point is made clear in a letter which Morgan delivers to Wentworth, informing him of his decision to investigate his supposed misconduct:

> Of course I do not pretend to any authority over you, nor can I enforce in any way your participation in the inquiry or consent to it; but I beg to urge upon you strongly, as a friend, the advantage of assenting freely, that your innocence (if possible) may be made apparent, and your character cleared (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 256-7).

As Shattock explains, 'a perpetual curate was nominated and licensed directly by a Bishop to officiate in a parish or an ecclesiastical district', but Wentworth's situation is peculiar as he works from the chapel of St Roque's, which 'does not have an accompanying district and his pastoral work in Wharfside is technically irregular because Wharfside is part of the parish of Carlingford, under the care of the Rector' (1995, p. 123). Therefore, Wentworth's activities in this district, conducted without the permission of Morgan, have been an unresolved point of conflict between the two
clergymen. Prior to the arrival of Morgan, and during the incumbency of the previous rector, Mr Proctor, Wentworth had enjoyed complete authority within the parish of Carlingford, acting as rector, archdeacon and bishop for Proctor, 'who was humble, and thankful for the advice and assistance of his young brother, who knew so much better than he did' (Perpetual Vol I, p. 33). In fact, Oliphant carefully ensures that Wentworth's activities in the Wharfside district pre-date the arrival of Mr Proctor. Wentworth is shown to be active in the district during the incumbency of the Evangelical rector, Mr Bury, who was 'very glad of "assistance"... in his public and parish work' (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 4). Mr Bury had a verbal agreement with Wentworth that he was to manage the 'difficult' district of Wharfside. It was not until Mr Bury found out too late that Wentworth 'held views of the most dangerous complexion, and indeed was as near Rome as a strong and lofty conviction of the really superior catholicity of the Anglican Church would permit him to be', that he felt moved to 'issue an interdict' to limit Wentworth's influence in that district (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 4).

Morgan is pressured into taking action by Elsworthy and, to a lesser extent, by his own self-interest. If Wentworth were judged unfit to hold his position by a panel of his peers, this would in turn justify Morgan's belief that he is a threat to his authority.

Oliphant shrewdly announces that 'the tribunal was one which could inflict no penalties' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 2), presumably because Morgan has no authority over Wentworth and because his case has not been reported to the bishop. In the fictional context of the novel, social ostracism would be the penalty of a "guilty" verdict. That the commission appears to be improvisatory and quasi-legal should not be criticized as
being the work of an ill-informed mind, as Oliphant's critic in *The Athenæum* was quick to decide ('Chronicles of Carlingford', 1864). On the contrary, Oliphant appears to be entirely cognisant with the methods of procedure outlined in the Church Discipline Act of 1840. Oliphant's familiarity with the case known to Blackwood, and the lengthy outline of court proceedings reported in *The Times*, for example, would make further enquiry unnecessary. That the tribunal hears evidence against Wentworth in the vestry of St. Roque's and in a private dwelling, is not unusual, given that proceedings at the time were fairly irregular, according to Stephen White, with sessions held in public houses and in private dwellings (personal communication, June 24, 1997). The purpose of the public tribunal was, according to Richard Burn, to gather information to ascertain 'whether there be sufficient *prima facie* ground for instituting further proceedings' (1842, p. 359). It is possible, too, that the personal exposure associated with a public hearing might be sufficient to deter errant clergymen. On the other hand, a public hearing put considerable pressure on the assembled commissioners to conduct the hearing along quasi-legal lines. Furthermore, the Act required that all witnesses be examined 'upon oath, or upon solemn affirmation' (Burn, 1842, p. 359). None of the witnesses called by the Carlingford commission are asked to swear an oath. If sufficient evidence were gathered to suggest that the incumbent was indeed guilty, then the matter would be dealt with by the diocesan bishop or, in Wentworth's case, by the bishop who appointed him to his present position. From this point, the matter would rest with the bishop who would then decide if the case should be taken to the Court of Arches for trial. Clearly, Oliphant's depiction of the trial contains sufficient legal allusions to convey a sense of formality to the proceedings without resort to an in-depth
representation of legal matters, which would be quite out of place in the context of the narrative.

Oliphant's fictional inquiry into the supposed immoral conduct of Wentworth consists of six tribunal commissioners, including Dr Marjoribanks; Mr Morgan, the rector of Carlingford; old Mr Western; Mr Centum the banker; Colonel Chiley; and, appearing as 'a kind of auxiliary to this judicial bench', the late rector of Carlingford, Mr Proctor (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 3). The Church Discipline Act of 1840 outlined the method of proceeding with disciplinary measures against a clergyman. According to Burn, the bishop would issue a commission, consisting of 'five persons, of whom one shall be his vicar general, or an archdeacon or rural dean within the diocese' (1842, p. 358). These preliminary proceedings were to be held in public. As the location for the hearing is not specified in the Act, Oliphant's decision to have her assembly gather in the vestry of Carlingford Church and to regather later at Mr Morgan's rectory, seems to be quite in order. In some cases it was felt that if an inquiry was held in a legal setting, such as a Magistrates' Chambers, the expenses involved, as Knight explains, would be prohibitive (1995, p. 164). The commissioners and the accused party were then allowed to examine witnesses upon oath. After examining the witnesses it was then the task of the commissioners to declare, publicly and openly, the findings of the majority (Burn, 1842, p. 359).

Oliphant's panel of six, instead of five, includes the clergymen Morgan and Proctor, although not in the capacity as outlined in the Act. Writing three years after the
publication of *The Perpetual Curate*, Trollope includes a similar commission of enquiry in *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867). Unlike Oliphant, Trollope’s commission of inquiry consists of five clergymen, and takes place at Dr Tempest’s house in private: ‘The ladies of the family were not present, and the five clergymen sat round the table alone’ (1867/1994, p. 462). Trollope, too, appears to be entirely cognisant with the requirements of the Act:

> It was at last arranged that the five clergymen selected should meet at Dr Tempest’s house in Silverbridge to make inquiry and report to the bishop whether the circumstances connected with the cheque for twenty pounds were of such a nature as to make it incumbent on him to institute proceedings against Mr Crawley in the Court of Arches to determine the guilt of Josiah Crawley (1867, p. 459).

Compared with Trollope’s account of the inquiry against Crawley, Oliphant’s commission of inquiry is improvisatory, given Morgan’s embarrassment and lack of knowledge in the manner in which an inquiry should be conducted. Nevertheless, Morgan attempts to conduct the proceedings in a logical fashion, but is thwarted by the rambling, anecdotal evidence of Elsworthy. The presence of two lawyers, John Brown and Mr Waters, who ‘had volunteered his services as counsellor’ throughout the

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2 Commentators have been quick to point out the similarities between Oliphant’s clergyman May, who forges a cheque in *Phoebe Junior* (1876) and Trollope’s Mr Crawley, who is accused of stealing a cheque for £20 in *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867). Whilst it is almost certain that Oliphant borrowed these details of plot from Trollope, it has escaped attention that a similar case could be made for Oliphant. The details surrounding Trollope’s commission of inquiry closely resemble the inquiry into the behaviour of
proceedings, adds legal weight to the authority of the trial (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 3-4). These two characters intervene from time to time when confusion arises over half-understood legal forms, such as the points that arise over the reception of hearsay evidence and the order in which witnesses should be heard (Perpetual, Vol III, pp. 12, 15).

For the people of Carlingford, the hearing affords a unique opportunity to witness the 'moral extinction ... of the unfaithful priest' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 2). The peculiar nature of the trial and the rare occasion it provides for communal gossip and speculation has the effect of drawing together and temporarily uniting the people of Carlingford. The town's opinion of Wentworth is filtered through the narrator, who momentarily abandons her position of omniscience to declare that: '[a]s for Mr Wentworth, it was universally agreed that, though he looked a little flushed and excited, there was no particular discouragement visible in his face' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 3). The trial takes place within the vestry of the parish church, with many of the townsfolk spilling beyond the threshold and peering in at the door and window. The small space, into which the witnesses are confined, transgresses the usually fixed boundaries of decorum and social placement so strictly policed in Carlingford. The Miss Hemmings, gentlewomen of Carlingford, notable for their low church persuasions and their allegiance to the former Evangelical rector, Mr Bury, are seated next to the Elsworthys, together with the wife of a shopkeeper and the Miss Hemmings' maid. The Miss Hemmings are subjected to the unsolicited comments of the shopkeeper's wife, forcing

Frank Wentworth in The Perpetual Curate, which was published three years before Trollope's account
them to appear 'superior to curiosity, while the others stretched their necks to get a peep into the terrible inner room' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 5). Minor irritations, which under normal circumstances would be suffered with quiet equanimity, assume major proportions within the close confines of the vestry: 'Dr Marjoribank's was not partial to Miss Sophia Hemmings [who has just given evidence]. She was never ill herself, and rarely permitted even her sister to enjoy the gentle satisfaction of a day's sickness' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 21). These slyly placed examples of social tensions are scattered throughout the narrative. There are hints here of the narrator as raconteur, gleefully exposing the sensitive social nerves of some of the characters.

The assembly agrees to disband until the evening, when Frank Wentworth announces that he will 'bring forward - a witness all-important for me, whom I cannot produce in so public a place, or at an hour when everybody is abroad' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 23). He is referring to the late Mr Wodehouse's son who has returned to Carlingford on hearing of his father's death, in the hope of claiming his father's property. Thomas Wodehouse is something of a stock character, playing the part of a braggart and villain. It is he who is responsible for the disappearance of Rosa Elsworthy, and it is his presence in the town that Frank Wentworth has promised to conceal. Wodehouse's providential appearance at the commission restores Wentworth's character intact, although society within Carlingford is shaken and does not return to its former ways. Public exposure had had the desired effect upon some, 'who had been cheerful enough when Mr Morgan came to Curlingford, who now did not care what

appeared in 1867.
became of them; and of women who would be glad to lay down their heads and hide from the mocking light of day' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 293-4). Clerical power and reputation, although dented, reigns supreme as Oliphant allows Wentworth the last word: 'Mr Wentworth trode with firm foot the streets of his parish, secure that no parson nor priest should tithe or toll in his dominions' and 'that henceforth no unauthorised evangelisation should take place in any portion of his territory' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 294-5). That Wentworth survives and even triumphs, following the attempts to taint his character, says much about lay perceptions of clerical autonomy. Furthermore, as an artist, Oliphant was not prepared to ruin her hero's career on a flimsy question of morality. Oliphant shows that a clergyman's behaviour towards his parishioners is more likely to be influenced by his kin and trusted lay workers than by edicts issued by fellow clergymen or the bishop.

It was rare for a clergyman to be convicted of immorality by the ecclesiastical courts. Anglican gravamina were varied but, of the twenty cases of clergy discipline reviewed by Brodrick and Fremantle that were appealed in the Court of Arches, only one charge, out of three for immorality, failed to have the appeal dismissed (1865, p. 201-211). As Knight confirms, the Church Discipline Act was drafted at a time, 1832, 'when the threat to church discipline was perceived as coming from drunks and adulterers', yet by the time it reached the statute book in 1840, 'discipline problems were increasingly likely to involve disputes about the nature of the Church itself' (1995, p. 166). That is, disputes over matters of doctrine began to outweigh disputes involving the moral conduct of clergymen. Likewise, Waddams considers the period after 1840 a time
during which the ecclesiastical courts were more likely to be called upon to determine matters of doctrine and theology, rather than question the character of individual clergymen (1992, p. 270).

Although the thrust of the 'trial' has been to determine the health of Wentworth's moral character, there are hints that Wentworth's positive stance towards Ritualism is also on trial, given Morgan's disapproval of Wentworth's methods of parochial management. The 1860s were notable for the efforts of a group of powerful lay men, namely, Henry Seymour, Lord Fermay, and Lord Shaftesbury who, according to Burns, sponsored bills designed to prohibit certain ritual practices (1999, p. 185). This activity, continues Burns, culminated in the passage of the Public Worship Regulation Act in 1874 (1999, p. 185). Certainly, Oliphant was aware of Shaftesbury's influence in ecclesiastical matters, as a reference to him in The Perpetual Curate shows. Furthermore, the assault on the curate's character reaches out to include his immediate family, whom Oliphant depicts in a state of decay. The temperamentally conservative Squire Wentworth is the patriarch of a large and unwieldy clan, modelled closely on the classical lines of primogeniture. The Squire's position is attenuated when, as noted previously, his son Gerald, who holds the family living, announces plans to become a member of the Roman Catholic Church and renounce his wife and children, thereby abdicating his social role in preference to a spiritual choice. Gerald's actions will undermine the interdependent social structure of the establishment, parson and squire.

3 Frank Wentworth's tendency to gloat over small victories provokes this outburst from his aunt Leonora: "'I daresay he's bold enough to take a bishopric ... but fortunately we've got that in our hands as long as Lord Shaftesbury lives'" (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 290).
which is based on the professional status of the former and the property and political rights of the latter. Oliphant shows that the old order, represented by the Squire and his family, is anachronistic in an age that valued a sense of vocation in its clergymen. As mentioned earlier, not only was there a swathe of Acts passed that granted religious and social equality to non Anglicans, there were also parliamentary endeavours to reform the Church of England. One of the most significant of these Acts was the Pluralities Act of 1838, which limited the circumstances by which a clergyman could claim non-residency, thereby ensuring that the majority of English parishes, at least by the middle years of the century, had a resident clergyman. Apart from parliamentary imperatives, Best identifies that, during the middle of the century, the clerical profession was suffused by a zealous sense of self-sacrifice and commitment 'to the service (rather than mainly to the moral supervision) of the community' (1964, p. 399-400). It is not surprising, therefore, that Oliphant chose to depict lay roles in terms of an emergent shift in the relationships between the professions and the people they serve. The influence of lay people in the affairs of the parish, even those as "insignificant" as Elsworthy, is now an important factor in lay/clerical relationships.

Contemporary ecclesiastical issues, of the kind that affect relationships between clergymen and laity, interested Oliphant, who incorporated them into her fiction. For example, Dr Stephen Lushington (1782-1873) is mentioned in The Perpetual Curate in an exchange that presents both sides of a contemporary debate. When Wentworth is asked by his father, the Squire, why Morgan is prejudiced against him, he responds: "I know no reason except that I have worked in his parish without his permission . . . for
which he threatened to have me up before somebody or other - Dr Lushington, I suppose, who is the new Council of Trent, and settles all our matters for us nowadays'". The Squire replies: ""There is nothing to laugh at in Dr Lushington... He gives you justice, at all events, which you parsons never give each other, you know" (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 57). According to Waddams, Stephen Lushington was, at various times, a Whig Member of Parliament, Admiralty Court judge and privy Councillor, and an ecclesiastical court judge (1992, p. xi). Lay people like Lushington, in his capacity as an ecclesiastical court judge, were required to decide matters of doctrine in the Church of England - a matter of serious concern to many Churchmen. Lushington's most famous, or infamous, judgement concerned the publication of Essays and Reviews in 1860, which resulted, as Gerald Parsons explains, with two of the authors, Williams and Wilson, charged with heresy (1988, p. 42). In 1862, Lushington 'pronounced a sentence of suspension for one year upon each of the accused clergymen', but these sentences were later reversed upon appeal (Brodrick and Fremantle, 1865, p. 252). Oliphant's readers would have been aware in 1864, the year of publication of The Perpetual Curate, of the controversy surrounding Essays and Reviews. The exchange between the squire and his clerical son is a thinly veiled and timely reminder.

As I mentioned earlier, Oliphant's clergymen are more likely to submit to the authority of trusted lay workers and family members than to the loud imprecations of brother clergymen. Oliphant emphasises this type of behaviour in the career of Morley Proctor in The Rector who is fresh from the protected environment of All Souls and out of his depth in the new environment of Carlingford, where he displays no aptitude for
pastoral work. Like other clergymen in the Chronicles of Carlingford, Proctor relies on
his aged mother and other female kin for support and advice and, to a lesser extent on
the Wodehouse sisters and Frank Wentworth. Although not operating within the
purlicus of Carlingford, Wentworth's three aunts demonstrate, as mentioned in the
previous chapter, their superior abilities as lay workers.

With their well developed sense of personal responsibility, Wentworth's
Evangelical aunts, led by the 'iron-grey' Leonora, are vigorous supporters of a
temperance organisation and various mission societies (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 177) and are
duty bound to support lay work, especially as it may result in the conversion of many. As
Ian Bradley notes, Evangelicals preferred the spontaneity and flexibility of voluntary
missions, as they found the formalism of the Church restrictive (1976, p. 57). Any
clergyman likely to hinder lay participation was particularly irksome to Evangelicals,
which is why Leonora views with surprise her nephew's activities in the district of
Wharfside: "I did not think a man of your views would have cared for missionary work.
I should have supposed that you would think that vulgar and Low-Church, and
Evangelical. . . . I was surprised to hear what you were doing at the place they call
Wharfside" (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 100). In time, even Aunt Leonora concedes that her
nephew's work in the district should continue, in spite of his misguided Ritualist
tendencies. The tenet that underpinned all lay Evangelical work was its attitude towards
salvation. The wider the scope allowed to Evangelical lay workers outside the Church,
the wider the scope for the social and spiritual amelioration of many. That salvation was
a matter of urgency, and the responsibility of the individual is unkindly parodied by the
eldest Wentworth son, the dissolute Jack, who undergoes a mock conversion, to the 
delight of his Evangelical aunts who are unaware of his deceit (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 78). 
Jack defends his perfidious behaviour as an example to his aunts who, in their anxiety to 
make an honest man out of a reprobate, fail to notice the genuine religious and social 
motives of Frank who was refused the family living. As Jack Wentworth explains: ‘If I 
had been a greater rascal than I am, and had gone a little further, you and your people 
would have thought me quite fit for a cure of souls’ (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 227). By 
exposing their private perturbations and public indignations for the greater Evangelical 
cause, the Wentworth aunts provide much of the novel’s humour. It is the intensity and 
urgency of many Evangelical individuals, of whom the tyrannical Leonora is an example, 
that Oliphant finds problematical, rather than the theology on which Evangelicalism is 
founded.

Female lay assistance was common currency in many contemporary English 
parishes, where clergymen were heavily reliant on an obliging population of female lay 
workers to assist them in the day-to-day running of the parish. The contemporary 
clergyman, J. H. Blunt, was a cautious supporter of controlled female activity in the 
parish, conceding that ‘the most available form of lay help which the clergyman will 
find at his disposal is that offered by ladies of the higher middle classes, many of whom 
do, and many more wish to devote themselves altogether to works of charity’ (1865, p. 
328). Oliphant recognised that the sisterhood and deaconess movements and other 
charitable associations gave women a valuable opportunity to take an active role in the 
running of their Church. Furthermore, the plethora of charitable associations and
religious orders available to women throughout the nineteenth century subtly changed women's status in the Church from outsider to insider.

Oliphant's interest in ecclesiastical sisterhoods and deaconess societies stems from the intense topicality of the subject, and her readiness to exploit its social and moral effects in her fiction. Recently widowed and with children and an ever growing household of retainers to support by her literary efforts, Oliphant's interest in societies which offered publicly and religiously sanctioned roles for women is easily understood. Mumm notes that the fashionable Clewer community, for example, attracted women from 'the aristocracy and upper gentry', and received the unimpeachable attention of Queen Victoria and one of her daughters who made a private visit to the community in 1864 (1999, p. 8). The Clewer community was situated 'near the Windsor military camp' and began its life as a refuge for prostitutes (Mumm, 1999, p. 8). As Oliphant began her thirty-year residency at Windsor in 1865, it is more than possible that she was aware of the community's existence. Whilst alert to its benefits, Oliphant was aware that conventual life was not the preferred option for many women. Following the death of her father, Lucilla Marjoribanks is forced to take a pragmatic stance towards her future life in line with her changed domestic circumstances and considers, in turn, parish work, taking Inmates, and marriage (Miss Marjoribanks, p. 436-7). Lucilla also briefly with the idea of establishing a House of Mercy, but quickly abandons the idea, because she lacks the vocation and is unwilling to abandon 'all projects for herself', and does not possess 'that utter devotion to the cause of humanity which would be involved in it' (Miss Marjoribanks, p. 435). Mumm reminds us that a lack of professed religious
vocation did not prevent women from entering convents, noting that the Mother Superior of the Clewer community looked first for women 'possessing common sense', believing that common sense could be instilled with religion, whereas 'piety unaccompanied by common sense was of no value to a community' (1999, p. 15). No doubt, this was a position that Oliphant would have readily endorsed. Therefore, by providing an objective check-list of possible future occupations for Lucilla, Oliphant not only emphasises the limited opportunities available for "respectable" women, but also shows that her heroine's want of 'utter devotion to the cause of humanity' is entirely appropriate for a character whose interest in sisterhoods is limited to the voguish pursuits of a self-proclaimed impresario, whose links with altruism are severely attenuated.

Oliphant's attitudes towards the "woman question" in her fiction and non-fiction are tantalizingly ambiguous. Trela notes that Oliphant's views on women's rights and women's social position changed throughout her career, from a hostile stance in the 1850s and 1860s, to views which, by 1880, expressed frustration and sympathy, particularly with 'the patriarchal devaluation of women's work and "women's sphere"' (1995, p. 14). Oliphant's inability to secure 'regular, salaried work as an editor in a male-dominated profession', Trela says, together with her personal experience of male ineptitude at the domestic level, were significant factors in her changing views (1995, p. 14). Trela's use of the term 'gentle subversive' aptly locates and expresses Oliphant's mid-way position between ardent feminism and unquestioning upholder of patriarchal values, as one which "shows women operating in an empowered and emboldened"
domestic space, and, less often, as empowered in a man’s world’ (1995, p. 15). According to Ann Heilmann, Oliphant was interested in ‘how individual women responded to the pressures in their lives, how they negotiated between domestic responsibilities and their wish for meaningful work, how they managed to protect their femininity and female values from the onslaught of private and public demands, while at the same time achieving a sense of independence and professional fulfilment’ (1999, p. 232). Oliphant shows that women were important lay workers and could aspire to much more given the chance.

Oliphant was aware that the deaconess and sisterhood movements were topical enough to court public interest, particularly as the opponents and supporters of Sisterhoods were, at this time, according to Hill, embroiled in an energetic and sometimes vituperative ‘pamphlet debate’ (1973, p. 278). As Jill Duroy notes, sisterhoods were ‘the ecclesiastical alternative to secular feminism’ (1997). Oliphant was positively disposed towards sisterhoods, which offered women personal and professional autonomy, plus the opportunity to serve others, and where religious devotion was not necessarily a prerequisite to such service. Mumm stresses that the mix between ‘[!]ove of work, and love of God’, as the prime motivating forces that attracted women to sisterhoods, ‘varied from sister to sister, community to community, and over the passage of time’ (1999, p. 19).

Although Oliphant is not specific, it is likely that she envisaged Lucy and Mary Wodehouse as associate sisters attached to a conventual community. In For Love and
Life Oliphant carefully explains the duties of an associate sister: 'She is what we call an associate, and does what she can for our charges, the poor people— in something like our dress; but it is far from being the dress of a professed sister' (1874, p. 80). As Mumm explains, associate sisters 'were women who could not, or did not wish to, formally enter the community but who were interested in its work' (1999, p. 47). Many associates had the opportunity to live within the communities for part of the year, while at other times they lived at home, maintaining simple rules and wearing the habit. Associate sisters included married and unmarried women, those whose vocation was undecided, and those who were 'waiting to overcome family objections to their vocation' (Mumm, 1999, p. 48, 49). Oliphant allows Lucy and Mary Wodehouse the professional freedoms of the sisterhood whilst, at the same time, allowing them the social wherewithal to receive their clerical lovers, Frank Wentworth and Morley Proctor respectively.

According to Gill, the Tractarians revived Anglican sisterhoods in 1845, and, in 1848, Priscilla Sellon founded the Sisterhood of Mercy with the support of Edward Pusey (1994, p. 148). Oliphant's fictional Sisters of Mercy, named, no doubt with Sellon and Pusey in mind, figure most prominently in The Perpetual Curate, where their activities are overseen by the Ritualist clergyman Frank Wentworth, whose support of sisterhoods is understandable in this context. The Wodehouse sisters operate under the solicitous guidance of Frank Wentworth, who encourages them to visit and tend the sick and the poor, and participate in Sunday school services for the Wharfside people, and act, in Pusey's words, as 'the pioneer for the parish priest' (in Gill, 1994, p. 156). Literally and symbolically 'cloaked in the respectability of religion' (Reed, 1988), the
sister could move freely about the cities and towns and consort with a variety of "undesirables", without attracting condemnation. Reed (1988) notes that a life spent within a religious community 'took women out of their homes. It gave them important work and sometimes great responsibility. It replaced their ties to fathers, husbands, and brothers by loyalties to church and sisterhood. It demonstrated that there were callings for women of the upper and middle classes other than those of wife, daughter, and "charitable spinster"'. Oliphant was also aware that the sisterhoods, and their close associations with Ritualism, were part of the movement whose churches were, according to Reed, overrepresented by women (1988). For many contemporaries, such organisations were symbolic affronts to middle-class sensibilities, because of their threat to patriarchal authority. There are hints throughout The Perpetual Curate that, although the Wodehouse sisters are active and dedicated workers in the parish, they nevertheless find the aesthetics of Ritualism equally compelling. It is probable that Lucy Wodehouse's attraction to the Sisterhoods is simply an extension of her appreciation of the aesthetics of Ritualism in general. Mumm points out that there was a short lived contemporary body of opinion, which 'argued that there was no via media between fashionable dissipation and the convent for intelligent women in the 1860s' (1999, p. 204). As a contemporary churchwoman wrote, the '[a]ctivity, progress, beauty, refinement, and devotion are allying themselves with the Catholic side, and Protestantism finds its chief adherents among the vulgar and money-gaining classes' (in Reed, 1988). There is clearly a desire to remove the everyday and mundane aspects of parochial work from the taint of trade associated with Low Church and Dissenting factions. Elsewhere in The Perpetual Curate, the quasi-religious/social motives of Lucy
and Wentworth are rendered suspect, as they are linked with naïve idealism of character that does not fit easily with the realities of parochial life: 'Neither of them, perhaps, was of a very enlightened character of soul. They believed they were doing a great work for Tom Burrows' six children, calling God to His promise on their behalf... and in their young love and faith their hearts rose' (*Perpetual*, Vol I, p. 71). Oliphant shows that the lessons of experience make little impact on Wentworth's 'generous and hasty tempérament' (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p. 262), as Wentworth and Lucy Wodehouse continue their work in Prickett's Lane undaunted, still taking comfort out of the very hardness of the world around them, in which their ministrations were so much needed, ... and a belief in the possibility of mending matters, in which their love for each other bore a large share; for it was not in human nature thus to begin the ideal existence, without believing in its universal extension, and in the amelioration of life and the world (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p. 262-264).

Oliphant cautions against wholehearted readerly support for the social and religious work performed by Lucy and Frank Wentworth, as their efforts to alleviate the lot of the poor in their district are tinged with a large degree of self-satisfaction which diminishes their altruism. Whilst a certain amount of insensitivity and condescending sentimentality towards the needs of others might be excused in Oliphant's male characters who, as Jay explains, provide 'the raw material upon which women practise the daily self-denial which will sharpen their moral faculties', such traits are not easily
excused in her female characters (1995, p. 73). Oliphant, notes Jay, was willing to permit her female characters to indulge in virtuous acts of self-sacrifice, but stopped short of investing it with 'any hint of heroic allure', and refused the temptation in her fiction to provide role models that glamorised a woman's lot (1995, p. 55). For Oliphant, women possessed, overall, greater aptitude for altruism than men did, making them desirable avatars of moral and religious instruction. It is not surprising, therefore, that Oliphant's lay women influence the moral and religious lives of their fellow parishioners with a compassionate intensity.

Contemporary sources generally support women's moral and religious influences in parochial life. The anonymously authored *Hints to a Clergyman's Wife* encouraged clerical wives to use the opportunities afforded by a visit to the sick to 'confer spiritual as well as temporal benefit' (Moore, 1988, p. 245), noting that a wife's careful ministrations to the 'young women of the parish' would encourage the sharing of confidences that would 'subserve their more serious and intelligent reception of the truths delivered from the pulpit' (Moore, 1988, p. 246). Clerical wives, such as the real-life Evangelical Anna Maria Clarke, wife of the Rev. Thomas Clarke, relished the opportunity to promote spirituality amongst her husband's parishioners, and accompanied her husband in his visits to parishioners to establish 'small groups for cottage instruction' (1853, p. 215-6). Not all of Clarke's parishioners welcomed her spiritual injunctions. Her biographer notes that a family, 'not of Gipsy extraction, but living in the wandering and degraded habits of that tribe', threatened her efforts with physical violence (1853, p. 216). This attitude was not confined to Evangelical
approaches to pastoral work, as Oliphant shows, for example, in the career of Lucy Wodehouse.

Whilst the Wodehouse sisters attend mostly to the physical needs of the poorer parishioners, they act also as their moral guardians, attentive to any religious irregularities and infidelities or moral slips of character. Lucy Wodehouse runs a school for the girls of Prickett's Lane, whilst Frank Wentworth oversees a similar establishment for the 'young bargemen' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 270). In the absence of Wentworth from his school duties, Lucy is 'invited to take his place in this public and open manner . . . ' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 271), with the result that some of the boys threaten mild insurrection in the face of female authority. Oliphant shows that Lucy is morally superior in this situation, able to counter any acts of insubordination: 'Lucy looked one of the ringleaders in the eyes as she spoke, and brought him to his senses — all the more effectually, to be sure, because she knew all about him, and was a familiar figure to the boy, suggesting various little comforts, for which, in Prickett's Lane, people were not ungrateful' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 271). Lucy's unabashed use of subtle bribery, Oliphant assures us, is necessary to assuage rebellion, encourage docility amongst the people of Prickett's Lane, and maintain the moral and social order of Carlingford. The overriding moral purpose implicit in much district visiting is admitted by a contemporary commentator, who explains that, whilst his own visitors undertook visiting 'ostensibly to invite membership in a Provident Society', it also allowed them to ascertain who was 'praiseworthy or culpable' amongst the poor families (in Rack, 1973). It was hoped that district visiting would assist in 'promoting kindly feelings' between
rich and poor and that the genteel ministrations and examples of the district visitor
would 'encourage prudence, industry and cleanliness', and eliminate 'the moral causes
which increase or aggravate want' in these classes (in Rack, 1973). Oliphant shows that
lay women are important assets in parochial life, providing not only for the physical
well-being of parishioners, but also proving themselves capable of ministering to their
moral and religious needs.

CHURCHWARDENS

The position of churchwarden was the most influential lay position although, as
we have seen, Oliphant chose to give precedence to the position of parish clerk in The
Perpetual Curate. Once elected, the churchwarden held the position freehold and, like
the clergyman, it was difficult to remove him. The churchwarden was also the legal
representative of the parish and it was his duty to ensure that a sober and reverential
attitude prevailed amongst parishioners in the church and churchyard during divine
service and at other times. He was responsible for the upkeep of the church fabric and,
in the eighteenth century, for the payment of parish relief. It was his duty to call a vestry
meeting to establish a rate, and thereafter to enforce the payment of these rates, if
necessary (Mackreth, 1848, p. 9). Significantly, it was the churchwarden's
responsibility to report to the bishop or archdeacon any episodes of immorality or
misconduct within the parish, including clerical misconduct, although Mackreth, himself

4 The payment of church rates was compulsory until the passing of the Compulsory Church Rates
Abolition Act of 1868. However, the payment of church rates was not uniform throughout England prior
the incumbent of Halton in Lancaster, and author of The Churchwarden's Manual, warned churchwardens against making an improvident rush to report on the moral status of their clergymen, 'if a case could be imagined' (1848, p. 76-7). Mackreth's fears were largely unfounded as, according to Knight, churchwardens were reluctant to complain about the private moral trespasses of their neighbours and especially their clergymen (1995, p. 186-7). Robinson observes that their reluctance could be a sign of social deference, because the office of churchwarden in the rural parishes was usually filled by yeoman farmers and was 'below the notice of the gentry' (1980, p. xxiv). In The Perpetual Curate, the churchwarden is Wodehouse, Carlingford's leading solicitor, whose position straddles the social space between the middle-classes and the gentry. As churchwarden, Wodehouse contributes little to the parish and appears to function as a class figurehead, 'looked upon with favourable eyes even by the great people as being himself a cadet of a county family' (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 69). Oliphant playfully presents him as a tactless and sometimes ridiculous man, whose social indubitability causes many awkward moments with other characters. The point is that Wodehouse is an unlikely churchwarden, whose limited influence within the parish is curtailed by his death, which evinces no great 'sense of loss when he was gone' (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 234). Wodehouse occupies the position of churchwarden by dint of social position alone, which Oliphant stresses, is not the most reliable indicator of ability. By consigning Wodehouse to an early death, Oliphant implies that his inability to understand and apply himself with due gravity to the demands of his position as churchwarden cannot be tolerated. On the other hand, Elsworthy's lack of social weight, to the passing of the Act, as some parishes levied no rate, while others with small expenses paid them out
as we have seen, does not hinder his purpose or unduly affect his support network within Carlingford.

**PATRONAGE**

By the middle years of the 1870s, Oliphant was educating and supporting her two sons and a nephew, with an eye to their future employment prospects. Having already established herself as a doyenne of the contemporary literary scene, Oliphant hoped that her name would assist her boys in securing positions. Accordingly, a letter to John Blackwood in 1874 shows her ready to dispense with 'her usual principle of anonymity' (Jay, 1995, p. 243) to reveal herself as a reviewer of Lord Lytton's work: 'I see no reason why he should not know who his reviewer is', she declared to Blackwood, 'except that I think one usually thinks much less of the praise when one is aware of the identity of the writer. However, as it is an object worth considering, to connect the name which my boys, I hope, will make something of' (Jay, 1995, p. 243-4). As Jay (1995, p. 244) points out, Oliphant was aware that an acquaintance with well-known names in English public life was an essential precursor in securing patronage and, in a further letter to Blackwood in 1879, she begged an introduction to Lord Salisbury, 'with the view of asking him for a Foreign Office nomination for one of my boys', hoping that their mutual associations with Eton would count for something: 'Lord Salisbury's sons were in Mr Marindin's house along with my boys', she explained to Blackwood, 'and I suppose he will know my name' (Jay, 1995, p. 244; Oliphant, 1899/1974, p. 278-9).
According to Bourne, Lord Salisbury was foremost amongst prime ministers and party leaders in the importance he attached to the 'role of patronage in the promotion of party solidarity inside and outside the House of Commons' (1986, p. 148).

Given her understanding of the importance of patronage in nineteenth-century life in general, it is not surprising that Oliphant refers to ecclesiastical patronage in her novels, with an awareness that ecclesiastical patronage, in particular, was a fraught area of Church administration because, as Haig notes, '[e]very benefice in the Church of England had a patron (or patrons)' and 'appointment to a benefice thus involved catching the attention, by one means or another, of some one of these very various people or bodies' (1984, p. 249). Ecclesiastical patronage, notes Bourne, was an area where 'moral ambiguities and administrative contradictions ... were most clearly focused' (1986, p. 179) and it is this moral grey area that becomes the focus of Oliphant's criticisms of patronage in her fiction. For example, in Phoebe Junior, Oliphant captures the thought processes of the newly appointed chaplain and holder of a sinecure, the Rev. Reginald May, who attempts to justify his appointment by adopting the convenience of loose and abstract thinking that is couched in vague syllogistic terms:

[Why public appointment was given and held according to abstract right, as, formally speaking, it ought to be? Those in the highest offices were appointed, not because of their personal excellence, but because of being some other man's son or brother; and yet, on the whole, public duty was well done, and the unjust ruler and hireling priest were exceptions. Even men
whose entry into the fold was very precipitate, over the wall, violently, or by some rat-hole of private interest, made very good shepherds, once they were inside. Nothing was perfect in this world, and yet things were more good than evil; and if he himself made it his study to create for himself an ideal position, to become a doer of all kinds of volunteer work, what would it matter that his appointment was not an ideal appointment? (1876/1989, p. 134-5).

This may have its antecedents in Oliphant's personal experience of patronage for, as Haig explains, from about 1870 onwards, the Church, acting 'contrary to the tendencies of the age... stood alone in continuing appointments by direct, personal patronage' (1984, p. 254). Promotion by merit was now, as Bourne confirms, the principal means by which one sought favour with powerful and influential interests, by adopting 'rational "middle-class" values of merit, efficiency and competence' (1986, p. 31).

In order to understand Oliphant's depiction of ecclesiastical patronage in the Chronicles of Carlingford and in some of her other novels, I will use the method described by Durey in her discussion of ecclesiastical patronage in the novels of Trollope, as one that 'accord[s] with Diana McClatchey's pentagonal schema: patronage in the gift of private individuals; patronage in the gift of collegiate bodies; patronage in the gift of bishops and other ecclesiastical dignitaries; patronage in the gift
of the Crown; and patronage in the gift of capitular bodies' (1995, p. 251). Oliphant’s interest in ecclesiastical patronage will centre on the first two items in Durey’s list.

In the Gift of Private Individuals

Roberts notes that patronage in the gift of private individuals was the largest type of patronage and, as such, was most vulnerable to charges of simony (1981). The issue of private patronage evoked a great deal of public outcry from its defenders and detractors alike, because of the problems associated with finding an acceptable alternative. An article in The Times in 1862 railed against a ‘piece of jobbery from which the family of Bishop Villiers have profited’ (‘Church Patronage’, 1862), but, a few years later in 1867, The Times was moved to defend private patronage as a form of private property, and, while noting that ‘property has its duties as well as its rights’, nevertheless, ‘no legislative interference may be admissible’ (‘Statistics of the Church of England’, 1867). The Times found in its survey, entitled ‘Statistics of the Church of England,’ that just under half of the Church’s 12,888 livings were in private hands. This statistic was alarming, because ‘a yearly increasing proportion of clerical poverty arises, announced The Times, upon the livings in private patronage’ (‘Statistics of the Church of England,’ 1867).

5 The Times article asked its readers to consider the case of the Evangelical Bishop Villiers, who favoured his family by offering a living worth £1,250 per year to his son-in-law. Following the bishop’s death in 1861, a living valued at £1,300 was offered to the Rev. Henry Montague Villiers, who took his degree at Oxford in 1860, was ordained a deacon in 1861, and was made a ‘priest’ this year only; but who has the
Oliphant demonstrates how disputes over ecclesiastical preferment could polarize families. Durcy notes that ‘patronage was treated as a form of property’ (1994, p. 253), and Oliphant’s portrayal of warring factions within a fictional family adds credence to this idea. Oliphant was aware that all parties within the Established Church gained through the institution of private patronage, especially groups such as Evangelicals, whose spiritual priorities appear to sit oddly with the rampant materialism of private property. In fact, as Roberts observes, Evangelicals, more than other groups within the Established Church, had the most to gain from private patronage and were the group most attached to its continuance (1981). During the 1850s and 1860s, the Evangelical movement within the Church of England was enjoying a revival and its cause was well served by a number of Evangelical bishops. Bebbington points out that, during the period 1856 to 1860, six Evangelical bishops were elected to the House of Lords and most of them gained their appointments due to the influence of Lord Shaftesbury, who conscientiously campaigned to increase the number of Evangelical bishops on the bench (1989, p. 107). Oliphant was obviously well acquainted with the activities of the Earl of Shaftesbury, whose name is invoked with reverential awe by Aunt Leonora when there is talk of Carlingford becoming a bishopric (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 290). Leonora’s solemn obeisance towards Shaftesbury reminds the reader that Leonora shares this great man’s philanthropic interests and activities, which are undertaken within the theological framework of Evangelicalism. The question of securing an Evangelical clergyman to

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good fortune to be the son of a bishop, the nephew of Lord Clarendon, and the son-in-law of Earl Russell’ ('Church Patronage', 1867).
inhabit the living in her gift is of vital importance for Leonora, who is willing to risk the bonds of Wentworth kinship to achieve her aims.

Led by the formidable Leonora, the Evangelical Wentworth sisters in The Perpetual Curate are private patrons, committed to eliminating Ritualist practices and doctrines from the church by appointing a clergyman with Evangelical sympathies. The maternal side of the Wentworth clan, that is, the sisters Leonora, Dora and Cecilia Wentworth, hold the living of Skelmersdale and, as the present incumbent shows signs of failing health, they are anxious to appoint a successor. Their arrival in Carlingford, disguised on the grounds of familial interest, is an attempt to ascertain the suitability of their nephew Frank Wentworth, who 'had been educated expressly with an eye to Skelmersdale,' for the living (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 34). Wentworth is equally entrenched in his Tractarian views and will not accept the living, 'not for freedom [from penury], not for Lucy' (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 34). Oliphant shows how adherence to party lines affects the dispersal of private patronage, as the forthright Leonora Wentworth, holding fast to her Evangelical beliefs, decides that the living must go to a clergyman with Evangelical sympathies. Leonora's actions provoke a state of mutiny between herself and her sisters, who attempt to free themselves from the interdictions of their elder sister in order to elevate family ties above the press of party claims. The living, they announce, must go to their nephew, Frank (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 132). The powerful Leonora might share the familial sentiments of her sisters by assisting their nephew but, 'they were guided like

6 Knight notes: 'Perhaps one-fifth of the [private] patrons were women' (1995, p. 158), which constitutes a considerable sum of the livings in private hands.
ordinary women by their feelings, whereas Miss Leonora had the rights of property before her, and the approval of Exeter Hall' (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p. 133).

On the other hand, Oliphant allows the squire, who holds the family living of Wentworth, to claim family preferences ahead of party beliefs in the dispersal of private patronage. The squire, whom Oliphant portrays as old-fashioned and long-winded, weighs into this imbroglio by suggesting 'that failing Frank, Mary's husband had the next best right to Wentworth Rectory' (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p. 129). In the following speech, the squire touches on points that would have been familiar fare to Oliphant's readers:

I think it's a man's bounden duty, when there is a living in the family, to educate one of his sons for it. In my opinion, it's one of the duties of property. You have no right to live off your estate, and spend your money elsewhere; and no more have you any right to give less than — than your own flesh and blood to the people you have the charge of (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p. 126).

Landed families such as the Wentworths, stresses Oliphant, augmented their power and prestige by using the claims of private patronage to support a clergyman of their choice. As Dewey points out, 'kinship groups continually tested the full range of patrons to whom they had access', as '[i]ndividual inclinations were subordinated to the common struggle for survival' (1991, p. 144). Yet, as Oliphant demonstrates in *He That Will Not When He May*, the special claims of kinship in securing a clergyman of choice were dependent on the vagaries of providence:
The rectory of Markham Royal was a very good living—a living intended for the second son of the reigning family when there was a second son; and indeed it was more than probable that Roland Markham, when he grew up, would have to 'go in for' the Church, in order to take advantage of this family provision. Sir William, being in his own person the third son of his family, and the youngest, there was nobody who had a claim upon it when he came into possession of the title and estates; for the Markhams of Underwood, who were the next heirs, and who had been very confident in their hopes up to the moment of Sir William's marriage—a wrong which they had never forgiven—had but one son, who was too old to be cut into clerical trim. This was how Mr Stainforth had got the living (1892, p. 195-6).

Oliphant elects a bipartisan stance in her depiction of private patronage reflecting, perhaps, the views of the wider community who realised that clerical livelihoods depended on attracting private patronage. Oliphant also shows the dilemmas facing private patrons who submit to the pull of kinship, because the ties of blood did not always recommend the most suitable or deserving man. Above all, Oliphant's depiction of private patronage highlights the power and influence available to those lay men and women who enjoy its privileges.

In the Gift of Collegiate Bodies
Oliphant most directly addresses the question of ecclesiastical patronage in the gift of collegiate bodies in *The Curate in Charge*, showing that the most suitable and deserving man is often denied preferment. The living of Brentburn is worth £450 per year to the non-resident incumbent Mr Chester, and 'less than half of the stipend' for his curate, Mr St John (p. 4). When the rector dies, the curate's daughters, aware that their father possessed 'little energy of disposition', take action by way of a petition to the Lord Chancellor, in a misguided effort to secure tenure of the living for their father (1876/1877, p. 4, 65). St John gainsays his daughters' efforts, reminding them that, as 'the living is a college living... the Lord Chancellor has as much to do with it as you have' (p. 66). Echoing popular sentiment, Oliphant is critical of clerical preferment which, she believed, often disadvantaged more deserving clergymen:

Why he [Mr Chester] should have accepted the living of Brentburn it would be hard to say; I suppose there is always an attraction, even to the most philosophical, in a few additional hundreds a year. He took it, keeping out poor Arlington, who had the next claim, and who wanted to marry, and longed for a country parish. Mr Chester did not want to marry, and hated everything parochial; but he took the living all the same (*Curate*, p. 3).

Oliphant shows that Brentburn's unfortunate history of clerical preferment is likely to continue in the same manner when St John is overlooked for the living. The college, remarks Oliphant, 'might have been capable (though I don't know whether they would
have had any right to exercise their patronage so) of a great act of poetic justice, and might have given to the undistinguished but old member of their college the reward of his long exertions, had they known' (Curate, p. 69). According to Chadwick, '[t]he university appointment was conducted with candidates and a poll ... and the colleges were bound by custom to offer the living to the senior fellow in orders, who might or might not be an appropriate person' (1970/1972, p. 208). Chadwick adds; '[a]fter the fellows ceased to be obliged to take holy orders, this custom faded quietly or was consciously abandoned' (1970/1972, p. 208). Clearly, Oliphant shows that the Rev. Cecil St John's college was not about to deviate from customary practices in the manner suggested by Chadwick. Oliphant stresses that, whoever exercises ecclesiastical patronage, wields considerable power.

Patronage was one way, albeit the most powerful one, that guaranteed the laity a voice in the administration of the Church. Another was the burgeoning of voluntary lay organisations that gave many Anglicans real input into parochial management. Clerical dependence on lay financial involvement increased from the 1870s when, according to Haig, the official and private means of clergymen fell (1984, p. 239). The contemporary clergyman, J. J. Halcombe, believed that the laity had a special responsibility to assist in the placement of more clergymen. He wrote: 'It has been found far easier to lower the standard of requirements for Holy Orders, in order to meet the growing need for more clergy, than to adopt the more legitimate, though more laborious, process of urging upon the laity the necessity of providing a proper maintenance for such an additional number of properly trained and educated men as the increased population of the country required'
It is, however, one thing to accept financial assistance, but quite another to accept advice and practical assistance from an untrained body of lay men and women, especially when such people might threaten the professional independence of the clergy. Clerical independence, once gained, was a jealously guarded prize and, as Frank Wentworth discovers, one that neither love nor the promise of preferment could deter. Oliphant implies that it is Wentworth's position as a Ritualist, and one who is narcissistically bound to its aesthetics, that acts as a further barrier in his refusal to surrender clerical authority: '[It suddenly flashed over him that, after all, a wreath of spring flowers or a chorister's surplice was scarcely worth suffering martyrdom for' (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 56).

According to Knight, throughout the nineteenth century, the duties and nature of the office of Anglican clergymen were undergoing redefinition within the context of the Church of England's transition from national to denominational status (1995, p. 201). That is, the changes were more of degree than of kind. With this in mind, it is reasonable to argue that there were few changes in the composition of the laity between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but changes instead in the laity's perception of the clergyman's role. It was the clergy, after all, who responded to the requirements of the laity. Walsh and Taylor argue that, until the 1830s, nearly all clergymen were Oxford or Cambridge educated and were usually included within a network of propertied gentry. Such a position, they claim, is a source of potential weakness for the clergy, who 'had become, perhaps, too much like the laity', and, from this perspective, 'were unable to provide spiritual and moral leadership for the community' (1993, p. 29). Throughout the
period, from approximately 1850 to the end of the century, the Anglican clergyman distanced himself in manner, dress, and professional attitude from the laity.

Questions of lay authority and power in ecclesiastical and moral matters occupied Oliphant throughout the Chronicles of Carlingford. Oliphant shows that relationships between clergyman and laity were symbiotic and success depended on the ability of both parties to acquiesce on occasion, as control of the parish church lay in no one pair of hands, and both clergy and laity were responsible for the well being of the church. The tensions that occurred between clergy and laity were the result of struggles between strong community loyalties and individual wills. Oliphant's depiction of Wentworth's trial, conveyed with laudatory verisimilitude, is an important landmark in the context of the nineteenth-century novel, as it explores the vexed question of clerical discipline and the power of lay people to question the moral standing of an authority figure who claims moral superiority. Wentworth's self-regard is such that he arrogantly dismisses every small contretemps with Elsworthy as the fantastic imaginings of an ill-informed and inferior mind. Wentworth's trial is a timely reminder that no one, especially a clergyman, is above prevailing moral codes. Moreover, formal lay roles offered an effective check to the degree of autonomy that a clergyman could exercise within his parish. If ill feeling did arise in the clergy-lay relationship then it was difficult to remedy, given the emotionally charged nature of the relationship. As I have mentioned, once a clergyman had possession of a living, it was almost impossible to remove him, except in cases of extreme immorality or heresy. Likewise, lay people elected to hold ecclesiastical positions, such as churchwardens, clerks and sextons, enjoyed a certain
amount of personal and public autonomy and power which was unavailable to them in any other situation within the parish.

Lay people also asserted their power and influence in the area of ecclesiastical patronage to the extent where quarrels over the preferment of private patronage divided families. As patronage permeated wide areas of contemporary life and was an especially topical and controversial part of the Established Church, Oliphant was able to offer a critical assessment of its uses and abuses. Overall, Oliphant's depiction of lay people reflect a shift in relationships between the clergy and the laity in accordance with contemporary perceptions that viewed the clergy as a distinct and professional group. Clerical performance, as Oliphant shows, was open to increased public scrutiny and the mid-nineteenth-century laity was not content to accept a clergyman who failed to perform his duties, particularly when many considered the clergyman a member of a wealthy and privileged group within society.

To a certain extent, these criteria may be applied to Nonconformist clergymen and their lay communities although, as Oliphant's novels attest, Carlingford's Nonconformists assume a certain confident autonomy in their relationships with their ministers and with each other that allows several potential potenates of both sexes to emerge from lay ranks. That certain individuals enjoy high status is due, in part, to the independent organisation of Congregational churches in mid nineteenth-century England. The changing positions of Oliphant's clergymen and their professional and personal predicaments will be investigated in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

CLERICAL RANK AND CLASS

In her fiction, Oliphant is particularly sensitive to the conflicts that arise when her clergymen display a desire to rise both socially and professionally, or when they are emotionally unsuited to their calling. With this in mind, the chapter will examine Oliphant's representation of her clergymen, both Anglican and Dissenting, by focussing on their rank and class. The aim of this chapter is to ascertain what Oliphant thought about and how she depicted her clergymen in terms of general reputation and their position within society and within the denominations they represent.

Although Oliphant's stance towards Nonconformists is mixed, it seems that she wished to distance herself from the representation of religion by some of her contemporaries. A letter to John Blackwood confirms this: 'I think Dickens is one of those men to whom religion is but a system of mild and sentimental prettiness — I think in his heart he would prefer Charles Honeyman and I think every man who associates systematically, as he does, religion with vulgarity and meanness, deserves a heavier whip than any small switch of mine' (in Jay, 1995, p. 147). As we have seen in previous chapters, Oliphant's novels do not admit mildness or sentimentality when the author speaks of religious matters, neither do they allow 'vulgarity and meanness' to dominate or mask her sympathetic stance.
The two novels within the Carlingford series that deal with Dissent, Salem Chapel and Phoebe Junior, reflect anxiety towards the lower social status of Nonconformists in general, perhaps tapping into what Miall described as the 'aristocratic sentiment', expressed as an overriding attention to worldly concerns such as 'pride of class', 'appearances', and 'respectability', at the expense of the true functions of Christianity (1849, p. 197). Oliphant chose to represent Congregationalists as her preferred choice of Nonconformist denomination, because Congregationalism appealed to the middle classes who made up the bulk of her readers. This suited perfectly the interests of an author who, as Jay explains, was comfortable depicting the 'rise and rise of the middle classes', especially since Oliphant's own experience had been one of upward social mobility (1995, p. 206). The Congregational minister, Thomas Bismey, admitted that Congregationalism's 'mission is neither to the very rich nor to the very poor. Its mission', he continues, is to 'the thinking active, influential classes . . . consisting of several gradations . . . [who] are the modern movers and moulders of the world' (1848, p. 9). Congregationalism's distance from ministering to the lower classes allowed Oliphant to take issue with this point. Schlossberg notes that the 'failure of the Church to attract more of the middle class, which frequently went to Dissent, was a frequent lamentation of the clergy' (2000, p. 128-9). At times, Oliphant's fictional depiction of Dissent reads suspiciously like an apology for the Church of England, yet, her representation of the Established Church and its clergymen is not without censure. Oliphant recognised that Nonconformity's strengths and weaknesses emerge from the
shared values of the chapel environment, which she depicts sympathetically, but not uncritically, in her fiction.

Written thirteen years apart, *Salem Chapel* in 1863 and *Phoebe Junior* in 1876, are chronologically arranged and separated by a generation, as *Phoebe Junior* explores the fortunes of the daughter of one of the leading members of the Salem Chapel community. The two novels may be read as a microcosm of contemporary Nonconformist chapel society, which concurs, at many levels, with contemporary and modern accounts of Nonconformist social structure in a small town. Indeed, the organisation of Congregational chapels into autonomous religious and social units is the singular feature of Congregationalism. Cunningham argues that Oliphant indulged in stereotypes in her depiction of Nonconformist clergymen and their congregations (1975, p. 200-1). Yet Oliphant herself deplored the use of stereotypical clergymen in her own fiction and in the work of other writers. In a letter to John Blackwood, she declared 'that there are bad men and vulgar men, I do not doubt, among the servants of the churches, but I cannot help resenting the perpetual reproduction of such a filthy reptile as [Dickens's] Chadband as a type of the class and I condemn it quite as much on behalf of art as of truth' (in Jay, 1995, p. 141-2). Oliphant was aware that Nonconformity had many detractors within contemporary literary circles, occasioned as Bebbington suggests, because Victorian writers displayed an 'instinctive aversion to a community that was often suspicious of fiction' (1992, p. 1-2). An awkward and slightly embarrassed concession to Nonconformity's reputation for narrowness is evident in J. Guinness Rogers' description of his early years in the chapel of which his father was
pastor: ‘Far be it from me to hint that they were prejudiced or unduly bigoted, but they were so afraid of making mistakes, and they had so many qualifications on which they were accustomed to insist, that it is very possible that their severity went to the bounds of narrowness, and occasionally even overpassed them’ (1903, p. 18).

On the other hand, Oliphant had a decided picture of what she believed to be the duties and lifestyle of the Dissenting minister. In a review of books written for Blackwood’s Magazine in 1871, Oliphant reflected on the state of the contemporary clergy and the clerical profession, both Anglican and Nonconformist and declared that, because ‘he [the Dissenting minister] is not an officer of the State, he has none of the snares and cares of parochial work’; neither is he burdened with the poor, and ‘his congregation, even if it is not rich, is well to do’ (1871a). This is not entirely true. According to Bebbington, various arms of Nonconformity, including Congregationalists, ‘were hives of philanthropic activity’ and, continues Bebbington, ‘charitable work, like most other aspects of chapel life, was disproportionately in the hands of the ministers’ (1992, p. 48-9). Oliphant suggests that the parochial duties of Dissenting ministers are not as onerous as those of his Anglican brothers; instead, his especial duty is to preach. Oliphant concludes ‘that the general voice . . . will still be for the Gospels . . . and for the revelation of God instead of the counsel of man’ (1871a). Generally, Oliphant’s fictional Anglican clergymen labour under parochial duties, whilst her Nonconformist ministers tend to be eloquent and persuasive preachers and political activists. Oliphant does not suggest that Anglicans enjoy any particular advantages over their Nonconformist brothers. This is because Oliphant’s overriding interest lies with the
motives that prompt men to pursue a clerical career, whatever their theological preferences may be.

**Dissenting Ministers**

Oliphant’s depiction of Dissent may be charted, to some extent, by following the careers of her two dissenting Ministers: the Rev. Mr Arthur Vincent in *Salem Chapel* and the Rev. Mr Horace Northcote in *Phoebe Junior*. Firstly, however, a brief outline of the social and political conditions of mid-Victorian English Nonconformity will help to set the works of fiction historically, and attempt to explain Oliphant’s ambiguous stance towards Nonconformity in general.

The publication of *Salem Chapel* in 1863 coincided almost to the year with the bicentenary of the ejection of Nonconformist ministers from the Church of England in 1662, a fact that would not have been lost on Oliphant’s readers. English Nonconformity was about to embark on what D. M. Thompson has termed its ‘golden age’, from 1863 to 1886, covering the bicentenary to the Home Rule split which divided the formerly united political front of Nonconformity (1972, p. 177-179). By the 1880s, most of the legislative impediments preventing Nonconformist participation in national life had been removed, putting them, politically at least, on an equal footing with followers of the Established Church. A. D. Gilbert mentions the second quarter of the nineteenth century as a period during which significant legislative progress was made for religious equality, citing sixteen of the most important Acts of parliament passed
during the period 1836 to 1898 as evidence (1976, p. 162-3). It is important to note that both Salem Chapel and Phoebe Junior were written in 1863 and 1876 respectively, during the period of Nonconformist political and social change outlined by Gilbert. For example, a contemporary review of Phoebe Junior that appeared in The Academy praised Oliphant’s representation of ‘a more modern phase of Nonconformity, that which is due to the case and culture which the development of commercial wealth in our day has made possible to a class which was formerly excluded from such advantages’ (Littledale, 1876). The modern writer, Helmstadter, too, identifies the 1850s, to the 1880s, as the period when Nonconformity made most of its important political gains. Helmstadter notes that Nonconformists fought for the removal of discrimination in the areas of church rates, marriages, civil registration of births and deaths, access to Oxford and Cambridge universities, and burial by their own ministers in their own grounds (1979, p. 145-6). To help it achieve its goals, Nonconformity required leaders and agitators of sufficient skill to shape public opinion. The most well known agitators for the Nonconformist cause were the Congregationalist ministers, Edward Baines (1800-1890) and Edward Miall (1809-1881).

The activities and writings of Baines and Miall were well documented during the 1840s to the 1870s, and it is possible that Oliphant had these men, especially Miall, in mind to serve as models for the careers of her Dissenting ministers. As stated in Chapter One, V. & R. A. Colby (1966) and V. Cunningham (1975) have nominated the career of the charismatic Edward Irving (1792-1834) as the real-life model for the fictional Arthur Vincent, whilst Penelope Fitzgerald (1986, vii) included George Macdonald in addition
to Irving. Oliphant was intimately familiar with the details of Irving’s life, having written his biography in 1862 and, whilst there are parallels between the careers of Irving and the character Vincent, it is likely that Oliphant adapted certain aspects of the careers of both Baines and Miall in her portrayal of Vincent and Northcote. Oliphant identified her fictional ministers with some of the well-known political aspirations of the Dissenting cause, such as the Liberation Society and Voluntaryism, which would be familiar material to many of her contemporary readers. As Oliphant is more interested in the progress of the individual than in society in these novels, her treatment of the political positions of Nonconformity lacks specificity and is often couched in the popular polemical rhetoric of the day. The political, social and spiritual concerns of Nonconformity are conflated, for example, in this rather glib summation of Arthur Vincent and Nonconformity in general:

[Vincent] was almost as particular as the Rev. Mr Wentworth of St Roque’s about the cut of his coat and the precision of his costume, and decidedly preferred the word clergyman to the word minister, which latter was universally used by his flock; but notwithstanding these trifling predilections, Mr Vincent, who had been brought up upon the ‘Nonconformist’ and the ‘Eclectic Review’, was strongly impressed with the idea that the Church Establishment, though outwardly prosperous, was in reality a profoundly rotten institution; that the Nonconforming portion of the English public was the party of progress; that the eyes of the world were turned upon the Dissenting interest; and that his own youthful eloquence and the Voluntary principle were
quite enough to counterbalance all the ecclesiastical advantages on the other side, and make for himself a position of the highest influence in his new sphere (Salem Chapel, p. 4-5).

Passages such as this invited criticism from some contemporaries. A review of Salem Chapel that appeared in the Nonconformist complained that, whilst Oliphant’s depiction of Dissent in Salem Chapel was ‘unfair . . . and one-sided’, and displayed ‘an ignorance on little points’, it may be ‘studied to great advantage’ (‘Salem Chapel’, 1863). The conflation of the political and the religious in this passage highlights the extent to which religious Nonconformity and political Nonconformity were popularly recognized to be the same thing. This is the reviewer’s main objection to Oliphant’s novel as he, possibly Miall himself, notes

the best class of our young men are deterred from devoting themselves to the ministry of the Gospel; and needless prejudices are excited not only against Dissent but even against Christianity itself. In saying so much for this book we must not omit to mark its fundamental defect in failing to take account of the religious element altogether (‘Salem Chapel’, 1863).

The missing ‘religious element’, identified by Miall, addresses a contentious point in contemporary Nonconformist circles that the theological underpinning of Nonconformist political thought received scant attention from Nonconformity’s detractors. Seeking to demonstrate that theological ideas were more influential in the Nonconformist political worldview than has hitherto been admitted, the modern historian Larsen notes that many
historians have instead relied on unhelpful ‘dualistic models in order to explain the relationship between Dissent and politics’ (1999, p. 8). It is misleading, contends Larsen, to divide religious and political Dissenters; “‘[p]olitical’ Dissenters were typically deeply religious ones acting politically’ (1999, p. 257). Clearly, Oliphant is no exception to Larsen’s rule, believing, like most of her contemporaries that one should not serve two masters. Frank Turner, on the other hand, points out that, since Nonconformists decided to use political means to gain religious ends, many Anglicans tended to divide Nonconformists into two opposing camps. There were political Nonconformists and Nonconformists whose dedication to religion outweighed questions of politics. The former, suggests Turner, were dismissed as agitators, suspected of harbouring insincere attitudes to religion, whereas the latter quietly accepted their second-class positions in society and remained religiously sincere (1993, p. 30-1). Ordained ministers, notes Larsen, were well placed in terms of ‘respectability, learning, talents, communication skills and social experience to represent Dissenting concerns’ (1999, p. 28). The combination of the religious and the political extended to Nonconformist ministers who, according to James Munson, had two identities. They were identified first by their denomination, which defined their doctrinal position, and as Nonconformists, which in itself implied a certain political stance (1991, p. 119). According to Briggs and Sellers, Edward Baines, Congregationalist minister, was a politician, the occasional controller of the Leeds Mercury, and champion of the voluntary principle (1973, p. 132). Edward Miall was a Congregationalist minister who resigned his post to become, in 1841, the editor of the Nonconformist (Thompson, 1972, p. 106). Miall was the leader of the campaign for disestablishment that became known
in 1854 as the Liberation Society (Thompson, 1972, p. 119), which Oliphant calls the Disestablishment Society in the novels. Interestingly, Oliphant has the unsuccessful Vincent, who has failed as a minister, resign his office to launch a periodical called the ‘Philosophical Review’ just as Miall produced the Nonconformist, following his resignation from his pastorate in 1840. Vincent is unable to make a complete break from the ministry; ‘[h]e still wore his clerical coat, and called himself “clergyman” in the Blue Book – and he was doing well, though he was not preaching’ (Salem Chapel, p. 461). Miall’s preaching continued within a secular context, allowing him to champion reform, in the words of Larsen, in the ‘arenas’ of ‘pulpit, press, platform and Parliament’ (1999, p. 31). The idea that Dissenting ministers relieved of their ministerial posts should involve themselves in literary concerns was a popular one for Oliphant. The novel, At His Gates, focuses briefly on the career of Stephen Haldane who, unable to continue his ministry because of sickness, becomes the editor of a magazine devoted to ‘reviews’, ‘essays’, and ‘discussion of the questions of the day’ (1872, p. 60). This is a departure from the magazine’s previous focus, which was ‘a record of what the “denomination” was doing: the new chapels it was building; the prayer-meetings gathered here and there, which might grow into congregations; and the tea-parties, which furnished at once intellectual and social enjoyment for the people’ (1872, p. 60). Consciously or not, Oliphant recognises the contribution made by Nonconformists in shaping the social, cultural and political questions of the day. Oliphant tells us that Haldane’s success in this new position does not continue unimpeded because, not only has Haldane used the magazine to voice a private matter, but there is also concern that
secular pursuits outweigh the spiritual (1872, p. 149). It is almost impossible, hints Oliphant, for a Nonconformist to escape the trammels of the popular stereotype.

Perhaps Oliphant had Miall’s career in mind when describing the career of Horace Northcote, who is strongly identified with the political side of Nonconformity in Phoebe Junior. Horace Northcote resembles Miall in his excoriations against the Established Church; Northcote is, like Miall, ‘a political Nonconformist, a vigorous champion of the Dis-establishment Society’, and ‘more successful on the platform than on the pulpit’ (Phoebe Junior, 1876/1989, p. 113). Northcote gains notoriety after his public meeting in Carlingford, where he criticises the sinecure held by the Anglican clergyman, Reginald May (Phoebe Junior, p. 125-6). Miall, too, believed that Nonconformity’s ‘strength lies in aggression rather than in defence’, and he equated support of the Established Church with ‘the recognition of falsehood and the worship of a lie’ (Briggs & Sellers, 1973, p. 127). According to his contemporary, J. Guinness Rogers, Miall’s campaigning for political reform on behalf of Dissenters earned him an unfair reputation for ‘bitterness of spirit’. This was entirely unfounded, continues Guinness Rogers, who claimed that Miall’s motives were always ‘absolutely dominated by conscience’ (1903, p. 93). Northcote is a minister, and appears in Carlingford as a freelancing anti-State Church lecturer and advocate for the Liberation society. Oliphant’s description of Northcote as a ‘political Nonconformist’ would have immediately alerted her contemporary readers to approach this character in a certain way. Both Miall and Baines became politically active after resigning their ministries. Significantly, Oliphant links Northcote’s professional decline directly to his support of
the political side of Nonconformity and his refusal to divide the secular from the sacred. When the real-life, politically active Congregational minister John Burnett died in 1862, the Guardian newspaper issued a stinging attack on the deceased man, outraged that

Mr Burnett does not appear to have considered that the salvation of souls was his proper and peculiar calling, but to have been from an early date absorbed in a great outward political object – viz., the destruction of the Established Church as an Establishment (in Larsen, 1999, p. 29).

By the end of the novel, Oliphant's once passionate advocate for political Nonconformity adopts a resigned obeisance to the May family, in particular his brother-in-law Reginald, 'but this did not make him a Churchman; for naturally he could not say the same of other members of the same class and family' (Phoebe Junior, p. 340). He has retired from the office of pastor and has come to see 'that Disestablishment was not a panacea for national evils any more than other things' (Phoebe Junior, p. 340). The underlying theme is that worldly success and social acceptance for Nonconformists may be realised only when it is prepared to alter its radical stance and move closer towards accepting the Established Church as the true arbiter of theology and doctrine. The price that Northcote pays for his radical stance is loss of power, position and influence. His reversal in fortune is paralleled by a gendered reversal of the traditional romance plot as Northcote's marriage to Ursula May, daughter of the Rector of St Roque's, is a step in the direction of social acceptance. Oliphant grants Northcote the traditional route of
marriage, whilst offering a cautionary and equivocal coda to this union, and Northcote's future, declaring that, although

[h]e was shaken out of his strong opinions . . . it was doubtful how far this was good for him, for he was a man of warlike disposition, and not to have something which he could go to the stake for . . . was a drawback to him, and cramped his mental development; but he was happy in his home with his pretty Ursula, which is probably all the reader will care to know (Phoebe Junior, p. 340).

Oliphant's equivocal attitude to her character is probably rooted in this Anglican polemic, referred to by Turner, which is, in turn, reflected in her own attitude to Dissent. In a letter to John Blackwood, written in 1856, she declared

I don't like English dissent though I am a Free Church woman and a more prejudiced and partial lover of presbytery and of all the forms and mode of my own church. I like the English Establishment a great deal better that the English sectarians with whom perhaps I might differ less in doctrine- but (I suppose I ought to be ashamed to say) I have fully more sympathy for the fervid poor preacher though he be ungrammatical, than for the chilly intellectualist (in Jay, 1995, p. 147).

Northcote's position within Carlingford suffers on several levels, and he is never able to sustain the popularity attained following his well-attended anti-state Church lecture. Nonconformity's association with 'trade' causes Northcote, and especially Phoebe
Tozer, much consternation. Northcote's embarrassed meeting with Phoebe Tozer in *Phoebe Junior* highlights this point, as the young minister, who can boast of 'two to three generations of wealth' (*Phoebe Junior*, p. 116) within his family, is anxious to distance himself from the society of trade represented by the Tozers. Yet activists such as Edward Miall regarded trade as a source of strength for Christianity; indeed, as the veritable 'handmaid of Christianity' (Miall, 1849, p. 297). For Miall, trade provided one with the opportunity for 'pushing the spirit of the gospel into notice' (1849, p. 296). When trade is placed 'subordinate to a dominant spiritual purpose', writes Miall, it may give 'scope for the exercise of ingenuity, contrivance, forethought and calculation'. In short, it provides 'an excellent stage for the observation of human character' (1849, p. 298). Nevertheless, there remained for some Nonconformists uneasiness between worldly success and spiritual integrity; the two were not always viewed as compatible. R. W. Dale, for example, tried to impress upon his congregations that Christianity should pervade every part of their lives, insisting that stress on the future life should not be at the expense of the present world:

"Thy will be done" - not in the church merely - but
"Thy will be done on earth" - in the family, in the farm, in the counting-house, in the court of kings, in the painting-room, in the cottage, in the school -
"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (in Kenyon, 1978, p. 196).

Jay notes that the metaphors of trade and poetry, the former applied to Nonconformity and the latter to Tractarianism, are useful ways to explore the differences between these modes of life (1983, p. 88). Miall, for example, applied a positive trade metaphor to
Nonconformity, while critics of Nonconformity, such as Matthew Arnold, used the negative aspect of this metaphor in his attacks. On the other hand, Tractarianism used the metaphor of poetry with its 'indirection and reserve' to instruct (Jay, 1983, p. 88). Applying these metaphors to the novels helps the modern reader to understand and appreciate the implicit differences between these religious and social ways of life. Jay's schema may be observed in Oliphant's shrewdly polemical chapter, entitled 'A Pair of Natural Enemies', that brings together the young Dissenting minister Northcote and the Anglican May to examine the differences between Church and Chapel and the ways in which both traditions are perceived in the contemporary public mind. Matthew Arnold criticised, amongst other things, what he perceived as Nonconformity's lack of a classical tradition upheld by Cambridge and Oxford universities. Bebbington explains that this aspect of Arnold's attack was unfair, given that Nonconformists in 1869, the year of publication of Culture and Anarchy, were unable to take degrees at these institutions (1999, p. 51). In another sense, continues Bebbington, Arnold's remarks were pertinent, because Nonconformist chapel culture did not nurture classical ideals; it represented a culture that was hostile to the élite who emerged from the ancient universities (1999, p. 51-2). This Arnoldian dichotomy emerges in Oliphant's chapter as she employs metaphors of tradition, a strong aesthetic sensibility and a conservative social outlook when speaking of the Church, whereas Dissent is captured in metaphors of 'new' money, social innovation, and an unapologetic stance towards investment in the spiritual needs of the middle classes. Nevertheless, Arnold did not receive unequivocal support from Oliphant, who was critical of his stratagems for self-promotion, finding
them 'distressingly prominent'; she likened his penchant for mockery as 'a highly-refined small voice, which never reaches beyond the orchestra-stalls' (1871b).

The chapter begins with an invitation extended to Northcote by May to accompany him on a tour of the fifteenth-century chapel of which May is now chaplain. May describes the old chapel as the 'anchor' and 'foundation' of the Church, and he, himself, its 'heir' whereas Northcote, who remains outside its 'vaulted roof', 'did not feel himself the heir of those centuries' although '[h]e tried to feel that he was the heir of something better and more spiritual' (Phoebe Junior, p. 195). Their discussion soon turns to the subject of the poor. Once again, May attempts to assure his interlocutor that the Church will safeguard the poor and elderly: 'The Dissenter declared his entire delight in being taken to see the place, and with secret satisfaction, not easily put into words, the Churchman led the way... "The charity of our ancestors might have been worse employed," said Reginald. "A home for the old and poor is surely as fine a kind of benevolence as one could think of – if benevolence is to be tolerated at all"' (Phoebe Junior, p. 193). According to Helmstadter, Nonconformists believed that poverty was the result of two different causes. One was aristocratic oppression through such means as taxation and paternalistic intervention, and the other was the result of the moral weakness of the poor person (1979, p. 155). The belief that poverty was the result of personal indifference and laziness was not surprising, given Nonconformity's stress upon the individual's conscience in determining his spiritual path. In this context, and taken to extremes, poverty could be seen almost as a matter of personal choice. If one could be saved by turning to Christ and renouncing sin, then surely one could, with
diligent application of one's will and hard work, remove the stain of poverty. It was, however, one thing to recognize that poverty existed but another to suggest workable solutions for its eradication. Edward Miall acknowledged that there existed within society a group so destitute that it was 'morally impossible for the light of Christianity to penetrate and purify' (1983, p. 100). Apart from recommending the work of 'ragged schools and ragged kirk', Miall could suggest no solutions to the problem of poverty.

Miall was not alone in his failure to address adequately the problems of poverty. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 effectively removed the 'safety net' provided by the parish, which distributed assistance in the form of charitable endowments and poor relief. There was the view amongst the clergy, according to Chadwick, that the old system encouraged indolence and slavish reliance upon the parish (1966, p. 96). It is the question of whether charity produces an unhealthy dependence on its recipients that forms the basis of the exchange between Reginald May and Horace Northcote in Phoebe Junior. May is the holder of a sinecure, which provides shelter for six old men and his acceptance of the chaplaincy has been denounced publicly by Northcote as an example of State Church simony (Phoebe Junior, p. 125). Oliphant presents May as a vigorous champion of parish assistance to the poor, and as a character keen to defend his current position. Northcote, on the other hand, follows the 'modern doctrine', believing that the abolition of sinecures and the sale of buildings and land occupied by a few old men would do much to appease the sufferings of the poor (Phoebe Junior, p. 193-4). In

1 This planting device appears to be a copy of Trollope's Hiram's Hospital, where the elderly Septimus Harding holds a sinecure in The Warden. In Oliphant's novel, the recipient of the sinecure is twenty-three-year-old Reginald May who has just returned from Oxford. The amount of the sinecure is £250.
Carlingford, the welfare of the poor is the concern of the Established Church, and Northcote is forced to admit to 'the absence of this element [the poor] in Salem Chapel' (Phoebe Junior, p. 194).

Watts argues that many Nonconformists, particularly the wealthy industrialists, eagerly embraced the notion of *laissez-faire* and sought to apply its principles to social issues such as poor relief and factory reform. Radical Dissent, according to Watts, did little to distance itself from such policies, and spokesmen such as Miali, published in 1842 in the *Nonconformist* a letter by Herbert Spencer, which stated that 'it was not the function of government... to administer charity' (in Watts, 1995, p. 487). Watts notes that the failure of many leading Dissenters to support the working classes on issues such as the reform of the poor law 'constitutes the most glaring failure of compassion in the whole history of Dissent' (1995, p. 487). Oliphant's clearly stated assertion, noted earlier, that a Nonconformist minister was unlikely to be burdened with poor people in his congregation, provides a clue to the absence of the poor in the Nonconformist congregation of Salem Chapel and Oliphant's ambivalent stance towards Dissenters. Moreover, Oliphant would have been aware that the poor, if they considered religion at all, were more likely to look to the Established Church to provide the necessary rites of passage.

These metaphors also represent the careers of the two young men. The career of May is flourishing, as it is built, like the college, upon centuries of tradition, while Northcote's career flounders on the well-meaning, but ill-conceived political platform,
of Dissent. Northcote’s encounter with May leads him to rethink his own strong feelings against the Church. He is now willing to admit, albeit a little insincerely, that ‘the old faith was more lovely than all the new agitations’ and ‘he felt a little ashamed of the Liberation Society, so long as he stood under that groined and glorious roof’ (*Phoebe Junior*, p. 196).

Oliphant adopts a similar metaphorical representation of Dissent at the beginning of *Phoebe Junior*, where the progress of the former minister of Salem Chapel, Mr Beecham, is shown in terms of conspicuous consumption. Algernon Wells, secretary of the Congregational Union, noted in 1848 that ‘our churches – everything about them – preaching, buildings, ministers, manners, notions, and practices – all have on them the air and impress of English middle-class life. . . . They are at this time more exclusively of that class than was the case a century ago’ (in Helmstadter, 1979, p. 152-3). Whilst most clergymen of the Established Church could lay claim to the title of gentlemen, ministers of Nonconformist congregations usually emerge from the same social backgrounds as their congregations. Oliphant’s Nonconformist ministers struggle to overcome social disadvantages by elevating themselves within their circle suggesting, notes Joseph O’Mealy, that Oliphant was prepared to acknowledge the existence of professional ambition amongst the ranks of Dissenting as well as Anglican clergymen (1991). Oliphant shows that a Dissenting minister’s social status has a bearing, in the minds of some characters, on his ability to counsel his parishioners. For example, Stephen Haldane, in *At His Gates*, is judged narrowly by Helen Drummond as an unworthy companion of her husband, because he is a Dissenting minister: ‘Yet it was
this man whom Robert had gone to consult at the greatest crisis in his life" (1872, p. 31). Helen chooses to ignore 'the fact that Stephen Haldane was a gentleman as much as good manners, and good looks, and a tolerable education could make him' (1872, p. 29).

Arthur Vincent, on the other hand, is himself the son of a minister and a mother who 'had done much to give him that taste for good society' (Salem Chapel, p. 15) and therefore judges himself worthy, in education and presentation, to bear the title of gentleman. Oliphant shows that Vincent's yearning for good society is wasted upon the few dubious characters who pass as gentlemen and gentlewomen in Carlingford.

Oliphant was aware that Nonconformists, lacking the social status of their adversaries in the Established Church, must instead encourage strongly united family bonds to form a bulwark against Anglican incursions. Oliphant shows that Beecham's rise from humble beginnings in the provinces to his later successes in London is due, in no small measure, to the solidarity of his family circle. The family and the larger chapel community, providing respectability and communal loyalty, have aided his upward social mobility. Adherence to the central tenets and values of Evangelicalism, together with the unqualified support of family, has helped to define and fashion a robust sense of personal identity. Beecham can claim membership by marriage to an extensive Nonconformist dynasty that began with Tozer and his family and reaches the height of gentility and respectability with the eponymous Phoebe's marriage to Clarence Copperhead. There is every reason to believe, suggests Oliphant, that this powerful Nonconformist network will continue to flourish with the capable Phoebe guiding and controlling her husband. Significantly, both Vincent and Northcote fail in their
professional endeavours in Carlingford because, in an alien environment, they lack strong family support. Northcote, 'finding no house to which he could betake himself among those whom Phoebe called 'our own people', found a refuge, which gradually became dearer and dearer to him, at the Parsonage, and in his profound sense of the generosity of the people who had thus received him, felt his own partisanship wax feebler and feebler every day' (Phoebe Junior, p. 218). Vincent's fractured family circumstances lead to frequent absences from his chapel community, which does little to secure his reputation as a stable, reliable minister. In Salem Chapel, the hapless Vincent embarks on frantic train journeys in pursuit of his sister's abductor, while his worried mother laments 'that all the 'Chapel folks' would be aware that their pastor was rushing wildly along distant railways on the day of rest' (1863/1986, p. 236).

Beecham, however, is representative of the type of Nonconformist that was anathema to Miall. As mentioned earlier, Miall was critical of Christians, especially those belonging to 'evangelical bodies', who rely heavily on 'the aristocratic sentiment' of giving precedence to class and deference to rank and wealth, to raise the respectability of these groups (1983, p. 89-90). The Athenaeum detected this stance in its review of Phoebe Junior by noting that 'the philosophy of hereditary dissent, as opposed to the mental attitude of the original separatist, is amusingly analysed by Mrs Oliphant' ('Novels of the Week', 1876). Oliphant aims to draw distinctions, whilst giving cautious support, between those Nonconformists, such as Beecham who, while pleading the cause of an alternative Christian stance, mimic in appearance, attitude, and association, the Established Church:
The dislike of the little for the great, the instinctive opposition of a lower class towards the higher, intensified that natural essence of separatism, that determination to be wiser than one's neighbour, which in the common mind lies at the bottom of all dissent. In saying this we do no more accuse Dissenters in religion than Dissenters in politics, or in art, or in criticism. The first dissenter in most cases is an original thinker, to whom his enforced departure from the ways of his fathers is misery and pain. . . . He is the real Nonconformist — half martyr, half victim, of his convictions. But that Nonconformity which has come to be the faith in which a large number of people are trained is a totally different business, and affects a very different kind of sentiments. Personal and independent conviction has no more to do with it than it has to do with the ardour of a Breton peasant trained in deepest zeal of Romanism, or the unbounded certainty of any other traditionary believer (Phoebe Junior, p. 6).

Beecham courts the friendship of members of the Anglican clergy, calling them 'our brethren in the Established Church', whereas for Northcote, Anglicans are his 'avowed enemies' (Phoebe Junior, p. 113-4). The Beechams' Nonconformity has undergone a change from 'the warmest feeling of opposition to the Church and everything Churchy', to a point where, as minister to the comfortable middle-class 'Crescent Chapel' in London, Beecham willingly 'appear[s] on platforms, to promote various public
movements, along with clergymen of the Church' (Phoebe Junior, p. 6-7). This stance effectively removes all vestiges of their former associations with trade, and creates, in the new generation represented by Phoebe Beecham, a sense of shame when she is confronted with her past.

Both Helmstadter (1979, p. 153) and Davidoff and Hall (1987, p. 76) agree that class and religion are inextricably linked. According to Davidoff and Hall, religion provided a secure niche for the individual as well as offering men and women a sense of identity and community (1987, p. 76). This was especially important for Nonconformists, whose claims for religious freedom were often countered by a hostile Establishment. Community support based on commonly held Christian values, coupled with a positive attitude towards trade as articulated by Miall, provided many Nonconformists with a secure base in which to practise their religion. It also provided a secure foundation upon which to launch attacks upon the privileges enjoyed by the Established Church. Helmstadter notes that Nonconformist attacks on 'privilege, patronage, and dependency' were 'encouraged by the individualism of their evangelical theology, by their traditional concern for liberty, and by their powerful commitment to an independent ecclesiology' (1979, p. 153). The independent nature of Nonconformist congregations actively supported and promoted self-government. They provided an outlet, perhaps the only outlet for many, for the development of self-expression and qualities of leadership. In 1856 a select committee of the House of Lords was told that pew renting was more popular amongst Nonconformist Chapels than Anglican Churches because
they have more offices in the Dissenting Chapels. They have deaconships and visitors, and tract distributors; and in these ways the Dissenting chapels manage to employ their people very much better than the Church in general does. This is an attraction to small shopkeepers and mechanics, who find they are looked upon as somebody in their congregation, and they are not an unheard-of unit as they are in the Church congregations (in Watts, 1995, p. 164).

Thus Oliphant is able to write with verisimilitude of the Tozers, Browns and Pigeons who, as deacons, are the enthusiastic guardians of chapel affairs and provide many of the comic scenes in Salem Chapel. The Tozers operate a cheese and bacon shop, the Browns a dairy, and the Pigeons, not surprisingly, are poulterers. Their occupations and their entertainments are interwoven into the framework of their religion. We are told that the chapel organises a ‘singing-class . . . ‘charitable societies and missionary auxiliaries’ (Salem Chapel, p. 2). Watts notes ‘Nonconformity often flourished in a situation in which work as well as leisure was centred on the hearth’ (1995, p. 165). This is certainly the case with the fictional Carlingford congregation, as the tea-meetings, arranged with great pride by Mrs Tozer, are conducted in her parlour, which ‘was not without a reminiscence of the near vicinity of all those hams and cheeses’, so that the visitor is constantly reminded of the inhabitant’s occupation (Salem Chapel, p. 36).
Oliphant believed that Nonconformist congregations were, at best, fickle organisms; her brother Willie, for example, was dismissed by members of his presbytery for drunkenness. Willie is described by the chronicler of *The Priests of Etal* as a 'pathetic figure ... good-natured, affectionate, docile, incurably weak, [and] hopelessly foredoomed' (MacGuffie, 1904, p. 63-4). The same writer notes that, although Oliphant was once 'favourably disposed to dissent', her brother's ill-treatment by his Berwick presbytery 'aroused in her breast contempt for dissent in every form' (1904, p. 68). One of Oliphant's contemporaries and fellow Scot, William Robertson Nicoll, confirmed in his obituary to Oliphant, that she harboured a 'certain contempt for dissent in every form' (1897, p. 485). It seems that Oliphant's main argument with Dissent was its power to dismiss ministers – sometimes for the flimsiest of reasons. In *Salem Chapel*, Oliphant comments shrewdly on the power of congregations to hire and fire ministers by informing the reader that Mrs Pigeon, who is dissatisfied with the conduct of the present incumbent Arthur Vincent, is willing to entertain the thought of Mr Beecher as a possible replacement:

Mrs Pigeon, who was the leader of the opposition, and whose daughter Mr Vincent had not distinguished, whose house he had not specially frequented, and whom, most of all, he had passed in the street without recognition, made a note of this man from 'Omerton. If the painful necessity of dismissing the present pastor should occur – as such things did occur, deplorable

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2 According to Munson, Nicoll was the 'son of a Scottish Free Kirk minister and followed his father into the ministry. In 1884 he resigned his position, migrated to England and begun publishing the *British Weekly* in 1886, a publication specifically aimed at Nonconformists' (1991, p. 74).
though they were - it might be worth while sending for Mr Beecher (Salem Chapel, p. 238).

The cohesive strength of the Salem Chapel community is the source of a bitter personal struggle for its minister, Arthur Vincent. From his early days in Carlingford, Vincent recognizes himself and the chapel community as two separate parties who are unlikely to form any close bonds. Apart from an early burst of enthusiasm, most of his time at Carlingford is spent largely in a state of inanition. Furthermore, he is reluctant to succumb to the charms of Phoebe Tozer, who pursues him as a potential husband. Oliphant tells us that he reneges on promised visits to members of his congregation, undertakes travel on the Sabbath, avoids tea-meetings, unwisely falls in love with Lady Western who is the society beauty and a Church-goer, and unwittingly becomes involved with the intrigue and scandal associated with Lady Western, which involves his mother and sister in disastrous consequences. Perhaps even more galling for his congregation is that he perceives himself as an especially favoured being amongst his people: 'What had the high mission of an evangelist - the lofty ambition of a man trained to enlighten his country - the warm assurance of talent which he felt itself entitled to the highest sphere, - what had these great things to do in a Salem Chapel tea-meeting?' (Salem Chapel, p. 101). 'So', remarks Oliphant, 'the lofty spirit held apart, gazing down from a mental elevation much higher than the platform' (Salem Chapel, p. 101). Throughout Salem Chapel, Oliphant emphasises that Vincent's hopeless striving for intellectual equals and social companions of an order higher than the humble shopkeepers of Salem is evidence of his unfortunate tendency to conflate respectability and morality. Vincent is, in some aspects, an example of the 'vulgarity and meanness'
that Oliphant found so abhorrent. What appears to hold him apart from his congregation is his concern for a ‘moral order’, expressed unconsciously as conceit.

Davidoff and Hall define the concept of a ‘moral order’, a term which they apply to the early nineteenth-century middle-classes, as a ‘categorizing mentality’ (1987, p. 25-8). Supported predominately by an Evangelical religious framework, which offered the promise of salvation to all, was the drive to save souls. Compassion for others, however, was tempered by a desire to control and distance groups such as women, children, the poor and prisoners who were considered to be on the periphery of the social order (Davidoff and Hall, 1987, p. 25). Davidoff and Hall argue that this desire to control led the middle classes to apply a moral dictum to categories such as ‘purity and pollution’ and ‘the separating of the useful from waste’(1987, p. 27). They add that Evangelical religion was influenced to some extent by romantic individualism, which tended to increase the middle-class desire to distance itself ‘from local culture to prove gentility’ (1987, p. 27). In Phoebe Junior, Oliphant shows that the congregation of the Crescent Chapel in London ‘embraced none of the unwashed multitude’, and is far removed from the type of Nonconformity represented by ‘the little Salems and Bethesdas’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 4). Arthur Vincent associates gentility and an ordered life with a higher social order. The Tozers, Browns and Pigeons, with their spontaneous behaviour and provincial colloquialisms, represent disorder. Vincent distances himself from his congregation by the formality of his speech and his dress; he wore an ‘Anglican coat’, and desired to mix with people such as Lady Western (Salem Chapel, p. 18). Oliphant portrays Vincent as a sensitive, perhaps morbidly sensitive character, but the
reader is not expected to take his emotional outbursts too seriously, as they are often described in mock heroic language: ‘Perhaps he had been brought here [to Carlingford], in all the young flush of his hopes, only to have the life crushed out of him by those remorseless chapel-managers, and room was made over his tarnished fame and mortified expectations - over his body, as the young man said to himself in unconscious heroics - for young Tozer’s triumphant entrance’ (Salem Chapel, p. 47). Set against the good-natured vulgarities of the provincial Dissenters of Carlingford, Vincent’s hankering for genteel respectability is inappropriate, whereas his intellectual and social accomplishments would have been well-regarded by the sophisticated London congregation of the later novel, Phoebe Junior. Vincent, like his Anglican counterpart Wentworth, is another of Oliphant’s clergymen whose perceptive nature is inclined towards aesthetics in matters of religious expression, but Vincent lacks the sang-froid of Wentworth to pursue his grand visions for Salem Chapel. The above passage, with its characteristic irony, touches on the power wielded by deacons who could advance or halt a ministerial career. Perhaps recalling the fate of her own ‘poor Willie’, whose ministerial career with the English Presbyterian Church was cut short by his summary ejection from the ministry by members of his presbytery, Oliphant was well positioned to criticise these procedures (Oliphant, 1990, p. 31).

The conflicts that occur between Vincent and his congregation arise from his inability to reconcile his public and private duties. As a minister, he must perform certain religious and social duties, whilst checking the longings of the private self. This conflict leaves him frustrated professionally and unhappy personally, with his social
position marginalised and indeterminate in his own eyes, but quite determined and fixed in the eyes of his congregation. Reinforced by the 'teaching of Homerton' and the Dissenting organs', emboldened by Nonconformity's strong political stance 'that the Church Establishment ... was in reality a profoundly rotten institution', Vincent believes that there is a profound social gulf between himself and the people of Salem Chapel (Salem Chapel, p. 4-5). Oliphant's use of a contemporary Nonconformist educational institution in this novel and in Phoebe Junior alerts her contemporary reader to the advantages or disadvantages of his education. The writer of the history of Homerton College notes that, during the period 1801 to 1850, subjects such as 'physics and chemistry, geography and astronomy, logic and psychology and rhetoric' were available to students. As Homerton was a theological college, most of its programme was devoted to the study of 'theological courses, biblical criticism, which drew heavily on German scholarship, polemics, preaching and pastoral care' (Simms, 1979, p. 12). An education such as this offered Nonconformists the advantages of a university education and a theological seminary rolled into one, at a time when their access to Cambridge and Oxford was limited. Nonconformists' exclusion from Oxford and Cambridge universities did not necessarily place them at a disadvantage to Anglican clergymen. Brown notes that, during the period 1800 to 1860, most Congregationalist clergymen, 'with their higher social pretensions and more generally opulent

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1 Homerton College, established in 1695, was the result of an amalgamation of several Congregational Academies. In 1768 it located to Homerton in East London and was henceforward known as Homerton College. In 1850 Homerton College merged with Highbury College to become New College (Sims, 1979, p. 6-28). Brown states that Homerton was opened 'in order to safeguard the traditions of Evangelical dissent against the trend towards Unitarianism which set in during the eighteenth century' (1988, p. 64).
backgrounds' (1988, p. 63), were educated 'at an academy, a college, or even a university' (1988, p. 58).

Stephen Haldane, son of a poor Dissenting family, attains his education for the ministry and his first post through the interests of a wealthy patron. Oliphant tells us that Haldane 'took to writing... and worked his way into the newspapers... Then he became a lecturer, getting engagements from mechanics' institutes and literary societies, chiefly in the country' (1872, p. 30). Thereafter, he is chosen by Baldwin, 'a kind of lay bishop in a great Dissenting community', who pays for his studies and then places him in 'the pulpit of the flourishing and wealthy congregation of which that potentate was the head' (1872, p. 30). Thus Oliphant illustrates the different educational and career paths available to Nonconformist ministers. According to Dowland, Dissenting interest in the development of 'pastoral and other sacerdotal skills' amongst its ministers spurred a similar response within the Church of England to undertake parochial reorganisation (1997, p. 6-7). For Oliphant, even the broad scope of Vincent's education at Homerton College cannot compensate for his want of 'graciousness' and 'dignity', available only, she suggests, to a 'Christchurch man' or a 'Fellow of Trinity' (Salem Chapel, p. 17). '[T]he sting of it all was', continues Oliphant, that he [Vincent] had 'no special right to his own pretensions... and ought to have found the Tozers and the Pigeons sufficiently congenial company' (Salem Chapel, p. 17-18). For Oliphant, the social prestige associated with an Oxford or Cambridge education is not easily dismissed, and demonstrates the educational gap that Nonconformist ministers had to breach to achieve educational and social parity with Anglicans.
Issues of inferior education and social position apart, there is something of a spiritual void in the character of Arthur Vincent. Nonconformity’s emphasis on simplicity in matters of doctrine and theology and suspicion towards intellectual speculation in matters of faith, do not seem to satisfy Vincent’s deeper spiritual concerns, which are inextricably linked with a preference for the social status of Anglicanism. He is unable to overlook and accept the simple home-spun platitudes of his congregation, and looks, instead, with a ‘wistful’ (Salem Chapel, p. 18) longing towards the Anglican clergyman, Wentworth. Whilst Miall could discern no theological purpose to Salem Chapel (1863, p. 158), the National Review, on the other hand, baulked at Vincent’s decision to resign his pastorate for the reason that ‘no cure of souls can be delegated to a preacher by the souls themselves who are to be his care’ (Salem Chapel, p. 453). Although ‘the moral is not offensively obtruded’, suggests the reviewer, ‘it reads suspiciously, at least, like a special pleading for an established church’ (1863, p. 351). There is, perhaps, more than a grain of truth in this statement as Oliphant, whose intellectual explorations into the varieties of Christian faith was inclined towards the broad base of Anglicanism, rather than the more narrow Evangelical road offered by Nonconformity.

Oliphant equated Nonconformity and Evangelicalism with a certain kind of spiritual aridity. The Evangelical Meredith in A Son of the Soil is a bleak exemplar, morbidly concerned with death and salvation. Stricken with a fatal illness, Meredith is engaged with writing his ‘legacy to the world’, to be called ‘A Voice from the Grave.’
A strange voice it was—saying little that was consolatory; yet, in its way, true, as everything is true in a certain limited sense which comes from the heart. The name of the Redeemer was named a great many times therein, but the spirit of it was as if no Redeemer had ever come. A world, dark, confused, and full of judgements and punishments—a world in which men would not believe though one rose from the grave—was the world into which he looked, and for which he was working (A Son of the Soil, 1865/1883, p. 213).

It is Meredith’s entrenched theological position that admits no other opinions, rather than his Evangelicalism itself, that Oliphant criticises in this passage. The character Meredith is encountered by the young Colin Campbell, the son of the soil of the title who, rather like his creator, embarks on a spiritual journey that takes him from Scottish Presbyterianism, to a brush with Roman Catholicism, and the Tractarian and Evangelical forms of Anglicanism.

Evangelicalism is, above all, a religion that evokes strong emotion. ‘If the delights of heaven were described’, stresses Bebbington, ‘so were the terrors of hell’ (1989, p. 5). In Salem Chapel, Oliphant gently ridicules the emotional force of Evangelicalism, especially when emotion is allowed to predominate over a muddled reasoning. For example, during one of Vincent’s sermons, ‘[s]ome of the weaker or more candid minds among the audience were upset by the young minister’s arguments.'
Two or three young people of both sexes declared themselves converted, and were persecuted to their heart's desire when they intimated their intention of henceforward joining the congregation of Salem' (Salem Chapel, p. 78-9). Oliphant's own nature welcomed privacy in religious practice. Jay notes that the 'voicing' of emotion was, for Oliphant, a difficult task, and '[i]n times of severe distress she would carry around her prayers, in written form, in her purse' (1995, p. 152).

As Oliphant shows in Phoebe Junior, the religious and social divide between Congregationalists and the Established Church was not as great as many people believed and became less noticeable towards the latter quarter of the century. This stance is most passionately displayed by Oliphant when the two young clergyman of opposing denominations meet to voice their views in a passage that pleads for greater understanding and tolerance:

They meant everything that was fine and great, these two young men, standing upon the threshold of their life, knowing little more that that they were fiercely opposed to each other, and meant to reform the world each in his own way; one by careful services and visitings of the poor, the other by the Liberation Society and overthrow of the State Church; both foolish, wrong and right, to the utmost bounds of human possibility. How different they felt themselves standing there, and yet how much at one they were without knowing it! (Phoebe Junior, p. 195).
There is evidence to suggest that the divide between Congregationalist Chapels and the 
Established Church was especially narrow and tended to favour social divisions more 
than theological ones. Indeed, some Congregational Chapels, such as the Union in 
Islington, began as a union between Episcopalians and Nonconformists which, as 
Harwood describes, became 'more and more exclusively Nonconformist' (1894, p. 18). 
Harwood notes that, under Henry Allen's pastorate, the Union Chapel discontinued the 
Liturgy, made adjustments to its celebration of the Lord's Supper, but preserved 
throughout its 'catholicity and its sympathy with all kinds of religious activity' (1894, p. 
26). Similarly, the Rev. John Coker Egerton was pleasantly surprised to learn how 
much his views agreed with those of a young Dissenting preacher who did occasional 
duty at the Independent Chapel: 'We talked amicably for some time on points such as 
Church Discipline & baptism . . . the shewed me the questions proffered [sic] to 
candidates for admission to Cheshunt Coll. & the 15 articles of their creed, many of 
which are taken from our 39 Articles' (Wells, 1992, p. 58).

It is also important to remember that Dissenters had a voice in the management 
of the parish church by their participation in vestry meetings. Their involvement in the 
Easter vestry, especially in the period before 1868 when payment of the church rate 
became voluntary, could easily thwart an Anglican incumbent's plans for church 
rebuilding. According to Knight, a contemporary clergyman, the Rev. Richard Davies, 
was forced to abandon plans for rebuilding when faced with a vestry dominated by 'a 
thorough Methodist - wily, smooth, plausible . . . a Roman Catholic of very great
influence, a churchwarden, a 'stern and bitter demagogue' married to a Catholic and the fifth, also a churchwarden, 'well meaning, but no match for his confreres' (1995, p. 67).

Anglican clergymen also extended sympathies towards Nonconformity. The Rev John Coker Egerton describes, with unabashed pride, his feelings when his presence was sought at an impromptu 'tea meeting' arranged by a group of Dissenters within his parish:

Passing by Thompson's ye blacksmith's found a tea meeting on behalf of a little preaching room at Witherendon Hill. They seized me & put me in the chair. Funny, ye Rector chairman of a Dissenting tea party, & yet I enjoyed it heartily. Ye good people have no enmity agst. ye ch: & are only doing their best in their way to do good. I said a few Words, wishing them well in their crusade agst. ignorance & sin. . . . Left ye good people with feelings of much sympathy (Wells, 1992, p. 101).

Perhaps it was because Burwash's Dissenters were not of the agitating kind that Egerton was moved to emotional largesse. Reflecting on the meeting, Egerton adds ruefully:

'Their head man, John Hall, a chicken fatter, says that he got his 'first impressions under me', but left because, I suppose, we did not keep them up; we are, I fear, somewhat unsympathetic with newly awakened souls' (Wells, 1992, p. 101).
Whilst Oliphant shows that Nonconformist ministers had to struggle with inferior social and political status and acquiesce to the demands of critical congregations and deacons, she was also aware of the problems peculiar to the clergy who inhabited the lowest rung of the ecclesiastical ladder in the Church of England – the curates, whom Knight dubs a 'clerical underclass' (1995, p. 116). Exploiting both pathos and wry humour, Sydney Smith describes the curate as a 'poor working man of God, a learned man in a hovel, with sermons and saucepans, lexicons and bacon, Hebrew books and ragged children, good and patient, ... yet showing that in the midst of worldly misery he has the heart of a gentleman, the spirit of a Christian, and the kindness of a pastor' (in Smith, 1868). Oliphant's curates endure professional and personal hardships similar to their Dissenting brothers, but Oliphant did not care to emphasise the similarities, concentrating instead on their differences. In Cousin Mary Oliphant, perhaps trading in commonly held perceptions, delivers a description of a poor and deserving curate that would be familiar fare to her readers:

A curate is a very useful member of the Church militant. He is the stuff out of which all its more dignified functionaries are made; and he does a great deal of the hard work, with a very limited proportion of the pay. But notwithstanding all this, he has a great deal to put up with in the way of snubs from his superiors, and indifference from the public, who accept his services often without prizing them very much. He has compensation in his youth, which
makes him acceptable to the younger and fairer portion of the flock, and in his hopes of better things, as well as, no doubt, to leave pleasantries apart, in the satisfaction of performing important duties, and doing the sacred work to which he has dedicated himself (1888, p. 19-20).

The contemporary writer J. J. Halcombe, himself a former curate, endorses Oliphant's portrait of the curate's plight and describes four areas of professional concern. These were: lack of professional status; insecurity of tenure; insufficient prospects of promotion, and the absence of a progressive increase of stipend (1874, p. 2). Halcombe acknowledged that it was 'easier to find fault with the present system than to propose one which would work better', particularly as the fact that incumbents pay curates out of their own pockets 'presents an insurmountable barrier to the legislation which ... is commonly urged' (1874, p. 18). With Halcombe's four areas in mind, this section will examine the place of the curate in some of Oliphant's fiction.

**Lack of professional status**

Throughout the nineteenth century the lay and clerical perceptions of the role and status of the curate were re-examined and re-formulated. From 1870 onwards, explains Knight, a curate was most often identified as a recently ordained clergyman who assisted and worked under the direction of a resident incumbent. Prior to this period, continues Knight, a curate was nearly always thought of as a clergyman who had sole charge of a parish in the absence of a non-resident incumbent (1995, p. 116). Knight argues that the Pluralities Acts of 1838 and 1850 significantly altered the
character of the parochial ministry; firstly, by limiting the numbers of plural livings which, in turn, reduced the numbers of non-resident incumbents (1995, p. 116). Secondly, Knight notes that, from 1820 onwards, there was a rapid rise in the numbers of men seeking ordination, with a corresponding drop in the number of available incumbencies (p. 116). Thirdly, explains Knight, the distribution of the population into the cities and large towns made it impossible for one man to work a parish unaided (p. 117). A combination of these factors resulted in what the contemporary Rev. John Blunt called 'the sudden and embarrassing increase' in the numbers of assistant curates (1865, p. 409) with which the Church of England had 'neither the legal nor the spiritual provisions' (1865, p. 412) to cope. Discussing the life and times of the Rev. Thomas Gurney (1763-1848), Edwin Jaggard notes that Gurney's attempts to obtain preferment were thwarted firstly by situation, as Gurney's entire life and career were spent in remote Cornwall, where 'most livings were filled by relatives and close acquaintances of the aristocracy and wealthy gentry', and secondly by Gurney's dogged determination as a political neophyte to plunge headlong into the 'often corrupt world of Cornwall electoral politics', in an effort to obtain his ecclesiastical goals. Gurney remained a poorly paid curate for thirty-eight years (1988, p. 17).

Oliphant, ever alert to changes in the contemporary clerical landscape, examines the curate's role and public perceptions of his role in her fiction. For example, in A...
Rose in June, the curate, Mr Nolan, is forced to admit that his relationship with the rector is always overshadowed by his sense of professional inferiority. The rector, explains Oliphant, 'was of his own kind, the ornamental and useless specimen, while he [the curate] was the worker whom nobody thought of' (1874, p. 27). Despite the heavy strictures on his time, the curate is willing to assist the rector's wife with her schoolroom duties even though his secondary status in the parish is beginning to gall and manifests in a state of dudgeon. Trollope, for example, was sensitively aware that the efforts of a man working unappreciated and unnoticed in the parish would eventually produce 'the heart-breaking disappointment of a soured and injured man' (1866, p. 102). Oliphant's curate must also suffer the prejudices associated with his place of birth. Oliphant pointedly refers to the 'mellow sound in his voice which was not brogue – or at least he thought it was not, and was ingenuously surprised when he was recognised as an Irishman' (1874, p. 22). On the other hand, the rector is 'the very picture and model of a gentleman' (p. 27), a claim that the curate cannot match. The contemporary Archdeacon George Wilkins scathingly attacked the large numbers of Evangelical curates who worked in the city of Nottingham, describing them as '[r]aw, fresh caught Irish curates imported by shoals from Liverpool' (in Knight, 1995, p. 125).

There was, too, a discernible and uncomfortable master/servant hierarchy that existed between some incumbents and their curates. As Knight observes, many incumbents were apt to forget that curates were servants of the Church and not the servants of the incumbents (1995, p. 125). Oliphant's novel, A Country Gentleman and His Family, includes a vignette of a curate who is the son of an earl and has taken the curacy at Pierrepoint until the 'very good family living' becomes available (1887, p. 215). This
prepossessing young man, 'who was very sound in his views; not extreme in anything; not an evangelical' or a 'Puseyist' (1887, p. 213), is far removed from the 'shabby old parson' or 'some poor gentleman who had been a failure in life', who will take duty at the church (1887, p. 212). Thus, Oliphant departs from her usual representation of a curate as a man 'rich in nothing but children' (1887, p. 212).

In *Cousin Mary*, the curate's inferior social status is uncovered by his rector, who discovers that he is a yeoman's son without 'private means' and 'expectations', even though he has 'had the education of a gentleman' (1888, p. 91-2). Even more troubling for Asquith is the fact that the rector should impugn his status as a gentleman, which is described in a mute aside: 'The curate winced a little at this, not liking the idea that he had not always been a gentleman, even though he had the moment before disowned any such pretensions' (1888, p. 92).

Oliphant shows that the curate's sense of professional and social inferiority is, in part, the result of the Church of England's recruitment of clergymen. For many clergymen, a curacy represented a transitional phase in their clerical careers, the period between ordination and acceptance of their first incumbency, which was expected to last no more than one year. The reality was altogether different, however, as the length of

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5 In 1863 the Rev. Benjamin Armstrong fretted over his new curate, Mr Bellingham Swan, who, he announced 'was literally the best I could get, the want of curates being grievously felt in all parts of the kingdom' (1963, p. 102). By 1868, however, with the appointment of a new curate, Mr Forbes Winslow, the son of the celebrated doctor of that name, Armstrong's tone was one of cosy familiarity and unabashed pride: 'I ought to be very thankful, in these days, to secure the services of one so well-connected, a thorough gentleman and so earnestly-minded' (1963, p. 118). Mr Winslow's impeccable social credentials, which so pleased Armstrong, are matched with concordant theological positions, for
some curacies stretched to fifteen years and beyond (Haig, 1984, p. 216). Dunhill notes that the Rev. George Bugg's inability to secure an influential patron hindered his advancement and meant that most of his professional life was spent as a curate. Furthermore, Bugg's acerbic temperament antagonised influential people, to the detriment of his career (1983, p. 41). Bugg did not attain preferment until 1849 when, 'at the age of 79; he was presented to the rectory of Wilsford, Lincolnshire by Mrs Janetta Brackenbury. Although he was told that he would be required to reside 'he appears not to have done so' (Dunhill, 1983/84, p. 50).

Oliphant also stresses that not all curates were ecclesiastical trailblazers, anxious to conquer each parish socially or otherwise. In Cousin Mary, for example, the curate, Mr Asquith, is singular in his pursuit of duty: 'He was not a young man on his promotion, waiting till the family living should be vacant, or till somebody should give him a benefice, but had thrown himself into his work as if he never meant to go away' (1888, p. 49). His Rector counters these rather extravagant claims for the curate's professional zeal, noting that Asquith lacks 'the prospects of the other young men', having 'few friends and nobody to push him' (1888, p. 51). His clerical future is pronounced bleak with the Rector's announcement that 'I should not wonder if he remained a curate all his life' (p. 51). Asquith's willingness to undertake hard and unrewarding parochial duties is unmatched with an eagerness to fulfil his social obligations; consequently, his presence in the parish occasions little or no comment.

Armstrong, who was "high", discovered that his curate was 'somewhat radical and very "high" church'
Reference to a curate’s assistant status receives further attention from Oliphant in *The Curate in Charge*, where St John’s personal and professional position is described by an influential parishioner, Mr Ascott, as almost indistinguishable from a ‘Dissenting preacher’. His lowly status, attributed to a lack of private ‘means’, is insufficient to make him ‘the centre of the parish, as the clergyman ought to be. Why, the poorest labourer in the parish looks down upon the curate. . . . The farmers look down upon him. They think nothing of a man that’s poor; and as for the gentry – ‘ (1876, p. 124). This speech receives important qualification from Mrs Ascott who, aware that clergymen provide the essential social cement that binds together the genteel elements of the parish, reflects that parochial sympathy for the lot of a poor clergyman and his family is of little consequence and ‘is a very different thing . . . from having a clergyman whom one can really look up to, and who will be a friend and neighbour as well as a clergyman’ (p. 125). Mrs Ascott’s condescending hospitality rests on the tenuous claim that, for one week of the year (race week), she is in demand as a hostess and lives ‘all the year through in a state of reflected glory from this brief but ever-recurring climax of existence’ (1876/1987, p. 121). Oliphant hints that the curate’s ‘assistant’ status is equated, in the public mind, with an inferior social position, giving the impression, notes Knight, that curates were ‘a clerical underclass, servants rather than independent gentlemen’ (1995, p. 125). In *The Perpetual Curate*, for example, Mrs Morgan, wife of the rector, takes exception to her husband’s curate, Mr Leeson, simply because he has the irritating habit of turning up unannounced at meal-times. Thereafter, he is an object of vilification for Mrs Morgan and ‘hung like a cloud over all the

advantages of Carlingford’, incurring her wrath for spreading rumour about her favourite clergyman, Mr Wentworth (1864/1975, Vol II, p. 156). Oliphant was aware that assistant curates, such as Leeson, occupied tenuous positions within the parish. Moreover, Leeson’s ability to irritate the wife of the incumbent clergyman, Morgan, hints Oliphant, might be sufficient grounds for his dismissal. According to Knight, curates ‘could be objected to, and sometimes dismissed, on relatively trivial grounds’ (1995, p. 123).

**Insecurity of tenure**

Until the effects of the Pluralities Acts became apparent in the parishes of England, and Knight suggests that this was not until 1870 (1995, p. 3), many curates enjoyed sole charge status in the parish that guaranteed them, if only for a short period of time, continuity of employment. This is the position of the Rev. Cecil St John in *The Curate in Charge*, whose sole charge status is halted abruptly by the death of the non-resident incumbent, Mr Chester. Oliphant devotes considerable time in the early chapters of this novel in order to establish the circumstances under which Chester has attained his non-resident status. According to Knight, the terms under which non-residency applied were altered by the Pluralities Acts. The Acts required that an incumbent seek a licence for non-residency for his own ill-health or infirmity, but did not allow him to plead his wife’s or his children’s ill-health for non-residency for a period of more than six months (1995, p. 120). Significantly, Oliphant’s non-resident incumbent, Mr Chester, ‘did not want to marry’ and managed to secure his non-
residency status on the grounds of ill-health: ‘He got incipient rheumatism, and he had a sharp attack of bronchitis’ (Curate, 1876, p. 3). In Chester’s case, readerly sympathy for his situation is modified by this clergyman’s well-developed self-regard because, as well as his ill-health, the parish of Brentburn offered ‘society more agricultural than intellectual’ and ‘then his cook, still more important, mutinied’ (Curate, p. 3). Chester’s ill-health, stresses Oliphant, is a smokescreen veiling self-serving motives for, ‘[h]e soon got better at Mentone and went on to more amusing and attractive places’ (Curate, p. 4). Relying on public knowledge of these clerical practices, Oliphant adds the ironic coda that, ‘as it was on account of his health that he got rid of his parish, consistency required that he should continue to be delicate’ (Curate, p. 4).

With the rector absent, St John dutifully applies himself to parochial duties for the next twenty years, but his phlegmatic nature, insists Oliphant, makes him ill-disposed towards seeking his own preferment. It is this character trait, more than circumstances of fate, which hinder his ecclesiastical advancement. During his twenty-year ‘incumbency’ St John has had the opportunity to improve his professional situation, but his captious refusals to ‘ask anything from anybody . . . A beggar for place or living I never could be’ (Curate, p. 111) has the ring of a hollow mantra to his daughters who must shoulder the responsibility of their father’s diminished financial and social circumstances. Inevitably, Chester dies, leaving St John at ‘sixty-five’ without employment but faced with the stark reality that his long period of attachment to the parish counts for little, when he ‘had never asked for anything, never tried for anything; but had kept himself out of sight and knowledge for a lifetime’ (Curate, p.
Oliphant tempers readerly sympathy for St John’s unfortunate dilemma by insisting that this old-style curate, taking stability of employment as a certainty, must bear some of the responsibility of his failure to obtain preferment due to his entrenched indolence. Oliphant also reminds the reader that the Church of England was no charitable institution, and assumed no moral obligation to offer the vacant position to the most ‘deserving’ man.

A similar real-life situation of a long-serving curate who, despite his strong claims for preferment following the death of the incumbent, found the living offered to another man. The Rev. James Emerton was appointed curate of Hanwell, Middlesex, by the incumbent because the latter’s old age prevented him from performing his duties. Buoyed with the benisons of his parishioners, Emerton hoped to be favourably considered for the living following the death of the incumbent in 1847. During his time at Hanwell he had, in the words of his parishioners, performed his duties ‘with great talent . . . assiduity, energy, and zeal’ (1866, p. 56). Furthermore, Emerton had also committed £200 of his own money towards the construction of a new church for the parish, and all with the Bishop’s approval (1866, p. 56). The living was in the gift of the Bishop of London, Charles Blomfield,6 who had another clergyman in mind for the living and, in a terse missive, wasted no time in informing Emerton of his decision, and in a later communication stated that, ‘if every assistant curate had the living on the death

6 Blomfield appointed the Rev. Charles Clarke to Hanwell. According to Blomfield’s biographer, the bishop withstood attacks from the press and other correspondents which allowed him to enjoy ‘the distinction of being the best-abused Bishop of the English Bench’ (Blomfield, 1863, p. 68). Blomfield also enjoyed rather fraught relationships with his clergy when ‘his natural quickness and occasional abruptness of manner might at times have worn the appearance of harshness’ and many unfortunate clergymen received a ‘stern rebuke’ from the bishop (1863, p. 211).
of an incumbent, the appointments would not be in the hands of the Bishops, but of the
incumbents' (1866, p. 33). Having previously refused a perpetual curacy offered by the
late incumbent, Emerton was effectively unemployed. Thereafter, Emerton engaged in
a long dialogue with Blomfield and with Blomfield's successor, Archibald Tait, in an
effort to have the Bishop's decision overturned by pleading, amongst other things, his
many years as general factotum for the parish. In a letter to Tait in 1857, Emerton's
exasperation and bitterness are palpable:

It would be perfectly absurd, my Lord, to suppose
that my mind was not sadly unhinged by the conduct
of the Bishop towards me. For twelve years, I had
gone on my way rejoicing in the execution of my
duty, and should have been quite content to have
lived and died curate of Hanwell. . . . I had laboured
incessantly to build the church, and had, by the
divine blessing, been enabled to fill it, as the
testimony of the churchwardens proves. I had made
every preparation for the building of schools, which
I had no doubt would shortly be effected. I had
overcome all the prejudice which might have arisen
from various causes, when I found all my hopes
shattered, and my plans frustrated, by one who was
in duty, as well as in honour, bound to aid me . . .
(1866, p. 32-3).

Knight notes that the Pluralities Acts greatly strengthened the powers of bishops to
appoint or dismiss curates and incumbents alike (1995, p. 121) and, as Trollope
observed succinctly, 'a deserving curate has no claim on a bishop for a living as a
reward for the work he has done' ([1866]1974, p. 28-9). This unfortunate situation is noted by Bishop Browne of Ely who, in his Charge of 1869, regretted that the selling of livings by private patrons 'is most injurious to the prospects of the unbeficed clergy' (1869, p. 5). Browne acknowledged that Bishops were uniquely positioned to confer or deny preferment to curates who suffered from 'no family interest'. These men, he continues, 'can have no one to look to except his Bishop, and the Bishop has generally not preferment enough to provide for one in fifty of those who have reasonable claims upon him' (1869, p. 5-6).

**Insufficient prospects for promotion**

Curates, whether assisting a resident clergyman or acting for non-resident incumbents, were often subject to the bane of frequent and expensive removals from one position to another. A letter to the *Times* in 1860, written by a ‘Poor Married Curate’, catalogued the complaints of this clerical caste, citing specifically the Pluralities Acts as the major cause of his present predicament. Because of the Acts, notes the correspondent, 'sole charges are yearly becoming scarcer, as the Plurality Act\(^7\) comes more into operation and each parish has its resident incumbent' ('The Case of the Curates', 1860). Explaining that his own situation 'is no solitary instance', he went on:

I am a married curate with a family of several very young children. I have been in Holy Orders 12 years, during which time I have had to move my

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\(^7\) Knight notes that the effect of the Pluralities Act, although 'highly effective', was incremental 'because existing interests were respected, and those incumbents who were instituted before the passing of the legislation were exempt from it' (1995, p. 121).
furniture five times, owing to the death, resignation, or return of the incumbent. Not one plurality charge have I been able to meet with in all that time. I am now under marching orders again. The utmost that my diocesan, whom I have just returned from consulting, can offer me at this moment, after looking out for me for the last 12 months, is £80 a-year and a house (‘The Case of the Curates’, 1860).

Frequent removals did not always further a curate’s career prospects, as Oliphant vividly demonstrates in Cousin Mary. Mr Asquith is offered a curacy in a large town where he ‘would have a great deal of work’, but ‘without . . . the general responsibility of everything. And though he would be under the rector, yet he would be over several younger curates, and in his way a sort of vice-bishop too’ (1888, p. 144-5). After six years in this position the curate and his family, we are told, accepted a position ‘of locum tenens to an invalid rector’ with the prospect that, should the rector die, ‘the patron’s choice would most probably fall upon the temporary incumbent’ (1888, p. 160). Doubt remains about this prospect, however, as ‘it is an understood thing that curates should not consider themselves permanent incumbents . . .’ (1888, p. 160-1). The curate is not offered the living when the rector dies and, at this stage, ‘in the bitterness of his heart’, must realise ‘that his work never had time to come to anything’ (p. 165). After sixteen years as a curate, Asquith ‘became, not, alas! rector or vicar, but incumbent of the new district church’ and, although financially dependent on a small endowment and the ‘precarious addition of pew-seats and offertories’, he was now
independent and ‘subject to no superior’ (p. 172-3). Oliphant hints that clerical independence comes at a high price for this curate and many others in similar positions.

Following the death of the rector Mr Damerel, the curate in *A Rose in June* learns that the new rector will not employ him (1874, p. 133). As Knight explains, ‘the curate’s security depended upon the incumbent’s continuing to hold office’, so, in the event of the incumbent’s death, there remained ‘always the possibility that the curate would find himself unexpectedly deprived of his livelihood’ (1995, p. 117). Nolan reports to the widow and her children that his new position is ‘with other poor folk much like those he had left, and other rich folk not far dissimilar – the one knowing as little about the other as the two classes generally do’ (1874, p. 217). Lamenting his want of financial and social import in the world, Nolan is resigned to life ‘between the two, with no great hold on either’ (p. 217). Oliphant specifically addresses the common grievances of curates, that is, frequent removals, insecurity of employment, inadequate stipend, and an unwelcome dependence on the small favours of others.

**No progressive increase of stipend**

Perhaps the most pressing grievance of curates was the ever-present prospect of penury due to inadequate stipends. Oliphant is critical of this aspect of clerical income, particularly where poverty of income will affect the clergyman’s dependants. Asquith’s position as assistant curate to the rector of Horton attracts a stipend of £100
'and the use of the cottage in which the curates always lived, with the very barest furniture – merely what was necessary' (Cousin Mary, 1888, p. 25). This is deemed sufficient until Asquith wants to marry and, without a private income, the family struggles until Asquith is offered a town curacy with a stipend of £250 per year (1888, p. 145). Although Oliphant rewarded her curate with a handsome stipend, the financial prospects for real-life curates remained bleak. Haig reports that the average curatal stipend had increased from £79 in 1853 to £129 in 1873 (1984, p. 223), but stresses that there was 'considerable poverty among long-serving curates' (p. 224). The 'Poor Married Curate', for example, complained that, after searching advertisements for vacancies, he could not 'meet with anything higher than £80 a-year and a house' ('The Case of the Curates', 1860). Samuel Wilberforce, commenting in a similar vein, notes that curates are expected to support a wife and family on a 'miserable pittance' of '£100 or £120 a year'. Furthermore, continues Wilberforce, 'since pluralities were happily abolished', a house is seldom provided for him, 'or if it is, the estimated rent is deducted from his small salary' (1867). The contemporary Rev. A. M. Deane concurs, noting that, under the terms of the Pluralities Acts of 1838 and 1850, '[t]he curate is to have the use of the glebe-house, out-buildings, and garden rent free', but he adds that what appears to be a generous gesture is all but eliminated, due to a provision of the Act that allowed the bishop, under certain circumstances, to assign to the curate a stipend less than the full amount specified in the Acts (1874, p. 93). Given the power of bishops to apportion curatical stipends, and more besides, it is easy to understand the despair expressed by the real-life curate James Emerton in his dealings with bishops Blomfield and Tait.
Oliphant shows that not all curacies were associated with financial hardship. The long-serving curate in *The Curate in Charge* has the 'rectory to live in, and the use of all his [Chester's] furniture, except his best Turkey carpets, which it must be allowed were too good for a curate' (*Curate*, p. 4). St John maintains his family and is 'very ready and happy to undertake all the duties for less than half of the stipend' of a college living valued at 'four hundred and fifty pounds a year' (*Curate*, p. 2, 4). Oliphant's curate is fortunate, indeed, in the 'lottery of preferment', as Smith (1868, p. 233) calls it, because so many contemporary curates were expected to manage on much less. In 1857, the unmarried Rev. John Coker Egerton was offered the curacy of Burwash by his uncle who was rector of the parish (Wells, 1992, p. 25). Whilst many of Egerton's contemporaries eked out an existence on stipends closer to 'the seventy pounds a year' suggested by Trollope (1866, p. 97), Egerton's stipend of £130 (Wells, 1992, p. 25) seems generous by comparison. Egerton found accommodation in Burwash with Mr Taylor, the veterinary surgeon, for 12s. per week (Wells, 1992, p. 25). Following a ten-year term as curate, Egerton became rector of Burwash in 1867 (Wells, 1992, p. 65). Knight counsels caution in 'generalising about the fortunes of the unbenefticed', stressing that it is 'almost impossible' to ascertain the amount of a curate's private income, adding that stipends also varied greatly between locations (1995, p. 127).

Oliphant's depth of knowledge regarding the plight of the unbenefticed clergy, a knowledge that, furthermore, seems entirely cognisant of the wide-ranging and critical changes wrought by the Pluralities Acts, allows her to write with verisimilitude on this
clerical class. Like many of her contemporaries, Oliphant recognised the problems of the curate and sympathised with his plight, as she was mindful that problems, such as lack of professional status, insecurity of tenure, inadequate stipend, and insufficient prospects for promotion, affected the lives of his dependents. The period of time that a clergyman spent as a curate was largely dependent on whether he had the support of influential people. The average length of time, however, was fifteen years and during this time he faced frequent removals or could find himself unemployed when the beneficed clergyman died. The curates depicted by Oliphant range from the hardworking and earnest Asquith to the rather indolent St John, who is content to remain a curate. Oliphant’s depiction of curates in her fiction offers the reader further evidence of her criticisms of the Church of England.

While most of her reading public would have been familiar with the problems facing curates in the Church of England, the same did not hold true for Dissent. In choosing a Congregationalist Chapel as the focus for her depiction of Dissent, Oliphant suggests that the theological and social differences between the two groups were rather more narrow than many contemporaries cared to admit. As we have seen, this view was indeed shared by many contemporary writers. Nonconformist clergymen defined themselves by stressing their appeal to the emergent middle classes, aided by a series of important legislative changes that greatly improved Nonconformity’s religious and social standing. These changes were due, in no small part, to the activities of activists such as Baines and Miall, whose willingness to effect change was portrayed by Oliphant in the careers of Vincent and Northcote. These fictional and real-life men champion the
anti-State Church movement in their sermons and public lectures, which has the effect of bringing together both Anglicans and Nonconformists. The humour and pathos that underwrite these situations do not diminish the irony that Oliphant exploits. Both Vincent and Northcote are jealous of the privileges enjoyed by their Anglican brothers and strive to invest their ministerial careers with the dignity and status they believe it deserves. Interestingly, Oliphant allows both men access to the company of influential Anglican women in their pursuit of social respectability, thereby emphasising the ability and status of women to bestow or withdraw social approval. Vincent seeks out the company of the ephemeral Lady Western and her Anglican entourage, while Northcote is absorbed into the May household, eventually marrying Ursula May. Northcote's marriage comes at a price, for he must sacrifice his prized religious independence for social respectability. Oliphant questions whether the sacrifice is worthy of the gain.

This chapter and previous chapters touch on the importance of family bonds that offered Dissenting and Anglican clergymen alike a strong sense of identity and support in their careers. For Oliphant, a clergyman's professional and personal success could be directly attributable to the support of his female kin. The next chapter will investigate the significance of, and contributions made by, Oliphant's female clerical kin in their roles as wives and widows, mothers, sisters and daughters.
CHAPTER FIVE

FEMALE CLERICAL KIN

This chapter will examine the influence of female clerical kin on the home environment, family concerns, and leisure pursuits of Oliphant's fictional clergymen. It will show that most of Oliphant's clerical women are active and enthusiastic parochial labourers who participate in most aspects of clerical work except, of course, the sacramental. Almost without exception, Oliphant depicts her fictional clergymen as one half of a clerical partnership. The other half of this partnership is enabled, sustained, and, very often, driven by a powerful and influential group of female relatives. The nature of parochial clerical work, with its round of visits to the poor and sick, Sunday school and other educational duties, the dispersal of charity and the organisation of communal self-help groups, such as Mothers' Unions and Coal and Clothing clubs, can be viewed as an extension of the domestic routine that encouraged, rather than discouraged, active female participation in clerical work. As Oliphant depicts her female kin in their many guises as wife and widow, mother, sister and daughter, this chapter will use these relational roles as organisational signposts for the discussion that follows.

During her literary career, Oliphant developed a penchant for presenting versatile, resourceful and independent heroines who were more competent than the men around them. This was, in part, a considered reaction to the studied indolence of some of her
male relatives, including her two sons. Jay notes that 'brother Willie's life of drink and debt' was a financial strain, while 'brother Frank's animal-like dependence upon her in his closing years, or Cyril's feckless improvidence' were emotional burdens (1595, p. 31). Personal motives notwithstanding, Oliphant's literary motives for presenting competent and independent heroines are a protest against what she felt was the 'misrepresentation' of male/female relationships by female authors in contemporary sensation fiction (Oliphant, 1867). The writers of such fiction, claims Oliphant, make 'sweeping judgments' about 'the vexed questions of social morality' and 'the grand problems of human experience' (1855a), and are engaged, instead, on producing women who 'live in a voluptuous dream, either waiting for or brooding over the inevitable lover' (1867). The problem, stresses Oliphant, is that these representations are offered 'as the natural sentiment of English girls, ... not only as the portrait of their own state of mind, but as their amusement and mental food' (1867). As Jay observes, Oliphant's heroes 'do not emerge as knights clad in strong armour but come with a full accoutrement of womenfolk anxious to protect their lad, but also well able to demonstrate his deficiencies as a son or brother' (1995, p. 80). Nowhere are Oliphant's literary objectives to depict strong, independent women more apparent than in the novels that feature female clerical relatives and many a flagging clerical career flourishes and prospers when guided by careful female management.
It is important to realise that not all clerical women were encouraged, or wished, to participate in the work of the parish, and many did not experience the pull of mutual obligation sufficiently to engage in clerical activity. Some of Oliphant's fictional female clerical kin were astute critics of the clerical profession, such as the eponymous heroine Cousin Mary, 'the unconsidered trifle in the feminine line', who, in a chapter ironically titled 'Mary's Little Thoughts', waxes enthusiastic on the merits and parochial weaknesses of two clerical uncles, 'arraign[ing] these two before her private tribunal' (1888, p. 46). The real-life clerical wife, Louise Creighton, had to endure the sermons of her husband's temporary replacement, which made 'Passion Week and Easter Sunday useless for my soul's health'. Creighton commented savagely that this 'far from lively' clergyman, for whom she had taken some unexplained dislike, 'contributed nothing' during his stay at her home, leading her 'to doubt whether he could have a soul' (Covert, 1998, p. 118). Creighton's mother was the recipient of this terse missive, although, by way of explanation, Covert suggests that Creighton's 'fornidable and domineering' nature masked 'feelings of insecurity' (1998, p. 4). It is likely that the academically talented Creighton suffered pangs of cultural disillusionment and intellectual estrangement after swapping the stimulating society of Oxford for a remote northern parish. Creighton may have scaled the heights of wifely devotion to home and family, but her letters to her mother brim with domestic irritations that say otherwise.
Through the middle decades of the nineteenth century, according to Russell, there emerged within English parishes a 'rectory culture', whereby clergymen adopted a distinctive lifestyle and occupational dress (1980, p. 41). Both the Evangelical and Oxford Movements were significant factors in the changing perceptions of the clergy, continues Russell, as they insisted 'on the distinctiveness, independence, and autonomy of the clerical profession' (1980, p. 41). Russell argues that a 'rectory culture' was, in part, a response by the clergy in its endeavours to develop a more professional mien in the 'context of an increasingly urban and advanced society' (1980, p. 48), yet nowhere in his analysis does he explicitly attribute this change to the influence of the clergyman's female kin. As noted in previous chapters, Oliphant considered her female clerical relatives as active agents in the changing role of their clergymen.

There were other forces at work that signalled change. The Pluralities Acts of 1838 and 1850 encouraged a permanent clerical presence in most English parishes. It is likely, too, that clerical residency acted as an effective bulwark against immorality and lax church-going practices, as well as signalling to any Dissenting places of worship, a reminder of the Established church's pre-eminence in the religious landscape. Clerical residency was an effective way of impressing upon local populations what the Bishop of London termed 'a deeper Christian character' (Tait, 1866, p. 2). Ideally, a clergyman and his family in situ were working examples of Christian unity, charity and duty that sought to inspire emulation amongst their parishioners.
Universal clerical residency was not the only criterion that governed a changing
degree to the dignity and solemnity of the clerical office. Like Russell, Bebbington, too,
argues that the 1850s and 1860s were years of "Evangelical ascendency in Britain", which
were dominated by "[t]he cult of duty, self-discipline and high seriousness" (1989, p.
105). Bradley concurs, noting that Evangelicalism placed great stress on the importance
of the family unit as a way of cultivating virtues (1976, p. 179). With this in mind, it is
reasonable to assume that a clergyman's choice of a wife, be he Evangelical or Tractarian,
might be constrained by prudence and a strong sense of moral obligation. After all,
mariage offered a clergyman a passport into the drawing rooms and cottages of female
parishioners without compromising reputations, as well as giving him access to an
expanded social circle. Furthermore, female members of the household usually managed
the prevailing rules of social etiquette, as Ursula May reminds her clergyman brother by
announcing triumphantly: "Heaven be praised! that is one thing you can't get into your
hands; we girls are always good for something there. Men may think themselves as
grand as they please . . . but their visits are of no consequence; it is Indies of the family
who must 'call' " (Phoebe Junior, 1876/1989, p. 173). There is no doubt that the clerical
office dispensed an aura of reflected glory on its female clerical kin, thus bestowing upon
them the potential to wield considerable parochial power and to dispense harmony or
wreak discord, if they so desired.
In spite of their high calling, the quotidian duties of clergymen, particularly those located in small towns and villages, consisted of many mundane tasks. As Richardson notes, with some satisfaction, the female clerical relatives who came to prominence after the Oxford Movement displayed noteworthy qualities of 'discipline of devotion and an activity in social service that would have been thought almost supererogatory', where previously 'any religious and secular education beyond the merest elements, [was considered] thrown away upon the poor' (1907, p. 265). Women were able to assist in these tasks by acting as unpaid parochial helpmeets, encouraged perhaps by the lack of a unified system that described the place of women, much less female clerical kin, in the community. Malmgreen notes that nineteenth-century women operated within the ambiguities of a compassionate, self-sacrificing stereotype of femininity that was advanced to limit their influence to the home, but, at the same time, empowered them to take active roles in numerous religious and secular organisations (1986, p. 6-8). This is a position that Oliphant readily exploits in her fiction. In an article, Oliphant acknowledged that '[t]he poor clergyman's wife (I know one such with such hands of toil, scarred and honourable - hands that have washed and scrubbed, and cooked and sewed, till all their lady softness is gone) is his curate as well' (1880). In Cousin Mary, Oliphant puts similar words into the mouth of a sympathetic curate who regrets the life of labour and indigence that awaits his betrothed: 'For the curate knew that, whatever any one might say, it was the woman that had the worst of it and he knew so many cases where she had sunk altogether into a half cook, half nurse - a careworn creature.
spoiled with toil' (Cousin Mary, 1888, p. 82). Many wives and daughters of clergymen were exemplary managers of domestic finances. Hester St John, wife of the ill-fated Rev. Cecil St John in The Curate in Charge, whom Oliphant celebrates as a domestic 'genius,' manages her 'two hundred a year... without any pitiful economics, without any undue sparing, making a warm, beneficent, living house of it, and yet keeping within her income' (Curate, p. 10). Clearly, Oliphant believed that women's 'genius' for domestic management should bring them a degree of semi-professional pride that should not be concealed or undervalued. On the other hand, marriage to a clergyman might increase a woman's social credentials, as Minnie Warrender discovers to her advantage in A Country Gentleman and His Family. Isolated in a parochial backwater, this young woman is resigned to follow 'the example set by her mother and grandmother' and postpone marriage due to a lack of eligible men (1887, p. 214). 'Providence', however, intervenes in the person of 'Eustace Thynne', a titled and wealthy curate (p. 214-5). Oliphant cannot resist a parting shot at this clerical union and, introducing salt into the sweetness, informs the reader: 'It [the wedding] made a great sensation in the parish... and while the few people in Pierrepoint gave the curate a teapot, in Underwood there was a great agitation in the Sunday school and much collecting to buy a fine big Bible... for Miss Warrender.... It was considered a very suitable present for a young lady who was going to marry a clergyman, just as the teapot was most suitable for a young clergyman about to be married' (p. 217).
Oliphant appreciated that prescribed definitions are often at odds with lived experience and sought to examine this umbrageous area in her fiction. I believe that Oliphant, recognising that clerical work blurred gender roles and divisions, exploits this anomaly in her fiction. This, in turn, allows her to comment, with insight and understanding, on the nature of clerical work and, by implication, on the motives of the men and women who make religion their life's work. Clergy wives, comments Gregory, are quite capable of turning "customary" practices to their advantage, as well as 'having the capacity to subvert, or at least find their own strategies within the legal and cultural limitations of patriarchy' (Gregory, 1998, p. 260). The novel *Joyce*, for example, concerns two rival clerical camps, where the wives of the clergymen exert considerable sway over their husbands and the parish. One clerical couple, the Rev Austin Sitwell and his wife Dora, have been promised a parsonage by Canon Jenkinson; only to have the promise to build withdrawn. Dora Sitwell earns the ire of Jenkinson by mounting a 'demonstration' guaranteed to provoke and embarrass the Canon who was responsible for placing the Sitwells in the district: 'It was I who put him in that district - it was I who got it constituted a district ... They were starving in a curacy when I put them there. Not that I blame Sitwell - it's that little sprite of a wife of his that is at the bottom of it all. A little woman like that can't keep out of mischief. She runs to it like a duck to the water' (1889, p. 208). His strenuous attempts to trivialise the activities of Dora Sitwell in language that appropriates some popularly-held notions of the simple, child-like speech patterns of women, at once betrays his anxieties about his formidable
female adversary and reduces his complaint to the inconsequential outbursts of a capricious child. Oliphant immediately extends the trope in the next chapter, when the spirited and irreverent Dora Sitwell, who is a gifted mimic, regales her company with 'takes' on the Canon and his wife: ‘She walked about the room to represent Mrs Jenkinson panting with rage, demanding, ‘Canon, what were you doing that you let it be? Why didn’t you stop it? .... that man: and that woman! The woman is far the worst, in my opinion’’ (1889, p. 209). Male pretensions are mocked by reducing them to the manageable and subversive form of a joke.

For Oliphant, the clergywoman's most important function was as vector of acceptable social behaviour, alerting their clergymen to possible pitfalls in the management of their parishes and assisting them in their relations with the wider community. This latter point is important in the context of the Chronicles of Carlingford, as clergyman such as Wentworth, Vincent, Morgan and Proctor do not possess the experience and professional confidence of long-standing incumbencies; they require the gentle moral and professional guidance of their female clerical kin. There is no Carlingford clergyman who does not benefit from this type of female contribution. Not all of Oliphant's female clerical kin languish in domestic drudgery; neither do all of them allow misplaced emotions, romantic affectation or cosy sentimentality to cloud their judgement about the harsh realities of clerical life played out in a small, inward-looking provincial town.
It is likely that Oliphant's depiction of female clerical relatives was influenced, to some extent, by Trollope who, according to Durey (1997), revealed 'women's powerful influence in the private sphere' and 'the public world'. Trollope's novels, explains Durey, abound with a variety of influential female clerical relatives, whose 'power over ostensible male sovereignty in the Church, from the most innocent daughter to the most fallen woman, from the wealthiest wife to the poorest widow, transcends his comic design' (1997). In a critical review of the Last Chronicle of Barset, Oliphant paid Trollope a glowing tribute in his depiction of female clerical kin:

Mr Trollope is about the only writer we know (with, perhaps, one or two exceptions) who realises the position of a sensible and right-minded woman among the ordinary affairs of the world. Mrs Grantly's perception at once of her husband's character and his mistakes — her careful abstinence from active interference — her certainty to come in right at the end — her half-amused, half-troubled spectatorship, in short, of all the annoyances her men-kind make for themselves, her consciousness of the futility of all decided attempts to set them right, and patient waiting upon the superior logic of events, is one of those 'bits' which may scarcely call the attention of the careless reader, and yet is a perfect triumph of
Oliphant might have been writing a précis of her own female clerical characters. Oliphant's commitment to presenting 'sensible and right-minded' women is bound by the legal and cultural limitations imposed upon women. As Durey points out, Trollope, too, well aware of 'society's constraints', nevertheless 'illustrates the enormous influence of women within socially prescribed parameters' (1997). The aim of this chapter is to redress the impression of a beleaguered mid nineteenth-century female clerical kin underclass, both in Oliphant's fictional texts and in the contemporary context.

Wives and WIdows

Oliphant did not have to look far for suitable female and male clerical models. Her intimate knowledge of the inner workings of at least two clerical families allowed her access to a range of valuable source material to augment her fictional clerical creations. The Principal and Mrs Tulloch and Robert Herbert Story and their families were amongst her closest friends, and afforded her many opportunities to observe and participate in parochial life and to observe the courses of these clerical marriages. Following her return to England in 1865 after several months spent wandering about Europe in the aftermath of her daughter Maggie's death, Oliphant revealed that her most frequent visitors at that time were a 'parsonic family – a family of four, all parsons, two brothers and two sisters, very nice and most wonderful to behold, up to their necks in
school feasts and soup-kitchens and flannel petticoats, and, so far as I can see, with no other aspirations in particular’ (Oliphant, 1899/1974, p. 208-9). Oliphant tended to view clergymen in general and her clerical friends in particular as ordinary men, undistinguished by their special calling. She relied heavily on their friendship, particularly in times of personal hardship and emotional distress. The Tullochs and the Storys also provided Oliphant with theological and ecclesiastical resource material. When none was forthcoming, Oliphant requested assistance and, in a letter to Jane Tulloch, asks ‘if anything interesting in the way of the Church controversy comes in his [Principal Tulloch’s] way to send it to me: I want to try to do a paper on the subject’ (Oliphant, 1899/1974, p. 209). Following the death of Oliphant’s daughter, Maggie, in Rome in 1864, a lasting friendship developed between Oliphant and Jane Tulloch that was enhanced with visits and frequent epistolary conversations. Oliphant’s sobriquet for Jane Tulloch, the Padrona, neatly encapsulates Oliphant’s perception of her friend, while at the same time implying reciprocity as Oliphant, too, considered herself a capable mother and manager, so the epithet has tones of self-congratulation. Perhaps, too, it is a veiled criticism of the Principal whose valetudinarian concerns Oliphant found, on occasion, irritating (Oliphant, 1899/1974, p. 299-300). It is possible that his periods of depression left him, according to Oliphant, ‘not (entre nous) the active kind of father who pushes his children’, prompting Oliphant to use her influence to act in securing positions for the Tulloch brothers (in Jay, 1995, p. 311).
Whatever the small irritations of lengthy friendship, Oliphant's literary relationship with Principal Tulloch and Robert Story was one of reciprocity and mutual admiration. When requested, Oliphant volunteered criticisms of manuscripts that Story sent her and obligingly pleaded his case with her publisher, John Blackwood, in a humouring, playful, faintly hectoring letter, embedded with a coda, that her labours on behalf of Story would not go unheeded:

'Now I want to ask you a great favour. - do please look at poor young Story's book... Now pray be merciful—once upon a time we too were young and did not know whether we were to succeed or fail. ... You know an hour or two at it would determine your rapid (and always infallible) judgement. Do please dear Mr Blackwood! And I shall be your devout bedeswoman. Can you resist such a feminine appeal?' (MOWO to Blackwood (Mss 4119-4725) 28 August 1861).

When occasion demanded, Oliphant was not above applying the language of helpless femininity to secure a favour, although the ironic tone of the letter includes Blackwood as a fellow conspirator in a game that gently mocks the pretensions of the convention. This social and literary convention is also examined by Oliphant in the Chronicles of Carlingford.
Few of the clerical men in the *Chronicles of Carlingford* are husbands. Oliphant preferred clerical bachelors and recent arrivals such as Frank Wentworth, Arthur Vincent, and Morley Proctor so that she could introduce into the narrative the promise of future romantic entanglements. More established unions include the Rev. William Morgan and Mrs Morgan, amongst the Anglicans, and the Rev. Tufton and Mrs Tufton amongst the Dissenters. Of these clerical couplings, only the relationship between Mr and Mrs Morgan is described in detail.

Although recently married, there are signs of conjugal disillusionment within the Morgan marriage. Mrs Morgan has been forced to suffer the ignominy of a lengthy, ten-year engagement whilst her husband was a Fellow of All Souls. Both parties are now in their middle years and there are hints that Mrs Morgan’s age, she is thirty-five, would make her an unlikely candidate for motherhood. Her years of waiting and dutiful forbearance have taken their toll and heightened her awareness of the passage of time, which her husband chooses to interpret as virtue:

“My dear, I am very sorry to see you so much the victim of prejudice”, said Mr Morgan. “I had hoped that all our long experiences – ” and here the Rector stopped short, troubled to see the rising colour in his wife’s face. “I don’t mean to blame you, my dear”, said the perplexed man; “I know you were always very patient”; and he paused, not knowing what more to say, comforting himself with the thought
that women were incomprehensible creatures, as so many men have done before (The Perpetual Curate 1864/1975, Vol II, p. 153).

The Rector's expressions of befuddlement, although well intentioned, do not soothe but add to his wife's list of irritations. Oliphant shows how the exchanges between the Rector and his wife exploit the paradigm of female subservience and male dominance. Within this paradigm, Mrs Morgan asserts herself by subverting the female reputation for volubility with a code of silence that has the desired effect of confusing her husband: 'If she [Mrs Morgan] had been angry and found fault with him, he might have understood that mode of procedure; but as she was not angry, but only silent, the excellent man was terribly disconcerted, and could not tell what to do' (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 198). Thereafter, her words bear the weighty significance of careful reason that exposes the petty tyranny of her husband. Oliphant uses the imagery of the distaff as a powerful trope to illustrate this relationship. Mrs Morgan frequently displays the tools of her bondage in a manner designed to provoke her husband. For example, her 'work' is always kept handy for emergencies' and made available 'at all kinds of unnecessary moments, which much disturbed the Rector when he had anything particular to say' (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 153). His wife's refusal of matrimonial martyrdom places the Rector in a difficult position, as any concessions he might make towards her assertiveness will have direct and unthinkable consequences on the social order of matrimony: On the other hand, he can ill-afford to appear to his wife as a heartless
patriarch: 'He would have liked to toss the stocking out of the window, though it was his own, and the task of repairing it was one of a devoted wife's first duties, according to the code of female proprieties in which both the husband and wife had been brought up' (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p. 206). The act of sewing both defines Mrs Morgan's 'inferiority' within the marriage and, ironically, provides her with a method of circumventing the very instrument of her bondage. As the Rector discovers too late, an early investment in a complementary and companionate domestic ethos would have been a worthwhile pursuit and could reap rewards in later years.

The Morgan marriage is a particularly vivid example of Oliphant's attitudes towards marriage, both fictional and real. Oliphant's intimate association with Thomas and Jane Carlyle, and with Jane Carlyle in particular, gave her privileged insight into the partnership between this 'much maligned, much misunderstood pair!' (Oliphant, 1990, p. 103). The Carlyle marriage, like so many nineteenth-century marriages, survived in Oliphant's opinion, because it acquired a social and cultural patina that endorses virtuous female self-sacrifice to ensure domestic harmony and family equilibrium. Trela notes that much of Oliphant's fiction dealing with male/female relationships is inscribed with 'the whole-hearted and unquestioning male acceptance of female sacrifice on the one hand; the willing yet clear-sighted female acquiescence in this state of affairs on the other' (1996, p. 206). According to Trela, Oliphant recognised a recurring situation in the Carlyle marriage, which provided a source for many of her own fictional marital
representations. In an article devoted to a defence of the reputations of Thomas and Jane Carlyle, Oliphant wished to address the popular contemporary impression that Jane Carlyle was a 'suffering' wife:

She [Jane Carlyle] for her part – let us not be misunderstood in saying so – contemplated him, her great companion in life, with a certain humorous curiosity not untinged with affectionate contempt and wonder that a creature so big should be at the same time so little, such a giant and commanding genius with all the same so many babyish weaknesses for which she liked him all the better! Women very often, more often than not, do regard their heroes so... To see what he will do next, the big blundering male creature, unconscious entirely of that fine scrutiny, malin but tender, which sees through and through him, is a constant suppressed interest which gives piquancy to life, and this Carlyle's wife took her full enjoyment of. He was never in the least conscious of it. I believe few of its subjects are (in Trela, 1996, p. 206).

The passage admits of the shared pleasures of female mutiny conveyed by dumb insolence, to which the purblind male, safely cocooned within the entrancing ideal of loving female self-abnegation, is blissfully unaware. Many of Oliphant's fictional clerical husbands fall prey to this consoling ideal.
At its heart, the Morgan marriage falters, due to a mental struggle between reason and emotion, the former universally associated with males and the latter with females. Mrs Morgan’s ‘longings after the lost life which they might have lived together . . . remained forever a mystery to her faithful husband’ (Perpetual Vol I, p. 204). The Rector is suspicious and dismissive of his wife’s emotional self-indulgences and, although ‘very fond of her . . . but if she had spoken Sanscrit, he could not have had less understanding of the meaning her words were intended to convey’ (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 204-5). His inability to understand his wife’s point of view is given added credence by the professional medical opinion of Dr Marjoribanks, who reassuringly dismisses her outburst as ‘a little attack on the nerves’ (Perpetual Vol I, p. 204). On the other hand, Mrs Morgan ‘could not make them [her husband and Mr Proctor discussing Wentworth’s character] see into the heart of things as she did. She had to wait until they had attacked the question in the orthodox way of siege, and made gradual entrance by dint of hard labour’ (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 230). Oliphant’s use of a military metaphor not only emphasises Morgan’s campaign-like strategies and approach to his parish, it also neatly demonstrates the way in which this discourse excludes and silences women. Oliphant shows that a balance between reason and emotion is the missing ingredient in the Morgan marriage, and when Mrs Morgan learns of her husband’s concessions to Wentworth that involve their, the Morgans’, removal from Carlingford, she endeavours to palliate former marital and domestic grievances: ‘Life does not contain any perfect pleasure. But when Mrs Morgan stooped to lift up some stray reels of cotton which the
Rector's clumsy male fingers had dropped out of her workbox, her eye was again attracted by the gigantic roses and tulips on the carpet, and content and satisfaction filled her heart' (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p. 213). The proposed move to another living promises to restore her chastened husband 'upon his pedestal' and to remove from her vision 'the gigantic roses and tulips on the carpet' (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p. 211, p. 213) that have become a fetish. Oliphant allows Mrs Morgan the triumph of the last word. Mrs Morgan invites some of Carlingford's most prominent citizens to dine and, during a lull in the conversation, the unpopular Leeson, her husband's curate, chooses to comment unwisely on a piece of hearsay concerning her favourite clergyman, Wentworth. Making some critical remark on this news, Mrs Morgan replies with the force of an exquisite and practised effrontery that leaves her antagonist speechless and defeated:

Mr Leeson felt that he had received his *congé*, as he sank back into his chair. He was too much stunned to speculate on the subject, or to ask himself what was going to happen. Whatever was going to happen, there was an end of *him*. He had eaten the last All-Souls pudding that he ever would have presented to him under *that* roof. He sank back in the depths of despair upon his seat, and suffered the claret to pass him in the agony of his feelings. Mr Wentworth and Mrs Morgan were avenged (*Perpetual*, Vol III, p. 255).
The Saturday Review commiserated with Mrs Morgan in her choice of a husband yet found matrimonial disillusionment, such as hers, ‘all very natural’ when ‘[w]omen do somehow worship Fellows, of All Souls and everywhere else, and live for a decade on the Christian Year and Herbert’s Country Parson’ (‘Chronicles of Carlingford (Third Series)’, 1864). The writer of this article could proffer sympathy for a husband ‘of rather more than middle age and rather less than average sense’, but could not align himself with a character such as Mrs Morgan, who spent her quest for happiness ‘on the mausoleum of broken hopes’ (‘Chronicles of Carlingford (Third Series),’ 1864). For Mrs Morgan, wifely devotion framed ‘with subtle feminine policy’ eventually produces a favourable outcome (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 213). Oliphant’s depiction of Mrs Morgan refuses her character the more usual escape route of silence and self-effacement, although she exploits the former to her advantage. Mrs Morgan’s deferential utterances mask a less than deferential spirit.

Mrs Morgan is a dutiful parish worker, being ‘very active in her district at all times, and had proved herself an admirable clergywoman’ (Perpetual, Vol II, p. 157), although her forays into the parish are, on occasion, timed to avoid the intrusive presence of Mr Leeson. Oliphant’s use of the term ‘clergywoman’, in the above passage, invites the reader to consider Mrs Morgan’s role in terms of active agency, rather than containment. In her visiting she does not venture far beyond the inhabitants of Grove Street, which, in Carlingford, acts as a visible barrier between the middle and lower-
classes; also she does not visit the poor neighbourhood of Wharfside, due to the Rector’s ongoing arguments with Wentworth over parish boundaries. Her clerical career, as a Sister of Mercy, is discarded to accommodate her husband’s objections to this type of female employment: ‘[Y]ou know I don’t approve of sisterhoods – never did; they are founded on a mistake’ (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 10). Thereafter, she lacks the sense of vocation that stamps the parochial careers of Lucy Wodehouse and Leonora Wentworth.

Many clerical wives as well as their husbands found parochial duties an irksome burden that did not suit their temperaments or their interests. Louise Creighton, wife of Mandell Creighton future Bishop of London, notes that, following their removal to Embleton in remote Northumbria, they were forced into an unknown sphere where neither Louise nor her husband had ‘knowledge of the mechanisms of parochial life’ (Covert, 1994, p. 63). Both of them developed a dislike for ‘Sunday school teaching’, noting dismally that the thought of it caused them to ‘wake on Sunday morning with the sense of a weight hanging over us’ (Covert, 1994, p. 64). Eventually, however, both Louise and Mandell Creighton came to enjoy a friendly rapport with the parishioners of Embleton, and, years later, while addressing the Pan-Anglican Congress in 1908, Louise Creighton exhorted married lay and clerical women to ‘add to their usefulness both as a wife and a mother’ by developing ‘interests outside the home’ (Creighton, 1908, p. 2). Unlike the fictional Mrs Morgan, Louise Creighton did not have to create a spatial barrier into which she could withdraw when the matrimonial relationship became strained.
Mrs Morgan’s interests are located within the Rectory, with its decoration, the preparation of meals, the regulation of unwelcome visits from her husband’s curate, and with the management of her garden and ferns. The importance that she attaches to these activities makes her, according to Freestone, a less than ideal wife for a clergyman. The ideal wife, suggests Freestone, must be willing to renounce ‘that treasure of a Woman’s Life, ‘The Home’, which ‘must in all cases take second place’ to her work in the Church (1932, p. 4). Denied any outside employment, and still chaffing over the wasted years of a lengthy engagement to discover that her husband ‘had taken himself down off the pedestal on which she had placed him’ (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 203), Mrs Morgan has, according to Jay, invested the commonplaces of domestic existence ‘with a significance that transcends their literal status’ as a way of imposing her will and gaining a small measure of independence in the marriage (1995, p. 302-3). Similarly, in A Rose in June, the overworked and overlooked Rector’s wife enlists the help of her husband’s obliging curate to help in the schoolroom when her efforts to secure the assistance of her eldest daughter, the ‘Rose’ of the title, have been ignored by her husband. Whereas Mrs Morgan uses the encumbrances of the domestic sphere to gratify her self-esteem, Mrs Damerel, revealingly called Martha by her husband although her name is Rose, has no choice in the matter, since her husband refuses to be disturbed by bills, by the noise of their eight children, and by the surrounding poverty within the village cottages (A Rose
in June, 1874, p. 6-7). Damerel leaves most aspects of his irksome parochial routine to an obliging curate and a harassed wife.

Another example of a disgruntled clergy wife is found in Caritā where Mrs Burchell views with mixed contempt and envy the lot of the unmarried female owners of the benefice who are placed literally and metaphorically above the clerical family, ‘at the top of the hill,’ and occupy a sheltered house ‘set in velvet lawns and dewy gardens’ (1885, p. 27). The irony of her situation is not lost on the rector’s wife who comments with some bitterness: ‘They don’t have any long pull . . . they have their carriage. Ah, yes, they are very different from a poor clergyman’s wife, who has done her duty all her life without much reward for it’ (1885, p. 27-8). The symbol of the hearth, Oliphant assures us, does not necessarily convey abundant security or a reassuring familial intimacy.

Mrs Morgan’s influence in Carlingford is most apparent in the fraught area of clerical internecine battles between her husband and the perpetual curate, Frank Wentworth. Mrs Morgan, at first seduced by Wentworth’s ‘good looks and good manners’, becomes his champion when her husband proceeds to discredit Wentworth’s character. The Rector’s attempts to dismantle Wentworth’s reputation threaten further impecuniousness for Wentworth, and the unthinkable prospect, for Mrs Morgan, of yet another ‘unmarried woman wearing out her youth in the harassments of a long
engagement’ (Perpetual, Vol III, p. 216). Mrs Morgan interprets her husband’s unreasonable behaviour towards Wentworth in the context of her own romantic tragicomedy: ‘The real Rector to whom she was married was so different from the ideal one who courted her; could it be possible, if they had married in their youth instead of now, that her husband would have been less open to the ill-natured suggestions of the gossips in Carlingford, and less jealous of the interferences of his young neighbour?’ (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 198). Mrs Morgan, stresses Oliphant, has unwisely invested her youth on the romantic possibilities of courtship, and her husband’s well-meaning but clumsy excuses leave her with nagging doubts about the state of her marriage as well as underpinning the male power play associated with the marital union.

The thematic problem of women who wait while their beloved dallies occupies Oliphant in The Curate in Charge, where the Rev. Mr St John’s lover, Hester, submits to a lengthy courtship, again of ten years’ duration, to suit her clergyman father who has claimed her as the companion for his old age. This arrangement also accommodates the curate’s naturally submissive and placid temperament (The Curate in Charge, 1876/1987, p. 9). Thus, Oliphant celebrates feminine forbearance in mock-heroic language: ‘How much is there in the hearts of such good women which never can come into words! She had in her still soul a whole world of ideal people – the ideal man as well as the ideal woman – and her ideal man would not have been content. Yet he was, and she was glad; or rather I should say thankful, which is a different feeling’ (The Curate in Charge, p. 9).
As explained earlier in this chapter, Oliphant clearly sets no store in the romantic pursuit of unattainable ideals where expectations so often exceed reality.

Whilst the Morgan marriage founders on exalted expectations, Oliphant shows that the marriage of the Nonconformist couple, the Rev. and Mrs Tufton, in *Salem Chapel*, seems to follow the general direction of Dissenting life in Carlingford, that is, it has grown ‘torpid’ and relies on commonplaces such as ‘knowing and keeping ‘its own place’ in a manner edifying to behold’ (*Salem Chapel*, p. 3). Matrimonial apathy is manifest in the cloying atmosphere of the Tuftons’ house with its verdant abundances, and in their limited cultural and social pursuits, which consist entirely of the ‘Carlingford Gazette,’ local gossip, and Mr Tufton’s talk, which is couched in the overworked idioms of the pulpit. The Tuftons are not natives of Carlingford but immigrants with ‘highly respectable connections’, ‘from storied Islington’¹ (*Salem Chapel*, 1863/1986, p. 26). The marriage is financially bolstered by Mrs Tufton, who has contributed the benefits of a ‘little property’, and, ‘acting in laudable opposition to the general practice of poor ministers’ wives, had brought many dividends and few children to the limited but comfortable fireside’ (*Salem Chapel*, p. 26). According to Oliphant, social position is important within the contracted world of English Dissent. The Dissenting railway magnate, Mr Copperhead, in *Phoebe Junior* jeopardises his social position by his total disregard for the social niceties, which he dismisses as foppery, and his contumacious

¹ Clearly, Oliphant was familiar with the class distribution of Congregationalists in London as the London chapters of *Phoebe Junior* show.
behaviour towards his long-suffering wife, whose former position as his daughter’s
governess gives him ‘something belonging to him at which he could always jeer, and in
this way the match was highly successful’ (Phoebe Junior, 1876/1989, p. 10). Copperhead’s vulgar manners and crass displays of wealth are, for Oliphant, characteristics of the parvenu who runs rough-shod over the genteel English social landscape and, like the railways on which Copperhead and others like him have made their fortunes, are unwelcome agents of social disruption. Oliphant’s equivocal attitude towards the *nouveau-riche*, as displayed in her depiction of Copperhead, seems to have its origins, according to Jay, in her own hard-won rise as an author of note and in ‘overcoming antipathies to the kind of people’ who bought her books (1995, p. 206).

Oliphant does not confine her criticisms of the newly wealthy to Dissenters. The novel *Joyce* contains a portrait of Sir Samuel and Lady Thompson who have become rich as ‘soap-boilers’ and are pursued by two sets of warring Anglican clergymen and their wives in their attempts to obtain the magnate’s financial favours. The clerical wives are far more enterprising than their husbands in gaining the rich man’s attentions and Oliphant shows that the clerical wives, unlike their husbands, are unconcerned with the taint of ‘trade’ that such associations will inevitably bring. Such duplicitous behaviour is the province of females:

Austin [the Rev Mr Sitwell] did not like the idea of wheedling a soap-boiler-especially when it was entirely unsuccessful. He did not want it to be
supposed, even by himself, that he ever countenanced such unworthy ways. A man cannot (notwithstanding all Biblical and other warrants for it) control his wife, or get her to refrain from using her own methods; and so long as it is clearly understood that he is not responsible for them – Adam did not object to the apple, - rather liked it, so far as we have any information; but he wished it to be known that it was his wife's doing, not any suggestion of his. Unfortunately, however, he could not slide out of the responsibility, as Mr. Sitwell, among a community always disposed to think it was her doing, was not unhopeful of being able to do (Joyce, 1889, p. 211).

Oliphant delivers a comic _coupe de grâce_ to a pattern of male reasoning that hinges on dubious interpretations of Biblical texts and received folk wisdom to deliver a moral interpretation of female behaviour. As the concluding sentence in the passage acknowledges, the energetic Dora Sitwell is the stronger partner of this clerical pairing and her efforts to secure the funds to build a parsonage have earned her the ire of her husband's clerical superior. This enterprising clerical wife supplements the family income by delivering to magazines and newspapers literary vignettes based on photographic portraits submitted by correspondents. Her industry and stamina allow her to boast, in much the same vein as her creator might have done, that 'I was at my Characters two days after that boy was born. I couldn't afford to lose a week! I sat up
in bed and did them. Don’t you think it was clever of me? . . . and never did me the least harm’ (Joyce, p. 222-3). Oliphant shows that these Anglican clergymen and their wives are not beyond the reaches of mammon and suffer the ‘soap-boiler’s’ sage prediction that ‘all [people] knock under to it [the value of money] in the end . . . . They think a deal of themselves and their families, and rank and all that, but money’s what draws them in the end’ (Joyce, p. 235).

The Tuftons, however, augmented by Mrs Tufton’s ‘highly respectable connections’ and ‘many dividends’, enjoy a high social position within the chapel community that allow Mrs Tufton to look down upon fellow chapel members, such as the Pigeons, dismissing them as ‘only tradespeople’ (Salem Chapel, p. 237). As the wife of a minister, however, her reputation in the community is linked with that of her husband, whose limited abilities as a preacher are the cause of discontent amongst the deacons and a source of embarrassment for his wife: ‘Mr Tufton meant to do exactly what was right; she knew he did; but to sit still and hear him making such a muddle of it all! Such penalties have to be borne by dutiful wives. She had to smile feebly, when he concluded, to somebody who turned around to congratulate her upon the minister’s beautiful speech’ (Salem Chapel, p. 384). Such scenarios, suggests Oliphant, are the bane of women taught to uphold in silence and without question, the superior claims of male wisdom which, she hints, persist now only as desiderata.
Tufton’s lengthy pastorate at Carlingford is unusual, given the unsettled nature of the Nonconformist ministry in general. Although the Congregationalist ministry did not labour under the many emotional and financial inconveniences of itinerancy as did, for example, the Methodists, Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians, it did suffer, according to Brown, with the drift of men to other churches, usually Methodist and Anglican, and mainly on points of church government rather than points of belief (1988, p. 132-3). Thus when Horace Northcote and Reginald May meet, in Phoebe Junior, to discuss the merits of their religious stance, the former is a Congregationalist minister and the latter an Anglican clergyman, their argument centres on the merits of each tradition as a social agency; points of theology or doctrine are not mentioned. Northcote and Vincent have benefited from a formal system of training that is gradually replacing men such as Tufton. Tufton is under-educated to meet the changing demands of chapel life, a point that Oliphant makes clear in Salem Chapel, so that his type of ministry is quite different from that offered by characters such as Arthur Vincent, well educated, enthusiastic and ‘fresh from Homerton’, who aims to transform the chapel community at Carlingford, and Horace Northcote in Phoebe Junior, who is a gifted and sought-after preacher. Oliphant’s portrayal of the minister, Tufton, suggests that he lacks the education and savoir-faire necessary to meet the changing needs of the Salem Chapel community. Whilst it is clear that the Tuftons are comic characters, there is the underlying suggestion that people of their type are no longer suitable representatives for mid century Nonconformity.
Although ill-matched and struggling clerical marriages provide much of the humour in the Chronicles of Carlingford, the plight of clerical widows and widowers add pathos. The clerical widower, Mr May, in Phoebe Junior, condemns his wife in absentia, bitterly ‘resent[ing] the blow which took her from him’, and berating ‘Providence for leaving him with his motherless family upon his hands, a man so utterly unfit for the task’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 67-8). His grief is tinged with a cynicism that arises from his position as a clergyman that, in turn, requires him to convince others ‘that everything that happened to them was for the best’, whilst he himself dismisses the axiom with contempt (Phoebe Junior, p. 67). Oliphant hints that his widowed state has prevented his advancement within the Church, simply because he has no wife to assist him in his career and, more importantly, to promote his status as father to his children (Phoebe Junior, p. 68). Consequently, his children do not wholeheartedly endorse his position of paterfamilias, for there is an underlying current of resentment in his relationships with them. The presence of a wife, suggests Oliphant, would smooth over domestic concerns, particularly those associated with financial management, perhaps averting this clergyman’s eventual descent into penury and perdition.

In The Curate in Charge, following the death of the Rev. Mr St John’s second wife, St John immediately recalls his daughters from school, where both have positions as teachers and one shows promise as an artist, to inflict upon them the heavy
responsibilities of surrogate motherhood. Their father’s perspective is quite distinctly lodged within the unquestioning and immovable bounds of patriarchy:

Mr St John felt that it was quite natural his girls should come home and keep his house for him, and take the trouble of the little boys, and visit the schools – so naturally that when he had said, ‘Now you are here again,’ it seemed to him that everything was said that needed to be said (Curate, p. 53).

This reverend gentleman marries his daughter’s governess in an effort to forestall her dismissal and to avert any disruption to his domestic routine. Mr St John and Mr May are examples of clergyman who are content to meander through life, leaving all domestic concerns to their female kin. This theme which provokes an authorial aside in Innocent in the form of a ‘digression’ addressed to the ‘gentle reader’, that has all the impress of her own journey through widowhood, announces that: ‘Women, however, abandon their post much less frequently, and sometimes, I suspect, get quite reconciled to the double burden, and do not object to do all for, and be all to, their children. Sometimes they attempt too much, and often enough they fail; but so does everybody in everything, and widows’ sons have not shown badly in general life’ (1873, p. 66-7). Male indolence in the face of female forbearance and sacrifice was a theme that resonated throughout Oliphant’s own life and fiction.
There is no doubt that the loss of a wife for a clergyman would have been a heavy blow, particularly when he was left with children and the affairs of the parish to manage single-handedly. No wonder, then, that the Rev. John Coker Egerton poured forth his blessings on his married state noting, with a palpable sense of relief, 'the completion of 3 years of absolutely unclouded happiness as far as our married life is concerned. Troubles I have had independently of domestic life, & what they wd. have been but for my dear wife. I cannot say but she wonderfully helps me to bear them. May God bless her & our child . . .' (Wells, 1992, p. 201). Men and women expected different things from marriage but forbearance and mutual support in the face of difficulties was an important consideration for connubial happiness, as Oliphant discovered in the early years of her own marriage. Oliphant's husband emerges from her autobiography as a marginal, shadowy figure, faintly sketched and devoid of the passionate intensity that she lavished on her children, in death as well as in life, which so defines this document. Oliphant was married for a brief six years before her husband's death in 1859 and the early years of the marriage were soured by rivalry and jealousy between Frank Oliphant and his mother-in-law, leading Oliphant to reminisce: 'I have gone through many sorrows since, but I don’t know that any period of my life has ever contained more intolerable moments than those first years that should have been so happy' (Oliphant, 1990, p. 37). It is possible that Oliphant harboured unspoken resentment towards her husband, who failed to share the details of his last illness with her, leaving her 'angry and wounded beyond measure' (Oliphant, 1990, p. 65).
In the *Chronicles of Carlingford*, the widows of clergymen, for the most part, fare better than the widowers, which is unsurprising, given their creator’s adjustments to the state of widowhood. Writing at a distance of thirty-odd years, Oliphant could afford to be slightly prosaic about her status as a widow, noting ‘I don’t remember that I ever thought it anything the least out of the way, or was either discouraged or frightened, provided only that the children were all well’ (Oliphant, 1990, p. 96). Perhaps we should take Oliphant’s reminiscences of this time at her word for, in the years following her husband’s death, the flow of novels and articles did not cease; neither did she indulge in excessive self-pity, apart from admitting to the temptation to do so (Oliphant, 1990, p. 81). At the time of her husband’s death in 1859, Oliphant was left £1,000 in debt with only a small annuity of £200 on his life (Oliphant, 1990, p. 79). According to Curran, only men at the top of their professions could afford life insurance, but buyer ignorance and the widespread fraudulence of some companies did not always make life insurance a viable alternative for many middle-class families (1993, p. 220-1). Many widows, clerical or otherwise, experienced immediate financial crisis, as Oliphant’s own situation attests. Nevinson notes that, following her clergyman father’s death when she was seventeen, her family was ‘left very badly off with many bills for house-moving and the heavy claims of dilapidation\(^2\) on our big old vicarage (that burden of all outgoing clergy), above all with four boys still at school . . . the bulk of the business and the

\(^2\) According to Knight, ‘dilapidation payments . . . had to be made to the incoming incumbent’; such costs could easily eat away a ‘clergy widow’s modest legacy’ (1995, p. 132).
responsibility fell upon my youthful shoulders, for my mother was delicate, unused to business, and well-nigh stunned by the grief and anxiety of her widowhood' (1926, p. 42). Oliphant's fictional clerical widows are stoic in grief and valiant in widowhood.

When the Rev. Mr Damerel in A Rose in June dies, it is revealed that his dilettantish ways have left his wife and family without means. Although Mr Damerel had made provision for his family, this was now spent, lost 'in unsuccessful speculations,' there being 'repeated encroachments on the capital, made to pay debts,' and '[o]f the insurances on his life only one had been kept up, and that chiefly because his bankers held it as security for some advance' (Rose, 1874, p. 124). In an effort to deliver her family from penury, Mrs Damerel insists that Rose marry a wealthy suitor, although her affections lie elsewhere, explaining that her deceased husband's life of 'self-indulgence' in 'choosing the pleasure of the moment' over duty has brought the family to their present state of indigence (Rose, p. 150-1). As the benefactor of her father's self-indulgences, Mrs Damerel insists that Rose sacrifice her future happiness for the more pressing concerns of family duty (Rose, p. 151). An unlikely plot saves Rose from the wretchedness of a loveless marriage, but the point has been driven home; the welfare of the family unit and surrender to familial obedience, as far as Oliphant is concerned, must be the paramount motives of a good daughter. This is reflected in Oliphant's own life, when she was sent to London to take care of her brother Willie, who had 'fallen once more into his old vice and debt and misery' (Oliphant, 1990, p. 26).
Once the pain of bereavement had passed coupled, perhaps, with the knowledge that her immediate future was not jeopardised by material impoverishment, widowhood, for many women, might signify a period of liberation and quiet authority over the direction of their lives. Oliphant describes her world beginning anew following her husband’s death in a way that does not necessarily suggest dissimulation (Oliphant, 1990, p. 79). A similar insouciance is applied to the widow Proctor, mother of Morley Proctor, the recently appointed rector of Carlingford in The Rector, whose frequent badinage with her clerical son is designed to relieve his growing sense of despondency that he might be temperamentally unsuited to the profession. Whilst Morley Proctor is described as ‘middle-aged’, his mother is ‘a hundred years or so younger’ and ‘having got to the bottom of the hill . . . five years ago, . . . had completed her human term; now she had recommenced her life’ (The Rector 1863/1986, p. 11). Mrs Proctor’s advanced years and deafness allow her to speculate, without censure, on her son’s choice of marriage partner by alerting him to the pitfalls in his pursuit of young Lucy Wodehouse, ‘a wicked little flirt’ (Rector, p. 18). Mrs Proctor prefers, instead, the ‘elder one’ who ‘would make a nice wife for somebody, especially for a clergyman’ (Rector, p. 17). Recognising her son’s weaknesses in pastoral duties she enthusiastically, but indiscreetly, suggests that he engage a curate to relieve him of some responsibilities, all the while pressing upon him that ‘a good wife . . . who would enter into all parish work and give you useful hints’ is a cause worth pursuing (Rector, p. 32-3). This is advice
that he angrily refutes and female influence, suggests Oliphant, is helpless in the face of wanton male intractability. A woman’s only recourse, then, is to wait till the creature should come to itself again and might be spoken to. The incomprehensibleness of women is an old theory, but what is that to the curious wondering observation with which wives, mothers, and sisters watch the other unreasoning animal in those moments when he has snatched the reins out of their hands, and is not to be spoken to! What he will of it in those unassisted moments, afflicts the compassionate female understanding. It is best to let him come to, and feel his own helplessness (Rector, p. 33).

To appeal to a man in this state of mind with an equally pathetic performance is to invite certain defeat; he must, insists Oliphant, learn to recognise ‘and feel his own helplessness’ (Rector, p. 33). Only then can the balm of female influence be applied successfully.

Male helplessness and female stoicism in the face of bereavement is a quality celebrated by Oliphant in The Doctor’s Family, when Nettie Underwood, in an exemplary display of independence and efficiency, undertakes to manage the newly bereaved family consisting of her sister, ‘in her double capacity as a woman and a fool,’ and her sister’s three tiresome children, following the death of the doctor’s wastrel
brother (*The Doctor’s Family*, 1863/1986, p. 84). This fictional scenario has uncanny parallels with Oliphant’s own family circumstances when, in 1868, she agreed to care for two of her brother’s children in the aftermath of his financial ruin. During this time, Oliphant sent her brother’s son to Eton to be educated with her own boys, and later, both before and after her brother’s death in 1875, Oliphant educated and cared for her nieces until her death (Oliphant, 1990, p. 128-32). Whilst recounting the details of this time in her autobiography, Oliphant pondered whether it was ‘likely that such family details would be of interest to the public’ (Oliphant, 1990, p. 130). These misgivings are of a temporary nature, however, for in the next sentence she defends the telling of family dramas, noting ‘it is exactly those family details that are interesting, - the human story in all its chapters’ (Oliphant, 1990, p. 130). Although these words were written from the safe vantage point of hindsight that may obscure veracity, the general concept can be discerned in Oliphant’s fiction as she strives to invest the travails of family life with a dignity it so often lacks in real-life situations.

Oliphant invests the widow Mrs Vincent, in *Salem Chapel*, with considerable dignity and status while glossing over her financial situation; we are told only that the widow does not keep a school, a common and acceptably genteel mode of employment for a widow (*Salem Chapel*, p. 90-1). In *The Perpetual Curate*, Frank Wentworth lodges with ‘Mrs Hadwin, the widow of a whilom curate, [who] was permitted by public opinion, on the score of her own unexceptionable propriety, to receive a lodger without
loss of position thereby' (Perpetual, Vol I, p. 32). Mrs Vincent’s first appearance in Salem Chapel is via her epistolary conversations with her son that already establishes her as an influential force in his personal life and career. Although Oliphant establishes an air of helpless naïvety in the character of Mrs Vincent, she proves to be anything but a helpless widow. Her experience as the wife of a minister allows her to offer sound advice to her son when he encounters difficult chapel members, yet a family crisis is partly the result of her own complaisant and facile approach to her daughter’s suitor. This aspect of her character caused concern amongst some contemporary reviewers of the novel, including the Saturday Review. According to Deacon and Hill, the ‘ultra-conservative’ Saturday Review in an article devoted to establishing the differences between male and female thought processes, ‘carefully distinguished between the inductive intellect of man, . . . and the deductive intellect of women (1972, p. 88). Women, it asserted, ‘do not proceed [in thought] by arriving at argumentative conclusions from clearly defined premises, but they throw out observations, which they cannot tell how they came by but which give the discussion a new turn and open up new lines of thought’ (in Deacon and Hill, 1972, p. 88-9). These popular contemporary theories about the nature of women in general resonate throughout the reviews of Salem Chapel and, for this reason, it is worthwhile examining some of them in detail. Contemporary critics suspected anomalies in the depiction of Mrs Vincent, perhaps because Oliphant’s portrayal of this complex fictional widow made it less easy for reviewers to judge her worth as a character by relying on stereotype. The Saturday
Review was generous in its praise of Mrs Vincent, noting that her role as the wife of a minister equipped her with an understanding of the difficulties encountered in clerical relationships with parishioners (‘Chronicles of Carlingford’, 1863). The reviewer was particularly impressed with the way in which she is able to attend to the mundane necessities of daily life while, at the same time, fending off gossip concerning her son and daughter (‘Chronicles of Carlingford’, 1863). Likewise, the review of Salem Chapel that appeared in The Spectator singled out and praised Mrs Vincent for upholding ‘congregational decencies and expectations . . . even at the very crisis of her distracting anguish of mind . . . her preternatural maternal vigilance with which she perceives and defeats the rising spirit of dissatisfaction with her son’ (‘Books: Chronicles of Carlingford’, 1863).

The author of a review of Salem Chapel that appeared in the National Review produced the most detailed assessment of this character. Mrs Vincent, it noted appreciatively, is a pleasing mixture of feminine tact, tenderness and good management, but was unable to understand how a woman so lacking in ‘judgement and will which make her a cipher in her daughter’s emergency’, is adept at ‘handling her son’s congregation’, when his integrity is questioned by his deacons and parishioners (Pearson, 1863). Pearson sought to explain these incongruities, or the ‘double-natured pliancy,’ in the character of Mrs Vincent via a lengthy discourse on the nature of masculinity and femininity that aims to voice and uphold the opinions of the status quo (1863). The
reviewer's language betrays uneasiness that women were already operating successfully outside the prescribed boundaries of the domestic sphere where they might challenge the traditional concepts of masculine authority:

More sensitive to impressions than the man, and more observant of little things, the woman broods over the trivial details of her life in a way which the close work of an office or the distractions of business absolutely forbid. She is matchless in her own field, and lost out of it. The very intenseness of her study, her complete mastery of all that is within her range, unfit her to suspect her deficiencies, or surmise an outer sphere (Pearson, 1863).

The defensive tone of the above extract is readily understood, stresses Hammerton, when seen in the context of contemporary discourses that offered men a masculinity that invited their 'domestic presence and family involvement' (1995, p. 151), but was shot through with contradictions. Tensions increased, argues Hammerton, due to '[t]he simultaneous growth of a contrasting discourse of aggressive heterosexual manliness which rejected 'feminine' qualities and close male friendships' (1995, p. 151). It is possible, too, that the National Review's response to the novel is a reaction to the overwhelming female presence in Salem Chapel, particularly as the reviewer found Tozer's defence of Vincent 'the most manly bit of writing in the book' (Pearson, 1863). Clearly, Oliphant's portrayal of abundant feminine society in Salem Chapel affronted some male readers, just as Vincent was overcome by his female parishioners, while 'the
men, the lawful owners of all this feminine display, they huddled all together, indisputable cheesemongers as they were, quite transcended and extinguished by their wives and daughters' (*Salem Chapel*, p. 7-8).

The chapel women are the keepers of chapel folk memory and the purveyors of homespun wisdom who remind Vincent of the fate that awaits any minister or his wife who set themselves ‘up above the people, . . . and was too grand, . . . to visit the deacons’ wives’ (*Salem Chapel*, p. 8). They operate within a powerful female network dominated by gossip and hearsay, which are disguised as domestic and social camaraderie. In this way, the chapel women not only consolidate family and religious ties but also regulate the boundaries for social inclusion and exclusion. As most of the social activities of the chapel group take place within the exclusively female domestic space of the home, which does not admit male posturing, it is almost impossible for the men to police or regulate the information their women gather and impart to others. For example, Vincent learns of the fate of his predecessor and his wife from Mrs Pigeon, whose opinions of the clerical pair are given freely and without any attempt at censorship (*Salem Chapel* p. 8-9), while Mrs Brown reminds him that her long associations with the chapel will not vouchsafe his reluctance to socialise. Gossip and eavesdropping are not exclusively female activities as Oliphant shows when Vincent, secreted within the vestry of Salem chapel, eavesdrops on a conversation between Mrs Hilyard and Colonel Mildmay that leads to an imbroglio involving himself, his mother and sister (*Salem Chapel*, p. 104-109). Vincent’s
eavesdropping is defended and legitimised by Oliphant in terms of strategic information gathering: ‘Mr Vincent was not startled into eavesdropping unawares, nor did he engage in any sophistical argument to justify himself for listening. On the contrary, he listened honestly, with the full intention of hearing all he could . . . straining his ear to catch some knowledge of a history, in which a crowd of presentiments warned him that he himself should yet be concerned’ (Salem Chapel, p. 104). It is the women, rather than their menfolk, who have the power to bestow or withdraw social approval. The women’s domination of the domestic network extends well beyond the confines of their own hearths and, as Oliphant demonstrates, infiltrates the business of the chapel as well. Oliphant stresses that the chapel women are near equals to the men and capable of dispensing charity or ‘plotting schism’, as Mrs Pigeon threatens to do towards the end of the novel (Salem Chapel, p. 419). Underlying the comedy associated with the chapel matrons, Oliphant displays serious regard for the influence of the domestic sphere. It is these women, after all, who dispense charity and hospitality, are the carers of chapel members and its unofficial fundraisers, and it is their daughters who will ensure its continuity.

The discourse that offered men ‘domestic presence,’ referred to by Hammerton, was Evangelicalism. Evangelicalism promoted an ethos of domesticity that had the family as the centre of religious practice. It encouraged worship within the home and demanded that its adherents demonstrate piety and compassion which, although not
exclusively feminine virtues, were perceived by many as virtues more easily attained by women than by men. Middle-class women were the beneficiaries of mid-century religious enthusiasm within the church and the chapel. Davidoff and Hall note that involvement in church and chapel duties and activities offered many women 'a woman's subculture of validation and support' that built on virtues thought innate to the sex (1987, p. 108). Men, on the other hand, explain Davidoff and Hall, found that their business interests were often at odds with 'religious precepts' (1987, p. 108). In the Carlingford series, and especially in Salem Chapel, Oliphant shows that women are the agents of social cohesion in the chapel community. It was important that middle class families, and those aspiring to middle class status, such as the poulterers, dairymen and cheesemongers of Salem Chapel, foster a welcoming social environment for their neighbours, as social conviviality was, very often, a prerequisite to social and mercantile credit. Oliphant shows that the wives of these men share in the running of the family business. Mrs Tozer, for example, takes an active interest in the shop and finds retirement in Grange Lane dull, compared with 'her rooms over the shop in High Street, where she saw everything that was going on' (Phoebe Junior, p. 81). As many Nonconformist denominations eschewed the worldliness associated with public entertainments, the small comforts of domestic sociability offered their adherents a legitimate social outlet that had the unquestioned support of religion. This humble hospitality is offered to Vincent upon his arrival in Carlingford, where he is expected to attend numerous tea meetings organised by the wives of chapel deacons and where any
refusal to attend is interpreted as a social slight. Perhaps to emphasise the vulgarity of Carlingford's chapel society, Oliphant injects a spirit of competition between the chapel matrons that implies an overriding emphasis on the importance of social rank at the expense of sound Christian values. Mrs Tozer is the first matron to secure Vincent as a tea guest but, in the midst of this woman's soiree, his presence is solicited by Mrs Brown for one of her gatherings in a speech that neatly explains the common social background, the influences and the prejudices of Carlingford's chapel people:

For if there's one thing I can't abear in a chapel, it's one set setting up above the rest. But bein' all in the way of business, except just the poor folks, as is all very well in their place, and never interferes with nothing, and don't count, there's nothing but brotherly love here, which is a deal more than most ministers can say for their flocks. I've asked a few friends to tea, Mr Vincent, on next Thursday, at six. . . . All our own folks, sir, and a comfortable evening; and prayers, if you'll be so good, at the end. I don't like the new fashion,' said Mrs Brown, with a significant glance towards Mrs Tozer, 'of separatin', like heathens, when all's of one connection. We might never meet again, Mr Vincent. In the midst of life, you know, sir. You'll not forget Thursday, at six (Salem Chapel, p. 12).
Speeches such as the above, with its convoluted syntax, circuitous rhythm, the repeated naming of the interlocutor in a way that is faintly aggressive, intermingled with snatches of homilies and vague biblical references that nearly always illustrate the speaker's self-regard, are found throughout *Salem Chapel* whenever Oliphant depicts the strains of social advancement and class inferiority of her Nonconformists. Oliphant shows that competitive social affectation and intrusive garrulosity undermine the hospitality displayed by these chapel women in a manner that is out of place in a small provincial town. This onslaught of rude but well-meaning matrons is enough to send Vincent on a self-deluded search for genteel society in the rarefied social circle inhabited by Lady Western and her Anglican entourage.

This situation changes when Oliphant represents the social and cultural aspects of a later generation of Nonconformists in *Phoebe Junior*. In this novel the urbane Phoebe Beecham of the title, and the minister, Horace Northcote, are educated, culturally refined Nonconformists who share few similarities with their kinsmen and kinswomen of *Salem Chapel*. A review of *Phoebe Junior* that appeared in *The Academy* was concerned that Oliphant allowed her Nonconformists to be unduly influenced by 'the superior social advantages of the Establishment' (Littledale, 1876). It is likely, however, that Oliphant was casting a critical eye over the social effects of religious and social apartheid that so complicated ordinary human relationships between the Established Church and English Nonconformity throughout the nineteenth century. Novels such as *Salem Chapel* and
Phoebe Junior allow Oliphant to incorporate the social worlds of Nonconformity and Anglicanism into a palatable format, that does not stretch unduly the bounds of veracity for her reading public. One way to accomplish this is to allow her leading Dissenters, such as Arthur Vincent, Horace Northcote and Phoebe Beecham, to enjoy the benefits of a liberal education that sets them apart from their Nonconformist brethren.

Daughters and Sisters

Oliphant indicates that Nonconformity's place in the cultural milieux is enhanced by the emergence of educated females such as Phoebe Beecham. Phoebe's education has allowed her to move beyond the narrow social and religious confines that mark the lives of her parents and grandparents in Salem Chapel. Oliphant began work on Phoebe Junior in 1872 and published it in 1876 so that, by her industrious standards, the novel was a slowly evolving work. During this time, Oliphant was responsible for five young dependants consisting of her two boys, her nephew and two nieces. The girls were despatched to boarding school in Germany from 1875 until 1879, which must have engendered a great deal of soul-searching for their aunt, who was now responsible for their education and beyond. Phoebe Junior considers, amongst other things, the question of female education. Through the character Phoebe, Oliphant laments that women's
education labours under the tensions of two systems: the Ruskinian ideal of womanhood ‘that dancing, drawing, and cooking were three of the higher arts which ought to be studied by girls’, and the other that allowed girls the benefits of a liberal education, but prevented them ‘acquiring the highest instruction’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 17). Restrained by parental authority, Phoebe cannot take the ‘Cambridge examinations’, as, to do so, would encourage speculation that she was to become a schoolmistress, whilst education ‘in the department of cooking’ is likewise deplored by Mrs Beecham, who ‘did not wish her daughter to make a slave of herself’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 18). For Oliphant, neither ‘system’ offered a satisfactory solution for women, since ‘there is in the mind of the age some ineffable way of harmonizing them which makes their conjunction common’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 17-18). Despite these limitations, Phoebe is well educated, is learning German, attends lectures at a nearby ladies’ college, and ‘read[s] Virgil at least, if not Sophocles’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 18). Mermin notes that training in Latin and Greek equipped boys for university entrance as well as allowing them to demonstrate their intellectual superiority to girls (1993, p. 50), adding that knowledge of Greek ‘allow[ed] men to establish “poetry” as their exclusive possession’ (1993, p. 54). For example, Margaret Nevinson, whose father was an Anglican clergyman and a noteworthy classical scholar, was taught Latin with her brothers and Greek when she was older (1926, p.7). Nevinson reports that, prior to her brothers’ departure for university, they had ‘hitherto taken my classical attainments for granted, but finding “other chaps’ sisters” were not so learned, they began to advise me to take up some more feminine accomplishments, of
which I knew I was grossly ignorant’ (1926, p. 17). Thereafter, Nevinson’s education changed, and, ‘except occasionally and half surreptitiously, my father ceased to teach me Greek. My mother had struck, as she said that no one would ever marry a girl who read Greek’ (Nevinson, 1926, p. 17). As Nevinson’s case illustrates, Anglican, as well as Nonconformist girls, felt themselves lost between two competing systems. In Cousin Mary, the education of the clergy daughters, stresses Oliphant, takes place entirely within the domestic sphere, with dutiful attention paid to nursing the sick, needlework and housekeeping (1888, p. 163). On the eve of her eldest daughter’s sixteenth birthday, the eponymous heroine muses over the possibility of ‘higher education, of which everybody talks nowadays’ for her daughter, a ‘serious’ girl who scorns the popular stereotypical depiction of girls in ‘story-books’ whose ‘dreams were of balls and triumphs’ (Cousin Mary, p. 170). Nevertheless, she dismisses the learning of Latin and Greek as superfluous and ‘incompatible with her [daughter’s] other duties’, deciding that education in the way of ‘accomplishments’ is all that is necessary (Cousin Mary, p. 174). There is little significant dialogue between mother and daughter about the latter’s education, and the subject of music lessons is swept aside as an unnecessary expense, ‘especially in a town where rich mercantile folk abound’ (Cousin Mary, p. 174). In this clerical household of straightened finances, argues Oliphant, ‘the boys’ education was a necessity; the girls’ had to go to the wall’ (Cousin Mary, p. 174).
Binfield notes that, as Nonconformity gained most from 'the middle class revolution', it was more likely to be 'socially conformist' (1981, p. 7). Prosperity, in turn, 'encouraged an ideal of womanhood' that promoted the popular concept of the idle gentlewoman who was maintained by the labour of her father, brother, or husband, notes Binfield (1981, p. 6). It was impossible to educate girls with the view of maintaining the ideal, says Binfield, when society demanded in the one person a 'moral guardian,' a woman of leisure, but not an 'idle woman, for the evangelical work ethic could not tolerate that' (1981, p. 9). It is no wonder, then, that Phoebe's 'noble ambition' is stranded somewhere between competing systems (Phoebe Junior, p. 18). Oliphant offers an opt yet equivocal summary to the issue of female education in A Country Gentleman and His Family, stating that

> with all the new-fashioned talk about education and work for women, which then had just begun, nice girls were not quite so sure as they used to be that to reclaim a lost prodigal, or consolidate a penitence, was their mission in life. Perhaps they were right; but the old idea was good for the race, if not for the individual woman, human sacrifices being a fundamental principle of natural religion, if not the established creed (1887, p. 96-7).

It is possible that the ideal of a leisured female existence was, in part, the product of a consumer society. Whilst mid-to-late nineteenth-century retailing did not
completely dispense with household production, it offered to city dwellers, in particular, a wide variety of finished goods. This impression is conveyed in *Phoebe Junior* in the chapter titled 'Shopping', when Ursula and her cousins explore London shops offering a variety of made garments, jewellery and toys. Oliphant presents 'shopping' as 'an occupation which all young girls and women like' (*Phoebe Junior*, p. 46) and, more importantly, an activity that satisfies many psychological desires. For the wealthy Mrs Copperhead, shopping gives her the pleasure of female companionship and a degree of independence that she is denied within her home. So powerful is the pleasure of purchase that Oliphant describes it as rupture: 'She was quite transformed so long as this transaction lasted. Her languid countenance grew bright, her pale eyes lighted up' (*Phoebe Junior*, p. 48-9). Ursula's shopping experience, on the other hand, has the overwhelming summons of a siren's call that both threatens loss of identity and promises fascination, compelling her to '[lose] herself in a maze of fancies, to which the misty afternoon atmosphere, and the twinkling lights, and the quickly passing crowds lent a confused but not unpleasant background' (*Phoebe Junior*, p. 50). Shopping offers Ursula a temporary respite from the bills and tradespeople 'and papa, who was more difficult than the servant, and more troublesome than the children', that has heretofore marked her life (*Phoebe Junior*, p. 46). Ursula's return to Carlingford immerses her once more in the family arguments and domestic troubles and selflessness that particularise the pattern of life for many women. Writing without the protection of anonymity, Oliphant put her name to an article that deplored the implied frivolity of the
contemporary notion that rendered women’s domestic labours almost invisible, whilst at the same time paid homage to the men who laboured daily to keep their womenfolk in ‘bonnets and millinery’ (1880, p. 705). Even more damaging to the honour she felt was owed to the domestic hearth was the idea, ‘universally accepted’, that the married woman ‘sits at home in ease and leisure, and enjoys the fruits of his [her husband’s] labour, and gives him an ornamental compensation in smiles and pleasantness’ (Oliphant, 1880).

Oliphant recognised that education alone does not necessarily lay the foundations of an independent life for most women. A prudent match remained the most acceptable route for the majority of women to exercise their talents. The Nonconformist ministry provided a lucrative marriage market for women and men, as Oliphant makes clear in the opening chapter of Phoebe Junior, when she recounts the history of Phoebe Tozer, who makes a carefully calculated marriage with the promising young minister Mr Beecham, who also happens to be ‘the son of respectable people in a good way of business’ (Phoebe Junior, p. 1). Binfield tells us that ‘the number of ministers who married above them[elves] and who married both intelligently and well is more than an impression’ (1981, p. 8). Mr Tufton, for example, is the beneficiary of his wife’s money and influential connections in Islington. Like her mother, Phoebe Beecham realises that marriage to a clergyman or an influential man of the chapel would give her social recognition and important status within the chapel community. Oliphant
shows that Phoebe's judgement in choosing the dim-witted but wealthy Clarence Copperhead above the Anglican and socially irreproachable clergyman Reginald May, is not an entirely mercenary act, but a shrewdly reasoned strategy for putting her undeniable talents to good use. For Phoebe, Clarence would be 'a Career'. '[S]he could put him into parliament, ... [h]e would be as good as a profession, a position, a great work to Phoebe. He meant wealth (which she dismissed in its superficial aspect as something meaningless and vulgar, but accepted in its higher aspect as an almost necessary condition of influence), and he meant all the possibilities of future power' (Phoebe Junior, p. 234). Recognizing Phoebe's talents, Clarence concedes that the match would relieve him of the burden of an academic coach and perhaps assist in his election to parliament (Phoebe Junior, p. 233). Dismissing excessive romantic display, Phoebe wisely recognises that it is her 'head that was full of throbbing and pulses, not her heart' (Phoebe Junior, p. 234). Phoebe's dominion, stresses Oliphant, will extend beyond the domestic realm into the very seat of the nation's power (Phoebe Junior, p. 339), just as the earlier novel in the series, Miss Marjoribanks, the eponymous heroine cuts a swathe from Carlingford town to her new seat of Marchbank, via a fortunate match with her cousin, leaving behind 'a vision of a parish saved' and the satisfaction that her prenent from town to county 'was but the culmination of her career' (1866/1988, p. 497). Oliphant illustrates that many possibilities of practical power were open to clever women willing to exploit the ill-defined social sphere contiguous with the public and the private. Thus, during her reformation of Carlingford society,
Lucilla Morjoribanks gains notoriety, a degree of independence, and a great deal of personal credence through her social machinations, whilst never deviating from her often repeated 'object in life [which] is to be a comfort to papa' (Miss Marjoribanks, p. 51). Both Phoebe and Lucilla, at various stages of their careers, act as social luminaries for the benefit of Carlingford society. Phoebe's dignified presence in the May household transforms the parsonage into 'the centre of a little society' (Phoebe Junior, p. 217), and she beguiles even the irritable Rev. May who enjoys a fatherly flirtation with her.

For Oliphant, a capable and positive female influence is deemed essential in the development of girls. For example, characters, such as the eponymous heroine Joyce and Rosa Elsworth in The Perpetual Curate, are denied the benefits of a regular family group, which, it is implied, is the reason for their difficulties in adulthood. Both women view their clergymen as substitute father figures and imbue them with the power and authority of the father. Relationships between the clergy and their parishioners were most difficult when it was a woman who sought the clergyman's counsel. In Joyce, the Canon, Dr Jenkinson, befriends the eponymous heroine and it is to him that she later turns to for advice in matters of love. Her attempts to speak candidly to him are thwarted by his imposing clerical presence, 'his large prosperous person, and the capacious round of his black-silk waistcoat, and the air about him of a man who had everything and abounded'. Faced with this imposing male presence, 'her courage and confidence failed her' (Joyce, 1889, p. 349). Bound by rules of etiquette, she finds it
impossible to speak of such matters, whilst the Canon, in turn, regards her reticence as the illogical workings of the female mind, admitting that, 'like other women, Joyce, ... you would like me to be at all the expense of the talk, my dear' (Joyce, p. 349). Jenkinson's bluff manner and forthright approach, suggests Oliphant, does not inspire trust, particularly in his female parishioners.

On the other hand, a character such as Phoebe Beecham enacts an almost seamless transition from dependent daughter to influential wife, whilst the circumstances surrounding Phoebe's Anglican opposite, Ursula May, are complicated by a series of difficult family situations. Ursula is burdened 'with the duties of a mother' since her mother's death and, like Mab and Cicely, in The Curate in Charge, lacks any 'special inclination towards these duties' (Phoebe Junior, p. 27). The May home does not exemplify the pinnacle of Christian family values because it lacks, suggests Oliphant, a pivotal female figure. The parsonage is the site of intense familial disagreements with a flinty and imperious father who is, by turns, indulgent and then dismissive towards his children. Oliphant makes this point in the disturbing scene where Mr May seeks to gratify publicly his tenuous image as benevolent and dignified patriarch:

He was a tall man, and the sight of him triumphantly dragged in by these imps, the youngest of whom was about up to his knees, was pretty, and would have gone to the heart of any spectator. He was not himself unconscious of this, and when he was in a

...
good humour, and the children were neat and tolerably dressed, he did not object to being seen by the passers-by dragged up his own steps by those two little ones. The only passers-by, however, on this occasion were a retired shopkeeper and his wife. It was a pity that the pretty spectacle of the clergyman with his little boy and girl should have been thus thrown away upon a couple of Dissenters, yet it was not without its effect (Phoebe Junior, p. 69).

Soon after this display of false family fellowship, Mr May peremptorily dismisses his young children and argues with Ursula about domestic expenses, all the while maligning Ursula's sense of female duty and obedience that supports his position as 'the head of the family' (Phoebe Junior, p. 71). The chapter titled 'Mr May's Affairs' prefaces May's financial problems and irascible temperament by applying mock aphorisms such as: 'Debt is an idiosyncrasy like other things' (Phoebe Junior, p. 128), and 'A bad temper is a possession like another, and may be made skilful use of like other things which, perhaps, in themselves, are not desirable' (Phoebe Junior, p. 127). The character of May is constructed around these axioms. In this way, Oliphant suggests that, although May's flaws fall within the commonalities of human experience and emotion that make him no better or worse than any other man, his implacable behaviour towards his family will, nevertheless, violate readerly expectations of the clerical character.
Complicating Ursula's passage to maturity is the lack of suitable female role models. A neighbouring widow, Mrs Sam Hurst, 'a portly good-looking woman with an active mind, and nothing, or next to nothing to do', is an unwelcome figure in the May household who enjoys the jealousies and anger that her presence causes (Phoebe Junior, p. 96). Both Mrs Hurst and Mr May enjoy 'a decorous semi-filiation' (Phoebe Junior, p. 72) that is particularly irksome for the May children, because it is driven solely by the imprudent thrill of romantic excitement minus the sober application of duty. May's knowledge that his behaviour incites anger in his children further strains the parental relationship, particularly as Ursula is aware that her father's example is 'very much against the scriptural rule' (Phoebe Junior, p. 72). Unlike Phoebe, who has used her generous education to augment her opportunities, Ursula's 'irregular' education consists of no more than 'reading and writing' and 'pretty manners' that underwrite her father's belief that education beyond these basics is wasted on girls (Phoebe Junior, p. 106, 71). Her father's entrenched position reinforces Ursula's status as ingénue in the family hierarchy and allows Oliphant to question the implications of female, and male, sacrifice. Ursula's ties to domesticity and surrogate motherhood are the common lot of many motherless daughters, clerical or otherwise, suggesting that Oliphant thought of love and duty as countervailing principles. Ursula's marriage to Horace Northcote, who has himself surrendered his career as a
Nonconformist minister and quietly repaid Tozer the debt incurred by May, seems to support this view. Oliphant hints at future problems in the marriage, suggesting that sacrifices, unless freely made, may harbour resentment. Ursula has surrendered her youth to the severe constraints of filial obedience and the heavy burdens of housekeeping and can look forward to more of the same, while Northcote has abandoned the office of pastor, the Liberation Society and other societies to accommodate his adopted Anglican family. The efficacy of this union is by no means wholeheartedly endorsed.

Ursula's brother, Reginald, must also pay the price of perfect obedience to parental authority by accepting the sinecure against his will. Reginald retains the chaplaincy and his father's living, 'so that he is in reality a pluralist', thereby securing his professional future, but is unable to overcome his disappointment in not securing the hand of Phoebe Beecham (Phoebe Junior, p. 341). Phoebe is alert to Reginald's equivocation in the face of parental authority, and is heard to say to Reginald that 'it is not nearly so easy to please you ... you don't know half so exactly what you want, as Clarence Copperhead does, though you abuse him, poor fellow' (Phoebe Junior, p. 223). Marriage to Clarence will provide Phoebe with a career, boundless wealth and a social position, with which Reginald cannot compete. Nonconformity, in the person of Phoebe Beecham, has indeed achieved
the heights of social acceptance that Oliphant outlined in the novel's opening chapters.

Whilst mindful of the social and cultural restraints imposed upon women, Oliphant was interested in how men and women negotiate life when the arbitrary boundaries of the domestic and the public are blurred, because clerical work, by definition, crosses gender boundaries. There is no doubt where Oliphant's clergy wives, widows, sisters and daughters position themselves in relation to their clerical kin. Her interest is fuelled not only by the personal and professional demands of her own domestic situation, but also by a body of influential contemporary fiction, which Oliphant believed misrepresented relationships between the sexes. Oliphant was indeed acting against the contemporary social grain by depicting her female clerical relatives as active agents, committed to co-operating with and, at times, directing the lives and careers of their clergymen. Oliphant's portrayal of female clerical relatives therefore, provided an ideal opportunity to present men and women working in this gender-grey area. Calling on her intimate knowledge of real-life clergymen, their wives and families, Oliphant was able to invest her female clerical relatives with the same sound values, sympathies and good sense that the reading public expected of their clergymen. Indeed, as Gregory notes, although wives are technically part of the laity, many contemporary parishioners, convinced of the essential nature of their duties, considered them, as much as their husbands, as worthy representatives of the Church (1998, p. 268). Clerical
marriages, Oliphant realised, operated within the same paradigm of female subservience and male dominance that guided marital unions within the wider community and she shows her clerical wives ready to exploit intractable male posturing to their advantage. For the most part, Oliphant presents her clerical wives as active, independent agents and noteworthy clergywomen in their own right, ready to participate in most areas of parochial life. Although Oliphant's clergy wives must make due allowance for the inscrutable demands of male posturing, and are not above employing 'subtle feminine policy' when occasion demands, their widowed sisters, instead of buckling under the increased burdens of financial and other responsibilities, come to enjoy the fruits of their newly independent status.

Clerical widows, on the other hand, fare better than clerical widowers and, once the details of her financial future is secure, the clerical widow could sally forth, like the widow Proctor, with a renewed zeal for life. Widowhood also inscribed women with a degree of authority and independence not always enjoyed by wives, sisters or daughters. The widow Vincent, for example, whose labile nature masks a flinty resistance to any encroachments on her daughter's virtue or her son's worthiness as a minister, is anything but a helpless widow and proves herself quite capable of quashing rumours and managing her son's congregation when the need arises.
Clerical widowers such as May and St John are lost without wives to manage their households and children and are heavily reliant, instead, on the support of their daughters. These clerical daughters might balk at the level of responsibility such work entails but expressions of rebellion are attenuated when they are made aware that the welfare and survival of the family unit is of paramount importance and depends on their active and willing participation. Clerical daughters and sisters might labour under the demands imposed by fickle and feckless clerical fathers and brothers but hesitate, like Phoebe and Ursula, when presented with serious clerical suitors. Marriage to clergymen is not a state that they readily pursue.

Linked to greater female networks operating within the Church and Chapel environment, Oliphant perceives women as a formidable force both for change and in preserving traditional religious values. Beneath the comedy of petty rivalry and the jostling for social gain, Oliphant is adamant that the survival of Nonconformist chapel groups is dependent on influential groups of chapel women whose ability to exert influence is felt beyond the confines of their domestic sphere. The maternal dynasty that began with Mrs Tozer and her daughter in Salem Chapel, continues unabated and triumphs in the person of the eponymous Phoebe Junior.

In her autobiography, Oliphant confessed that all knowledge of 'curious freedom from human ties' was a state 'which I have never known' (Oliphant,
1990, p. 15, 16), adding that she was merely ‘following my instincts’ to work incessantly, to support others and renounce ‘the self-restrained life which the greater artist imposes upon himself’ (Oliphant, 1990, p. 16). Such confessions are tinged with regret, for Oliphant was keenly aware that her domestic situation took precedence over her writing career, noting that ‘it was better to bring up the boys for the service of God . . . than to write a fine novel’ (Oliphant, 1990, p. 16), although there is the lingering suspicion that this sentiment was inserted as a token offering for public appeasement. Whatever her personal motives might have been, these sentiments resonate throughout the fiction that depicts the lives of her female clerical kin.
CONCLUSION

Religion dominates the thematic concerns of the *Chronicles of Carlingford*. The spiritual, moral and social life of the characters in Oliphant's fictional provincial town circulate through and around its churches, chapel and clergymen. The novels not only depict a small and solidly middle class community reliant on a safety net of religious tradition, but also portray individuals and communities faced with the momentum of change. The *Chronicles of Carlingford* are, indeed, a comprehensive chronicle of religious change and show how clergymen and lay people cope with such change. By locating the *Chronicles of Carlingford* within the contemporary religious and social milieu, the thesis argues that Oliphant's depiction of the complexity and diversity of the mid-nineteenth-century religious landscape intersects, at many levels, with contemporary religious debates and controversies. I argue also that Oliphant's detailed knowledge and understanding of the problems faced by contemporary clergymen and their families enabled her to make sense of the shifts and ambiguities that such change necessarily entails.

This thesis is the first to offer a detailed critical investigation into Oliphant's depiction of the Church of England, Nonconformity, clergymen and congregations in the *Chronicles of Carlingford* and in some of her other fiction. Until now, most of the

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1 The following book is a recent publication. Birgit Kimmpr (2001), *Margaret Oliphant's Carlingford Series: An Original Contribution to the Debate on Religion, Class and Gender in the 1860s and '70s*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang. I have been unable to obtain a copy of this book.
literary criticism on Oliphant, apart from those works mentioned previously, has focussed on secular concerns. Thus, the thesis bridges a considerable gap in modern research by addressing in detail the interweaving threads of nineteenth-century English religion and society in the Chronicles of Carlingford. By drawing on a wide range of examples, both in the novels and in contemporary life, the thesis offers compelling evidence to support the claim that Oliphant was a serious commentator on religion, not just a novelist devoted to depicting provincial matters and concerns. Oliphant's representation of the contemporary Church and Chapel, its clergymen and the congregations they serve, reveals a writer sensitively and critically engaged with a range of important religious issues and willing to test and evaluate them. The thesis shows how Oliphant challenges the conventions and doctrines of factions within the Church of England, whose ongoing influence, she argues, is damaging and encourages schism.

Oliphant's depiction of the clergy and the clerical profession in the Chronicles of Carlingford takes place, as already mentioned, against a backdrop of change. The Pluralities Acts of 1838 and 1850 loom large as significant determinants of the clergyman's role at the parochial level and affect all aspects of clerical life addressed in this thesis. The acts encouraged, amongst other things, a resident incumbent who was well positioned to assert his authority within the parish. The extent to which a clergyman could exert his influence within the community is a significant theme in most of the novels that form the Chronicles of Carlingford. Oliphant is sensitively aware that clerical residency adversely affected the fortunes of the large group of unbeneficed clergymen, who endured professional and personal hardships on inadequate stipends in
positions where security of tenure was not guaranteed. The thesis shows that Oliphant reflected mainstream public opinion and depicted clergymen and communities in the process of reinterpreting and renegotiating their roles within their churches and chapels.

For example, church and chapel renovation and building, often commissioned by clergymen and interested lay parties, are significant examples of the changing religious landscape encountered by Oliphant, as rebuilding not only severed ties with the past, it also served as a real and symbolic way of marking out doctrinal boundaries for the future. I argue that Oliphant's interest in the varieties of ecclesiastical architectural styles served as a creative and critical point of departure for her to voice concerns about the services conducted therein. Innovations in public worship interested Oliphant who found Ritualism to be the most influential and the most contentious of all ecclesiastical innovations. I argue that Oliphant gives cautious, qualified approval to Ritualism, but hesitates at giving it her whole-hearted endorsement, believing that Ritualism was susceptible to the passing shifts of ecclesiastical fashion. Furthermore, as such services were organised and performed almost exclusively by the clergyman, they tended to diminish the role of lay office-bearers, such as the parish clerk. Public worship, suggests Oliphant, was in danger of becoming a spectacle rather than a solemn communal offering.

Whilst styles in public worship highlighted the authority and independence of the clergyman and the clerical office, they also opened up aspects of his duties and roles to public enquiry. As clerical roles were redefined and questioned so, too, were shifts in
lay roles. I explore, in detail, the issue of clerical discipline raised by Oliphant in *The Perpetual Curate*, because, as she points out, the clergyman's insistence on professional status also made him professionally and personally accountable to a discerning and powerful lay body. Oliphant warns that clerical claims to moral superiority could be countered by an increasingly influential lay body who were ready to pursue litigation as a means to ensure that a wealthy and privileged group within society did not set themselves above prevailing moral codes.

Another aspect of the clerical role portrayed by Oliphant, and one vitally important for the preservation of smooth social relationships between individuals and groups, was the need to provide practical pastoral support, moral guidance and careful attention to the spiritual and secular education of parishioners. Success in these duties depended on adequate training, but Oliphant was adamant that the Church of England failed its clergymen because it did not provide training sufficient to meet the needs of ordinary people in the parish. The theme of inadequate clerical training recurs in several novels, which is testament to the strength of Oliphant's feeling and her accuracy in capturing the prevailing mood of her contemporary reading public.

Whilst Oliphant attributed an unthinking allegiance to doctrine as one of the most pressing problems facing the Church of England, Nonconformity's greatest problem was its social marginalisation, even after its many political inequalities were removed. The thesis shows that Oliphant's depiction of Nonconformity rejects any glib reliance on stereotype and accordingly dispels the notion that Nonconformists were
inward-looking, uneducated and vulgar. According to Oliphant, it is only when blind obedience to convention is examined and found wanting, and when people refuse to indulge their prejudices with recourse to stereotype, that change will occur. I argue that the thirteen-year time lapse between the publication of *Salem Chapel* and *Phoebe Junior*, allowed Oliphant to portray, with laudatory verisimilitude, the significant social and political changes affecting Nonconformity and to compare Nonconformity's position with that of the Established Church. Oliphant hinted, and contemporary sources show, that the social and religious gaps between the two groups were not as wide as many contemporaries believed. The thesis shows how Oliphant's fiction offers creative alternatives to religious convention and stereotype.

The fictional group that most assuredly defied stereotype was the female clerical kin. Oliphant positioned her female clerical relatives in equal partnership with their clergymen and as active agents in the Church visible. So important are the contributions of these women to clerical life, that Oliphant refused the arbitrary impositions of the domestic and public spheres, and celebrated, instead, her 'clergywomen' as an integral part of religious life. The very survival of contemporary religious life, together with the well being of individual clergymen and their families, insists Oliphant, depended on support networks of female kin.

As the thesis shows, Oliphant is no religious iconoclast, so the ideological impulse to test alternatives is not radical in scope but favours, instead, increased
tolerance and fellow-feeling. Oliphant encourages the reader to realign allegiances and re-examine the values and attitudes associated with religious belief.

There are some themes emerging from my investigation, which invite more thorough exploration. As Oliphant presents the reader with a large and rich vein of complex, female clerical relatives, future research would benefit from a detailed investigation into this character type, both within Oliphant's extensive oeuvre and in the fiction of other nineteenth-century writers. The thesis has implications for further research by investigating the works of other nineteenth-century authors in their religious context. Such research would contribute greatly to an understanding of the nineteenth-century English novel and should not be limited to authors whose main thematic concern is religion. It is important to realise that religion informed the moral and intellectual development of many nineteenth-century authors, so any analysis of their fiction that excludes the religious context, as Thormithlen notes, is incomplete. Not only does the contextualisation of religion in the nineteenth-century novel bridge gaps in research, it also points to ways in which the disciplines of literary criticism, religion and history may be utilised productively in the examination of a work of art. This approach also has applications for investigations into the fiction of the eighteenth century, as well as forward into the early decades of the twentieth.

The Victorian reading public never tired of its fascination for fiction that depicted clergy, church and chapel communities. Oliphant tapped into this popular fictional trend in the Chronicles of Carlingford, to show her readers that their most
hallowed of institutions, together with the lives of the men and women who serve it, was beset by the same pleasures and pitfalls that marked the tenor of their own lives. Oliphant was right to examine, in close and critical detail, the roles and duties of ordinary men who, possessing no particular claims to a heightened spirituality, take the awful and irrevocable step to become cures of souls. She was also right in her assertion that the 'point, round which everything circles, is, in Carlingford, found in the clergy' (The Perpetual Curate, 1864/1975, Vol I, p. 2).


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