

The Politics of Survival:
Irish Women in Outcast Liverpool,
1850-1890

Martha Kanya-Forstner

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Abstract

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While historians have stressed the need to consider the nature of male employment in any examination of the Irish immigrant community in nineteenth-century Liverpool, very little has been written about the particular effects of the casual labour market on Irish women. This thesis, through an examination of Irish women's work and community experiences, attempts to fill this historiographical void. As the material realities and ideological representations of the social and economic structure of the commercial port are explored, it is argued that poor Irish women assumed a focal position within public discussions of poverty in Liverpool. Given the low and insecure wages earned by the majority of Irish men, the economic contributions of women were crucial for the survival of their families. The strategies pursued by all working-class women as they tried to maintain their homes on meagre resources became a source of contention and generated a unique brand of gender politics in the city. Irish women developed distinct systems for coping with the poverty which so dominated their lives. Their efforts, which often propelled them into public space, embodied a fundamental challenge to middle-class conceptions of appropriate gender roles.

Although formal employment opportunities for women in Liverpool were extremely limited, Irish women did find a prominent place for

themselves in the secondary economy of the streets. Street selling was an especially important occupation for Irish women of all ages. However, few commentators considered the trade to be a suitably feminine enterprise. Nonetheless, Irish basket women fought to defend their place on the streets. From their confrontations with business owners and law enforcers, these women became known for their insolence.

In Liverpool, where so much of women's work was conducted in the public sphere, domestic service took on added significance. Not only did service offer work for women within the safety of the private sphere, it was also hoped that the homes of their employers would provide the appropriate location for young working-class women to acquire housekeeping skills, to learn to appreciate the value of domestic work and to embrace the gender roles promoted by Victorian society which were otherwise undermined within working-class communities in Liverpool. This thesis explores the specific place of Irish domestic servants in Liverpool and pays particular attention to the ethnic and religious prejudices which affected the employment opportunities of this group of working-class girls and women. Although it was believed that domestic service would protect women from the perceived moral threats of working-class community life, a good deal of evidence suggests that it was the experience of service itself which propelled young women onto the streets as prostitutes.

In Liverpool the figure of the prostitute served to accentuate the instability of gender roles in the port, acting as a regular reminder of the shortage of formal, 'respectable' employment opportunities for women. The appropriateness of each form of paid work for women in the

city was assessed in relation to prostitution. The moral standing of a working woman was measured in the distance between her and a prostitute. Irish women were particularly prominent in Liverpool's prostitution trade and so anxieties about the presence of unruly women in the public spaces of the city took on an ethnically specific character.

The various survival strategies pursued by Irish women often brought them into conflict with law enforcers, government officials and religious leaders. This thesis is particularly concerned with the uneasy relationship which developed between the Catholic church and Irish women in the second half of the nineteenth century. The church in Liverpool was determined to mould Irish women into pious mothers who would ensure the religious allegiance of future generations. Towards this end, the church developed an extensive welfare network using the offer of relief as a means of influencing the habits and behaviour of its recipients. However, far from being the passive objects of religious reformers, Irish women actively negotiated their relationship with the church. They were resolute in their battle to secure those types of assistance which would best suit their needs, while at the same time appearing to meet the requirements of their benefactors. A theme which runs through all seven chapters of this thesis is that, though they were at the centre of numerous moral reform projects in Liverpool, Irish women were more than just acted upon. Indeed they were constant in their efforts to affect the terms of association with those above them.

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Introduction

In 1850 the journalist, Dr. Charles Mackay, wrote of Liverpool: "Next to the Metropolis Liverpool is perhaps the most important town in the Kingdom, whether as regards its past and its present or its future prospects."¹ While impressed by the grand public expressions of the city's riches, Mackay was struck by the grim poverty which characterised the lives of the majority of Liverpool's inhabitants. He observed that as a result of the type of employment generated by the city's commercial trade, poverty was the fate of those with work as well as those without. Josephine Butler recorded similar impressions of the city, commenting on the energy and excitement of the port. She too was taken by the clash of great wealth and abject poverty in Liverpool.² While visitors to Liverpool in the nineteenth century appreciated the uniqueness and importance of the place, twentieth-century historians have devoted less attention to the city than it would appear to warrant. However, if there is one field in the historiography of nineteenth-century Britain where Liverpool has assumed a central position, it is that of Irish immigration. The immigration of the Irish to Liverpool increased rapidly in the last years of the 1820s and continued at a steady rate through the 1830s when the average net immigration of Irish-born to Liverpool numbered about three thousand per annum. This rate increased dramatically between the years 1845 and

¹ "Labour and the Poor: Letter I", Morning Chronicle, 20 May 1850.

² J. Butler, Recollections of George Butler, Bristol, 1892, p. 167.

1850. Fleeing the devastation of the Famine, thousands of Irish immigrants arrived in Liverpool in the late 1840s. Although for many of these immigrants Liverpool was just a temporary home as they prepared for the journey across the Atlantic, for thousands of others Liverpool represented the final destination. In 1851 there were 83,813 Irish-born enumerated in the city, representing 22.3 per cent of the total population. By 1871 there were still 76,761 Irish-born in Liverpool, constituting 15.6 per cent of the population.³ These figures do not account for the prominence of the Liverpool-born children of Irish immigrants in the Victorian city. As will be considered in this thesis, Irish Catholic identity in Liverpool was constructed to include second and third generation members of the community.

Historical geographers⁴, political historians, and social historians⁶ alike have explored various aspects of the lives of Irish people in Liverpool. Indeed the extent to which this community has been studied has prompted some historians to argue that the story of the Irish in Liverpool has been told. Further they contend that any

³ C. Pooley, "Segregation or integration? The residential experience of the Irish in mid-Victorian Britain", R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds.), The Irish in Britain 1815-1939, London, 1989, p. 74.

⁴ See J. Papworth, "The Irish in Liverpool 1835-1871: Segregation and Dispersal", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1981.

⁵ L.W. Brady, T.P. O'Connor and the Liverpool Irish, London, 1983.

⁶ W.Lowe, The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire, New York, 1989.

insights gained from work on the Irish in Liverpool are specific to the city and cannot be applied with any validity to the experiences of Irish people in the rest of Britain, save perhaps Glasgow. Steven Fielding has asserted that precisely because Liverpool and Glasgow attracted so many Irish immigrants these cities have little relevance to discussions of ethnicity at a national level.⁷ Roger Swift, in a recent review of the historiography of the Irish in Britain, argues that researchers need to turn their eyes away from Liverpool as a continued emphasis on the port has unduly coloured perceptions of the Irish in Victorian Britain.⁸ Interestingly Swift does not identify gender as an area in need of future study. In response to Fielding and Swift I would argue that a great deal of the story of the Irish in Liverpool remains untold because previous work has ignored the experiences of Irish women. Further, an exploration of the dynamics of class, gender and ethnic relations in Liverpool raises important questions about the nature of Irish identity which might fruitfully be pursued in other geographical contexts.

Much of what has been written about the Irish in nineteenth-century Liverpool has focused on the character of sectarian conflict

⁷ S. Fielding, Class and Ethnicity Irish Catholics in England, 1880-1839, Buckingham, 1993, p. 5.

⁸ R. Swift, "The historiography of the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain", in P. O'Sullivan, The Irish in the New Communities, Leicester, 1992, p. 74.

within the city.⁹ In an effort to explain the relative weakness of organised trade union politics in Liverpool, historians have examined the ways in which the predominant form of employment in Liverpool - casual, unskilled work on the docks - created conditions conducive to sectarianism. While many historians have stressed the need to consider the nature of male employment in any examination of ethnic relations in Liverpool, very little has been written about the particular effects of the casual labour market on the experiences of Irish women. The most compelling work on sectarianism in Liverpool has emphasised the positive functions of sectarian politics, both Protestant and Catholic, within working-class communities.¹⁰ In other historiographical contexts feminist historians have demonstrated that a focus on community as opposed to workplace can serve to highlight the experiences of working-class women. However, too often historians of sectarianism in Liverpool discuss these communities as if only working men with something to gain

⁹ See T. Gallagher, "A Tale of Two Cities: Communal Strike in Glasgow and Liverpool", in R. Swift and S. Gilley, The Irish in the Victorian City, London, 1985, pp. 106-129; F. Neal, Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1819-1914, Manchester, 1988; J. Smith, "Class, Skill and Sectarianism in Glasgow and Liverpool, 1880-1914", in R.J. Morris (ed.), Class, Power and Social Structure in Britain Nineteenth-Century Towns, Leicester, 1986, pp. 158-215; and P.J. Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism. A Political and Social History of Liverpool 1868-1939, Liverpool, 1981.

¹⁰ See especially J. Bohstedt, "More than One Working-Class: Protestant and Catholic Riots in Edwardian Liverpool", in J. Belchem (ed.), Popular Politics, Riot and Labour, Liverpool, 1992, pp. 173-216. See also J. Smith, "Commonsense Thought and Working-Class Consciousness: Some Aspects of the Glasgow and Liverpool Labour Movements in the Early Years of the Twentieth Century", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1980.

from a particular form of political organisation were present. Thus, the story of Irish women in Liverpool has remained untold.

This thesis, a study of the work and community experiences of Irish women in Liverpool during the second part of the nineteenth century, attempts to plug this historiographical hole. It considers the ways in which class, gender and ethnic relations were constituted in Liverpool. Gisela Bock has argued that class and gender are invariably context-specific and context-dependent categories.¹¹ The predominance of casual seasonal employment among working-class men in Liverpool during this period profoundly effected the work of women both in and outside of the home. Given the low and insecure wages of casual labourers in Liverpool, the economic contributions of women were crucial for the survival of their families. In an effort to stretch their meagre resources working-class women in Liverpool pursued many of the same strategies as their counterparts in other cities throughout Britain, as revealed in the recent work of Ellen Ross, Andrew Davies, Elizabeth Roberts and Carl Chin.¹² Yet these studies say very little about the

¹¹ G. Bock, "Women's History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate", Gender and History Vol. I (Spring 1989), p. 19.

¹² E. Ross, Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918, Oxford, 1993; A. Davies, Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939, Buckingham, 1992; E. Roberts, A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940, Oxford, 1983; C. Chin, They worked all their lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939, Manchester, 1988.

degree to which the experiences of working-class women varied in relation to their ethnic and religious differences. Perhaps this absence is a reflection of the fact that each one of the above named authors consider the final decades of the nineteenth-century up to the beginning of the Second World War in their work, a later period than the one explored here. It is the contention of this thesis that ethnicity was fundamental to how class and gender identities were represented in Liverpool from the late 1840s to the early 1890s. The lives of Irish working-class women differed not only from the lives of their Irish husbands and brothers but from those of their non-Irish counterparts as well. From a statistical analysis of census data and church records, Lynda Letford and Colin Pooley argue that more than sixty per cent of Irish Catholic women in mid-Victorian Liverpool were married to unskilled casual labourers and thus they were more likely to be worse off than other women.¹³ This thesis examines the distinct strategies developed by Irish women for coping with the economic and social difficulties which they confronted. At the same time, it is argued here that Irish women assumed a focal position within public discussions of poverty and crime in the city. Moral reformers, religious leaders, and law enforcers all represented Irish women as peculiarly problematic. Indeed, Irish women were the source of

¹³ L. Letford and C. Pooley, "Geographies of migration and religion: Irish women in mid-Victorian Liverpool", in P. O'Sullivan (ed.), Irish Women and Irish Migration, London, 1995. Luckily, despite Swift's oversight, the editor of the Irish World Wide series, Paul O'Sullivan, did recognise the need for studies focusing on the lives of Irish women.

considerable anxiety among their social superiors who consistently tried to alter their unruly behaviour and habits.

David Fitzpatrick has argued that a sense of Irishness among immigrants in Britain was, in one respect, a response to the popular prejudices they confronted in their host societies. Simultaneously immigrants were pulled together by shared cultural beliefs and practices.¹⁴ In Liverpool the Catholic church, in accordance with its own political and religious agenda, attempted to draw the Irish community under its influence by emphasising the historic connections between Ireland and Catholicism. The policies of the church were key factors in reinforcing the "otherness" of the Irish community in Liverpool. It is argued throughout this thesis that women were singled out by the negative forces which defined the Irish as different. They were also at the centre of the church's project to fortify the separateness of the city's Irish Catholic community. Gender is thus an essential category for understanding the nature of ethnic relationships in Liverpool.

Irish women were, however, more than the passive objects of competing religious and political discourses in Liverpool. From this study Irish women emerge as historical actors who determinedly contested and negotiated the relations of power which structured their

¹⁴ D. Fitzpatrick, "'A peculiar tramping people': the Irish in Britain, 1801-1870", in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), A New History of Ireland: Ireland under the Union, 1801-1870 Vol. V, Oxford, 1989, pp. 650-651.

lives.¹⁵ Further, it is suggested here that Irish women, as they struggled to survive, left an indelible mark on the character of the city. Tony Lane insists that it is hard to exaggerate the contribution made by seamen to Liverpool life.¹⁶ Irish women in their own unique way made as important a contribution to the reputation for defiance enjoyed by Liverpoolians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

¹⁵ For an insightful discussion of the dynamics of power and agency see A. Clark, "The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language and Class in the 1830s and 1840s", Journal of British Studies 31, (January 1992). See also K. Canning, "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience", Signs Vol. 19, 2 (1994).

¹⁶ T. Lane, Gateway of Empire, London, 1987, p. 108.

Chapter One

The Politics of Poverty

This chapter begins with a story of civil unrest. For a few days in February 1855 Liverpool was shaken by bread riots in which hundreds of citizens participated. A vast number of pages in local newspapers were devoted to coverage of the disturbances. For all their editorial differences, the newspapers agreed that the riots were perpetrated by gangs of men and women recruited from the "undeserving" poor. An analysis of how the category of the "undeserving" poor was constructed in the media provides a compelling introduction to the peculiar nature of class, gender and ethnic relations in Victorian Liverpool. After exploring both the material realities and ideological representations of the economic and social structure of the commercial port, it is argued here that poor Irish women assumed a focal position within public discussions of poverty in Liverpool.

In the early hours of Monday, February 19th 1855 in the Scotland Road area of North Liverpool a crowd began to gather and it soon numbered between 800 and 1000 people. The crowd proceeded to invade the bread and provision shops along Scotland Road and surrounding streets demanding bread. Proprietors who refused to comply with the crowd's commands were pushed aside and the bread removed from the shops by force. Mr. Jackson's shop, Mile end, was one of the first to be attacked. Within a few minutes all the bread in the shop had been seized. Bags of flour, taken from the shop's store rooms, were pitched

into the street and women in the crowd began to fill their aprons. As in a number of other cases, the crowd emptied Mr. Jackson's till.¹ Simultaneously shops were attacked in the Vauxhall Road area, suggesting that these bread riots, as they were labelled in the press, were a coordinated affair. Eventually the police were able to apprehend a handful of people, but the rest of the crowd divided into smaller groups and headed off in different directions, frustrating the attempts of the authorities to contain the disturbances. One group, joined by rioters from the Brownlow Hill area, reached Mr. Charnock's shop on Epworth Street. They stripped the shop not only of bread but of flour and of anything else at hand. The reporter for the London-based Times, witnessing this attack, noticed a division of labour on the part of the crowd. There appeared to be a group of lads who were employed in terrifying the shopkeeper while the rest walked off with his stock. When the police tried to arrest two of the group's ringleaders, a woman began to hurl both insults and stones at the officers in an effort to free the two prisoners. Instead the police captured her and she was taken to the Bridewell.² Rioting spread throughout the north end of the city. Bread shops were attacked on London Road, Copperas Hill, Brownlow Hill, Limeclin Lane, Tichfield Street, Crosshall Street, Standish Street, Dale Street, Great Howard Street, Great Homer Street and along the docks. Indeed shops were not the only businesses vulnerable to the

¹ Liverpool Mercury, 20 February 1855.

² The Times, 20 February 1855.

crowd's fury. Between twelve and one o'clock on Monday afternoon a crowd of about 1000 arrived at Mr. Robinson's eating house located across from Wellington dock. A group of rioters entered the premises and demanded food. Without waiting for a response the rioters removed the meals from the diners' plates. They also confiscated a roast leg of mutton, a piece of roast beef, and other joints which had been prepared for the afternoon customers.³ The Liverpool Mercury gave the following description of the city on the first day of rioting: "The appearance presented by the town during the day was remarkable. The shops in all the principal streets were closed at an early hour of the day, and businesses were brought to a perfect standstill. Add to this, the streets were choked up by the crowds who thronged them."⁴ The open defiance embodied in the riots caused great alarm among the authorities. Special constables were sworn in and a strong detachment of mounted police was formed. It took three days to restore order and in total 106 people were arrested for their participation in the disturbances.

For all their disagreements the newspapers in Liverpool concurred that the riots had been perpetrated not by the deserving, suffering poor of Liverpool but by "females of the lowest class, youths familiarly known to the police, mixed up here and there with some of

³ Liverpool Mercury, 20 February 1855.

⁴ Ibid.

the more noted plunderers and ruffs."⁵ Further, all the newspapers agreed that the rioters were recruited from the "very lowest and most vicious class of the Irish population of the town". The central concern of this chapter is the process by which the "undeserving" in Liverpool took on an explicitly ethnic and religious meaning. In other words, how was it that the undeserving poor became synonymous with the Irish poor? Of comparable significance was the emphasis placed on the character of Irish women in representations of the ethnic group.

Any discussion of the 1855 bread riots in Liverpool must be situated in the context of the economic crisis that gripped the city in the winter of that year which was in turn a reflection of the city's commercial economy. From the middle of January prevailing easterly winds had prevented ships from entering the port throwing thousands of dock labourers out of work. The huge blocks of ice which clogged the Mersey prompted many elderly seamen to observe that they could not remember a more severe winter.⁶ One newspaper estimated that between 15,000 and 19,000 labourers were without employment.⁷ The paralysis of trade occasioned by severe weather conditions exposed the precarious position of labourers employed on the Liverpool docks.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century Liverpool promoted itself, with just cause, as the second city of the Empire. Yet the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The Times, 22 February 1855.

⁷ Liverpool Mercury, 19 February 1855.

rapid commercial growth experienced by the port in the eighteenth century spawned intense social problems which were to mark its history well into the twentieth century.⁸ The expansion of the docks in Liverpool created employment for scores of dock labourers, carters, warehousemen, and seafarers. Most of this work was low paid and contingent on trade and wind cycles.⁹ An 1848 survey conducted by Abraham Hume, a prominent Liverpool clergyman, revealed that 48 per cent of the families in his sample were supported only by irregular work.¹⁰ Dr. Charles Mackay, in an 1850 survey of life in Liverpool, observed that for those with work, as well as for those without, daily survival was a constant battle.¹¹ From his investigations Mackay estimated that the average wage of casual labourers employed on the Liverpool docks was between three and four shillings a day with most labourers earning between ten and fourteen shillings a week. These wages placed Liverpool dockers among the lowest paid workers in England and Wales.¹² Evidence produced in an 1865 survey revealed that the

⁸ M. Power, "The Growth of Liverpool", in J. Belchem (ed.), Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History 1790-1940, pp. 21-37.

⁹ E. Taplin, "False Dawn of New Unionism? Labour Unrest in Liverpool 1871-1873", in J. Belchem (ed.), Popular Politics, Riot and Labour, p, 136.

¹⁰ A. Hume, Missions at Home: A Clergyman's Account of a Portion of the Town of Liverpool, London, 1850, Appendix I.

¹¹ "Labour and the Poor: Letter I", Morning Chronicle, 20 May 1850.

¹² J. Ginswick (ed.), Labour and the Poor in England and Wales, 1849-1851 Vol. I, London, 1983, Appendix I. Ginswick notes that the

average weekly earnings of dock labourers had increased only slightly. As Edward Heath, the secretary of the Central Relief Society, testified:

I believe that the dock porters, whose wages per week are from 21s. to 24s., do not average more than 14s. to 15s. throughout the year. Taking into account the increased cost of living in Liverpool, the dock porter is not much better off than the agricultural labourer with 10s. per week.¹³

In his 1886 investigation, Toiling Liverpool, Hugh Farrie estimated that thirty thousand labourers in Liverpool could secure work for only three or four days a week and consequently earned a weekly wage of no more than fifteen to sixteen shillings.¹⁴

The low wages earned by casual labourers during periods of employment left them extremely vulnerable to the effects of trade slumps and bad weather. Despite the Liverpool Courier's suggestion that the distress of 1855 might have been avoided had dock labourers only been more prudent when there was work, few labourers earned the type of wages which would enable them to create a cushion of savings for times of distress.¹⁵ Thus a similar crisis was experienced during the winter of 1863 when strong easterly winds blew frosty air into Liverpool preventing ships from leaving the port. The American Civil War

wages for dock labourers quoted by Mackay were most likely overestimated.

¹³ Liverpool Mortality Sub-Committee, Report and Evidence, 1865-1866, Liverpool, 1866, p.193.

¹⁴ H. Farrie, Toiling Liverpool, Liverpool, 1986, p. 52.

¹⁵ Liverpool Courier, 28 February 1855.

generated further disruptions to the city's trade and the thousands of dock workers who were thrown out of work began "suffering the pangs of starvation".¹⁶ In 1878 the supporters of the North End Domestic Mission, one the city's charities, offered this sombre reminder:

The first reflection that strikes any thoughtful observer of events, which has again and again been uttered, is one of almost terror at the revelation every depression of trade brings of the vast number of our fellow creatures who are forever hovering on the brink of utter destitution and who at the first touch of slackness of trade, fall into a gulf terrible to contemplate.¹⁷

The nature of poverty in Liverpool created particular problems for the city's ruling class as well. Casualism made it difficult for employers to assert direct control over their employees in the work place.¹⁸ Further, economic growth was accompanied by a marked increase in the residential segregation of classes.¹⁹ In 1867 William Rathbone, a successful merchant and leading philanthropist in Liverpool, wrote with regret of the passing of the traditional social relationships when masters knew their men:

The rich see less of the poor than they used to do; know less of the poor than they used to do; know less of their habits,

¹⁶ Liverpool Chronicle, 1 March 1863.

¹⁷ Liverpool Record Office, (hereafter L.R.O.), North End Domestic Mission, (hereafter N.D.M.), Annual Report (1878), p. 5.

¹⁸ G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society, London, 1992, p. 239.

¹⁹ R. Lawton and C. Pooley, "The Urban Dimensions of Nineteenth-Century Liverpool", Social Geography of Nineteenth-Century Liverpool Project Merseyside Project, Working Paper No. 4, 1975, p. 36.

their feelings, and their wants; and the poor have so little acquaintance with the rich, that to many of them the well-dressed neighbours who they meet on their daily walks hardly seem as fellow-creatures...The mutual ignorance, the incapacity to understand one another, which want of intercourse has produced in rich and poor, which prevails to an extent that may fairly be called dangerous, is illustrated by the absurd caricature and misrepresentation of either class which finds credence among the other.²⁰

In a city centrally involved in Britain's imperial expansion, the growing distance between rich and poor was often represented in colonial terms. In 1858 Abraham Hume warned the wealthy citizens of the city that Liverpool's working-class neighbourhoods were becoming "unexplored regions".²¹ Hume insisted that while they lived within the same municipal boundaries under the authority of the same chief magistrate, with respect to conditions of life and social customs, the rich and poor of the city appeared to reside "in two separate quarters of the globe".²² Although not blind to the difficulties faced by working-class families dependent on the proceeds of casual work, men like Hume often depicted poverty not as a state of material deprivation, but as a condition of moral depravity. The Liverpool

²⁰ W. Rathbone, Social Duties considered with reference to the Organisation of Efforts in Works of Benevolence and Public Utility, London, 1867, pp. 1-2. Samuel Holme, a successful builder and the first president of the Liverpool Tradesmen's Conservative Association, expressed similar regrets. See J. Belchem, "'The Church, the Throne and the People: Ships, Colonies, and Commerce': Popular Toryism in Early Victorian Liverpool", Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Vol. 143 (1993).

²¹ A. Hume, Conditions of Liverpool, Religious and Social; Including Notices of the State of Education, Morals, Pauperism and Crime, Liverpool, 1858, p. 32.

²² Ibid., p. 24.

Domestic Mission, a charity founded by prominent members of the Unitarian community including the Rathbone family, understood the sufferings of the poor to be a consequence of their own moral corruption. As Francis Bishop, the Minister of the Mission from 1848 to 1856, explained:

I have been more deeply impressed with the fact that the greatest evils under which the masses of the community labour are moral evils. It is not poverty, it is not want of employment, crushing and painful as are often their effects, that occasions the greatest difficulties and bitterest sufferings amongst the labouring classes. The three fold overshadowing tree which poisons their life, springs from ignorance, irreligion and above all intemperance.²³

In an 1871 report the high mortality rates of numerous streets in Liverpool, including Sawney Pope Street where there were 55.86 deaths per 1000 inhabitants annually,²⁴ were attributed not to the fact that people were poor but that they were "careless, ignorant, and probably barbarous in their modes of life".²⁵ From this perspective the responsibility of Liverpool's respectable classes to their poorer neighbours was generally portrayed as a moral rather than financial one. Thus, Hume urged his readers to embark on a crusade to extend their civilising influence to the inhabitants of Liverpool's dark slums.²⁶ Interestingly, experienced missionaries who came to Liverpool

²³ L.R.O., Liverpool Domestic Mission, (hereafter L.D.M.), Annual Report (1850), p. 15.

²⁴ Dr. Parkes and Dr. Sanderson, Report on the Sanitary Condition of Liverpool, Liverpool, 1871, p. 54.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁶ A. Hume, Conditions of Liverpool, p. 31.

often found the obstacles they encountered in reaching the city's poor insurmountable. After working for the North End Domestic Mission for short trial period in 1867, Reverend Robert John Orr refused the offer of a more permanent position concluding that the circumstances of the mission promised too few rewards:

From my short experience I have learned sufficient to know that missionary work may easily be done in even the poorest and apparently most abandoned districts and that anyone with a fair amount of zeal and ability need not be discouraged from trying to do good as a missionary. The condition however under which their missionaries have to work vary very much; and from what I have seen of the condition at present annexed to this post I can not feel the least inducement to solicit any appointment as your missionary.²⁷

Nevertheless, William Rathbone identified philanthropy as an effective means of bridging the gulf between classes in Liverpool and thus protecting society from the threat of moral contamination and social unrest.²⁸ As Gareth Stedman Jones has argued of London, where the problem casual work took its most dramatic form, by requiring applicants to conform to a particular definition of "deserving" in order to receive relief, charitable work provided wealthier citizens with the opportunity to influence the behaviour of the poor who were otherwise beyond their reach.²⁹ In this context an organisation like the Liverpool Domestic Mission saw itself much more as an agency of moral

²⁷ L.R.O., N.D.M., Minute Book, Letter to the Committee from Rev. Robert John Orr, 18 June 1867.

²⁸ W. Rathbone, Social Duties, pp. 14-15.

²⁹ G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, Part III.

reform than of relief distribution. Strict moral criteria had to be met before aid would be granted to an applicant.³⁰

The class dynamics embodied within the philanthropic relationship in Liverpool were conspicuous during the events of February 1855. Certainly the distress caused by the disruption to commercial activities that winter did not go unnoticed by Liverpool's wealthier citizens. Parochial authorities and private charities combined forces in a massive relief effort. From February 4th to March 3rd, 25,560 people, pleading destitution, applied for and received outdoor relief from poor law officials. In the week preceding the riots over 17,000 applicants were given relief.³¹ Of comparable importance was the extensive involvement of Liverpool's network of private charities in the relief effort. For example, the District Provident Society, in the week before the riots, provided relief for more than three hundred people a day; on February 17th alone 1,523 loaves of bread and 688 quarts of soup were distributed to 599 people.³² The strain placed on individual charities by the vast number of people out of work and in need of relief prompted calls for a coordinated operation. On February 16th, at a meeting of Liverpool "gentlemen" it was agreed that something beyond the usual action of private benevolence would be

³⁰ L.R.O., L.D.M. Annual Report (1848), p. 9.

³¹ Select Committee on Poor Removal, Report, 1855, Appendix I, Letter from Rev. Augustus Campbell, Rector of Liverpool, Chairman of Select Vestry. PP 1854-55 (308) Vol. XIII.1.

³² Liverpool Mail, 24 February 1855.

required to alleviate the prevailing levels of distress. The meeting solicited the help of Head Constable Grieg and a divisional superintendent who collected thousands of loaves of bread from local bakers. The bread was distributed from the old High Street police station throughout the weekend.³³ However, like the parochial authorities, private charities did not distribute relief indiscriminately. Even during periods of mass unemployment efforts were made to provide relief only to those people judged to be deserving. The providers of charity claimed the right to determine the deservedness of each applicant. On the weekend before the riot a ticket system, designed to regulate the distribution of bread, was adopted. Under this system, each benevolent gentleman purchased relief tickets from a Central Relief Fund and, in affirmation of his dominance, allocated his tickets to the people he considered to be the most worthy of assistance.

In routine circumstances a willingness to work was central to the definition of deserving for both the parochial authorities and private charities. However, given the huge number of people who had been forced out of work, the private distributors of the relief tickets emphasised "patience" and "passivity" as essential characteristics of the deserving poor. The system adopted by Liverpool's benevolent gentlemen prior to the riot was designed to produce the spectacle of an orderly assembly of people deemed worthy of relief waiting patiently for bread.

³³ Liverpool Mercury, 20 February 1855.

The scenes witnessed the day before the riots began were an ominous intimation that things might not go according to plan. Under the weight of the needs it was meant to address, the ticket system began to falter almost immediately. The system proved to be woefully inefficient as many of its subscribers failed to dispense their tickets promptly. Crowds of hungry people gathered outside the distribution points pleading for bread and coal. Thus, it was extremely difficult to deny relief to those who had not received tickets. As the Liverpool Albion reported:

The food was distributed by porters and by policemen, under the supervision of the committee members. Hundreds of starving unfortunates thronged the approaches to the building, although they knew that without tickets it was impossible to obtain assistance, their appeal for relief backed by repeated and heartrendering declarations that they were dying was distressing to hear.³⁴

Thus the meaning of being poor in Liverpool on that day was not only about having no work and not enough to eat, but about the humiliation of having to demonstrate to a stranger in a position of power that you and your family were in fact deserving of bread.

One can only imagine the conversations which took place that Sunday evening as scores of men and women returned to their homes having waited in vain for assistance. The next day, however, thousands of rioters took it upon themselves to decide who was deserving. The riots, therefore, not only threatened law and order, and the security of property, but also represented an open challenge to the right of

³⁴ Quoted in R.M. Jones, "The Liverpool Bread Riots, 1855", North West Labour History Bulletin 6 (1979-1980), pp. 35-36.

Liverpool's wealthier citizens to define who was worthy of assistance. As will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis, individuals who applied for help often tried to manoeuvre their way around the strict criteria which had to be met in order to be deemed deserving. But the riots represented a collective and open contest to the unilateral power of the giver to determine who should receive relief. Privately, unemployed labourers and their families may have complained to each other about the injustice of the relief system, in a discourse which the anthropologist James C. Scott would refer to as the "hidden transcript" of a subordinate class.³⁵ The cry, "We don't want your crumbs, we want your brass", heard from the bread rioters brought this concealed resentment into the public realm. As Scott has insightfully argued:

The importance of a public refusal to reproduce hegemonic appearances helps to explain why the first open declaration of the hidden transcript often takes the form of a public breaking of an established ritual of public subordination.

The pertinence of the riots for class relations in Liverpool was vividly expressed by the Head Constable, Major Grieg, and the Head Magistrate of Liverpool's police court, Mr. Mansfield. During the riots Grieg ventured into the crowds warning the rioters of the folly of their actions. He insisted that what they were attempting to gain by force, the merchants and other inhabitants of the town were willing to give them freely if only they would remain quiet. He felt sure that no

³⁵ J.C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, New Haven, 1990, p. 113.

one would suffer the pangs of hunger for much longer. Grieg's address was continuously interrupted by rioters who shouted that they had waited long enough and that too many people had already died of hunger. As Grieg attempted to reason with the crowd a woman threw a reaper's sickle at him which, The Times reporter estimated, missed him by only an inch.³⁶ Mr. Mansfield's explanation of why he was imposing the harshest sentence available to him, three months imprisonment with hard labour, upon many of those who were convicted of participating in the riots was an even more explicit defense of the social order the riots subverted:

It was very possible that those brought before him might not be of the most vicious and criminal portion of the population but they were charged with having committed a grave offence under circumstances which made it necessary that an example should be made of them. For the benefit of the working classes themselves it was necessary that those who were contributing largely by their personal exertions and their bounty should be protected in their ordinary avocations and be able to devote their time in acts of benevolence on behalf of those who were out of employment. There could be nobody living in this town who did not feel most acutely for the afflictions which had fallen upon those who were engaged in the loading and unloading of vessels, and others engaged in the mercantile commerce of the port. Yet, such was the feeling universally pervading all classes that in no other town would such spontaneous, such prompt, such magnificent bounty be offered the suffering working classes as in the town of Liverpool...Under all circumstances persons were able to obtain relief by applying to the proper quarter, which was easily ascertained and therefore there was no excuse for proceeding to acts of violence.³⁷

³⁶ The Times, 20 February 1855.

³⁷ Liverpool Mercury, 23 February 1855.

Aware that his judgement would be widely reported the magistrate used the occasion to articulate a vision of Liverpool divided in two not by the economic disparities of class but by a moral gulf. As Paul Craven, a Canadian historian, has argued, in a society disjointed by a casual labour market, the police court provided a valuable forum in which broad class alliances could be constituted. In the court, characters were identified by their moral standing not their economic status.³⁸ Respectability, as delineated by Mansfield, could be realised by those working-class people who accepted the authority and appreciated the generosity of their social superiors.

For members of Liverpool's middle-class to define themselves in terms of their largesse, they required grateful recipients of their "magnificent bounty". The riots, then, represented a challenge to the very identity of Liverpool's benevolent gentlemen. Nonetheless, when brought before the magistrate, several rioters attempted to camouflage their actions within the lauded relief effort. Thomas Gavan told the court that he was given two loaves of bread as he passed by an open shop. He assumed that the person distributing the bread was one of Liverpool's generous relief workers. Despite his ingenious defense, Gavan was sentenced to two months' imprisonment with hard labour. Thomas Flannigan was able to use a similar defense more successfully. Flannigan, an Irish labourer with a large family, was able to

³⁸ P. Craven, "Law and Ideology: The Toronto Police Court 1850-1880", in D.H. Flaherty (ed.), Essays in the History of Canadian Law Vol. II, Toronto, 1983, p. 297.

demonstrate to the court that he was an industrious working-man of good character. He stated that he had been walking along the street when he noticed loaves of bread being placed into an open shop window, believing the bread to be free he helped himself to three loaves. He was astonished when a policeman later collared him and took him to the Bridewell. Flannigan was sentenced to one month imprisonment, but Mr. Mansfield regretted that the prisoner's good character had been irrevocably damaged by his behaviour during the riots.³⁹

In their coverage of the riots the newspapers labelled the rioters as "the lowest and most vicious class of the Irish population of the town".⁴⁰ By emphasising the ethnic origins of the rioters the Liverpool media played upon prevalent prejudices in the port. The arrival of thousands of Famine immigrants in the late 1840s had placed a heavy burden on Liverpool's relief institutions and generated considerable resentment among the city's rate payers. For example, during 1847, the average numbers of Irish persons relieved weekly reached 26,000, representing forty per cent of the total number who received relief. Between 1848 and 1854 an average of twenty-five per cent of outdoor relief in Liverpool went to Irish recipients.⁴¹ Beyond the financial costs they represented to the city's authorities, Famine immigrants,

³⁹ Liverpool Mail, 24 February 1855.

⁴⁰ Liverpool Mercury, 23 February 1855. See also Liverpool Mail, 24 February 1855; Liverpool Courier, 21 February 1855.

⁴¹ W. Lowe, The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire, New York, 1989, p. 29.

many of whom arrived in Liverpool already afflicted with typhus and dysentery, also posed as a severe health threat. The crowded and unsanitary conditions in which Irish men, women and children were forced to live were frightfully conducive to the spread of infections. In July 1849, Dr. Duncan, the Medical Officer of Health for Liverpool, calculated that 10,000 houses occupied by the poorest working-class inhabitants were visited by medical officials monitoring the symptoms of cholera.⁴² Despite this comprehensive inspection system the disease reached epidemic proportions. In the first week of September there were over 1000 new cases in the city and over three hundred people succumbed to cholera in that week alone.⁴³ In his 1849 report Dr. Duncan did not specify the exact number of Irish immigrants who had been afflicted with cholera, although he believed that an Irish family had brought the disease to the city. As the north and central wards, where Irish immigrants were most concentrated, were the worst affected areas in Liverpool, William Lowe considers it safe to assume that a large proportion of cholera patients were Irish. He adds that though the disease was most prevalent in most deprived sections of the port, there were instances of cholera throughout the population.⁴⁴

⁴² L.R.O., Letter Book of the Medical Officer of Health, 1849-1853, Letter to Mr. M.J. Whitty from Dr. Duncan, 25 July 1849.

⁴³ Ibid., Letter to Mr. Abraham, Chairman of Medical Relief Committee from Dr. Duncan, 7 September 1849.

⁴⁴ W. Lowe, The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire, pp. 30-31.

Statistics furnished during the Famine years fuelled the sectarianism of popular Tory politics in Liverpool. However, the stereotype of the Irish as an unhealthy and ungrateful lot was espoused by spokespeople from all ends of the political spectrum. In his 1850 survey Dr. Mackay, reporting with professed objectivity, remarked that the benefits Liverpool reaped as the largest port in the west of England were nearly offset by the disadvantages of its being the major gateway from Ireland to England and beyond.⁴⁵ Mackay described the Irish as an outcast group, clearly distinguished from the "naturally laborious, honest and well inclined" working men of Liverpool. He insisted that the Irish were a drain on the city's resources; that they represented a dangerous threat to the health of its other inhabitants; that their willingness to work for minimal wages degraded the condition of non-Irish workers; and that generally they were a depraved people ready to take advantage of the kindness of the citizens of Liverpool.⁴⁶ As late as 1886 the Irish assumed a peculiar prominence in analyses of poverty in Liverpool. Hugh Farrie, the author of Toiling Liverpool, observed that ninety-five per cent of poverty in Liverpool was a "direct" consequence of the policies of Irish landlords, insisting that the injustices perpetrated by that class drove thousands of Irish families to Liverpool. Accustomed to poverty, Farrie observed, Irish

⁴⁵ "Labour and the Poor: Letter I", Morning Chronicle, 20 May 1850.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

labourers willingly took work at lower rates forcing down the earnings of non-Irish workers in the process.⁴⁷

The media's emphasis on the "Irishness" of the 1855 riots thus reinforced popular prejudices and served to delegitimise the rioters' claims that they were in desperate need of bread. The staunchly Tory Liverpool Courier imbued the category of the deserving with an explicitly sectarian meaning in its coverage of the riots. The paper reported that the "disgraceful" riots had emanated from the "lower order of Roman Catholics in the town". It impressed upon its readers that the "mob" was not made up of Englishmen or Protestants. The ethnic and religious character of the riots needed to be highlighted in order to ensure that those who were "really deserving, namely, the industrious poor who at present are unemployed and who really took no part in this outrage" might still be aided by the public bounty.⁴⁸

Police statistics appeared to confirm the widespread view that the riots were an Irish affair. Of the eighty-four men arrested for their involvement in the disturbances, sixty-four were Irish-born; of the twenty-two female arrests, nineteen were Irish.⁴⁹ When considering the disproportionate number of Irish people arrested during the riots it should be remembered that the same prejudices which informed the media coverage of events might also have been reflected in the activities of

⁴⁷ H. Farrie, Toiling Liverpool, pp. 84-85.

⁴⁸ Liverpool Courier, 21 February 1855.

⁴⁹ Select Committee on Poor Removal, Report, 1855, Appendix I.

the police. It is not difficult to imagine that non-Irish rioters found it easier to avoid capture. However, rather than deny that the rioters were predominantly Irish, it is perhaps more interesting to consider why such was the case. The majority of Irish immigrants in Liverpool were in unskilled or semi-skilled employment. Many worked as casual labourers on the docks.⁵⁰ Sections of the Irish community in the city were hard hit by the cessation of trade in 1855. In the weeks preceeding the riots thousands of Irish people received relief--a fact duly stressed in the newspapers. The vast majority of people given parish relief in February 1855 were Irish.⁵¹ Similarly, private charities provided assistance to a considerable number of Irish people. For example, the District Provident Society, between February 2nd and 21st, afforded relief to 8711 people, 6876 of whom were Irish.⁵² Irish immigrants in Liverpool might have been more inclined to turn to private charities given the threat of removal which was associated with receiving relief from Poor Law authorities. During the late 1840s officials in Liverpool took full advantage of settlement legislation, sending thousands of immigrants back to Ireland. The number of removal orders from Liverpool peaked in 1847 when 15,008 Irish paupers were expelled at a cost more than £4000 to the union. Irish people continued

⁵⁰ C. Pooley, "Segregation or integration? The residential experience of the Irish in mid-Victorian Britain", in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds.), The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939, p. 75.

⁵¹ Select Committee on Poor Removal, Report, 1855, Appendix I.

⁵² Liverpool Mail, 24 February 1855.

to be removed from Liverpool and by the mid-1850s the number had stabilised at 4,500 a year. As Christine Kinealy suggests, this figure was well in excess of pre-Famine levels.⁵³ While they may have endeavoured not to rely upon the Select Vestry for assistance, the Irish did have a reputation for pressing their demands for relief. Reverend Campbell, the chairman of the Select Vestry, deemed it inadvisable to refuse them.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, there was a growing concern on the part of private charities that relief only be given to applicants they judged to be deserving. The ticket system adopted just prior to the riots reflected this concern. Perhaps the Irish were aware that they were commonly excluded from the category of the deserving poor in public discussions of poverty in Liverpool. They might have feared that if applicants for relief were to be assessed, not simply on the basis of need but in relation to other criteria, they might be denied relief. The scenes which occurred the day before the riot, described above, would only have intensified their worries.

As the newspaper reports suggested, many of the people involved in the riots lived in the Scotland Road area. The streets and courts in this part of the city were home to poor families of all ethnic backgrounds who needed to live in close proximity to the dockland

⁵³ C. Kinealy, This Great Calamity. The Irish Famine 1845-1852, Dublin, 1994, pp. 336-337.

⁵⁴ Select Committee on Poor Removal, Report, 1855, Appendix I.

hiring stands.⁵⁵ Few streets in the area had exclusively Irish residents, however, Irish families were more likely live in the city's overpopulated courts. In the course of his journalistic work Dr. Charles Mackay had occasion to observe poverty throughout Britain, but he was ill-prepared for the suffocating atmosphere which characterised life in Liverpool's crowded courts:

In one small court of four-houses, containing three rooms each, I inquired the number of inhabitants and found that it was upwards of eighty...I never saw anything approaching to the dirt, discomfort, and squalor that I have seen in such streets in Liverpool, as Ben Jonson-street, Harrison-street, Lace-street and Vauxhall-road.⁵⁶

In 1851 19.4 per cent of Irish and 17.6 per cent of non-Irish households resided in the courts. In 1871 close to 22.1. Irish households continued to occupy the courts, whereas the figure for the non-Irish population had dropped to 12 per cent.⁵⁷ In 1861, of the 121 households enumerated in seventeen courts in Bishpam Street, 109 had Irish-born heads.⁵⁸ In 1871, of the 192 households counted in the thirty courts of Oriel Street, 165 had Irish-born heads. Further, of the twenty-seven non-Irish heads, eight were Liverpool-born men married to

⁵⁵ L.R.O., Lodging House Committee, Report of the Medical Officer of Health, in Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1864.

⁵⁶ "Labour and the Poor: Letter VIII", Morning Chronicle, 8 July 1850.

⁵⁷ Lowe, The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire, p. 54.

⁵⁸ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of England and Wales, 1861. RG9 2666: Dale St, 6F.

Irish women.⁵⁹ The courts were densely populated. Most of the houses in the Bishpam Street courts were home to at least two households. James McCormack, an Irish shoemaker, his wife and seven children shared their house with Michael Murphy, an Irish-born dock labourer, and his family of four. There were thirteen occupants in the house where Catherine Gaynor, an Irish fish hawker, lived with her niece and daughter. John Dooley's household lived with five others, all with Irish heads, comprising twenty-one people, in the street's most crowded house.⁶⁰

The significance of these residential links for Irish women will be considered in detail in the next chapter, for the purposes of this discussion it is important to note that such close living quarters would have facilitated the organisation of the riots. The simultaneous attack on bread shops in several streets in the area suggested a degree of coordination. Further, the rioters selected specific shops for invasion. For example, all of Mr. Huntington's five bread shops were raided. Mr. Huntington was one of the bakers working for the relief committee. As R.M. Jones has argued, by targeting Mr. Huntington's businesses the rioters by-passed the relief system, gaining direct access to the bread which they believed was being kept from them.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of England and Wales, 1871. RG10 3768: Howard St., 11-12.

⁶⁰ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of England and Wales, 1861. RG9 2666: Dale St., 6F.

⁶¹ R.M. Jones, "Liverpool Bread Riots, 1855", p. 37.

Other shops remained untouched. The Liverpool Courier reported that only Protestant- owned shops were attacked.⁶² This charge was not substantiated by the other newspapers. However, there might have been a different sort of religious discrimination at play in the choice of targets. Mr. Lester's shop, situated opposite St. Anthony's Catholic Church on Scotland Road, was the only shop on the street which the rioters avoided.⁶³ It would seem that the rioters were willing to openly defy the police but not the priest.

Neighbourhoods were not the only things Irish people in Liverpool shared with each other. Irish people brought with them common customs and experiences. In a challenge to the sectarianism expressed in the Liverpool press the Irish newspaper, the Tablet, contrasted the "infuriated savage mobs of stalwart men, women and children" who paraded through the streets of Liverpool menacing the lives and property of the citizens of the city to the "meek resignation and heroic patience" which characterised the behaviour of the Irish poor during the Famine. Conveniently ignoring the participation of Irish Catholics in the Liverpool riots, the Tablet claimed that the Irish poor were steeped in a uniquely Catholic tradition of noble obedience.⁶⁴ However, a good deal of evidence suggests that the Irish poor did not

⁶² Liverpool Courier, 21 February 1855.

⁶³ The Times, 20 February 1855. The relationship between the Catholic church and Irish immigrants in Liverpool is the focus of chapter six of this thesis.

⁶⁴ Tablet, 24 February 1855.

passively accept their fate during the Famine. Throughout the Famine demands for more extensive relief provisions were often reinforced by collective action. For example, in Castlemartyr, County Cork, a local mob threatened to "smash all the soup boilers in the country" because they wanted no more "greasy kitchen stuff but should have either money or bread". Confrontations of this kind often resulted in the plundering of foodstores.⁶⁵ Although not all of the Irish people involved in the riots in Liverpool had experienced the Famine directly, those who had would have shared with the community their memories of starvation, of inadequate and unjust relief policies, and of resistance.

The large number of women who were involved in the riots was also emphasised in the newspaper coverage. In some instances women were said not to have been directly involved in the attacks but to have played a supporting role: "In many cases the gang seemed to be under the leadership of a half-dozen tall muscular fellows, chiefly Irishmen, and

⁶⁵ C. Kinealy, This Great Calamity, pp. 144-145. There were more explicit connections between events in Ireland and food riots which occurred in London during the 1855 trade depression. Pilfering and plundering increased in Ireland in the early months of 1847 with numerous reports of deaths caused by disease and starvation in all parts of Ireland. Kinealy describes instances of crowds of hungry people in a number of areas attempting to exert pressure on local officials by marching into town centres or local workhouses, carrying poles with large loaves of bread stuck on top. [Ibid., p. 89] When bread shops in East London were attacked by a mob of men and women "from the lowest and most distressed class in society", the rioters brandished long poles adorned with loaves of bread and placards which read "We are starving and want bread". [The Times, 23 February 1855.]

to be animated and urged on by the yells and cheers of the women."⁶⁶ In other cases women appear to have been more actively involved in events. Mary Dooley, described as a cross eyed, broad-shouldered Irish woman, was charged with leading the attack on Mr. Jackson's shop. She was apprehended in Scotland Road with stolen loaves of bread in her possession.⁶⁷ Mary Ann Jones, a young Irish street seller, assisted in breaking into Mr. Ashcroft's provision shop with a crow bar.⁶⁸ Mary Hopkins, Bridget McManus and Bridget Sweeny, all Irish-born, took part in an attack on one of Mr. Huntington's flour shops and were found with large quantities of flour in their possession.⁶⁹

The newspapers stressed that it was only "disorderly and unruly" women who were involved in the rioting. The emphasis on the character of the women rioters served to further impugn the riots and clearly reflected the nature of gender politics in Liverpool. The casual labour market had specific consequences for women's work both in and outside the home. The economic and social challenges which women confronted in the commercial port are the focus of the next four chapters. The role of women in the 1855 riots did bring to the fore anxieties about the public prominence of poor women in Liverpool. In their book, Family Fortunes, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall examine the importance of

⁶⁶ Liverpool Mercury, 23 February 1855.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the ideology of domesticity in the making of the middle class. This ideology dictated that women, by nature, were suited to domestic life. Within the private sphere women would be able to express their superior nurturing instincts. By taking responsibility for the parenting of industrious children women were said to assume a position of moral authority in their homes. The bourgeois notion of an ideal family was thus constituted by a male breadwinner and a female homemaker.⁷⁰ In cities where factory employment was the norm, battles over the family wage represented the attempts of male workers to fulfil the masculine ideal of the sole breadwinner.⁷¹ The low and insecure wages of casual labourers in Liverpool made it next to impossible for men to fulfil this ideal. Accordingly, middle-class relief agencies, social commentators, and religious leaders, both Catholic and Protestant, stressed that the well-being of a working-class family was determined, not by the income which a man brought home, but by the domestic skills of his wife. In assessing the moral standing of working-class households special scrutiny was placed on the habits and attitudes of wives and mothers.

Women who were involved in the 1855 riots may have been attempting to fulfil their assigned role as home makers by procuring bread to feed their families. However, having entered into the public sphere, the

⁷⁰ L. Davidoff and C. Hall, Family Fortunes, London, 1992, chapter 3.

⁷¹ S. Rose, Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England, Los Angeles, 1992, p. 131.

women who participated in the riots openly defied prescribed notions of femininity. Bread riots, as E.P. Thompson has argued, provide useful insights into the contentious nature of gender relationships:

For two hundred and more years these food riots were the most visible and public expressions of working women's lack of deference and their contestation with authority. As such these instances contest in their turn the stereotypes of feminine submission, timidity, or confinement to the private world of the household.⁷²

As will be discussed in the following chapter, many of the strategies developed by women as they attempted to "make ends meet" caused them to breach the public/private divide. Irish women were especially prominent in Liverpool's outdoor trades. In particular, Irish women became associated with the two most contentious female occupations in Liverpool: street selling and prostitution. These economic activities pushed Irish women out into the public arena and in fighting against attempts to suppress the two trades they became fierce defenders of their space on the streets. Consequently Irish women as a group gained a reputation for being the most disorderly and unruly women in Liverpool. In their habits and manners they were the antithesis of bourgeois feminine virtue. The Irish women who took part in the 1855 riots not only challenged traditional gender roles, they were also centrally involved in what was, as suggested above, essentially a contest of class power in mid-Victorian Liverpool. Throughout the period under study Irish women fought in both covert and overt ways to secure for themselves and their families a greater share of the city's

⁷² E.P. Thompson, Customs in Common, London, 1993, p. 335.

riches, which included its public spaces. Thus if the meaning of class struggle is extended to embrace battles over the distribution of resources beyond basic wages, as feminist historian, Jeanne Boydston, has urged, then Irish women in Liverpool emerge as the most determined of class fighters.⁷³

What were the consequences of the riots? The first, and most obvious, outcome of the riots was that hundreds of hungry men, women and children had bread to eat. Indeed, the relief policy" implemented by the rioters was far more generous than any proposed by Liverpool's benevolent gentlemen. On the other hand, the riot provided further impetus for the imposition of stricter regulations for the distribution of relief. After the riots erupted private relief bodies determined that assistance would only be allocated to the poor on an individual basis in their own homes. Placards posted along Scotland and Vauxhall Roads informed residents of these changes:

The poor of Vauxhall Ward are earnestly requested to be peaceable for riotous conduct only makes things worse. Prompt

⁷³ J. Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread: Housework and Antebellum Working-Class Subsistence", in V.L. Ruiz and E.C. DuBois (eds.), Unequal Sisters. A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History, New York, 1994, pp. 44-56. Sonya Rose has observed that as class politics became more organised and rationalised in the nineteenth century unskilled and casual labourers, both male and female, became increasingly marginalised. [S. Rose, "'Gender at Work': Sex, Class and Industrial Capitalism", History Workshop Journal 21, (Spring 1986), p. 126] However, in Liverpool, as John Belchem has argued, riot continued to be a characteristic form of protest and so women remained actively involved in this more "traditional" pattern of resistance throughout the nineteenth century. [See J. Belchem, "Introduction", in J. Belchem (ed.), Popular Politics, Riot and Labour, p. 17. See also Ann Bryson, "Riotous Liverpool, 1815-1860", in Ibid., pp. 98-134.]

orders have been given to take up all persons violating the law, and to deal with them in a summary manner by sending them to the house of correction. In the meantime steps have been taken to divide the ward into districts, and each person will be visited and relief given in all cases where it is required.⁷⁴

As the placard advised, people who were apprehended by the police for participating in riotous activities would be severely punished. Over the course of the three days of rioting, twenty-two female and eighty-four male rioters were arrested. Many of those who were convicted received prison sentences of up to three months with hard labour. Several people were held over for trial at the Spring Assizes where they received sentences of up to one year. As harshly as those who were convicted for their participation in the riots were punished, it should not be forgotten that the vast majority of people who took to the streets demanding bread escaped punishment.

In his brief discussion of the bread riots, Frank Neal argues that the principal effect of the riots was to reinforce sectarian prejudices in Liverpool. In the minds of many, the Irish were confirmed as an unruly and ungrateful lot.⁷⁵ Indeed, in his letter to the Select Committee on Poor Removal, Augustus Campbell offered the widespread involvement of Irish men and women in the riots as evidence that Liverpool's authorities should be granted greater powers for the

⁷⁴ Liverpool Mercury, 23 February 1855.

⁷⁵ F. Neal, Sectarian Violence, p. 163.

removal of unsettled Irish from the city.⁷⁶ However, perhaps the riots left in their wake a more positive legacy. Even though the riots did not affect any lasting change in the social order of mid-Victorian Liverpool, for three days men, women and children did openly challenge the right of Liverpool's wealthier citizens to determine who should and should not have bread. Stories of the days' defiant events would have been told and retold in the streets where the rioters lived, providing another example of resistance to be stored in the collective memory of the Irish community of Liverpool.

Food riots occurred in Liverpool during the winters of 1861 and 1867 when harsh weather conditions paralysed the port as they had in 1855. As events unfolded in these later years it became evident that memories of 1855 remained fresh in the minds of many in the port. On January 9th, 1861, a number of "half grown men, women and boys" assembled in Scotland Road causing serious apprehension among tradesmen, several of whom, fearing a repetition of the 1855 bread riots, hurriedly put up their shutters and closed their shops. The police hastened to the thoroughfare and the crowd began to disperse. A large number of the protesters proceeded to Marybone where they so alarmed the person in charge of Walmsley's shop that he gave them all of the bread he had. This imprudent decision, Head Constable Grieg noted with some relief, was followed by no mischief.⁷⁷ One might argue,

⁷⁶ Select Committee on Poor Removal, Report, 1855, Appendix I.

⁷⁷ L.R.O., Head Constable's Reports to the Watch Committee (1851-1861), 15 January 1861.

however, that simply by triggering memories of 1855 the men, women and boys outside Walmsley's shop, using just their intimidating presence, were able to seize the business's bread. In the winter of 1862 Liverpool's commerce was once again forced to a standstill. When the economy was healthy the yards, warehouses and quays along the line of the docks might employ more than fifteen thousand men. On February 1st, 1862, less than seven thousand dock labourers had work.⁷⁸ In anticipation of the unrest which could erupt from such levels of distress, several volunteers were recruited to act as Special Constables in case of riot. Justifying this decision, the Head Constable reminded the Watch Committee of the riots of 1855 when "many of the bread and flour shops were plundered by the mob, several thousands strong".⁷⁹

In the winter of 1867, though they were suppressed quickly, the police were not able to prevent bread riots from occurring. Once again cold temperatures and frosty easterly winds had ravaged the city's economy. By the middle of January the Central Relief Society estimated that 36,000 people were in receipt of relief. Including merchants among those distressed by the crisis, the Liverpool Mercury gave the following description of port:

Our mercantile classes have suffered almost unparalleled losses; a gigantic panic has shaken our commercial system;

⁷⁸ L.R.O., Head Constable's Reports to Watch Committee (1861-1864), 1 February 1862.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 18 February 1862.

the trade of the port has been injuriously affected...Along the docks, at the Exchange, and at the gates of the manufactories, may be seen crowds of men vainly looking for employment, while the week returns for relief granted by the parochial authorities show how many of the class have been compelled by stern necessity to look to the union for assistance.⁸⁰

Rumours began to circulate that, owing to the prevalent destitution, riots were about to erupt. On the 1st of January these suspicions came to fruition as there were reports that bread shops in the north end had been entered, their contents seized by the crowd and divided. It was also said that the police, while endeavouring to quell the disorder, had been roughly handled. In its coverage of these disturbances the Liverpool Mercury insisted that through the prompt action of the police serious results had been averted.⁸¹

Once again those involved in the events were identified as the undeserving characters who hailed from the neighbourhood of Scotland Road and whose sole object was to "get up a riot". The Liverpool Mercury reminded its readers that the area affected by the unrest was inhabited by the "lowest and depraved class of the community". Actions taken by such a "disorderly mob" were only to be "dreaded by the peaceable and well-disposed" persons of the city.⁸² The Liverpool Courier concurred, reporting that the riot had been confined exclusively to "roughs who are always prepared to take advantage of the

⁸⁰ Liverpool Mercury, 19 January 1867.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

slightest pretext to help themselves to other people's goods or to wantonly destroy them". The paper added that a large number of women had done much to promote the riot as they shouted out "We'll have bread", and, "We'll have coal".⁸³ It has been argued here that the association of the Irish community with the undeserving, riotous poor of Liverpool was well-established and by 1867 it did not need to be stated explicitly. It is to the efforts of Irish women to secure bread and coal for their households that this thesis now turns.

⁸³ Liverpool Courier, 21 January 1867.

Chapter Two

Making Ends Meet: Irish Women and their Neighbourhoods

This chapter explores the particular problems Liverpool's commercial economy created for women, with special attention paid to married women. The predominance of casual employment among working-class men in Liverpool profoundly affected the work of married women both in and outside the home. The type of work available to women in Liverpool was extremely limited and exceptionally poorly paid. As John Finch discovered in his 1842 survey of the Vauxhall ward, the poorest families in the area were those reliant on women's incomes.¹ Yet during periods of high male unemployment, increasing numbers of households did become dependent on the earnings of women. The unpaid work of married women within the home was constant and no less fundamental to the survival of their families. The strategies pursued by working-class women as they tried to maintain their homes on meagre resources became a source of contention and generated a unique brand of gender politics in the city. It is argued here that Irish women developed distinct systems for coping with the poverty which so dominated their lives. Their efforts often propelled them into public space and therefore embodied a fundamental challenge to middle-class conceptions of appropriate gender roles. This chapter then expands upon the argument,

¹ J. Finch, Statistics of the Vauxhall Ward, Liverpool, Liverpool, 1842, pp. 10-12.

introduced in chapter one, that Irish women assumed a pivotal position in representations of poverty in the Victorian Liverpool.

In 1851 while forty-five per cent of adult females were employed nationally, in Liverpool only thirty-six per cent were in employment.² In 1861 forty-nine per cent of adult females, or 40,002 women, in Liverpool were enumerated as "wives with no other occupation". In Manchester, Lancashire's industrial centre, this segment represented forty per cent of the female population twenty years of age and older. In Blackburn, a textile town, only thirty-six per cent of adult women were described in the census as wives with no other occupation.-Twenty-four per cent of adult women with work in Manchester were employed in cotton manufacture. In Blackburn 12,713 women, representing sixty-one per cent of women with work, were involved in the trade. In contrast, Liverpool provided few manufacturing opportunities for women. Domestic service, which is the subject of chapter four, employed the largest number of women in the port. Needlework employed significant numbers of women as well. In 1861, for example, there were 5,410 seamstresses, shirtmakers, milliners and dressmakers in the city.³ In 1871 the larger geographical area of the Borough of Liverpool was enumerated and there

² I.C. Taylor, "'Black Spot on the Mersey'. A Study of Environment and Society in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Liverpool", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1976, p. 84.

³ Census of England and Wales, Population Tables, Occupations of the People in Principal Towns, Division VIII, 1861. PP 1863 [3221] Vol. LIII Pt.I.1.

were 6,599 milliners and 2,375 shirt makers and seamstresses.⁴ An overstocked female labour market combined with assumptions about gender roles to ensure the highly exploitative nature of needle work. An exploration of the trade exposes the economic vulnerability of Liverpool's working women. Although he commented on the difficulty of ascertaining the precise number, Dr. Charles Mackay, in his 1850 survey, estimated that there were more than five thousand needlewomen in Liverpool. Slopsellers employed needlewomen on a piece work basis to make canvas and duck trousers, flannel drawers, cotton shirts, and waist coats of all material except heavy woollen cloth.⁵ Needlework was particularly important for married women. Isabella Donnegan, an-Irish-born dressmaker, combined her earnings with those of her husband, a dock labourer, to support their three children.⁶ Both the wife and daughter of Edward Davies, an Irish seaman, were seamstresses.-Twenty-nine year old Catherine Davies was the young mother of a fourteen year old daughter.⁷ During periods of high male unemployment many houses became dependent on what women could earn in the trade. However, married women were forced to enter into an already swamped labour

⁴ Census of England and Wales, Population Tables, Occupations of the People, Division VIII, 1871. PP 1873 [C.872] Vol. LXXI Pt.I.1

⁵ "Labour and the Poor: Letter VI", Morning Chronicle, 24 June 1850.

⁶ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of Great Britain, 1851. HO 107 2179.2.7: St. Paul's and Exchange.

⁷ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of England and Wales, 1861. RG9 2665: Dale St., 2H.

market and they could exert little bargaining power over their working conditions and wages. Employers complained of the incompetence and attitudes of these "temporary" workers:

The needlewomen of Liverpool are very often the wives of sailors and dock workers. If they get their husbands' monthly money pretty regularly they do not care for needlework, but if there is a falling off in that they apply for slopwork. They are not regularly trained for the business and I could not depend on them for the execution of the orders I have to supply.⁸

While they bemoaned the quality of work done by married needlewomen, it would be difficult to deny that the balance between supply and demand in the labour market tilted in favour of Liverpool's employers. Dr. Mackay came across many women who had been compelled to take on needlework at substandard wages because of the urgency of their family's situation. He gave this account of one dock labourer's wife's predicament:

Her husband had been confined to bed for nine weeks. She had pawned everything that she possessed which she could part with, and she applied to a slopseller with tears in her eyes, saying she would make cotton shirts at two pence a piece rather than starve any longer.⁹

As chapter one described, thousands of male labourers could be without employment if trade was interrupted in the port. At these times scores

⁸ "Labour and the Poor: Letter VI", Morning Chronicle, 24 June 1850.

⁹ "Labour and the Poor: Letter VI:", Morning Chronicle, 24 June 1850. See L.M. Grant, "Women Workers and the Sexual Division of Labour: Liverpool 1890-1939", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1987. See also G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, pp. 83-87, for a discussion of the place of women in London's casual labour market.

of women were pressed to seek employment. Mr Hyman Balsam, who employed fourteen women to make coats, explained to an 1889 Select Committee that many of these sewers were married to men who had no work for months on end and "if not for the women working the children would be almost in the workhouse".¹⁰ Many women in Liverpool turned to needlework when, as a result of desertion or widowhood, they became the sole breadwinner. The outwork system allowed single mothers to stay in their own homes, which was particularly important for women with small children. Often the older children were able to assist their mother with her work or to mind their younger siblings while their mother sewed. One young Irish woman with three small children whose sailor husband had died three years earlier gave the following description of her circumstances to Mackay:

He used to give me his monthly money regularly; and when he died I was obliged to earn my living by needlework, as I could do nothing else...I principally make canvas and duck trousers. They are hard work, but I could manage to earn ten shillings a week, if I could get the work to do. I should be obliged to work from six in the morning to eleven at night to gain as much as that. I do not send my little girl to school...She is eleven years old, and I make her useful to me. She can sew and do common work.¹¹

Despite the significance of women's wages for the survival of their families, needlework was not remunerated accordingly. A woman was rarely acknowledged as the primary breadwinner of a household if it

¹⁰ Select Committee on the Sweating System, Fourth Report, Minutes of Evidence, Mr. H. Balsam, q. 28 039, 1889-1890. PP 1889-1890 (331) (331-1) Vol. XIV Pt.I.1, Vol. XVI Pt. II.1.

¹¹"Labour and the Poor: Letter VI", Morning Chronicle, 24 June 1850.

included an adult male. In part this reflected the hidden nature of women's work. As Sally Alexander has argued, social commentators and reformers recognised the need for working-class women to earn wages and yet they only sanctioned the type of work which could be done in the home.¹² Needlewomen employed on an outwork basis, as many of them were, remained tied to their domestic duties. Whether or not their households were maintained by their earnings, there was no question that women bore sole responsibility for child care, cooking and cleaning.¹³ Women thus worked a double shift as housewives and wage workers. Employers of outworkers then both benefitted from and reinforced the sexual division of labour in the home.¹⁴ Male tailors who competed with female sewers, however, often condemned the outwork system not as a highly exploitative form of employment but as a scheme which undermined male authority and privilege in the home.¹⁵ John Belmer Goodman, a former secretary of the Liverpool Operatives Tailors' Society, complained to the 1889 Select Committee that the sweating system demoralised a man's home as it interfered with the wife's household duties and so decreased a husband's comfort. Echoing a familiar caution which will be discussed

¹² S. Alexander, "Women's Work in nineteenth-century London: a study of the years 1820-1850", in E. Whitelegg (ed.), The Changing Experience of Women, Oxford, 1982, p. 33.

¹³ S. Rose, Limited Livelihoods, p. 98.

¹⁴ C. Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, -1789-1860, Chicago, 1987, p. 106.

¹⁵ See S. Rose, "Gender antagonism and class conflict: exclusionary strategies of male trade unionists in nineteenth-century Britain", Social History, Vol. 13, 2 (1988), pp. 191-208.

in detail below, Goodman insisted that a wife who failed in her domestic duties would drive her husband to the public-house.¹⁶

For many middle-class reformers, however, it was the very fact that needlewomen worked in the private sphere that made them morally deserving of support. Indeed, the popular perception of women employed in the needle trades was, as will be revealed in chapter three, in marked contrast to the view of women who gained their livelihood on the streets of Liverpool. Destitute needlewomen were the objects of grave concern among respectable Victorians. Londoners shuddered as Mayhew recounted tragic tales of young seamstresses driven by shortages of work and starvation wages into prostitution.¹⁷ Members of the Liverpool Society for the Relief of Distressed Needlewomen warned that the city's needlewomen faced a similar plight. The Liverpool Mercury recorded Reverend Appleton's description of how the society intervened in the lives of needlewomen who, as a result of lack of employment, had already "fallen from virtue":

He had himself witnessed much degradation and suffering which he really believed had been caused by want of work. Now, if these societies stepped in, as they appeared now to be doing, to relieve and to give work to those poor creatures who had fallen from virtue and from honesty through sheer necessity in so many instances, he thought they might expect great good to be done even in that respect.¹⁸

¹⁶ Select Committee on the Sweating System, Fourth Report, Minutes of Evidence, Mr. J.B. Goodman, q. 27 802, 1889-1890.

¹⁷ E.P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo, The Unknown Mayhew, London, 1970, p. 121; p. 147.

¹⁸ Liverpool Mercury, 27 January 1860.

The sympathy and concern expressed towards impoverished needlewomen who had been forced into prostitution was at odds with the disgust shown to "vicious" women who had entered the trade through other routes. The construction of needlewomen as the worthy female poor, the most helpless of victims, served to legitimise middle-class intervention in their lives.¹⁹ Francis Bishop, a Minister of the Poor with the Liverpool Domestic Mission, was consistently shocked by the sufferings of needlewomen and expressed particular concern for widows involved in the trade. In one of his annual reports he recorded the hardships faced by one such woman:

A poor widow in my district who had lately four children, now reduced to three, supports herself and them by working for a shop, and often, I believe, goes without sufficiency of food for herself to give her children enough. She is chiefly employed in making drawers and canvas trousers, for which she is paid at the rate of three shillings per dozen, (I know some who receive only two shillings per dozen). When she is fully supplied with work, by employing herself from six in the morning till eleven or twelve at night, being a remarkably quick worker, she can manage according to her own account, to make ends meet; but there are times when she cannot get full supply, and then the privations of the family must be severe.²⁰

Bishop judged this young widow to be deserving of relief and in addition to the aid the Mission gave her, Bishop himself acted as her surety with the shop from which she obtained work. In 1872, as part of

¹⁹ See H. Rogers, "'The Good are not Always Powerful, and the Powerful not Always Good': The Politics of Women's Work in the London Needle trades, 1841-1864", Women's History Notebook, 1 (1994), pp. 3-25.

²⁰ L.R.O., Liverpool Domestic Mission, (hereafter L.D.M.), Annual Report (1849), p. 29.

a sustained period of labour unrest, Liverpool's needlewomen began to agitate for higher wages and shorter working days. The cause of the working women was championed by local businessman, William Simpson. Simpson received many sympathetic letters pressing him, "for God's sake", to "do something for the poor needlewomen".²¹ Acting in what he considered to be the interests of the needlewomen Simpson established a cooperative venture which closed down just a year later in October 1873.²² Throughout July 1872, when popular sympathy for them was at its height, needlewomen were described as "poor, wan, thinly clad worn creature[s]", who were invariably "cleanly and neatly attired" and "becoming in their behaviour". The oppressed needlewoman was thus portrayed as the epitome of the virtuous female poor. The characterisation of needlewomen as passive victims legitimised the actions taken by their supporters while the women themselves remained in the shadows.²³ And though it is certainly true that needlewomen were able to play upon this sentimental image to secure assistance from certain individual and agencies, the representation of female poverty in moral terms worked to the detriment of many poor women. Sentimentalism, Christine Stansell has observed, stripped the

²¹ Liverpool Mercury, 1872.

²² E. Taplin, "False Dawn of New Unionism?" in J. Belchem (ed.), Popular Politics, Riot and Labour, pp. 142-143.

²³ Ibid., p. 143.

needlewoman's experience of its class content and excluded her from the more disorderly support systems of her disreputable sisters.²⁴

In 1884 J. Stafford Taylor, Liverpool's Medical Officer of Health, identified the lack of female employment as one of the central causes of poverty in the city. It was not the fact that women were without a means of support which concerned the doctor, instead he insisted that the lack of work for "women of the lowest class" served to promote "idle and thoughtless habits". "A walk through any of the old parts of the town," he observed, "will disclose any number of dirty ill-clad women loitering about or sitting on dirty steps."²⁵ Thus, while acknowledging the material roots of the problem, Stafford Taylor represented poverty as fundamentally a moral issue. The supposed laziness and carelessness of working-class women were deemed to be of severe consequence for their families. Wally Seccombe in his comprehensive study of working-class families during the Industrial Revolution, Weathering the Storm, argues that through the 1840s-middle-class reformers became increasingly alarmed about the squalor in which the poor lived fearing that such conditions could lead to social unrest.²⁶ Seccombe argues that Victorian anxieties about the disintegration of the working-class family stemmed from a perception

²⁴ C. Stansell, City of Women, p. 153.

²⁵ J. Stafford Taylor, Report of the Medical Officer of Health, Causes of Fever and other Zymotic Diseases in the City, Liverpool, 1884, p. 16.

²⁶ W. Seccombe, Weathering the Storm, London, 1993, p. 54.

that a great many married women were toiling outside their homes. Seccombe does note, however, that the empirical basis of this prognosis was erroneous.²⁷ Nevertheless, the perceived threat to the working-class family in Liverpool derived not from the work which married women did outside the home, but what they apparently failed to do inside it. Francis Bishop, in his capacity as a moral reformer and charity worker, was convinced that while it was imperative for a man to be industrious, temperate and religious, if he was not cared for by a suitable wife his family would be doomed to destitution. Women who appeared to adhere to the bourgeois ideal of womanhood received the most ardent praise:

We are in a chamber where the hand of neatness and refinement has given an air of comfort and beauty to the home of a working man, having no ampler resources than many men whose homes are homes of wretchedness and destitution. But he is a man of industry and religion, and he is blessed with a wife of equal, if not superior virtue to his own.²⁸

Women who failed to achieve such saintly standards in their lives were the recipients of harsh criticism. A consistent theme in the writings of the popular journalist, Hugh Shimmin, was the influence of-working-class women in determining the economic and moral standing of their families. In their introduction to a collection of Shimmin's writings, John Walton and Alastair Wilcox observe that Shimmin perceived the "working-man's wife as either the pillar of the family by her support, encouragement and skills, or its subverter, by slatternly, disorganised

²⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁸ L.R.O., L.D.M., Annual Report (1851), p. 15.

conduct which drove the husband to the pub and the children into the street".²⁹ Shimmin was especially outraged by domestic scenes in which male authority and privilege, characteristic of middle-class families, appeared to be undermined:

The man now spoken of is the type of a large and, it is much to be regretted, rapidly increasing class. And can it be wondered that such men leave home and seek elsewhere for that which is here denied them?...Here the wife has such a poor perception of her duty that she does not even know how to take care of her house. There is nothing joyous, nothing cheerful, nothing inviting about wife or house to keep the man in it, where he might enjoy himself by his own fireside, free from all temptation.³⁰

Walton and Wilcox suggest a biographical explanation for Shimmin's views towards women, reminding their readers that the columnist's wife was an especially competent domestic manager and that it was her frugality which enabled the childless couple to become comfortably ensconced in Liverpool's middle class. At the same time, however, the editors advise that Shimmin's writings are best read as the observations of a man from "within the working class who tried to interpret the ideas and beliefs, habits and customs of working people to a more elevated audience".³¹ Yet Shimmin's strident criticisms of working-class women who refused to conform to bourgeois notions of

²⁹ "Introduction" in J. Walton and A. Wilcox (eds.), Low Life and Moral Improvement in Mid-Victorian England. Liverpool through the Journalism of Hugh Shimmin, Leicester, 1991, p. 7.

³⁰ H. Shimmin, "Driven from Home", in Walton and Wilcox (eds.), Low Life and Moral Improvement, p. 123.

³¹ "Introduction" in Walton and Wilcox (eds.), Low Life and Moral Improvement, p. 25.

femininity were more typical of the class to which he came to belong rather than the one from which he rose.

The emphasis placed on the domestic skills of working-class women had specific implications for Irish women who were judged to be particularly incompetent housewives. Several witnesses before an 1836 Select Committee offered the inadequacies of Irish women as explanation for the poverty of the Irish in Britain. From the evidence they heard the authors of the Report arrived at the following conclusion:

Another circumstance, which has a powerful influence in retarding the improvement of the Irish settlers in Great Britain, is the unthrifty and dissolute character of the women; as it is on the wife that the care of the house, and on the mother that the training of the children, chiefly depend among the poor. Irishwomen are likewise, for the most part, not only wasteful and averse to labour, but also ignorant of the arts of domestic economy, as sewing and cooking.³²

Father Nugent, a prominent Catholic leader, testifying before the Liverpool Mortality Sub-Committee, concurred with these earlier findings. Nugent regretted that there was a class of young Irish women in the port who were given to drink and to ignore their religion. A man who had the ill-fortune of marrying one of these disreputable women would be condemned to a life of poverty: "If a labouring man marries one of these women, his home becomes neglected, the children are allowed to prowl the streets, there is no cleanliness or comfort in the house, and if sickness occurs the whole family generally falls victim

³² Select Committee on the State of the Irish in Great Britain, Report, 1836, p. xiii. PP 1836 (40) Vol. XXXIV.

to it."³³ Irish women were held largely to blame then for the exclusion of their families from the ranks of the respectable poor.

The representation of the disreputable poor in the figure of the feckless slum wife and mother reflected to a certain extent the actual sexual division of labour in poor families: poor women as household managers were responsible for the moral and physical welfare of their families. However, Judith Walkowitz has observed that while recognizing the "power" of the working-class wives and mothers, middle-class observers ignored the actual constraints on women who appeared to be powerful but who suffered from male domination and the inequities of class.³⁴ The following discussion examines the obstacles confronting Irish women in fulfilling their domestic tasks and contends that their response to these difficulties fundamentally affected gender relationships in their homes and neighbourhoods. It is argued here that different meanings might be given to the behaviour of working-class wives which so shocked middle-class commentators. The suggestion is made that it was the failure of a working-class man to fulfil his role as a breadwinner which frustrated his claims to a privileged position within the home and provided the space for his wife to reconsider her own domestic rights and responsibilities.

³³ Liverpool Mortality Sub-Committee, Report and Evidence, 1865-1866, p. 198.

³⁴ J. Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight. Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London, Chicago, 1992, pp. 119-120.

Although the involvement of married women in paid employment may have been intermittent, their work in the home, no less crucial to the survival of their families, was constant. As Bettina Bradbury, a family historian, has observed, domestic labour in the nineteenth-century was fundamental to family survival, to the transformation of wages into a reasonable standard of living and to the reproduction of the working-class.³⁵ Working-class women in Liverpool faced the arduous task of stretching meagre resources to cover the expenses of the household. An Irish housewife's domestic responsibilities were peculiarly demanding as she was more likely to be married to a low-paid casual labourer than her non-Irish counterpart. As was described in the last chapter, the majority of Irish families lived in the most deprived areas of Liverpool. In the Irish-dominated courts the houses were small, usually consisting of just three rooms and a cellar. The atmosphere inside the crowded dwellings was stifling as a result of inadequate ventilation. Keeping such homes clean was something of a Herculean assignment. During their 1883 tour through "squalid" Liverpool, investigators noted that the foundries located in the dockland neighbourhoods pumped volumes of smoke and dust into the courts, "choking the residents".³⁶ A 1909 catalogue of the many obstacles to cleanliness in the city's courts included the prohibitive costs of scouring implements:

³⁵ B. Bradbury, Working Families: Ages, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrialising Montreal, Toronto, 1993, p. 151.

³⁶ "Squalid Liverpool", reprinted from the Liverpool Daily Post, 1883, p. 30.

When the income is insufficient for necessary food, it is not surprising that the 3d. to 6d. per week, which seems about the sum usually spent in the better homes on cleaning materials, is the first item to be cut down by the particular housewives.³⁷

However, the dust and dirt which marred the homes of labourers were often attributed not to environmental and financial impediments but to the incompetence of poor wives as housekeepers. Indeed, middle-class commentators commonly defined cleanliness as a moral trait.

The moral issues associated with the unhealthy atmosphere of the courts took on added significance when connected with the ethnic identity of many court dwellers. The conditions of their homes caused Dr. Duncan to question the very humanity of Irish residents in Liverpool: "The Irish seem to be as contented amidst dirt and filth, and close confined air, as in clean and airy situations ... they merely seem to care for that which will support animal existence."³⁸ Francis Bishop explicitly linked sanitary habits with moral condition in his descriptions of the Irish in Liverpool. Bishop was particularly concerned with the sexual implications of the crowded state of Irish homes:

...all who visit amongst the poor, and especially the Irish poor, know that there prevail in regard to it [regular air supply] the most fatal ignorance and indifference. I am acquainted with one house containing three small rooms in which there are living five married couples, and twenty young people, varying in age from childhood to eighteen and-twenty-
-it is obvious that all sense of propriety and self-respect

³⁷ Joint Research Committee on the Domestic Condition and Expenditure of Families of Certain Liverpool Labourers, How the Casual Labourer Lives, Liverpool, 1909, p. xxiii.

³⁸ Select Committee on the Irish Poor in Great Britain, Report, 1836, Appendix XI, p. 18.

must be destroyed, and decency and morality as much sacrificed as health and comfort.³⁹

Social reformers in the mid-Victorian period were, as Frank Mort notes, convinced that the wretchedness of the working-class environment, specifically bad housing and overcrowding, fostered deviant sexual behaviour. Incest was the source of extreme moral anxiety because it so dramatically challenged middle-class notions of family propriety.⁴⁰ The cramped quarters of Irish households, illustrated in chapter one, were taken as evidence of their moral degradation. There is no way of assessing the prevalence of incest in slum neighbourhoods, but Wally Seccombe suggests that the postulated connection between domestic crowding and illicit intimacy was a dubious one. It might just as plausibly be argued that the lack of privacy would have reduced opportunities for incest while at the same time increasing the risks of discovery. The thought of several family members sleeping in a single bed may have fuelled bourgeois imaginations, but rather than the tales of sexual debauchery told by middle-class reformers most working-class biographers recall a repressive sexual climate characterising their childhood homes.⁴¹

By taking in lodgers to supplement family income, Irish women inevitably contributed to the crowdedness of their neighbourhoods while

³⁹ L.R.O., L.D.M., Annual Report (1848), p. 13.

⁴⁰ F. Mort, Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral politics in England since 1830, London, 1987, pp. 38-39.

⁴¹ W. Seccombe, Weathering the Storm, p. 144.

at the same time actively forging residential links between Irish immigrants.⁴² In an 1861 sample of nearly two hundred married and widowed Irish women who lived on streets where there were significant numbers of Irish people, forty took in lodgers. Twenty-three of these women took in only Irish lodgers, five had only non-Irish lodgers and twelve had both. However, of the twelve women who took in both Irish and non-Irish lodgers, three provided lodgings for Irish parents and their Liverpool-born children.⁴³ While the majority of these women were not registered as doing paid work outside the home, many were. Often the lodgers they took in were similarly employed. Mary Mulrooney, for example, was a fish hawker and her husband was a porter. The Mulrooneys and their three children shared their home with a thirty-year-old Irish widow named Mary Shordon. Shordon was also a fish hawker. Women who were married to seamen often took in lodgers while their husbands were away. Occasionally their lodgers were women in the same predicament. Irish-born Ann Drain, a mariner's wife, had one lodger, Catherine Hoyne, another Irish woman whose husband was at sea. By sharing living space they were able to combine resources in their husbands' absence.⁴⁴

⁴² A large number of married women took in lodgers in London and New York as well. See L.H. Lees, Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London, Manchester, 1979, pp. 115-116; C. Groneman, "Working-class immigrant Women in mid-Nineteenth-Century New York: Irish Women's Experience", Journal of Urban History, 3 (1978), p. 262.

⁴³ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of England and Wales, 1861. RG9 2665-2674: Dale St. and Howard St.

⁴⁴ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census for Great Britain, 1851. HO 107 2179.2.5: Dale St.

Given the cramped condition of their homes it is hardly surprising that life for residents of poor neighbourhoods often spilled out onto the streets. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who served as the American consul in Liverpool in the early 1850s, was constantly drawn into the poorer areas of the city. Like many other Victorian social explorers, Hawthorne was captivated by the public nature of working-class life which stood in such conspicuous contrast to the isolating privacy of respectable homes. Wandering along Tithebarn Street or Scotland Road, the author was at once repulsed by the squalor and disease which surrounded him and intoxicated by a "sense of being in the midst of life, and of having got hold of something real, which I do not find in the better streets of the city".⁴⁵ Intrigued by the public character of life on these streets he commented on the presence of women sewing or knitting at the entrances of their homes, and groups of men and women talking, quarrelling, and laughing on the door-steps. Chronicling his excursions into this exotic world Hawthorne observed: "In a drama of low life, the street might fairly and truly be the scene where everything should take place--courtships, quarrels, plot and counterplot and what not besides."⁴⁶

Women within working-class neighbourhoods relied on each other for child care, the use of cooking utensils, the granting of small loans, and perhaps even for shelter from abusive husbands. In communities

⁴⁵ N. Hawthorne, English Notebooks, New York, 1941, p. 13.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

where the wages being brought into the home were insufficient to meet the needs of the household, women's sharing networks ensured the survival of their families.⁴⁷ A Cheshire labourer who, during the 1860s, stayed a short while in one of Liverpool's courts remembered how the welcome his wife received from the neighbourhood women involved the assumption that she would necessarily participate in their sharing networks:

Why, before my wife had got her furniture put into any sort of order, she had been visited by half the women of the court--in a friendly way, of course. One and all wished her good luck; some wanted to borrow pans and mugs; some wished her to join them in a subscription to bury a child that was dead in the top house; others that had joined for a little sup of drink, wished her to taste with them; some wanted her to subscribe to a raffle for a fat pig, which had been fed in the cellar where it now was, and that was right opposite the house in which I lived.⁴⁸

In their 1871 report doctors Parkes and Sanderson were also taken by the reliance of poor neighbours on one another's kindness noting in particular that cooking utensils were treated as communal property.⁴⁹ Of course the reliance of working-class women on one another was no defence against conflict. Just as neighbours could be kind to one another they could also be spiteful. In March 1859 an "old Irish woman"

⁴⁷ E. Ross, "Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London before World War I", History Workshop Journal, 15 (1983), pp. 4-27.

⁴⁸ Quoted in H. Shimmin, "The courts at Christmas time", in J. Walton and A. Wilcox (eds.), Low Life and Moral Improvement, p. 156.

⁴⁹ Dr. Parkes and Dr. Sanderson, Report on the Sanitary Condition of Liverpool, p. 65.

named Hines charged her young neighbour, James Nixon, with assault. The court heard that Nixon's mother had quarrelled with Hines over "some trifling matter". Believing his mother to be "getting the worst of it", James had intervened on her behalf, hitting Hines over the head with a large stick. Described as a "young ruffian", James Nixon was ordered to pay forty shillings and costs or face three months in prison - a severe sentence indeed.⁵⁰

Neighbourhood assistance was premised on notions of reciprocity and was often given without the recipient having to make pleas for help. Living in such crowded streets it was next to impossible for a working-class woman to keep her business her own. However, what she lost in privacy she gained in the swiftness with which her neighbours could respond to a crisis in her life. Ellen Ross has argued that the distinction between state welfare and private charity was less important, from a working-class woman's perspective, than the contrast between official philanthropy and the help supplied by kin and neighbours.⁵¹ The case of Mrs. Brown, who came before the Liverpool Coroner's Court in 1867 following the death of her infant, vividly illustrates Ross's argument. The winter of 1867 was particularly harsh.

⁵⁰ Liverpool Mercury, 4 March 1859. The vindictive comments made to charity workers by one neighbour of another will be discussed in chapter seven.

⁵¹ E. Ross, "Hungry Children: Housewives and London Charity, 1870-1918", in P. Mandler (ed.), Uses of Charity. The Poor on Relief in Nineteenth-Century Metropolis, Philadelphia, 1990, pp. 166. The importance of private charities, especially Catholic ones, for Irish women in Liverpool will be discussed in chapter seven.

Cold easterly winds prevented ships from landing in Liverpool throwing thousands of dock labourers out of work. Mrs. Brown's husband had been unemployed for three months and the family of four had tried to survive on the seven shillings a week which Mrs. Brown earned working at a ropery. The situation became so desperate that Mrs. Brown was forced to pawn her boots in order to buy food, but without her boots she could not go to work. For several days she and her family existed on the help of neighbours. Mrs. Brown became so malnourished that she was unable to produce enough breast milk to nurse her infant son who died in her arms as he slept. The Deputy Coroner in addressing the jury described Mrs. Brown as an ignorant woman who had failed to apply for poor relief and was therefore responsible for the death of her child. He added that the defendant's failure to keep her house clean had also contributed to the tragedy, callously suggesting that she could have easily obtained soap and water. Indeed the jury, betraying their middle-class expectations, asked the Deputy Coroner to impress upon the defendant that "although she was very poor she ought to have the place tidy and sweet". Mrs. Brown answered these severe charges by confessing that she had not applied for charitable relief because "I never was used to it and was ashamed to do it." The Deputy Coroner snidely countered that her pride had not prevented her from begging off her neighbours. To this Mrs. Brown responded: "I did not beg from my neighbours but they knew I was in want and they gave assistance to me." After being reprimanded by the

court and advised not to allow herself the luxury of pride, Mrs. Brown was released.⁵²

The crowded streets of Liverpool were fertile ground for the growth of close female friendships. Given the irregular nature of male employment men were certainly present in the neighbourhoods during the day, but women seem to have maintained the gendered exclusivity of their daily routines. Hugh Shimmin described with disgust the rituals of female companions in the courts:

They [the women in the courts] could, however, muster funds every Monday to have a tea party...to which friends from a distance would sometimes come to join them. On these occasions there appeared to be no lack of meat or drink, and immediately after the arrival of each visitor a little girl would be sent off to the grog shop for spirits...There was generally a great bustle to get all indications of the tea party cleared off before the time at which the husbands might be expected home--that is supposing them to be at work--and the women separated with loud protestations of friendship for each other.⁵³

John Walton and Alastair Wilcox identify this occasion as an example of women celebrating Saint Monday.⁵⁴ In his autobiography, Pat O'Mara, recalled the way the fine clothes which had been worn with such dignity to Mass on Sunday would on Mondays be pawned by the Irish Catholic women who lived on the Liverpool street where he grew up:

This pawnshop was an integral part of this neighbourhood's social and economic life. Sunday, was the day for us to wear civilised clothing. Hence the obvious question: why keep good

⁵² Liverpool Courier, 23 January 1867.

⁵³ H. Shimmin, "The social condition of the People", in Walton and Wilcox (eds.), Low Life and Moral Improvement, p. 11.

⁵⁴ "Notes in the Text", in Ibid., n.48, p. 247.

clothes and boots loafing in the house all week when they could be pawned? Every Monday morning a queue would line up outside Harris's pawnshop, pledging the elegant things worn (with creases still in them) so proudly on Sunday...This pawning-redeeming routine kept up until the pawnable material had deteriorated to a point viewed with scepticism by the very cynical Mr. Harris.⁵⁵

Ellen Ross had commented on the place of Mondays within the rhythm of working-class women's weekly responsibilities. By pawning Sunday best women secured vital cash to carry them through to the end of the week when, with any luck, their husbands would bring home some wages. Interestingly, in spite of their tight budgets, women considered part of the pawning proceeds to rightfully be for their personal use.⁵⁶ The job of stretching meagre resources thus fostered social rituals and a collective culture among working-class wives.

The neighbourliness which was an essential component of all working-class communities was reinforced among Irish women by cultural traditions of generosity. In his autobiography John Denvir described the hospitality extended to newly arrived immigrants by Irish residents in Liverpool:

Many of them have set out from Ireland, intending to go to America, but their little means failing them, have been obliged to remain in Liverpool. Here they considered themselves fortunate if they met someone from the same part of the country as themselves to give them a helping hand, for it is a fine trait in the Irish character--and "over here in England" the trait has not been lost--that, however poor they

⁵⁵ P. O'Mara, The Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy, London, 1934, pp. 63-64.

⁵⁶ E. Ross, "Survival Networks", p. 11.

are always ready to befriend what seems to them a still poorer neighbour.⁵⁷

Denvir considered this uniquely "Irish" generosity, which drew Irish immigrants in Liverpool together, to be a mixed blessing. As he explained: "It often so happens that, from the very goodness of the Irish heart, the newcomers are frequently drawn into the same miserable mode of life as the friends who have come to England before them may have fallen into."⁵⁸ Testifying before a parliamentary committee in 1836, Liverpool builder, Samuel Holme, argued, less sympathetically than Denvir, that the "wretched way" the Irish live might be attributed in part to "their foolish hospitality; for they are very kind to each other".⁵⁹ Historian Michael Anderson argues that Irish hospitality might be represented in a more positive light. He suggests that the maintenance of community was more important to the Irish in England than personal success. Certainly Liverpool's Irish women relied heavily on the material support of their immigrant neighbours.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ J. Denvir, The Story of An Old Rebel, Dublin, 1990, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁹ Select Committee on the State of the Irish in Great Britain, Report, 1836, Appendix XI, p. 28. In 1884 Dr. Stafford Taylor detailed the health risks embodied in the kindness Liverpool's poor extended to each other in as much as neighbours visited from house to house carrying contagion as they went. [Dr. J. Stafford Taylor, Report on the Medical Officer of Health, Causes of Fever and other Zymotic Diseases in the City, p. 34.]

⁶⁰ M. Anderson, "Urban Migration in Victorian Britain: Problems of Assimilation?", Immigration et Societe Urbain en Europe Occidentale, XVIe-XXe Siecle. Ed. Recherche sur les civilisations, 1985, p. 90.

Further, for immigrant women the generosity they showed to one another could foster a sense of belonging. Many of the women Hugh Shimmin met in the predominantly Irish courts of Oriel Street confessed that the kindness they showed to each other made life in the dismal courts bearable:

When the people here in the next court...were pouring out their complaints,--the evils they had to endure, the dreadful state of their houses,--it occurred to us to ask some of them why they remained in such wretched places, as, for a few pence more each week, which might be saved from the grog shop, they could get much better residences, in more healthy situations. One old woman stepped forward to reply. She had lived there for a long time--we forget how many years--she had found friends and neighbours there...and it was not easy to leave a spot which she had known for so long, and where, in sorrow or in joy, she had met with sympathetic hearts. She put the case in very homely language, in a most telling way, and her old eyes glistened as she gave utterance to words which were the natural language of the human heart. 'True to you, Biddy,' was the response; 'God's truth you've spoken this day, if you never speak again,' and then warmed by the old woman's burst of genuine feeling, others began to gush forth in expression which showed what a very dear thing home is, be it ever so humble.⁶¹

Ironically, Shimmin interpreted these sentiments as evidence that the women could be persuaded to adopt more provident and temperate habits: "There is always hope whilst love of home exists".⁶² However, their participation in a collective culture which clearly involved drink, which Shimmin zealously despised, was precisely why these women felt so attached to their homes.

⁶¹ H. Shimmin, "An Oriel Prospect", in Walton and Wilcox (eds.), Low Life and Moral Improvement, p. 116.

⁶² Ibid.

By the mid-1860s Liverpool had gained for itself the reputation of being the most drunken town in England. Statistics for 1865 revealed that the number of drunken cases dealt with summarily by the magistrates had reached an annual rate of 1 for 33 inhabitants of Liverpool, a much higher rate than any other town in the country. In presenting these figures The Times offered this reminder: "The same sinners come before their worships frequently; and each conviction is treated by the statistics as a separate case." As shocking as it was to have 3100 habitual drunkards in the city, the greater disgrace stemmed from the fact that there were as many females as males among them.⁶³ The prominence of female drinkers within working-class neighbourhoods had long been a concern of officials and social commentators in the city. In 1850 Abraham Hume recorded with disdain that in the mainly Catholic parish, St. Simon's, there were fifty-one public houses and fifty-one beer shops, or one for every twenty-five families. Hume regretfully observed that these establishments were frequented as often by women as by men. The consequences of this state of affairs were indeed grievous: "property squandered, domestic comfort destroyed, children neglected, propriety outraged, industry suspended, virtue despised".⁶⁴ Hawthorne too was disgusted by the "inconceivably sluttish women" who entered the public houses at noon time and began to drink at the counter "among

⁶³ The Times, 28 August 1866.

⁶⁴ A. Hume, Missions at Home, p. 14.

boon companions of both sexes".⁶⁵ Of the 6360 female prisoners in the Borough Jail in 1870, 4461 of them were Catholic. Commenting on this statistic, Henry Gibson, who served as the Catholic chaplain in the institution while Father James Nugent was abroad, noted that a great many of the women who came under his care were habitually charged with being "drunken and disorderly". Further, he observed that drink was most prevalent among the lowest class of the poor who, for the most part, belonged to the Catholic church and who came from localities "chiefly peopled by the poorest Irish".⁶⁶ Throughout his years as Catholic chaplain in the Borough Jail, Father Nugent wrote often of the "disgraceful" fact that the Catholic women convicted for drunkenness not only outnumbered Protestant women, but regularly outnumbered Catholic men in the jail:

Drink is making terrible havoc upon the [Catholic] female population of this town; not only demoralising the young, and leading them step by step into crime and the lowest depths of vice, but destroying the sacred character of family life and changing wives and mothers into brutal savages.⁶⁷

Drink was often pointed to as the fundamental cause of domestic violence in working-class homes. Susan and Alexander Trotter were both in the habit of drinking. Edward Roache, a witness in the case against

⁶⁵ Quoted in J. O'Donald Mays, Mr. Hawthorne Goes to England, Burley, 1983, pp. 472-473.

⁶⁶ L.R.O., Magistrates' Court Records, Justices Sessions, Gaol and House of Correction, The Roman Catholic Chaplain's Report, 27 October 1870.

⁶⁷ L.R.O., Magistrates' Court Records, Justices Sessions, Gaol and House of Correction, Prison Minister's Report, 25 October 1877.

Susan after she fatally stabbed her husband, testified that he had seen the couple fighting on a number of occasions, and in each instance they had both been drunk. Martha Reed, a neighbour, confessed that she often saw the Trotters intoxicated and that on the night of Alexander's untimely death she had noticed the two in the public house. James Hopwood testified to the mood altering effects of alcohol. He observed that Alexander Trotter was "generally a very peaceable man except when in drink". Whereas Susan was "always very quarrelsome but particularly violent when drunk". In their final battle Alexander had called his wife a "bloody Irish whore". Susan had shouted back "you are only a tailor".⁶⁸ In sentencing Susan Trotter to three months' imprisonment with hard labour for the crime of manslaughter, the Quarter Sessions' judge lamented: "if anything could teach people in her class of life the wretchedness and misery consequent upon drunkenness he was sure this case ought". In justifying the relatively lenient sentence the judge assured the court that the punishment Susan had inflicted on herself was far more severe than any he could prescribe as "she was now a widow with two children, without a means of supporting herself or them, and would probably be a wretched beggar for the remainder of her life".⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Public Record Office, (hereafter P.R.O), Chancery Lane, PL 27/15/2. Depositions of Edward Roache, Martha Read, James Hopwood. Deposition taken 5 October 1859.

⁶⁹ Liverpool Mercury, 6 December 1859.

It was a commonly held assumption in Liverpool that the drinking habits of wives and mothers drove husbands to the pub and children onto the streets. However, as Jerry White's research on Campbell Bunk, a slum in North London, has suggested the presence of women in traditional male preserves like the pub was in fact a reflection, rather than a cause, of unstable gender roles.⁷⁰ In their study of marital relationships in working-class homes in Liverpool between the wars, Pat Ayers and Jan Lambertz convincingly argue that the emphasis on women as domestic managers enabled working-class men to evade responsibility for the financial well-being of their families.⁷¹ Just as men like Francis Bishop, Hugh Shimmin and James Nugent justified instances of male recklessness as the fault of neglectful wives, working-class men themselves adjusted their duties as breadwinners in relation to their wives' competence as homemakers. But as Ellen Ross has illustrated the inability of working-class men to bring home a decent wage undermined their masculinity and occasioned fierce domestic battles as women ridiculed their husbands' inadequacies and men attempted to reassert their dominance in the home.⁷² The scenes portrayed in Shimmin's writings in which traditional gender roles

⁷⁰ J. White, "Campbell Bunk, A Lumpen Community in London between the Wars", History Workshop Journal, 8 (1979), p. 28.

⁷¹ P. Ayers and J. Lambertz, "Marriage Relations, Money and Domestic Violence in Working-Class Liverpool, 1919-1939", , in J. Lewis (ed.), Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940, Oxford, 1986, pp. 195-219.

⁷² E. Ross, "'Fierce Questions and Taunts': Married Life in Working-Class London", Feminist Studies, 8 (1982), pp. 575-602.

appeared to be subverted by a wife's carelessness might also be interpreted as instances in which the woman of the household qualified her domestic responsibilities in accordance with her husband's limitations as a breadwinner:

She [a court dweller] is repulsive in appearance; and has no garments to cover her but a bedgown, which was originally white, and a striped petticoat. She has on neither shoes nor stockings. She seems in no way humiliated--does not feel the degradation of her position. 'A working man's wages are not much,' she says, 'even if one got them all; and when one does not get half of them, what can you expect?'⁷³

Sometimes it was a wife's inability to conceal her husband's failings which would provoke an attack from him. In March 1860 John Goss was brought before the magistrate at Liverpool's police court charged with assaulting his wife. Mr. Goss, the court was told, was in the habit of neglecting his responsibilities. On the night in question, upon returning home from the races, Mr. Goss asked his wife if his supper was ready. When she confessed that she did not have the means to provide him with supper, he threw a heavy chimney ornament at her severely cutting her face. No doubt, Mrs. Goss and her children had gone without supper before the attack.⁷⁴ Other women were beaten when their efforts to stretch meagre resources fell short. Betty Baynes summoned her dock labourer husband, Michael, before the magistrate after he violently assaulted her. The court heard that the defendant had failed to provide for his household's maintenance. On cross-

⁷³ H. Shimmin, "Driven for the Home", in J. Walton and A. Wilcox (eds.), Low Life and Moral Improvement, p. 131-132.

⁷⁴ Liverpool Mercury, 13 March 1860.

examination Betty Baynes admitted that she had pledged her husband's clothes in order to serve him supper. It was apparently the missing garments which had prompted Michael Baynes to strike his wife. However, the complainant pressed the issue asking whether the court expected her to starve?⁷⁵ James Boyd, a labourer, excused his assault on his wife explaining that she was an "improvident, drunken woman spending all his wages and pawning and selling all his children's clothes".⁷⁶ Certainly in some instances it was a husband's inability to bring home adequate wages which compelled his wife to enter into the pawning cycle. However, it should not be ignored that some women were unable or unwilling to manage their husband's wages competently. In either case gendered expectations were thwarted by the realities of men's and women's lives in Liverpool.

The presence of children on the streets of Liverpool was taken as evidence of the depravity of poor mothers. As Christine Stansell has argued of antebellum New York, middle-class reformers represented motherhood as an expression of female identity. Thus the supposedly neglectful ways of labouring mothers reflected badly, not only on their character as parents, but on their very identity as women. The mothers of street children were portrayed as "outside the bounds of humanity by virtue of their inability or unwillingness to replicate the innate

⁷⁵ Liverpool Mercury, 6 December 1859.

⁷⁶ Liverpool Mercury, 22 November 1859.

abilities of true womanhood".⁷⁷ Francis Bishop of the Liverpool Domestic Mission was outraged at the apparent lack of innocence among working-class children in the port: "it is a heartrending spectacle to see childhood corrupted; to see the ingenuousness and simplicity that naturally belong to its tender years, supplanted by precious cunning and deceit".⁷⁸ Bishop's lament was prompted by an encounter he had one evening with a young girl who came to him for help:

A little girl came to my door on one occasion, and, by her looks of innocence and modest intelligent demeanour, I was induced to believe that here I had at last met with a genuine and unexceptionable case. She told me a sad tale of her mother's illness; of her two younger sisters' hunger; of their parish pay being quite exhausted; and, with tears of apparent shame, she added that she had never been sent out begging before that day. I could not doubt the child's story and gave her therefore a supply of food to carry home to her mother, promising at the same time to call and see her the next morning. I went, and to my grief, discovered that a false address had been given me, and thus was driven to the conclusion, that the gentle little creature who had so interested me, was a skilful and accomplished dissembler.⁷⁹

Recounted to convince his audience of the corruption of working-class children, Bishop's tale might be read as a story of the poor attempting to manipulate the charity system to provide what they needed while avoiding the moral and religious teaching which often accompanied it. The young "dissembler" was in this respect a key player in her household's survival strategies. Thus, while Bishop mourned the girl's

⁷⁷ C. Stansell, "Women, Children, and the Uses of the Streets: Class and Gender Conflict in New York City, 1850-1860", in V.L. Ruiz and E.C. Dubois (eds.), Unequal Sisters, p. 119.

⁷⁸ L.R.O., L.D.M., Annual Report (1848), p. 9.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

loss of innocence, she was no doubt pleased that she had succeeded in getting a bit of food for her family. It is also important to note that the young girl represented her mother as a woman of considerable virtue who had fallen victim to circumstances beyond her control. The humiliation of seeking help from outside agencies was a defining characteristic of this identity. The all-female household was apparently in need of a male provider and protector - a role which Bishop was quite anxious to assume. Thus the child applicant was able to play on Bishop's gendered assumptions of the helplessness of poor women and of his power as a middle-class man.

Children in working-class families were required to contribute toward the common subsistence of the family. Parents set their children to work in a variety of ways: scavenging, peddling, doing small domestic tasks, and child minding.⁸⁰ The docks made scavenging in Liverpool an especially lucrative occupation. In 1847 Edward Rushton, the chief magistrate of Liverpool's police court, ascribed the great number of juvenile offenders in the city to the "open accessible docks upon which costly articles are exposed to pilferage and the needy, uneducated, and necessitous population abounding there".⁸¹ Five years later the Liverpool Mercury published a letter by a convicted felon which purported to expose the workings of juvenile crime in the city.

⁸⁰ C. Stansell, City of Women, pp. 52-53.

⁸¹ Select Committee into the Execution of the Criminal Law, especially Respecting Juvenile Offenders and Transportation, First Report, Minutes of Evidence, Mr. E. Rushton, q. 1614, 1847. PP 1847 (447) Vol. II.1.

The author, identified only as E.R., described that in a few streets located in a neighbourhood known as "Little Ireland", children were sent out in the morning and told to bring home a given sum, "whether obtained by selling, begging or stealing is immaterial". Child scavengers took anything they could from the docks and warehouses. Even door mats, if left exposed, could be pinched. Young boys in "Little Ireland" held their own markets, where they disposed of their "swag" and then set off again to look for more.⁸² In March 1852 the Mercury reported that five children, four girls and a boy, had been caught stealing coal from George's Dock quay. A policeman witnessed them putting coal into their pinafores and followed them to St. Nicholas' churchyard where they had already deposited a great deal of coal. Two of the girls, Ann Burke and Maria Garvey, were experienced thieves who had previously been before the magistrate. They were sentenced to seven days' imprisonment. Indeed, dockland girls were as busy scavengers as their brothers. A list of Liverpool girls committed to the Arnos Court Catholic Reformatory between 1856 and 1859, reveals that theft was the most common crime of these juvenile offenders. Of the eighty-one girls sentenced to five years in the reformatory, seventy had been convicted of stealing. Many of the girls were caught with goods from the docks. Most took just a pound or two of cotton or coal. Mary Carr and Elizabeth Staunton were more ambitious. Carr was captured with twenty

⁸² Liverpool Mercury, 24 February 1852.

pounds of cotton and Staunton with fourteen pounds of coal.⁸³ The legal system treated these children as thieves and sent them to reformatory schools where they would be kept from the "evil influence of the streets and of depraved parents".⁸⁴ However, some officials, like the Reverend Thomas Carter, recognised that "loose" goods on the docks and streets could be conceived of as common, rather than private, property:

There are trifling offenses committed by little children, who are sent out by their parents to steal cotton from the cotton bags, as they are being carted along the streets of Liverpool and a great variety of offenses of that kind which are offenses in the eyes of the law, but the child has no recognizance of doing wrong.⁸⁵

Children in Liverpool were active participants in the city's illicit exchange economy. Many of the goods they found on their scavenging rounds were taken to the pawnshop. Indeed Reverend Cater believed that juvenile crime could be significantly reduced if pawnshops were prohibited from accepting items from children.⁸⁶ However, in the absence of such restrictions the pawnshop remained a vital facility for children to dispose of their booty. In 1851 Celia Lloyd, a girl scarcely ten years of age, was charged with stealing a pair of trousers off the clothes' line of Ellen Woodyer. The accused was caught

⁸³ L.R.O., Liverpool Catholic Reformatory Association, Rolls of Juvenile Offenders, 1854-1860.

⁸⁴ L.R.O., Reports of the Head Constable to the Watch Committee, 22 January 1877.

⁸⁵ Select Committee on Criminal and Destitute Children, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Rev. Carter, q. 1435, 1852-1853. PP 1852-1853 (674) (674-1) Vol. XXIII.1, 567.

⁸⁶ Ibid., q. 1271.

with a "pawn ticket in one hand a some copper in the other". The pawn broker who received Celia's pledge testified that the girl was in the habit of pawning articles for her mum. He was, nonetheless, severely reprimanded.⁸⁷ The reluctance of poor parents to pay for their children to attend school was often taken as proof of the negligence.⁸⁸ As has been suggested children in working-class homes performed important tasks and their parents, especially their mothers, might not have been able to spare them during the day. Further, while middle-class reformers considered the costs of schooling to be trifling, given the insecurity of working-class incomes, it is not difficult to imagine that the funds for their children's education could not always be found. Two young sisters, Alice and Margaret Constable, discovered a way of making their attendance at the Corporation School on Park Lane pay dividends. Over the course of six months in 1862 the girls were able to steal forty to fifty shawls from the school without being detected. When the two were finally caught, Margaret told the police that she and Alice pledged the shawls at a number of pawnshops. The Constable sisters were remanded for seven days.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Liverpool Mercury, 2 June 1851. There were several pawnshops in Liverpool recognised for accepting stolen goods. Known as "dolly shops" they were said to take any description of property at any hour, a service for which they charged high rates. [L.R.O., Head Constable's Reports to the Watch Committee, 11 April 1859.]

⁸⁸ H. Shimmin, "The Social Condition of the People", J. Walton and A. Wilcox, Low Life and Moral Improvement, p. 111.

⁸⁹ Liverpool Mercury, 31 January 1863.

The fact that parents required their children to work on the streets meant that working-class boys and girls in Liverpool spent a good deal of their time outside the realm of parental authority. This provided the space for children to defy the wishes of their parents and to act in their own interests. As Stansell has noted, this could create conflict and tension within the home. At the same time children were able to use assumptions about parental responsibility to avoid punishment for their own actions.⁹⁰ Late one evening in November 1857, three children between the ages of four and seven were apprehended for begging on the streets. The children told the police that they had been sent out by their parents to earn a specific amount and if they returned home without sufficient funds they would be beaten. Mary Ann Johnston of Banastre Street, was summoned to court to answer for her two children. Ann Lenechan of Eaton Street, the mother of the third child, also stood before the magistrate. After the three children repeated the accusations against their mothers, Mr. Mansfield sentenced Johnston and Lenechan to hard labour for one month. No mention was made as to what would become of the children while their mothers were in prison.⁹¹ The suggestion that parents so misused their children testified to the baseness of poor neighbourhoods in the eyes of middle-class reformers. However, as Ellen Ross has argued, popular opinion in working-class communities was intensely hostile to those suspected of

⁹⁰ C. Stansell, City of Women, p. 53.

⁹¹ Liverpool Mercury, 4 November 1857.

cruelty to children. The trials of alleged child abusers in pre-World War One London attracted crowds of angry women and extra police guards were required to protect the accused.⁹² Francis Bishop himself recorded many instances of the tenderness shown to Liverpool's poor children:

It was proposed to take the orphan to the workhouse; but "No!" said a neighbour, "the girl shall not go there," and though a poor woman and not related to the child, she took her in, adopted her as her own, and is now bringing her up with a mother's devotedness and care.⁹³

While regarded by some as a contradiction, the appreciation of children as wage earners did not preclude notions that children required a degree of protection. The kindness extended to children by neighbours had more to do with community standards than religious edicts.

In 1874, following the murder of Richard Morgan on Tithebarn Street, the community standards of the "Irish" part of Liverpool were put on trial. One early August evening Richard Morgan and his wife were strolling along Tithebarn Street when, at the corner of Lower Milk Street, they were stopped by a "gang of roughs" who asked them for six pence. When Morgan refused scolding his assailants that they "might work for their money, the same as he had to", he was knocked to the ground and kicked for almost ten minutes. Morgan's wife and brother, who were both present during the attack, tried to intervene but to no

⁹² E. Ross, "Labour and Love: Rediscovering London's-Working-Class Mothers, 1870-1918," in J. Lewis (ed.), Labour and Love, p. 83.

⁹³ L.R.O., L.D.M., Annual Report (1850), p. 12.

avail. Morgan died in the street.⁹⁴ Following a Coroner's examination it was determined that Morgan's death was due to heart disease which had been "undoubtedly accelerated by the violence which he had sustained that night". At the Winter Assizes in December John Mulgrave, a twenty year old labourer, and Michael Mullen, a seventeen year old carter, were sentenced to death for the murder of Richard Morgan.⁹⁵ However, culpability for Morgan's death was said to extend beyond the two accused. What of the "brutalised population of the neighbourhood" who, whether from cowardice or amusement, did not intervene on Morgan's behalf? Four witnesses said they did not take much notice of the attack believing it to be an ordinary street brawl.⁹⁶ Before the Assize Court the prosecutor, Mr. Temple, noted how disgraceful it was that in a town like Liverpool such a violent assault was watched by crowd of people, not one of whom tried to interfere.⁹⁷ The Liverpool Mercury suggested that "lawless scoundrels" like Mulgrave and Mullen were regarded as "heroes" by their neighbours. How else, the paper asked, could a petition for clemency, started at St. Bridget's chapel, be explained? Mulgrave and Mullen were both Catholics and the priest who drafted the petition believed that they showed genuine remorse for their actions and insisted that, ignorant of Morgan's poor health, the two had not

⁹⁴ The Times, 11 August 1874.

⁹⁵ Liverpool Mail, 12 December 1874.

⁹⁶ L.R.O., Reports of the Head Constable to the Watch Committee, 1 August 1874.

⁹⁷ Liverpool Mail, 19 December 1874.

intended commit murder. The apparent sympathy shown to Mulgrave and Mullen was the source of as much disgust as the crime itself. The "Monsters of Liverpool", it was said, had won for the port a reputation for being one of the most "frightful towns in the kingdom for the destruction of human life".⁹⁸ Characteristically, the Tory paper, the Liverpool Courier, asserted that Liverpool was not quite as bad as it seemed and that the majority of its criminals were not natives of the city, but the worst sons and daughters which Erin had to offer.⁹⁹

Brought before the judges at the same Winter Assizes was William Worthington, a boatman charged with wilfully murdering his wife. Worthington had brutally beaten his wife to death, a crime for which he was executed. While Mr. Worthington joined the ranks of "Liverpool's Monsters" the papers remained somewhat silent on the role that Mrs. Worthington's neighbours had played during the attack. In stark contrast to the supposed passivity of the Tithebarn Street crowd, witnesses to William Worthington's violence actively tried to protect his wife. Susannah Daly, who lived with her husband John, a carter, on Vauxhall Road heard Ann Worthington's screams and saw William kicking her. Mrs. Daly yelled at him to stop and when he did not she called for the police. When an officer arrived at the scene another witness, Mr. Kerr, suggested that it was a shame to see a woman treated so badly by her husband. Both Kerr and Daly, in accordance with the victim's

⁹⁸ Liverpool Mail, 28 August 1875.

⁹⁹ Liverpool Courier, 11 August 1874.

wishes, urged the policeman to take Worthington into custody. The officer, however, instructed the Worthingtons to return to their boat where they might settle things. Susannah Daly was shocked to see a woman "covered in blood from the effects of ill-usage" sent home with her attacker. "We might as well have no protection for the town," she told the officer. Back on the boat Worthington continued to beat his wife who died a week later from her injuries. Worthington, a Catholic, was sentenced to death but he remained unrepentant, pleading that he had not intended to take a life.¹⁰⁰

As Jerry White has observed poor communities, like Campbell Bunk in London and the Vauxhall Road area of Liverpool, were turbulent places racked with contradictions and tensions.¹⁰¹ The Tithebarn Street murder and the failure of bystanders to intervene exposed the violent tendencies inherent within the area. Similarly, the beating that Ann Worthington suffered at the hands of her husband revealed just how rough marital relationships could be in poor households. And yet Susannah Daly's testimony presented a more varied picture suggesting a willingness of neighbours to intercede in each other's affairs in an effort to protect one another and to enforce community moral standards.

¹⁰⁰ Liverpool Courier, 17 December 1874.

¹⁰¹ J. White, "Campbell Bunk: A Lumpen Community in London Between the Wars", History Workshop Journal 8 (Autumn 1979), p. 21.

Chapter Three

Irish Women Working on the Streets

The streets of Liverpool provided space not only for communal life, they were also the location of a great deal of women's employment in the port. Despite the fact that formal opportunities for women in Liverpool were limited, women did have a prominent place in the secondary economy of the streets which developed to service the needs of seamen and casual labourers. Michael Brogden has argued that this informal economy included the provision of services and goods and featured low costs, low overheads and irregular employment.¹ Street selling was a vital aspect of this economy. Street sellers presented working-class communities with the opportunity of purchasing inexpensive goods within their own neighbourhoods. Hugh Shimmin gave this description of the fish stalls on a street in one poor neighbourhood:

Sawney Pope-street seems to be devoted to salt and dried fish and greens. About eleven o'clock in the morning there is quite a market held here, and no more suggestive sight, as to the wretchedness which abides in this locality could be met with than to see the poor people making their markets. Half-naked and shoeless women purchasing for a few pence the chief meal of the day, and yet withal there is a flow of wit amongst them, and little rills of humour come babbling by you, by which eyes are brightened up, and you see little forms trip away with apparent glee to their miserable homes. The dried fish seems to create no nuisance, and very likely

¹ M. Brogden, The Police: Autonomy and Consent, London, 1982, p. 44.

to have it so cheap and so near to their homes is a convenience for the poor people[.]²

In 1859 a letter writer to the Liverpool Mercury complained that street sellers operated at an unfair advantage with neighbourhood shopkeepers. Because itinerant hawkers did not pay local rates they were able to keep their prices much lower than their propertied rivals.³ This competitive relationship favoured the female consumers of Liverpool as they endeavoured to stretch meagre resources.

During his excursions through poor Liverpool Nathaniel Hawthorne was struck by the number of women of all ages who positioned themselves along the streets displaying their wares at the edge of the sidewalk: "you see women with fruit to sell, or combs and cheap jewellery, or coarse crockery, or oysters, or the devil knows what".⁴ An examination of the eighteen hawkers living in a small section of Fontenoy Street in 1861 provides a vivid picture of the extensive involvement of Irish women, from different age and marital groups, in street selling.⁵

² H. Shimmin, "Marybone and further on," in J. Walton and A. Wilcox (eds.), Low Life and Moral Improvement, pp. 118-119.

³ Liverpool Mercury, 8 March 1859.

⁴ Hawthorne, English Notebooks, p. 17.

⁵ Street sellers were a prominent feature of dockland communities in Ireland. Ellen Preston, who grew up in Dublin in the early part of the twentieth century, recalled that women in her family had been street traders for more than a hundred years. Ellen herself supported her twelve children with what she could earn trading on Henry Street:

I started selling when I was about twelve. Then I got married when I was nineteen and the children started coming along and I was selling fruit and flowers off me

Fontenoy Street was located within an enumeration district which was approximately forty per cent Irish.⁶ Of the eighteen hawkers living between 81 and 93 and 86 and 94 Fontenoy Street, sixteen were females and the two male hawkers were the sons of mothers engaged in the same area of work. Seventeen of the eighteen hawkers were born in Ireland. Only ten-year-old Margaret McGough, the daughter of a widowed Irish street seller, had been born in Liverpool. Seven of the hawkers were widows ranging in age from thirty to seventy-three. Of the six unmarried female hawkers in the same sample three had widowed mothers who were also hawkers. The ages of these daughters ranged from the ten-year-old Margaret McGough to thirty-year-old Catherine Moran. Mary Rooney and her sister, Rosy Boyle, were both registered as unmarried. The sisters, forty-six and twenty-six respectively, lived together and were both hawkers. Margaret Butler, an unmarried street seller, was the sole boarder of Patrick Riley, a dock labourer, and his wife.⁷

Lynn Hollen Lees noted in her study of the Irish in Victorian London that the work of married women was grossly underestimated by the

pram. The men, there was no work for them and them women they had to go out, they held the families together. [K. Kearns (ed.), Dublin Tenement Life. An Oral History, Dublin, 1994, p. 30.]

⁶ For a detailed study of the percentages of Irish people living in various enumeration districts in nineteenth-century Liverpool see J. Papworth, "The Irish in Liverpool, 1835-1871: Segregation and Dispersal", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1981.

⁷ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of England and Wales, 1861. RG9 2665: Dale St., 2H.

census as much of this work was seasonal or part-time: "Hawking food intermittently could bring in needed pence, but if one took to the streets to sell for only a few days a month, why mention it to the census taker."⁸ No doubt this warning is pertinent to historians engaged in census analysis in Liverpool. However, three married women in Fontenoy Street sample informed the enumerator that they were hawkers. Margaret Mealy, a hawker, and her husband, a labourer, combined their earnings to support their two children. Julia and John Kennedy were a childless married couple; she was a hawker and he was a courier. Finally, Catherine Connor identified herself to the enumerator as a married hawker. At the time the census was taken Catherine's husband was absent from the household. Catherine and her young son both worked as street sellers to maintain her two other children and her sister who lived with them. Given that Liverpool was a major seaport, it is possible that the missing Mr. Connor was away at sea, although some enumerators indicated that such was the case by registering the woman as "mariner's wife at sea". Perhaps Catherine's husband left his family to look for work outside Liverpool. It is also conceivable that Catherine and her three children had been abandoned - a less sanguine but no less plausible hypothesis. Whatever the explanation for the absence of Catherine's husband, it is important to note that street

⁸ L.H. Lees, Exiles of Erin, p. 113.

selling provided both Catherine and her son with crucial earnings in their efforts to keep the Connor family afloat.⁹

Providing evidence in 1865 on the incomes of various workers in Liverpool, Mr. Worsnop addressed the impediments to assessing how much street sellers earned. Just as married women had their reasons for concealing their work from the census takers, many street sellers chose to withhold information about how lucrative the trade was. Worsnop suggested to the Mortality Sub-Committee that women hid their earnings so that they might receive parish relief.¹⁰ Perhaps households which, from the census, appeared to survive on the proceeds of street selling were also supported by the parish. Other sources illustrate the difficulties of making enough on the streets to maintain a household. Many of the women who turned to the Liverpool Sheltering Home when they were no longer able to care for their children were street sellers.¹¹ Six-year-old Rosina Graham's mother was widowed when her sailor husband was lost at sea. Mrs. Graham went out on the street with a "bit of stuff in a basket". In 1878, when she came to the home, she could earn a shilling profit from two shillings worth of onions but she suffered

⁹ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of England and Wales, 1861. RG9 2665: Dale St., 2H.

¹⁰ Liverpool Mortality Sub-Committee, Report and Evidence, 1865-1866, p. 152.

¹¹ The work of the Liverpool Sheltering Home will be discussed further in chapter seven.

from a bad leg which limited her involvement in the trade.¹² Mrs. McEvoy, the widowed mother of Mark, had a basket from which she sold anything she could get. Since 1867 Mark had been fatherless. By 1873 Mrs. McEvoy was no longer able to keep a permanent roof over her son's head.¹³

It appeared to the authors of "Squalid Liverpool" that female street sellers were the only persons in poor neighbourhoods with a decided occupation.¹⁴ They were particularly taken with those women and girls involved in chip selling: "At certain times of the day you may see scores of tattered and battered women, young and old, sitting on the cellar steps, in the roadway, and on the sidewalks, chopping wood, and making up their baskets for sale."¹⁵ More than thirty years earlier in 1850 Charles Mackay had been impressed by the chip sellers of Liverpool. He observed that the docks provided the raw materials for the trade as "chips" or firewood could be chopped from the many

¹² University of Liverpool Archives, (hereafter U.L.A.), Barnardo's Collection, Liverpool Sheltering Home, D6 ii a.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Squalid Liverpool", p. 14. Interestingly, women featured much more prominently in "Squalid Liverpool" than in Hugh Farrie's Toiling Liverpool which was published three years later in 1886 having run as a series of articles in the Liverpool Daily Post. In Farrie's work women appear as the wailing dependents of hard-working men rather than breadwinners in the own right. Perhaps Farrie believed that the reading public would be more sympathetic to the plight of male workers if their wives could be shown to conform to traditional gender roles. [H. Farrie, Toiling Liverpool, pp. 43-44]

¹⁵ Ibid.

transport crates littering the port. Among the chip sellers Mackay met was an Irish woman whose dock labourer husband had not worked for six months. Her family, which included four children, had nothing to live on but the proceeds of the chip trade and begging.¹⁶ One of the priests who was quoted in "Squalid Liverpool" remarked that the majority of chip sellers in the city were Irish. On average they were able to make about ten pence a day, although one seller commented, "Some people is bad; some people is good; but we's [sic.] sell the chips anyway".¹⁷

Despite the importance street selling for poor women, both as consumers and as hawkers, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, efforts were made to restrict the trade in Liverpool. Few commentators considered street selling to be an appropriately feminine enterprise. In the first instance young, single women engaged in street selling became the focus of intense public concern in Victorian Liverpool. Their presence on the streets bore an obvious similarity with prostitution and government officials, law enforcers and religious leaders consistently drew the connection between the two trades. Beyond their association with prostitution, which will be explored in chapter five, street sellers in Liverpool were a notoriously rough-speaking, hard-drinking group of women. In July 1872 the Liverpool Mercury published a the names and occupations of men and women charged with drunkenness in the city. On July 2nd Ann Hannigan, Mary Cassidy,

¹⁶ "Labour and the Poor: Letter V", Morning Chronicle, 17 June 1850.

¹⁷ "Squalid Liverpool", p. 42.

Bridget Kelly, Margaret Taylor, Bridget Lundy, Elizabeth Hampson, Mary McDonald, Mary McFadgen and Sarah Burns, all of whom were basket women, found their names listed in the Mercury. All of the women had previously been charged with drinking offenses. Indeed, Mary Cassidy of North Street, who was sentenced to pay of fine of five shillings for being "drunk and incapable", had been in front of the magistrate eighteen times before.¹⁸ "The temptations to which they are subjected must be very great; the prospect of release from daily drudgery very alluring", sympathetic observers concluded of street sellers.¹⁹

In addition to battling inclement weather, Liverpool's basket women had to fight to defend their place on the street. From their confrontations with business owners and law enforcers these women became known for their insolence. The defiance of street sellers was evident when, in 1852, a young woman brought a complaint against a police officer accusing him of assault. The magistrate heard that the officer had, in response to protests from shopkeepers in Whitechapel, tried to move the complainant along. Joined by other street sellers she had refused to obey the order. A crowd of people gathered around and threatened to attack the officer if he did not leave the sellers alone. In the commotion that followed the complainant claimed that she was assaulted by the officer. The charge was dismissed but the incident does reveal the difficulties the police confronted in regulating the

¹⁸ Liverpool Mercury, 2 July 1872.

¹⁹ "Squalid Liverpool", p. 42.

trade.²⁰ In 1877 the Liverpool Markets' Committee, in an effort to remove female hawkers from the streets, cordoned off a small area of the fish market where, for a small fee, they might peddle their product. However, on being asked by the manager of St. John's Market to move into the allotted space, the women refused and en masse they "placed their baskets and boxes in the street which caused a great obstruction both to people wishing to enter the fish market and those passing along the street."²¹ Even when street sellers were driven off the streets they still remained outside the boundaries of accepted female space and behaviour. Many women went to "Paddy's Market", located at the top of Banastre Street, when they were forced off the thoroughfares. Nearly all the buyers and sellers at the market were women and together they formed a "shouting, gesticulating, swearing, and generally animated mob".²²

Clara E. Collett, in her 1886 report to a Royal Commission on Labour, described cotton pickers as among the most regularly employed women in Liverpool even though their work, similar to that of dock labourers, was dependent on trade cycles.²³ Bales of cotton brought off the ships which landed in Liverpool were picked clean by women and then

²⁰ Liverpool Mercury, 29 October 1852.

²¹ L.R.O., Head Constable's Special Report Book, 1875-1877, 7 May 1877.

²² "Squalid Liverpool", p. 53.

²³ Royal Commission on Labour, The Employment of Women, Report, 1886, p. 67. PP 1886 Vol. XXXVIII, Pt. 1.

dried over hot kilns in warehouses located close to the docks. In July 1872 one thousand of these female workers struck for higher wages and reduced hours. Before their walk-out cotton pickers worked twelve hours a day, six days a week. Following their successful strike the women worked ten hour days Monday through Friday and a six hour day on Saturdays. The highest paid cotton picker earned ten shillings a week.²⁴ The workplace culture which gave rise to the 1872 collective action also supported the rough habits for which cotton pickers were notorious. Like street sellers, cotton pickers were known as "brawny" characters who spoke with "excessive vigour and graphic directness".²⁵ Mr. Worsnop believed that a young woman who went to work in one of the warehouses would be baited by her workmates until she fell to their level. There was, apparently, more drunkenness among this class of women than almost any other trade in the port.²⁶ Father Nugent, giving evidence before the same committee, concurred. He described cotton pickers, who kept late hours and frequented the most disreputable public houses in Marybone, as "very little removed from the girls of the streets".²⁷

The disorderly habits of cotton pickers remained a source of anxiety among middle-class Liverpoolians into the twentieth century. In

²⁴ Liverpool Mercury, 19 July 1872.

²⁵ "Squalid Liverpool", p. 14.

²⁶ Liverpool Mortality Sub-Committee, Report and Evidence 1865-1866, p. 152.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 198.

1900 Miss Thoburn, a member of the Select Vestry, noted that the majority of the city's cotton pickers were Irish. They were "rough and noisy" and "so ignorant of domestic work or sewing" as to be useless at home.²⁸ Interestingly, these comments echoed almost word for word the charges made against Irish women before the 1836 Select Committee which were referred to in the last chapter. While prostitutes remained the most "disgraceful" of women in Liverpool, street sellers and cotton pickers were close behind. All three trades were distinguished as peculiarly Irish occupations. The three were further connected by the refusal of their participants to conform to traditional standards of feminine behaviour. These women were independent money makers who found, and defended, a place for themselves in the rough culture of the port.

²⁸ Cited in L.M. Grant, "Women Workers and the Sexual Division of Labour", p. 125.

Chapter Four

Domestic Service

The politics of domesticity affected working-class women not just in the expectations reformers placed on them as homemakers, but also in the increased demand for domestic servants to assist middle-class women to sanctify their own homes. Domestic service was considered to be the most suitable form of employment for working-class women as it conformed to Victorian notions of separate spheres for the sexes. The ideological importance of domestic service was accentuated in Liverpool where so much of women's work was conducted in the public space of the streets. Not only did service offer work for women within the safety of the private sphere, it was also hoped that the homes of their employers would provide the appropriate location for young working-class women to acquire housekeeping skills, to learn to appreciate the value of domestic work and to embrace the gender roles promoted by Victorian society which were otherwise undermined within working-class communities in Liverpool. Domestic service also figures prominently in the chronicles of women's immigration from nineteenth-century Ireland.

This chapter will begin by exploring the significance of domestic service for Irish women in the United States through a survey of the different interpretations historians have given to the immigrant experience of service. Next the specific place of Irish domestic servants in Liverpool will be examined with particular attention given to the ethnic and religious prejudices which affected the employment

opportunities of this group of working girls and women. This focused discussion of the unique experiences of Irish servants in Liverpool will be followed by a broader consideration of the class and gender politics which influenced not only the lives of Irish servants in Liverpool, but of all servants throughout Victorian Britain. Finally, the connections between domestic service and prostitution will be addressed and it will be argued that far from protecting women from the perceived moral threats of working-class community life, it was often the experience of service itself which propelled young women onto the streets.

Throughout the Irish diaspora during the nineteenth century domestic service was the most common occupation entered into by single Irish women.¹ In the northern urban centres of the United States, where the largest number of Irish immigrants were concentrated, Irish women dominated household service. In New York, for example, Irish women were able to take advantage of the space created in the job market by the fact that many American-born and other immigrant women preferred manufacturing work to service. Thus, by 1855 seventy-four per cent of the city's domestics were Irish.² Haisa Diner has argued that domestic service enabled young Irish women to fulfil the economic goals of migration. Although the wages servants earned were often lower than

¹ Akenson, The Irish Diaspora. A Primer, Toronto, 1993, p. 180.

² Stansell, City of Women, p. 156.

those secured by women in needle and factory work, service was steadier employment. Further, live-in domestics were able to avoid the costs of room and board. Thus, as servants, female immigrants were able to save large sums of money which they might invest in their new communities or send back to Ireland to help with their families' maintenance and to assist other relatives to emigrate.³ As Mary McCarthy, a New York servant, explained in a letter she sent, along with \$20, to her father in County Cork in 1850:

This my Dr. Father induces me to Remit to you in this Letter 20 Dollars that is four Pounds thinking it might be of Some Acquisition to you until you might Be Clearing away from that place all together and the Sooner the Better for Believe me I could not Express how great would be my joy at seeing you all here Together where you would never want to be at a loss for a good Breakfast and Dinner.⁴

Some historians, echoing the enthusiasm of nineteenth-century commentators for domestic service, have argued that the conditions of service in America compelled Irish women to conform to, and even internalise, Victorian values of cleanliness, punctuality and efficiency, so distancing themselves from the habits and standards which characterised life in rural Ireland. Historians have also suggested that by moving to America and into service young Irish women improved their marital prospects increasing their chances of being able to establish their own homes where they might put into practise the

³ H. Diner, Erin's Daughters in America: Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century, Baltimore, 1983, p. 93.

⁴ D. O Muirtithe, A Seat Behind the Coachman: Travellers in Ireland 1800-1900, Dublin, 1972, p. 138.

skills learned in service,, realising their own version of domestic bliss. Indeed, the efforts of these immigrant women to express the bourgeois values they had absorbed in service helped to insure the social 'respectability' of their households.⁵ However, as Faye Dudden has argued, because servants were unlikely to marry into the financial security of the middle class, their social aspirations, despite their determination, were often frustrated. Marie Haggarty worked as a nursemaid in New England in the 1880s and 1890s. While in service she came to appreciate "things nice" but when she married a grocer she was forced to lower her expectations even though her husband worked tirelessly. As Marie explained to an interviewer: "Pa knowed I was used to better things, and he always tried to get them for me." Marie's children refused to take advantage of the opportunities "to become high-class people" which their parents struggled to secure for them. Marie's sons ridiculed her pretensions to "put things on a little fancy like rich people do." And Marie became resigned to the fact that "things never turn out the way you want them".⁶

From a different perspective, a number of historians have explored the tensions within the employment relationship between Irish women and their middle-class mistresses pointing to the contests over wages,

⁵ K. Miller, D. Doyle, and P. Kelleher, "'For love and liberty'", in P. O'Sullivan (ed.), Irish Women and Irish Migration, London, 1995, p. 54-55. See also L. Glasco, "The Life Cycles and Household Structure of American Ethnic Groups", Journal of Urban History I, (May 1975), pp. 362-363.

⁶ K. Dudden, Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America, Middletown, 1983, pp. 229-230.

working conditions and conflicting notions of what was appropriate 'womanly' behaviour--all of which culminated in a "general servile war" in nineteenth-century America.⁷ Indeed, far from being quietly obedient, many Irish servants were aggressive in negotiating their wages and duties, gaining for themselves a reputation for impudence, laziness, and incompetence. James Redford, an Ulster Protestant living in Bloomfield, New Jersey, complained to his relatives in Antrim of the difficulties his household was encountering with Irish servants:

Now I must give you a description of Ireland in America if you want a girl to do housework the first question is have you got hot and cold water in the house...and what privileges and then the wages they want from 13 to 17 dollars a month and by their talk they can do everything when you get them...And to see their gait you would know they are from the bogs of Connaught we do all our own washing and we have to give a woman, \$1.50 or 7s.6d. per day.⁸

Further, Christine Stansell argues that many Irish servants refused to conform to the standards of behaviour demanded by their middle-class mistresses and that, far from embracing domesticity, these young women pursued a more defiant image of womanhood which was flaunted by other working women in the streets of New York. Indeed, as Dr. William Sanger discovered in his mid-nineteenth-century study of prostitution in New York, domestic service was more likely than any other occupation to propel young women into the trade.⁹ Finally, as Kaye Dudden notes, even

⁷ C. Stansell, City of Women, p. 155.

⁸ P.R.O.N.I., T3098B9 (A), Emigrant Letters from members of the Redford family in New Jersey to Antrim, 9 April 1863.

⁹ Quoted in C. Stansell, City of Women, p. 167.

those immigrant women who did appear to conform to the moral expectations of domestic service chose to keep their own daughters out of household employment so that second generation women were much less likely to enter into service than their mothers had been.¹⁰

The extent to which the experience of domestic service for young working-class women in general, and Irish women in particular, conformed to ideal vision of Victorian commentators was similarly ambiguous in Liverpool. In the absence of large scale manufacturing industries, service represented the most significant occupation for women in the city. For example, in 1861 twenty-nine per cent of women twenty years of age and older, who stated a specific occupation to the census taker, were domestic servants. There were more than nine thousand domestic servants of this age group in the city; over six thousand of these were general servants. In Lancashire's industrial centre, Manchester, just under fifteen per cent of working women twenty years old and older were domestic servants. And in the textile town of Blackburn, only eight per cent of employed women of the same age group were domestic servants. In the borough of Liverpool, a larger administrative district than the city, the occupations of women under the age of twenty were listed as well and there were just over eight thousand domestics in this age category, more than seven thousand of whom were general servants.¹¹

¹⁰ Dudden, Serving Women, p. 235.

¹¹ Census of England and Wales, Population Tables, Occupations of the People in Principal Towns, Division VIII, 1861.

Given the importance of this work for all young women in Liverpool, it was impossible for Irish women to dominate domestic service as they did in many American cities.¹² Competing with large numbers of English-born servants, and confronting ethnic and religious prejudices, many Irish Catholic women were unable to secure positions within the homes of Liverpool's wealthier citizens.¹³ Some employers made no distinction between Catholics and Protestants in their distaste for Irish servants. Francis Jordan, a Liverpool merchant, who was himself a native of Ireland, told the Parliamentary Committee on the State of the Irish Poor in Britain in 1836 that he would "never employ the Irish as domestic servants, thinking them deficient in steadiness".¹⁴ From the testimony of one of the city's Catholic priests before the same committee it is unclear whether it was religious or ethnic prejudice which influenced employers' preferences for servants.

¹² D. Fitzpatrick, "'A peculiar tramping people': the Irish in Britain, 1801-1870", p. 642.

¹³ There is evidence that similar prejudices worked against Irish servants in London. Margaret McGrath, an nineteen year old Irish servant, entered the Anglican-run House of Charity in the Soho district of London, in November 1861. McGrath complained that her destitution was the result of employers' unwillingness to hire Roman Catholics. The administrators of the charity managed to find a place for McGrath but she was later readmitted. [House of Charity, Case Book, 1854-1858. I am indebted to Dr. Pat Starkey for arranging my access to this source]. In Glasgow Highland women and girls were chosen in favour of Irish servants. As one of the city's clergymen remarked in 1841, "it may be a prejudice on the part of the Scotch but the generally prefer the Highland females in their families". [Quoted in D. Fitzpatrick, "'A peculiar tramping people'", p. 641.]

¹⁴ Select Committee on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, Report, 1836, Appendix XI, p. 26.

Rev. Thomas Fisher testified that "generally the Irish have fair play in Liverpool, though many have prejudice against the Irish character, and some dislike Catholics, especially for female servants."¹⁵

Employment advertisements in Liverpool's local papers often stipulated specifically that either "No Catholics" or "No Irish need apply". For example, on the 2nd of January 1857 the Liverpool Mercury printed four advertisements which specified that the applicants for the positions should be "English"; a fifth advertisement for a "plain cook and housemaid" advised only Protestants to apply.¹⁶ Later that same month, the paper ran an advertisement for a "good" cook which advised that "no Welsh or Irish need apply", although German and French cooks would not be turned away.¹⁷ The employment advertisements printed in the Liverpool Daily Post in 1880 continued to include religious and ethnic qualifications for applicants. Of the fifteen vacancies advertised on the 13th of February 1880, two stipulated that the positions were open only to English Protestants, another advised that the employer preferred English or Scottish servants, and two were open only to Protestants.¹⁸ In Liverpool better paid positions were more likely to be filled by English Protestants; whereas Irish Catholic women might find work as kitchen maids, they faced some difficulty in becoming cooks.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁶ Liverpool Mercury, 2 January 1857.

¹⁷ Liverpool Mercury, 16 January 1857.

¹⁸ Liverpool Daily Post, 13 February 1880.

Mona Hearn in her book, Below Stairs, notes that a similar religious division of labour was evident in country houses in Ireland where upper staff--butlers, cooks, and housekeepers--tended to be Protestant and English and lower staff--kitchen, scullery, laundry and dairy maids--tended to be Catholic and Irish.¹⁹ In Liverpool, positions which involved the care of children were often restricted to servants of the same religious persuasion as the employing family. Thus, when a head nurse was sought to care for five children living in the affluent area of Princes Park the advertisement specified that applicants should be experienced Protestants.²⁰ Conversely, a Walton Park family advertised for a "Catholic servant with good character" to care for their children and to do housework, though she would not be required to do the washing.²¹ Dublin employers were similarly concerned about the religious faith of their children's nursemaids. One Protestant woman explained that, while she was willing to employ Catholic servants in a variety of other positions, she preferred to hire a Protestant nurse who could read the children Bible stories as she put them to bed.²² American employers were also reluctant to hire Irish Catholics to care for their children. As Kaye Dudden notes the suspicions of Protestant employers were fostered by variety of publications like the Mother's Magazine and

¹⁹ M. Hearn, Below the Stairs, Dublin, 1993, p. 77.

²⁰ Liverpool Daily Post, 3 March 1880.

²¹ Ibid., 13 February 1880.

²² M. Hearn, Below the Stairs, pp. 12-13.

Family Monitor which made the lurid claim that Catholic servants were instructed by their priests to carry away their young charges for secret baptisms.²³

Sensationalism was not absent from the religious and ethnic politics of domestic service in Liverpool either. One Catholic woman told Francis Bishop, of the Unitarian Domestic Mission, that, at the insistence of her Protestant husband, she had attended an evening sermon where a popular preacher cautioned parents that the safety of their children would be threatened by Catholic servants who "might at any night set the house on fire over their heads". Following the sermon the woman entered into a heated argument with her husband as she explained "I was a servant myself for years...and I have relations who are servants, and it made my blood boil to hear such wickedness charged upon us".²⁴ Others shared this woman's outrage at the treatment of Catholic servants in mid-Victorian Liverpool. In October 1851, Whittaker Edmonson's appeal on behalf of Catholic servants, whom he described as a "class of unfortunate females", was published in the correspondence section of the Liverpool Mercury. Edmonson charged that "in consequence of their creed" Catholic servants were unable to secure "situations of the most menial kind". He asserted that Catholic servants were hired by Protestant masters but when it was discovered they were Catholic their contracts were annulled, "and with a swelling,

²³ K. Dudden, Serving Women, p. 69.

²⁴ L.R.O., Liverpool Domestic Mission, 14th Annual Report, 1851, pp. 22-23.

almost bursting heart, they have turned their steps to some other mansion, only to be meet with another refusal". In conclusion, Edmonson called on Protestant employers to hire these most honest servants.²⁵ The author of an unsigned letter responded by accusing Edmonson of reverse discrimination, suggesting that in order to provide situations for Catholics employers would be forced to dismiss their Protestant servants. The letter's author emphasised that Protestant servants could feel the pressures of destitution just as keenly as their Catholic counterparts. The letter concluded with this defense: "The whole question resolves itself as a matter of preference; and few persons will be disposed to doubt that it is reasonable, natural, and proper for Protestants to prefer Protestant female servants."²⁶

The reverse side of this principle was heartily endorsed by the Liverpool-based Catholic Institute Magazine which found an audience among wealthy English Catholics living in the city and elsewhere in the country. In a lengthy article on the "servant question" published in 1858, the Magazine assumed that its middle-class readership would prefer to hire Catholic rather than Protestant servants. The Magazine did, however, vent harsh criticisms on those Catholic employers who discriminated against Irish servants through advertisements which read: "wanted an English Catholic". The article referred to the "monstrous impropriety" of masters and mistresses who made "nationality a primary

²⁵ Liverpool Mercury, 21 October 1851.

²⁶ Ibid., 28 October 1851.

and indispensable qualification" for their servants, adding that because the majority of Catholic servants in England were either natives of Ireland, or of Irish descent, the imposition of ethnic restrictions would force large numbers of otherwise honest young servants to lie about their identity, or else remain idle and in want. The article concluded with a grave warning to those professed Catholics who, by indulging their own prejudices, put the futures of young Irish girls in jeopardy:

If poor girls, driven from house to house by Catholic ladies and gentlemen who frequent the Sacraments and make pretensions to religion, for no other fault than because they are natives of Ireland, afterwards succumb to the temptations of disappointment and want, and fall into sin, undoubtedly those who have driven them to this course will be, in some measure, answerable for their guilt and misery.²⁷

While critical of Catholic employers who declined to hire servants because they were Irish, the Catholic Institute Magazine conceded that there were legitimate reasons for denying Irish servants positions. The magazine endorsed the employer's prerogative to employ "the best servants he can obtain for the wages he can afford" and acknowledged that "a certain class of poor Irish girls, who from having had no education, and from seldom or never receiving any kindness from those above them, are not skilful and tidy servants".²⁸ There was no injustice in refusing employment to incapable servants, no matter how sorry their plight might be.

²⁷ Catholic Institute Magazine, Vol. III, 2 (1858), p. 65.

²⁸ Ibid.

The incompetence of young Irish servants was a source of dissatisfaction wherever they were employed. As James Redford observed, young women who hailed from the "bogs of Connaught" were unfamiliar with the techniques and standards of Victorian housekeeping. However, despite their perceived inadequacies, Irish servants were still able to secure employment in cities where they faced little competition from other women.²⁹ In contrast, as the comments in the Catholic Institute Magazine seem to suggest, Irish servants were kept out of the homes of Liverpool's "ladies and gentlemen", not only as a result of "improper" religious and ethnic prejudices, but as a consequence of the perfectly "proper" desire of employers to hire the most capable servants they could afford.

However, though they may have been unable to secure work in the homes of Liverpool's wealthier citizens, Irish women did find positions in the homes of less affluent employers. As Edward Higgs' research has demonstrated, the people who kept servants in Victorian England varied widely both in social position and income.³⁰ A survey of both workhouse and census records for the mid-Victorian period reveals that significant numbers of small tradespeople and workers in Liverpool did keep servants, and it was within their households that Irish girls and women found positions. Many young Irish girls who arrived in Liverpool

²⁹ H. Diner, Erin's Daughters, p. 85.

³⁰ E. Higgs, "Domestic Service and Household Production", in A. Johns (ed.), Unequal Opportunities. Women's Employment in England 1800-1918, Oxford, 1986, p. 133.

during the Famine years and who found themselves in the Kirkdale Industrial School either as orphans or while their parents remained in the Brownlow Hill Workhouse, left the school when they were taken into service. The Kirkdale school opened in 1845 with space for 1000 children. It was hoped that, separated from the morally contaminated adult population of the workhouse, children would stand a better chance of becoming industrious members of society. Girls in the school were trained specifically for service and spent their days engaged in "washing, mangling, and other household work".³¹ Despite this preparation, the skills they acquired were ill-suited to meet the needs of larger homes with strict standards of cleanliness. As one member of the Select Vestry conceded "merchants and upper classes of tradesmen would never think of taking girls from these schools".³² When industrial school girls were taken into service they were often not paid wages but were required to work in return for room and board. This arrangement enabled relatively poor households to keep servants. Young servants who were recruited from the school were restricted to these "second and third class positions" where they were forced to do the work of adult women.³³ Although the occupations of the people who took Irish girls in as servants were not always recorded, their addresses suggest that they were members of working-class communities, many living on streets with

³¹ Liverpool Mercury, 12 August 1859.

³² Liverpool Daily Post, 27 October 1858.

³³ Ibid.

high concentrations of Irish people. Catherine Neale was an orphan when she came into the school in 1847. In 1858, at the age of fifteen, Catherine was taken into service by Mrs. Greene of Athol Street.³⁴ Elizabeth Joyce, another orphan, was eight years old when she entered the school in 1850. Eight years later she was taken into service by Mr. Garvey of Vauxhall Road.³⁵ Similarly, orphaned Catherine Ford stayed in the school for three years from 1854, although she did run away from the school for two months. Mr. McPharlin, of Scotland Road, took Catherine into his service in 1857.³⁶ Servants who were recruited from the industrial school were particularly vulnerable to abuse from their employers. The easy availability of these servants meant that an employer could dismiss a servant if unsatisfied with her performance in the knowledge that she could be easily replaced. Servants, in turn, were in no position to challenge the wishes of their employers no matter how irrational their demands might be. However, they might have used their own bad conduct as a means of getting out of positions which made them unhappy. Consequently, there was a high turnover rate in the employment of these servants. Take for instance, Aur Agar, who came into the school in 1847, after her father had deserted her. She was first placed in the service with Mr. Swanson in March 1849 but was returned to the school in early July 1849. Later that month she was

³⁴ L.R.O., Kirkdale Industrial School, Classification Registers, 1845-1857.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

taken from the home by a Mr. Crissy. But again she was returned to the school after just a few months.³⁷

The 1851 and 1861 censuses provide further examples of Irish girls and women living as servants in the homes of Irish tradespeople and working-class families. Sixteen year old Rose Murphy was typical of the servants recruited from the Kirkdale Industrial School. The Irish teenager worked for Owen McCluskey, a cotton warehouseman, and his wife, Margaret, of Milk Street. The Irish couple had three Liverpool-born daughters. Eleven year old Mary Ann and eight year old Catherine were both in school. Perhaps the McCluskey's took on Rose to help care for their infant daughter, Eliza, who was just four months old when the census was taken in 1851. Rose might also have been needed to assist Margaret McCluskey in completing the domestic work of her household which included two Irish lodgers, both of whom were single men.³⁸ Margaret Mea was only ten years old when the 1861 census was taken. Margaret worked for John and Mary Campbell who lived in one of the courts off Marlborough Street. The Campbells appeared to be relatively recent arrivals in Liverpool as their three year old daughter and two year old son had both been born in Ireland. John Campbell was a butcher. Mary Campbell's occupation was recorded as "wife to butcher". Perhaps Mrs. Campbell assisted her husband in their shop while Margaret

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of Great Britain, 1851. HO 107 2179.2.5: St. Paul's and Exchange.

Mea minded their two children. Margaret might also have helped John Campbell in his trade.³⁹

Households in which both husband and wife worked outside the home required extra help to perform domestic tasks. As domestic work was considered exclusively women's work this slack was either taken up by other female family members or, where possible, by servants. Michael McCarthy, a tea dealer from Tipperary, was married to Catherine, a poulteress from Fermanagh. They lived with their six children, five sons and one daughter, in a house on Vauxhall Road. The children were all born in Liverpool and ranged in age from sixteen to two years old. The oldest two boys, ages sixteen and fourteen, were both employed, one as an apprentice cooper and the other as a shop boy. The McCarthys also took in three Irish lodgers. By combining the earnings of the four working family members and the rents of their lodgers, the McCarthys' were able to employ two Irish-born servants, twenty-six year old Margaret O'Brien, and Mary Ariel, a thirty year old widow. The ages of the two women suggest that they were not recruited from the workhouse but found their places by some other means. As Catherine McCarthy worked outside the home the servants would have been required to carry out the domestic tasks of the household including caring for the four

³⁹ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of England and Wales, 1861. RG9 2668: Dale St., 15E. For the use of domestic servants by trades people see E. Higgs, "Domestic Service and Household Production", p. 135.

younger children and tending to the needs of the lodgers.⁴⁰ Households with less income than the McCarthys' also kept servants when both parents worked. Michael Gorman, an Irish dock labourer, and his wife Elizabeth, an Irish fish hawker, had two daughters. Catherine Tully, a twenty year old Irish-born domestic servant, lived with the Gormans in their Adlington Street home. Catherine's services were required to care for Maria Gorman, an infant, whose mother plied her trade in the streets of Liverpool and whose sister, Ellen, was at school.⁴¹ -Twenty-four year old Mary Connolly, also worked as a servant for a dock labourer and a fish hawker. She worked for Michael and Ann Morris in their court house. The Morrises had four children ranging in age from seven years to six months.⁴² As Edward Higgs has argued, and as these examples suggest, servant employment was not simply an expression of middle-class status, but a response of all social classes to the demand for additional female labour within the home. From his sample of servant-employing households in Victorian Rochdale, Higgs has observed that the loss, incapacity or absence of a wife would most commonly necessitate the recruitment of extra domestic help. Although middle-class households would more likely be able to pay for these necessary services, working-class families might, when possible,

⁴⁰ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of Great Britain, 1851. HO 107 2179.2.3: St. Paul's and Exchange.

⁴¹ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of England and Wales, 1861. RG9 2666: Dale St., 4H.

⁴² Ibid.

respond to domestic crises by taking on servants as well.⁴³ Further, as the above instances illustrate, working-class families also took on servants when the wife was required to work outside the home, a situation with which most middle-class households would not have had to contend.

The distinctions between lodgers, visitors, and boarders were often blurred by nineteenth-century census takers and, as Leonore Davidoff has argued, historians have had difficulty unravelling these confusions. She offers an example taken from the diaries of Hannah Munby, a general servant, to illustrate the difficulties census takers might have had in distinguishing who was a visitor and who was a lodger. When Hannah was not employed she would move in with friends and during those short periods of time she would help pay for her keep by doing extra cleaning. However, if she was in a town where she had no friends, she lived for a while doing exactly the same thing for a woman whose house she had found simply by knocking on the door.⁴⁴ Perhaps Irish servants living in the homes of casual labourers and hawkers in Liverpool had come to similar arrangements with their employers and were working in return for their keep. The ages of many of the Irish servants living in working-class Irish households indicate that they were not recruited from the Industrial School but had negotiated the

⁴³ E. Higgs, "Domestic Service and Household Production", p. 134.

⁴⁴ L. Davidoff, "The Separation of Home and Work? Landladies and Lodgers in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century England", in S. Burman (ed.), Fit Work for Women, London, 1979, p. 77.

conditions of their service for themselves. As it did in the United States, service in Liverpool provided single immigrant women with a place to live on arrival. In the American example service was promoted as a form of employment which would enable a woman to save large sums of money which could be invested in her family's farm in Ireland or used to improve her social position and marital prospects in her new home. In addition to these financial advantages, service was celebrated as a means by which young Irish women could become schooled in domestic work, and appreciative of middle-class standards and values. Finally, in the immigrant context service was considered to be central in the process of 'Americanising' Irish women. There were significantly different implications embodied in the Liverpool employment relationships discussed above. In these instances if servants were paid at all, their wages would no doubt have been paltry restricting the amount that could be saved. Further, Irish-born employers residing in predominantly Irish sections of the city could hardly exercise an 'Anglicising' influence over their immigrant servants, although the ages of the Liverpool-born children in these households do suggest that the families had been in the city for some time. By working in the homes of Irish families who had already established themselves in Liverpool these servants learned the practical lessons of how to keep a household on the meagre earnings of casual work. Most servants who went on to marry after service, married into the working-class. If they had been employed in a middle-class household the lessons learned and the standards kept while in service would be difficult to apply in

their own homes.⁴⁵ In this regard, the experience of Irish servants working in the homes of Irish workers had much greater relevance for the lives many would go on to lead after service.

Clearly this type of service embodied markedly different gender roles than those represented in the idealised Victorian vision of the occupation. Consider the experience of Dublin-born Margaret Loughlin. In 1851, at the age of twenty-nine, Loughlin worked as a servant in a Westmoreland Street lodging house kept by an Irish widow named Mary Kearns. Kearns had four children aged fourteen, nine, seven, and five. While the older two had been born in Ireland, their younger siblings were Liverpool-born. Like many other widows in Liverpool, Mary Kearns responded to the loss of her husband by taking in lodgers, a practice which generated income but required the assistance of a servant to help with the increased domestic workload. Kearns took in one lodger, Elizabeth Shepherd, an unmarried woman from Ireland. Two of Kearns' cousins, Susanah Smith and Mary Ann Kearns, also lived in the house. These two single women, as well as Shepherd, stated their occupation as fish dealers.⁴⁶ Margaret Loughlin thus worked in female-headed household which was supported not by any male wage earners but by the proceeds of three female street sellers. What is more, for Loughlin, as for other servants living with working women, service may have provided an entry

⁴⁵ L. Davidoff, "Mastered for Life: A Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England", in A. Sutcliffe and P. Thane (eds.), Essays in Social History, Oxford, 1986, pp. 420-421.

⁴⁶ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of Great Britain, 1851. HO 107 2179.2.4: St. Paul's and Exchange.

into another trade. At any rate Loughlin would have become familiar with the life of a fish hawker in Liverpool. In this respect service was not a prelude to the "stability" of marriage but to something altogether more "unruly".

The moral ramifications of service in less than "genteel" households drew the attention of commentators in Liverpool. In a piece entitled "A bad servant manufactory" Hugh Shimmin represented the shortage of proficient servants in the city, a common grievance of the middle classes throughout the country, as the fault of lower class women who, both as mothers and employers, had no appreciation of thrift, industry and cleanliness, essential values for the keeping of a proper household. Describing the vast majority of the city's servants as "dressy, idle, ignorant of household duties, impertinent, and inconsiderate", Shimmin asked if it was any surprise that they were so, given the circumstances from which they came. With reference to his well-known lurid portrayals of working-class life Shimmin argued:

Domestic servants are, in the main, the children of working men. Those who know what these homes in too many cases are, and what fearful havoc drink has made amongst them--how fathers and mothers squander their earnings and neglect their families--will be at no loss to account for the degeneracy of domestic servants...Mothers are known to set their faces against the training of their children in what they term the 'drudgery' of domestic duties. A large class of mothers--the majority of working men's wives--know nothing of the dignity or value of this most womanly labour; is it then at all likely that their children ever can?⁴⁷

⁴⁷ "A bad servant manufactory", in J. Walton and A. Wilcox (eds.), Low Life and Moral Improvement, p. 146.

Even if a mother was attentive to her daughter's domestic education, the training a working-class girl received in her own home schooled her only in the most basic of skills disqualifying her from service with a "gentleman's family". Thus, as Shimmin observed, working-class girls in Liverpool were compelled, at least initially, to take "humble" positions in the hope of later securing more respectable employment.

The pool of inexperienced young domestic servants permitted, much to the disdain of Shimmin, a class of women--the wives of clerks, draughtsmen and respectable mechanics--to indulge their own social pretensions. Shimmin complained that these women were perfectly capable of keeping their own small houses and yet the availability of servants at "nine pence or one shilling a week" allowed them to shirk their domestic duties. These mistresses showed none of the consideration and patience required for the proper training of their servants and were instead "ignorant and overbearing", thus succeeding in making a good girl bad, and a bad one worse. In some respects, lower class mistresses received more severe censure from Shimmin than even working-class mothers. Service was intended to instil the value of domestic life in young working-class girls. How could a woman who, for the sake petty social aspirations, shunned her own responsibilities as a housewife impart this lesson, Shimmin wondered:

If Smith's wife [Shimmin's fictitious example of such a mistress] understood the duties of an English housewife, a young, strong woman like she is, she would not bring in a poor girl to worry and scold. She would not feel it any disgrace to scour her own floor, or make her own bed, or clean her windows, or her doorstep; although she is a tradesman's wife, she would by such means secure sound

refreshing sleep for herself, health for her offspring, and domestic happiness for her husband; instead of which she dawdles all her time away--does not know what the real comforts and happiness of home consist of--keeps a girl--changes her every fortnight or three weeks--wastes her husband's earnings--and all for what? To keep up her 'position', as it is termed.⁴⁸

Thus the corruption of Liverpool's female servants was represented by Shimmin as the consequence of neglectful mothers and lazy mistresses who failed to portray themselves as the models of proper English housewives.

The difficulties middle-class households confronted in finding suitable domestics received ample coverage in the pages of both local and national newspapers. Employers complained not that there were no servants to fill vacancies but that there were no "respectable" servants to take up positions. In Liverpool, householders claimed that servants came to their homes already corrupted by the debauched atmosphere of the city's working-class neighbourhoods. Mr. Lawrence, a Liverpool magistrate, told a 1877 parliamentary committee that a lady friend of his had advertised an opening for a servant. Nine women applied for the position but all nine were rejected by the prospective employer on the grounds that they were all given to intoxication.⁴⁹ Such grievances were not confined to Liverpool. A letter writer, identifying himself as "Nonsense" wrote to the The Times in 1878 bemoaning the poor

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 148.

⁴⁹ Select Committee on the Law on Intemperance, First Report, Minutes of Evidence, Mr. E. Lawrence, q. 516, 1877. PP 1877 (171) Vol. XI.1.

calibre of English female servants. The correspondent had spent several years in India with his wife where all but one of the servants employed by the couple had been men. In contrast to this competent and obedient staff, "Nonsense" had been discouraged by the quality of the cooks he was forced to employ on his return to England: "One drank, one stole, one did both, and something bad in other ways; they could all cook a little but none as well as Antone [his Indian cook]".⁵⁰

A regularly repeated suspicion was that the shortage of proper domestic servants was the fault of young working-class women who, with the approval of their families, rejected domestic service for employment which offered them lower wages but greater freedom.⁵¹ For this reason, many householders were unsympathetic to the plight of poverty-stricken working women and critical of philanthropists who took

⁵⁰ The Times, 9 March 1878.

⁵¹ The reluctance of women to become domestic servants was a source of regret in Canada and Australia as well. In response to calls for British women to emigrate to Canada, Mr. J.E. Pell wrote from Montreal:

I have no hesitation in saying women are not wanted in Canada; there are plenty and to spare here; but the class who should fill the position of housemaid servants prefer a bare living at anything else, with their liberty. Consequently, good household servants, and they alone are needed. [The Times, 31 July 1867.]

A report from the Melbourne Argus referred to a similar shortage of trained domestic servants:

Domestic servants are becoming more scarce every day. This is usually the dull time of year, and yet not one half of the orders can be supplied. The native-born girls do not take readily to becoming house servants. They prefer earning half the wages at a factory and keeping themselves, rather than go into service. [The Times, 28 November 1873.]

up their cause. For example, initiatives which were taken to alleviate the suffering of needle women were often met with cynicism from employers of domestic servants. During the 1872 agitation by needle women and their middle-class supporters in Liverpool, a householder from Princes Park wrote to the Liverpool Mercury questioning the prudence of campaigning to improve the conditions of needlework in the city:

I think that it should not be overlooked that a great deal of the distress amongst that class arises from the fact that so few of the daughters of the working classes can now a days be induced to become domestic servants. They deserve very much of what they now suffer.⁵²

In considering why it was that so many young women should chose an occupation in which they were "badly fed, badly paid, and overworked" inducing "ladies on all sides" to complain of the want of "good respectable servants", this same householder suggested that:

...these girls look upon domestic service as degrading, and partly because they prefer to have more liberty and time to themselves, which there can be little doubt is devoted in the few hours they have left before midnight to frequenting music halls, dancing saloons &c. &c. which are neither conducive to health nor to morals.⁵³

Indeed, the thrill-seeking, freedom-loving nature of young working-class women was the explanation most commonly advanced for the shortage of respectable domestic servants. Even proposals for the establishment of institutions to provide rigorous training for domestics were deemed to be inadequate solutions to a problem of "vast importance in a moral

⁵² Liverpool Mercury, 19 July 1872.

⁵³ Ibid.

and social point of view". As Mary Hooper wrote to the The Times in 1878:

A short period of instruction and training in household work and in cookery will not do away with the unreasonable dislike to the loss of a certain personal liberty which is one of the conditions of all well-ordered, domestic service.⁵⁴

The testimony of Annie Davies, a 20 year old Liverpool vestmaker, before a Select Committee investigating the sweating system, appears to confirm Mary Hopper's suspicions. Annie worked sixty-eight hours a week for 6s.6d. She provided the following answer as to why she preferred sewing to her previous employment as a domestic servant: "I have a little more time to myself for one thing, and I expect to earn more money in time".⁵⁵

The restrictions that induced women to avoid domestic service, were often doggedly resisted by women within the occupation. For middle-class mistresses a well-ordered house kept by modest and disciplined servants was not only a source of pride but an important aspect of how they identified themselves as women. Indeed, the rationalisation of the economic world which was the hallmark of how middle-class men distinguished themselves from those below and above them was mirrored in the rationalisation of domestic life, a project which was fundamentally directed by women.⁵⁶ Mistresses asserted their

⁵⁴ The Times, 24 April 1878.

⁵⁵ Select Committee on Sweating System, Fourth Report, Minutes of Evidence, A. Davies, qq. 27 905-27 911; qq. 27 949-27 951, 1889-1890.

⁵⁶ A. McClintock, Imperial Leather, New York, 1995, p. 168.

privileges as employers by demanding of their servants that they not only perform their duties in accordance with strict standards but that they conduct their private lives in accordance with a rigid moral code as well. A woman who wrote to the The Times on several occasions in 1864 using the name "Truth" complained that "servants now-a-days do not care either to obtain or to keep places where there are any restrictions as to dress, or as to hours for going out, or where regular attendance at church is required". How servants dressed was of particular concern for "Truth" as she asserted that the love of dress among servants was "quite a mania".⁵⁷ In a subsequent letter, as evidence of this "mania", "Truth" recalled an encounter she had recently had with an applicant for a position of kitchenmaid. She began with an elaboration of her own standards as a mistress:

My place is an easy one, there being three persons kept in my kitchen. I offered her eighteen pounds a year and I find tea, sugar and everything for my servants. I then made my usual stipulations as to dress--viz.:--That my servants did not wear flounces on their dresses or flowers outside their bonnets; that they wore white caps, and were required to attend church regularly.⁵⁸

Included with her own letter, was the response "Truth" had received from the woman to whom she had offered the position. The servant decided not to take up the place explaining that "I have always been acustom [sic.] to black caps...I am sorry to make any complaints; but if it is not your wish to alter this, I think I had better decline

⁵⁷ The Times, 13 January 1864.

⁵⁸ The Times, 28 January 1864.

it".⁵⁹ The desire to wear a black cap instead of a white one would not appear to be an expression of a passion for clothes. However, perhaps what offended "Truth" more than the specifics of the letter she received was that a servant would dare to place any conditions on the acceptance of a situation: "The tone of the letter is more as if "A.B." [the servant] was engaging me than the reverse".⁶⁰

The subject of dress was a central focus for middle-class resentments of working-class women. An irrational love of finery among young working-class women figured prominently in Victorian discussions of the causes of prostitution and will be considered within that context in the following chapter. In the case of domestic service how a servant dressed not only while she tended to her workplace duties but on her afternoons out as well became the battleground of heated class struggle within the household. Just as "Truth" objected to the audacity of the conditional response she received from the prospective kitchenmaid because it undermined her privileges as an employer, mistresses were offended by styles of dress among servants which seemed to blur class distinctions both in the private and the public realm. Servants who dressed above their station challenged their subordinate position as labouring women. As Christine Stansell has argued:

The stylish dress of working-class women, with its elaborated code of feminine physicality, implicitly challenged the ladies' designation of themselves as chief proprietors of

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

womanly gratification. It was a sign that servants as well as mistresses could aspire to the finery of life.⁶¹

For their part, servants resented standards of dress which served to stigmatise them from the rest of society. A woman who had been in service from the age of thirteen wrote to the The Times in response to "Truth's" series of accusations against servants. With respect to the alleged vanity of servants she countered:

I lived with a lady some years who would not let any of her servants (with the exception of her own maid) wear a crinoline in the house or out, and made them wear caps tied under their chins, like old women, of course, young servants don't like that and will not stay long in such a situation because other servants laugh at them.⁶²

The letter writer considered strict dress codes to be part and parcel of the daily humiliations servants suffered at the hands of their employers. Further evidence suggests that servants fought to dress the way they pleased, particularly when not at work, as part of their struggle to win for themselves the rights of other wage earners. In 1873 the The Times printed a report taken from the Dundee Advertiser of a meeting of Dundee's domestic servants. In the course of the meeting speakers asserted the rights of servants to a half-day holiday each week and a full day off every fortnight. Several speakers spoke of the "omnipotent" power of mistresses in determining the character of servants when they left their employ and it was agreed that servants themselves should form an association in which they might share

⁶¹ C. Stansell, City of Women, p. 165.

⁶² The Times, 2 February 1864.

information respecting the "general temper and conduct" of employers. Also voiced at the meeting were the resentments of servants towards restrictions on their dress. On this issue, the general opinion of the meeting was that if servants were compelled to wear a uniform it should be at the expense of their employers although it was suggested that such a requirement was unjust. With respect to other stipulations regarding dress and jewellery the meeting concluded that "the mistress had no right to interfere with their apparel in any way so long as it was paid for".⁶³ The notion that servants might organise themselves into some sort of combination would have horrified Victorian employers. Earlier in 1864 letter writers to the Times referred to "clubs" of servants where seditious plots against employers were hatched. In response to such allegations a butler, who had been in service for twenty-two years, wrote that he had never encountered such associations but added that "surely servants have an equal right with any other class" to organise. Female domestics in Dundee appear to have put this abstract principle into practise.⁶⁴

The letters referred to above and published in The Times during the 1860s and 1870s amount to a candid and public discussion of the character of the class conflicts which were embodied within the domestic service relationship. However, most battles between mistresses and their servants were fought privately within each household and thus

⁶³ The Times, 23 April 1873.

⁶⁴ The Times, 6 February 1864.

remain all but hidden from the historian. The common complaints that servants were careless, lazy, insolent and incompetent could have pointed to deliberate strategies developed by servants to resist the rigorous domestic regimes of their employers.⁶⁵ That servants altered the standard of their performance in response to how their employers treated them was confirmed by the retired domestic who wrote to the Times in 1864. She suggested that masters and mistresses who showed their servants kindness and respect would be rewarded with devoted employees, and yet, she concluded from her own experience that "masters and mistresses as a general rule don't speak kind to their servants and that makes bad servants who not being treated kindly don't care how they treat their masters".⁶⁶

Theft by servants can also be understood as a practice of resistance which embodied a challenge to the sanctity of private property so fundamental to the economic life of their employers.⁶⁷ Sometimes servants would take things they deemed to be theirs by custom or right but which their employers refused to give them freely. For example, cooks considered meat scraps and fat drippings to be theirs to dispose of as they wished. However, what servants classified as perquisites might be labelled by employers as stolen goods.⁶⁸ The The

⁶⁵ L. Davidoff, "Mastered for Life", p. 416.

⁶⁶ The Times, 2 February 1864.

⁶⁷ For the varied meanings of theft in slave cultures see J. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, p. 188.

⁶⁸ P. Horn, Victorian Servant, Gloucester, 1986, p. 140.

Times' uncompromising correspondent "Truth" conceded that disputes over the distribution of household resources stemmed as much from problems of definition as from the wilful criminality of servants:

How hard it is to make a servant see that it is just as dishonest to take 10lbs. of suet from the larder as to take 10s. from her master's purse. How difficult to put an end to those habitual thefts which go on in large establishments under the name of "perquisites".⁶⁹

This type of petty larceny, if detected by employers, would most often have been dealt with privately. The usual sentence imposed on offending servants was dismissal.⁷⁰

There is evidence to suggest that *servants also snatched more valuable items from their employers homes. These crimes only become visible to the historian in those instances when employers took the somewhat unusual step of publicly prosecuting their servants. Reports of these cases, published in the Liverpool Mercury, reveal that servants tended to take articles which could easily be exchanged in the city's many pawnshops. In earlier chapters the use of the pawnshop as a community resource was explored. It was argued that working-class people not only pawned their own possessions, but goods which could be found on the streets and docks of Liverpool. Further, needlewomen and charwomen pawned materials which belonged to their employers. Servants were also active participants in this illicit exchange economy. In June 1851 Mary Wood, a young servant with Mrs. Ainscough, was charged with*

⁶⁹ The Times, 13 January 1864.

⁷⁰ P. Horn, Victorian Servant, p. 139.

pawning wearing apparel belonging to her mistress. The magistrate committed Mary to the house of correction for one month.⁷¹ In October of that same year, Mary Nelson who worked as a housekeeper for William Marsden Henderson, an overseer at the docks, was accused of stealing a large quantity of clothing from her employer. Mary Nelson had had access to every apartment in her employer's home. On discovery that the house had been plundered Mary was found with several pawn tickets relating to the stolen property in her possession.⁷² Elizabeth, Margaret and Mary Welsh, a mother and two daughters, were involved in the theft of several items from the London Road home of Mrs. Jefferson, where one of the daughters had been employed as a servant. More than forty pounds worth of stolen goods had been pledged by the mother and the daughter who was not in service at various pawnshops in the city.⁷³ Mary Bromfield, a young servant with Elizabeth Grindale of Grove Street, was an even more ambitious thief. In October 1854 Elizabeth Grindale called the police to her home when a key and gold pin went missing. Mary denied having stolen the items but on searching her box Detective Povey discovered not only the key and the pin but also two silver pencil cases, a gold seal, some silk and some tape, all belonging to her mistress. An additional key was found which was later identified by Mary's former employer, a gentleman named Scary, as the key to his cash

⁷¹ Liverpool Mercury, 2 June 1851.

⁷² Liverpool Mercury, 31 October 1851.

⁷³ Liverpool Mercury, 5 October 1854.

box.⁷⁴ As Mary's case suggests, a servant could steal from her employer for some time before suspicions were raised and it is not difficult to imagine that many servants managed to escape detection altogether.

In January 1863, a young woman, also named Mary Bromfield, was brought before the magistrate on charges laid by her employer, Mr. Thomas Martin of Huskinson Street. This second Mary Bromfield, possibly the same person as the first, committed a crime which can be read as an indirect assault on the material privileges of her master. As Ellen Darwin observed of domestic servants in 1890: "No people contemplate so strikingly the unequal distribution of wealth: they fold up dresses whose price contains double the amount of their year's wages; they pour out at dinner wine whose cost could have kept a poor family for weeks."⁷⁵ Perhaps Mary Bromfield, together with the housemaid and the cook, were lashing out against this imbalance when they took seven or eight bottles of wine from Mr. Martin's cellar. The three also took a bottle of gin. After imbibing the stolen liquor the servants broke the empty bottles into pieces. The housemaid and the cook were both given notice to leave when Mr. Martin discovered their transgression. Mary, however, the senior of the three and having been identified as the principal player in the robbery, was apprehended by Detective Laycock to face public prosecution. Mr. Brick, who defended the accused, asked

⁷⁴ Liverpool Mercury, 19 October 1854.

⁷⁵ Quoted in M. Hearn, Below the Stairs, p. 94.

whether a caution might not be the most appropriate punishment given the relatively harmless nature of the crime. The magistrate disagreed insisting that such leniency would only encourage further attacks by domestic servants on the property of masters and mistresses. Accordingly Mary was sentenced to two months imprisonment.⁷⁶

The association of domestic servants with another illegal activity requires a more extensive explanation. To begin with, when considering the connection between domestic service and prostitution it should be remembered that service was promoted as a means of protecting young women from the moral threats of working-class community life. And yet, as Judith Walkowitz notes in her study of prostitution in Victorian England, domestic servants more commonly became prostitutes than other working women. For example, a late nineteenth century survey revealed that over fifty per cent of the prostitutes in London's Millbank prison had previously been employed as servants, largely general servants.⁷⁷ In Liverpool, as was discussed earlier and as will be explored further in the next chapter, street selling was more likely to lead to prostitution than was service. Nonetheless, although fewer domestic servants became prostitutes in Liverpool than elsewhere, the relationship between domestic service and sexual immorality generally, as well as prostitution specifically, was still routinely highlighted. Two explanations were regularly advanced as to why so many domestic

⁷⁶ Liverpool Mercury, 19 January 1863.

⁷⁷ J. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, Cambridge, 1980, p. 15.

servants became prostitutes. One account stressed that the character flaws of domestic servants led to their own downfall. This account echoed to a large extent employers' complaints that young women rejected domestic service because of the constraints the work placed on their liberty. The other held that the antecedents of the moral decline of young women in service could be found in the sexual aggression of men, whether fellow servants or masters. Typical of the first narrative was William Bevan's 1842 lecture on prostitution in Liverpool, in which he condemned impudent domestic servants who left their positions for trivial reasons and suggested that they had only their pride to blame if they were forced to "plunge into the abyss".⁷⁸ Some commentators pointed to a domestic servant's aversion to hard work as the primary cause of her descent into prostitution. Frederick Lowndes, the chief physician of Liverpool's Lock Hospital, in his analysis of the problem, contrasted the toil of service with the plethora of temptations which the city presented to young servants:

There are thousands of young women in Liverpool living a life of what is to them utter drudgery as domestic servants...They hear and see other girls at liberty to do what they please. They hear of and see other girls who have always fine clothes, and even jewellery to wear, money to spend and no hard work to do. As to how all these are obtained and other details, there is a mystery which is itself very seductive to the female mind. Many of them hover round the border line of prostitution, frequenting music halls, singing saloons, and public houses, where the

⁷⁸ W. Bevan, Lecture on Prostitution, Liverpool, 1843, p. 8.

girls and women more or less of abandoned character are to be found.⁷⁹

Lowndes, like many of his contemporaries, traced the transition from service to prostitution back to the laziness and vanity of the young women themselves.

At the same time, however, Lowndes warned that the virtue of young domestics was under threat not only on the wanton streets of Liverpool, but within the private internal world of service itself. The doctor reminded his readers that in their homes female servants occupied "under circumstances of peculiar temptation to immorality" the same living space as numerous male predators, from butlers to footmen.⁸⁰ William Sanger, a New York-based physician, reached a similar conclusion in his 1858 inquiry, The History of Prostitution, remarking that although domestic servants, in contrast to needlewomen, were removed from conditions of absolute want they were vulnerable to "influences of another kind--we mean seduction by masters and male members of the household".⁸¹ Even in smaller households where no male servants were employed there were still opportunities for sexual encounters of both a wanted and unwanted

⁷⁹ F. D. Lowndes, Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Liverpool, London, 1886, p. 26.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ W. Sanger, The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects throughout the World, New York, 1910 (second edition), p. 315.

members of the household".⁸¹ Even in smaller households where no male servants were employed there were still opportunities for sexual encounters of both a wanted and unwanted kind. As Françoise Barret-Ducrocq recounts in her study of the women who entered the London Foundling Hospital:

In the attics, basements and backstairs of the Victorian home, that haven of peace and security, housemaids were in permanent contact with a male population whose intentions were often bad. Like the casual labourer who was hired for an afternoon to shift furniture from room to room: he had ample time to plan his move, and ample pretext for working out a route, surveying corridors, identifying bedrooms. So that when he had been paid, instead of vanishing into the evening streets, he climbed the backstairs one last time to nurse's room, 'threw her on the bed and violated her'.⁸²

A servant who became pregnant faced immediate dismissal and could be driven out on to the streets to fend, as best she could, for herself. Lowndes charted this as the path that many servants followed into prostitution. Herbert Safford, before the meeting of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in 1869, concurred. He contended that an unmarried woman would be forced to give birth to her child in a workhouse as no Lying-in Hospital would admit her. Then, burdened with an illegitimate child, she would confront formidable obstacles in securing respectable work: "she might endeavour to obtain employment for herself, and then either have to resort to prostitution

⁸¹ W. Sanger, The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects throughout the World, New York, 1910 (second edition), p. 315.

⁸² F. Barret-Ducrocq, Love in the Time of Victoria. Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London, London, 1991, p. 47.

for her babe's support, or to starve both together, and be together buried in a pauper's grave."⁸³ There is evidence to suggest that some servants attempted to make arrangements for the care of their infants which would enable them to remain in service although more than likely not in the positions which they had held when they found themselves pregnant.⁸⁴ Mrs. Donnelly, a woman living in Liverpool, was paid a few shillings a week by the mother of a girl named Annie who was born in 1867. Annie's mother worked as a servant in a good place for three years after the birth of her daughter. However in 1870 her circumstances apparently changed and she left her employer without any word to Mrs. Donnelly. When Annie was thirteen years old Mrs. Donnelly and her son decided that they could no longer keep the child. Annie was taken to the Liverpool Sheltering Home where she was sent to Canada to work as a servant herself. She returned to England two years later having proved herself to be a "wild" and "troublesome" servant.⁸⁵

Given their limited options many servants attempted to disguise their pregnancies under layers of Victorian dress so that they might retain their positions for as long as possible. Some more desperate

⁸³ Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science for 1869, London, 1870, pp. 208-209.

⁸⁴ See F. Barret-Ducrocq, Love in the Time of Victoria, for a study of how domestic servants in London attempted to have their infants admitted to the city's foundling hospital.

⁸⁵ U.L.A., Barnardos Collection, Liverpool Sheltering Homes, D6 ii a.

servants also tried to conceal the birth of their infants.⁸⁶ As Mr. Saunders, the Recorder of Bath, reasoned:

"the young woman is generally in reputable service, and she keeps her condition secret from her mistress, in the hope that by removing the source of her shame she may continue in that service".⁸⁷ Frederick Lowndes, in a paper entitled "The Destruction of Infants shortly after Birth. In what Manner may it be prevented", drew on his experience as a medical witness before the Coroner's court in Liverpool, to explain that the authorities were unable to track most of the mothers of the considerable number of infants discovered dead in the city's streets. Lowndes also shared his belief that if the mothers were ever traced the majority would prove to be domestic servants.⁸⁸ However, several servants in Victorian Liverpool were unsuccessful in their attempts to deliver and dispose of their infants without detection. These women came before the Assize Court charged with concealment of birth or, in some cases, infanticide. Evidence from three of these cases will be explored in detail here. The stories of Bridget Cahill and Mary Ann Wright are pieced together from the testimonies of others as recorded in depositions given before the coroner. While these accounts offer few insights into the emotional lives of the servants involved, they do

⁸⁶ F. Barret-Ducrocq, Love in the Time of Victoria, p. 148.

⁸⁷ Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science for 1869, p. 213.

⁸⁸ Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science for 1870, London, 1871, p. 593.

provide a vivid picture of rigours of domestic service and an appreciation of the lengths to which servants would go to keep their positions. The documentation of Letitia Dordy's case is more extensive and allows for an in depth discussion of the restricted options open to a single woman who found herself pregnant while in service. Indeed, in the context of this third example the connection between domestic service and prostitution is drawn out explicitly.

Elizabeth Horne and her husband Robert, a joiner, had employed Bridget Cahill for less than two weeks when the servant gave birth to a female child in their Warren Street home in September 1853. Prior to *the delivery, Elizabeth Horne, an especially concerned mistress*, had noticed something strange in Bridget's appearance but she had not voiced her suspicions for fear of injuring her employee's character. One morning Bridget complained of being ill. Her mistress gave her some castor oil and sent her to bed. That evening Mrs. Horne was awakened by the sound of groans coming from Bridget's room. Bridget explained that she had been very ill and that she was experiencing spasms. Her mistress fetched her some cayenne pepper and whisky. The spasms continued at which point Elizabeth Horne sensed that "all was not right". In her deposition before the coroner Elizabeth Horne remembered remarking to her servant that "had she been a married woman I would have said she was in labour". Bridget exclaimed: "O no Mam". As Bridget's condition began to improve Elizabeth returned to her own bed. The following morning Bridget went about her work as usual until dinner time when, feeling ill once again, she was ordered by her mistress to

go back to bed. The next day Bridget appeared to be quite well. However, her mistress discovered spots of blood on the back stairs leading to Bridget's room. She then uncovered the afterbirth buried in the soil of the privy. The police having been informed, a surgeon, Mr. William Hannah, was sent for. At first Bridget denied having given birth to a baby but later, following confessions she made privately to Mrs. Horne, the body of a dead female child was found in the coal vault. It appeared that the baby's skull had been fractured by a hammer which was also discovered. Before formal charges were made against Bridget she was removed from her employer's household and taken to the workhouse.⁸⁹

Bridget Cahill appeared to be the Hornes' only servant and her mistress seems to have played a rather sympathetic role in Bridget and her baby's tragedy. Other mistresses were more remote. In the case of Mary Ann Wright, for example, it was her fellow servants in Captain John Thompson's Bedford Street boarding house, who took a greater interest in Mary Ann's condition. Mary Ann had been employed by Captain Thompson for two years prior to the birth of her female child. When Mary Ann was about eight months pregnant, Ann Thompson, the mistress of the household, did notice that there was "something strange" in her servant's appearance. When questioned Mary Ann explained that it was only her dress. In response to the inquiries of Martha Turtle and

⁸⁹ P.R.O., Chancery Lane, PL 27/13/1. Depositions of Elizabeth Horne, Robert Horne and William Hannah. Depositions taken 3 September 1853.

Eugenie Carley, two other servants in the home, Mary Ann had offered similar excuses. Martha was the most suspicious and she advised Mary Ann to change her dress as it made her look as if she was "in a family way". On 25 January 1857 Mary Ann came to Martha in the kitchen and confessed that she was feeling poorly. Martha noticed that one side of Mary Ann's dress was covered in blood and that the other side was covered in water as if it had been washed. Martha informed her mistress that Mary Ann was ill and she was ordered to give her some whisky and water. As Mary Ann was unable to work Martha was directed to take over her duties. The next day Mary Ann was able to resume her responsibilities within the household but when Martha went to collect a cloak Mary Ann refused to let her open the box where she kept her belongings. Martha told Eugenie Carley that she suspected there was a child in Mary Ann's box. Later Martha found Mary Ann's dead daughter in the room where the box had been located. She informed her mistress of her discovery. Ann Thompson gave Martha Mary Ann's wages and an additional 6/6 and told her to dismiss the servant. Mary Ann left before Thomas Mitchell, the doctor, arrived to examine the baby whom he declared to have been born alive but killed by several blows to the head. Detective Samuel Pooer traced Mary Ann to a house in Shepherd's Place Copperas Hill. Upon discovery Mary Ann confessed that she had given birth to a baby girl but swore that she had not injured the infant in any way. Throughout the ordeal Ann Thompson had not had any

contact with Mary Ann, testifying that the whole affair made her "quite ill".⁹⁰

The evidence available for the cases of both Bridget Cahill and Mary Ann Wright provides little insight into the motives and choices of the unfortunate servants themselves. Elizabeth Horne's deposition is a testament to her own concern for the plight of her young employee but she makes no mention of how her servant came to be in the predicament she was in. There is no way of appreciating the fear Bridget experienced as she found herself alone and in labour. Whether Bridget's ignorance of her condition was genuine or whether it was a calculated attempt to disguise the final stages of her pregnancy can only be guessed. That Bridget made no effort to hide her symptoms from her mistress and that she offered no explanation as to their cause does suggest a certain naivete. Mary Ann Wright, on the other hand, was more skilful in her efforts to conceal the true nature of her condition. For example, she tried to convince Eugenie Carley that her sudden illness was the result of having not "been regular for sometime" and of having taken something given to her by her mother which had "brought it on".⁹¹ Without the direct testimony of Bridget and Mary Ann, however, only informed speculation is possible.

⁹⁰ P.R.O., Chancery Lane, PL 27/15/1. Depositions of Martha Turtle, Eugenie Carley, Thomas Robinson Mitchell, Samuel Poer, and Ann Thompson. Depositions taken 9 February 1857.

⁹¹ Ibid., deposition of Eugenie Carley.

The case of Letitia Dordy was referred to the Home Office and is, for this reason, far more extensively documented. Indeed, included with the case file is a written petition signed by Letitia which allows for a more penetrating discussion of the experience of the accused herself beyond the interpretations of those who testified against her.⁹² On 23 March 1867 before the Liverpool Court of Assizes Letitia Dordy, aged 29, was convicted of the murder of her female child. During the trial the court heard that Letitia had worked as a general servant for Mrs. Eliza Forest of 21 Everton Valley between 24 January and 23 February 1867. Eliza Forest had noticed a strangeness in Letitia's figure, "like a woman near her confinement", but the servant explained that the stays of her dress were broken which seemed to quell Eliza's suspicions. Then one Monday in mid-February Letitia became ill with what she said was a cold. Her mistress gave her a number of cold remedies and Letitia's work around the house was not adversely affected. On Thursday evening while Eliza Forest was entertaining a guest in the back parlour, her eleven year old son, John, heard a cry from the coal cellar. Letitia called out from the cellar that the wail had been made by the cat when Letitia had punished it for stealing some cake. At ten o'clock that evening Letitia served her mistress supper and went out for beer. The next morning Eliza Forest discovered on the kitchen floor spots of blood leading to the cellar. Letitia was ordered to clean up the mess and nothing more was said. Later that day Eliza Forest did determine to

⁹² Public Record Office, Kew, HO 144/32/78794.

search Letitia's room but this decision was occasioned not by any irregularity in Letitia's work but by the loss of a ring and broach. It was during this inspection that Eliza Forest discovered the body of a dead female child hidden underneath Letitia's mattress. When confronted by her mistress Letitia confessed that she had given birth to the child in the coal cellar the evening before. Letitia said the delivery had been an easy one but she swore that the child had not been born alive. However, at the trial the jury heard evidence from David Dunlop Costine, a surgeon, which suggested otherwise. The doctor testified that from an examination of the child's lungs it was clear that respiration had been fully established. He declared the cause of death as suffocation from external violence.⁹³ This evidence, coupled with *John Forest's assertion that he had heard two cries come from the cellar*, was enough to convince the jury that Letitia was guilty of murder.⁹⁴ The prisoner was sentenced to death although the jury hoped

⁹³ Included in the Home Office file is a letter from Charles Locock, a London physician, challenging the medical evidence which had been central to the case against Dorcy. The doctor remembered the case of a married woman who delivered a child in a Lying-In Hospital in Lambeth. The unusually short umbilical cord was wrapped around the child's neck as its head emerged from the womb. The child was able to breath, and did let out a cry, but as the rest of the body was delivered the cord tightened and the child was strangled. A mid-wife had been present at the delivery. The doctor considered this medical precedent relevant to Dorcy's case. His emphasis on the marital status and respectability of the woman involved in the incident were offered as a means of legitimating the evidence.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Depositions of Eliza Forest, John Forest, Samuel Lindsey, P.C., and David Dunlop Costine, M.D. Depositions taken 20 March 1867.

that her punishment would be commuted to a life of penal servitude. Accordingly Mr. Justice Mellor wrote the Home Office and on 1 April 1867 Letitia was granted a stay of execution.⁹⁵

The harshness of the sentence first imposed on Letitia provoked an outpouring of public sympathy for her. Appeals to local newspapers portrayed Letitia Dordy as a victim of society's sexual double standards. Where was Letitia's seducer, letter writers asked. One letter, signed by "Sympathy", echoed a common narrative of Victorian melodrama, suggesting that Letitia had been enticed, and perhaps even drugged, only to be left in disgrace following the seduction. The correspondent went on to question the justice of sentencing "unfortunate" women to death while the "heartless fellows who have been the cause of the disgrace, suffering and indirectly of the death of both mothers and children" escape "scot-free".⁹⁶ A woman describing herself as a gentleman's daughter and a clergyman's wife, and calling herself "Janette", wrote directly to the Home Office in support of Letitia. "Janette" challenged the legitimacy of the system which had tried and convicted Letitia Dordy highlighting the gender inequalities embodied not only in English law but in English society as a whole:

But in this girl's case her fellows were not her jurors--men were her judge, her jurors, and her seducer, judge and jury were unable to enter into this woman's feelings to make allowance for her sin. Men have made unjust laws in regard to

⁹⁵ Ibid, Letter from Justice Mellor, Northern Circuit Court to Home Office, 31 March 1867. Report on Case of Letitia Dordy, Home Office, 1 April 1867.

⁹⁶ Liverpool Daily Courier, 5 April 1867.

women from which they make no appeal on earth but there may be a final tribunal where all will be answerable for acts of injustice and where she may be judged less guilty than her seducer who escapes here without punishment and perhaps less guilty than the legislators who have made laws which forced her to do this[.]⁹⁷

The letter's author moved far beyond sentimentality in her analysis of Letitia's Dordy's case. Letitia was not simply the victim of an unscrupulous seducer but of a whole system of gender oppression which condemned her to death while the father of her child escaped censure and denied her the opportunity to work in gainful employment in an effort to raise her child on her own.

Interestingly, while her supporters considered the absence of the father of her child to be central to her defense, Letitia remained silent on the subject. In November 1878 Letitia wrote to the Home Office petitioning that she be released. In this letter she recalled the predicament in which she had found herself in 1867. She explained that while she was in service she had "fallen into trouble", and, both her parents being dead, she felt compelled to remain in service for as long as possible in order to save enough money to support herself and her child until she could find "some fresh employment". It was Letitia's avowed intention to raise her child without the assistance of the father. However, in her inexperience, Letitia miscalculated the due date of her baby and was still in service when she went into labour. Letitia insisted that her crime was not infanticide but concealment of

⁹⁷ P.R.O., HO 144/32/78794. Letter from "Janette" to Home Office, 5 April 1867.

birth. Letitia confessed that "in my fright and the madness of despair at the shame and disgrace I had fallen into" she determined to hide the birth of her child but she swore that she did it "no violence".⁹⁸ Letitia's crisis, as she described it to the Home Office, reflected the constraints placed on her options as a working-class woman with no family support, no male provider, and limited employment opportunities. Letitia's first request for early release was rejected. She wrote again in July 1880 to inform the Home Office that if they granted her application she would enter immediately into the service of a Mrs. Meredith to finish out her days as a domestic, a prospect which did not trouble Letitia: "I am not afraid of hard work of any kind, however hard it may be I have been accustomed to hard work all my life."⁹⁹ In August 1880 Letitia was released from prison and in 1893 she was absolved from the conditions of her license. A report issued in 1893 by the Convict Supervision Office recorded that since being released "Dordy has obtained her living as a domestic servant and had been in one family for twelve years" suggesting that she no longer belonged "to the criminal class".¹⁰⁰

The case of Letitia Dordy highlights the vulnerability of domestic servants in a city like Liverpool demonstrating that, far from the

⁹⁸ Ibid., Petition of Letitia Dordy from Woking Prison to Home Office, 8 November 1878.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Petition of Letitia Dordy to Home Office, 13 July 1880.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Letter from Convict Supervision Office, New Scotland Yard to Home Office, 6 July 1893.

expectations of its advocates, domestic service did not always offer the road to permanent respectability. As her champion, "Janette", insisted, Letitia's crime was committed in an effort to save herself: "only by hiding its [her child's] birth could she hope to gain a respectable living, if known prostitution was in her case as in many others the only alternative". The conception and or birth of an illegitimate child were only two of the many circumstances which might occasion unemployment. As was discussed above, the failure to conform to an employer's standards of work and behaviour could also force a servant out onto the streets. Further, Irish Catholic women confronted particular difficulties in securing and holding on to domestic service positions. Recall the warning issued by the Catholic Institute Magazine to its middle-class readers that if they refused to hire natives of Ireland they would be responsible, at least in part, for driving these servants into sin. Perhaps the peculiarly precarious place of Irish women in Liverpool's domestic service market might help to explain why they were so prominent within one of the city's other trades. Indeed, in a city that offered few well-paying employment alternatives for women and with so much of the economic life of Liverpool centred on its docks, prostitution represented one of the most viable and lucrative means for young women to support themselves in the port.

Chapter Five

Prostitution

From the 1840s to 1880s respectable Victorians became increasingly concerned with prostitution. For middle-class social reformers, the widespread existence of prostitution in cities and towns throughout Britain was the starkest expression of the moral and physical degradation which plagued working-class communities. In her very existence a prostitute embodied a fundamental challenge to the domesticated feminine virtues which characterised middle-class notions of womanhood. The public expression of a prostitute's sexuality was threatening to the genteel Victorian woman who was repeatedly instructed to suppress her own sexual desires. For the Victorian gentleman the prostitute represented a constant temptation to deviate from the strict moral path on which his own identity rested. With the heightened concern about venereal disease in the 1860s, prostitutes were targeted by politicians and medical officers alike as the purveyors of physical contagion. Thus the prostitute was portrayed as a menace to both the material and moral well-being of Victorian society.

In Liverpool the figure of the prostitute served to accentuate the instability of gender roles in the port, acting as a regular reminder of the shortage of formal, 'respectable' employment opportunities for women. As was discussed in previous chapters, the appropriateness of each form of paid work for women in the city was assessed in relation

to prostitution. The moral standing of a working woman was measured in the distance between her and a prostitute. Further, because Irish women were particularly prominent in Liverpool's prostitution trade anxieties about the presence of unruly women in the public spaces of the city took on an ethnically specific character.

Given the limitations of the available sources it is difficult to comment with any insight on the experiences of prostitutes themselves and so, as these two introductory paragraphs suggest, this chapter focuses primarily on the ideological constructions of the 'prostitute'. The chapter begins by situating prostitution within the broader gender politics of Liverpool. This is followed by a consideration of the interventions of commentators from Liverpool into the discussions relating to prostitution which raged from the 1850s through to the 1880s. The views of F.D. Lowndes, the chief physician of the Liverpool Lock Hospital, and of Josephine Butler, a leading campaigner against the state regulation of prostitutes, are explored in depth as representative of two sides of a national political debate on how best to deal with the causes and effects of the trade. This chapter also introduces a third voice which became prominent in the local context of Liverpool during this period. Father James Nugent, a Catholic priest, consistently emphasised the material roots of prostitution within the commercial port. Here it is argued that in order to understand Father Nugent's materialism one must appreciate the ethnic and religious character of the population of prostitutes in Liverpool and the challenges this posed for the Catholic church.

For many commentators concerns about prostitution became conflated with more general misgivings about the subversiveness of gender relations within Liverpool's popular culture. In a pamphlet entitled Liverpool Life: Its Pleasures, Practices and Pastimes, Hugh Shimmin cast himself as a hero exposing, for the benefit of parents and employers of labour, "the moral foulness which infests certain quarters of this town and classes of this population".¹ Prostitutes figured prominently in Shimmin's expeditions through Liverpool's concert halls and supper rooms. However, it was not the openness of the sex trade but the immodesty of all the women in these locales which incensed the journalist. At a free concert room in Williamson Square, Shimmin encountered several disorderly and drunken women in the company of sailors. The audience of about forty people was entertained by a musical skit set in the Garden of Eden in which Adam was portrayed as "the incarnation of indelicacy" and Eve as embodiment of "indecorous and dissolute carnality". The crowd's genuine appreciation of this "vicious" display shocked Shimmin and he was most dismayed by the chuckles of delight which issued forth from the "nymphs" in the room.² At the Royal Casino Shimmin found foreign sailors, prostitutes "of the lowest grade", pugilists, pickpockets, donkey cart drivers and a

¹ H. Shimmin, Liverpool Life: Its Pleasures, Practices and Pastimes, reprinted from the Liverpool Mercury, Liverpool, 1856, p. vii.

² Ibid., pp. 26-28.

sprinkling of young girls. On the stage was a man bellowing a "character song" with lyrics which were deprecatory to the married state and which warned any man contemplating matrimony to "put an end to his life" rather than "embitter his existence with a wife". As they enjoyed the music the girls behaved in a most unbecoming manner: "slapping the men on the cheeks, pulling them by the whiskers, dragging them off the seats by the legs, or trying to do so, whispering and drinking with, swearing at, caressing, cajoling and kissing them". Shimmin's disgust with the female portion of the audience seemed only to intensify for, when several women got up to dance, he observed "every motion of the body, every expression of the face, almost every word they utter is indicative of unbridled lewdness".³ For Shimmin then prostitution represented an extreme point on a continuum of practices and customs which undermined Victorian notions of feminine modesty and subservience.

When the focus of discussions did narrow in on prostitution, it was often the sexual aggressiveness of the women involved in the trade that drew the ire of male observers. Alderman Samuel Holme passed through Lime Street one evening in 1859. He described the scenes he witnessed as "so shocking, dreadful and repulsive" that he felt quite

³ Ibid., pp. 34-35. In a paper delivered in 1876, Mr. Lucas Stubbs, a Liverpool magistrate, identified the prevalence of singing saloons in the city as a principal cause of vice, describing them as "cheap schools where minds were educated for crime". He drew particular attention to the lyrics of "indecent songs" which served only to demoralise large audiences. [Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science for 1876, London, 1877, p. 372.]

ashamed of his native town. According to Holme the street "literally swarmed with prostitutes from end to end". These most 'un-womanlike' women pulled at his coat and he was "publicly solicited" as he passed.⁴ If prostitutes embodied a challenge to the Victorian construction of womanhood they necessarily jeopardised the definition of manhood as well. Perhaps Holme's anger, like that of other men in his position, was rooted in the threat the prostitutes of Lime Street posed to his own identity.

The pervasiveness of the prostitution trade in Liverpool was often acknowledged as the regrettable but inevitable burden that all port cities were forced to bear although many considered the weight of Liverpool's to be almost intolerable. As Bishop Goss wrote in an address which was read to the parishioners of Liverpool's Catholic churches in 1859:

Our heart sinks when we contemplate the state of our city, which is said to surpass London in vice. Thousands of vessels unceasingly enter its docks and hundreds of thousands of emigrants from the United Kingdom and the continent make it their temporary abode on their way to the land of the West. In this immense vat the elements of prostitution ferment and boil over.⁵

Leading members of the police force also pointed to the atmosphere of the port in an effort to justify their lack of success in suppressing prostitution. Head Constable Grieg, when considering the supposition that "in a large seaport town like Liverpool, you would have a larger

⁴ Liverpool Mercury, 8 March 1859.

⁵ Liverpool Mercury, 4 April 1859.

proportion of unrespectable women than in most towns?", described a "floating" population of thousands of seamen who arrived home in Liverpool "frequently with large arrears of pay to receive which they [would] spend most thoughtlessly and wickedly".⁶ In his extensive international study of prostitution, Dr. William Sanger compared the number of prostitutes in proportion to the size of the population for major British cities excluding London. He cited figures which showed that Liverpool had one prostitute for every eighty-eight people, whereas its neighbour, Manchester, had one for every three hundred and twenty-five people, and Glasgow, another port, had one prostitute for every one hundred and eight-four members of its population. Despite the allegedly scientific nature of his investigation, Sanger offered scant explanation for the significant variance in the figures, simply remarking that "Liverpool is a great sea-port town, and a large number of regular prostitutes would be inevitable there".⁷

Accounts of why, despite the efforts of moral reformers, prostitution continued to thrive late into the nineteenth century reiterated earlier assumptions about the innate desire for prostitutes on the part of the transient male population in the city. In his 1889 report to the Watch Committee, Head Constable Nott Bower responded to the accusations of anti-vice activists that police passivity was liable for the sustained growth of the prostitution trade. Nott Bower insisted

⁶ Select Committee on the Law of Intemperance, First Report, Minutes of Evidence, Major Grieg, q. 196, 1877.

⁷ W. Sanger, The History of Prostitution, p. 342.

that it was preferable to permit brothels to operate in designated areas without much threat of prosecution than to risk driving them into unknown locations. Worse than a number of brothels in working-class neighbourhoods would be just one in "respectable localities, even in such streets as Bedford St., Falkner St., &c."⁸ Defending this policy of containment, which both he and his predecessors had adopted, Nott Bower offered this reminder to the Committee members:

...the town is a seaport, having the largest population of any town save London, and a population containing an unusually large proportion of seamen, foreigners, and a floating class of young men free from the restraints of home life, who cannot be "made moral by Act of Parliament" and who create a demand for vice, which all history teaches us, is sure to be responded to.⁹

In their assessments of the nature of the prostitution trade in Liverpool, religious leaders, medical professionals and law enforcers all took for granted the constancy of male sexual desires. Opinions differed, however, when the focus shifted to the dynamics of the female response to the demand for prostitutes.

The debate about why women became prostitutes in early-Victorian Britain was dominated by clergymen or by doctors and social scientists influenced by evangelical beliefs. British writers on prostitution in the 1840s assumed an uneasy stance towards their subject of study. On

⁸ L.R.O., Report of the Head Constable to the Watch Committee, Annual Police Returns, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1889-1890. R. Storch has observed that the Metropolitan Police pursued a similar policy. See R. Storch, "Police Control of Street Prostitution in Victorian London: A Study of the Contexts of Police Action", in D.H. Bayley (ed.), Police and Society, London, 1977, p. 51.

⁹ Ibid.

the one hand many of these observers were shocked by the brutal effects of industrialisation on the lives of working-class people and therefore considered prostitution as in some way linked to poverty and unemployment. On the other hand, through the prism of their evangelism they tended to view poverty itself as the result of an individual's moral frailties. As Judith Walkowitz has observed, this contradiction was expressed in their writings as an uneasy balance between the environmental and moral causes of prostitution.¹⁰ For example, in his 1843 lecture on prostitution in Liverpool, the Reverend William Bevan recognised destitution as a significant factor in a young woman's descent into prostitution, however, he represented poverty as primarily a state of moral depravity rather than material want. Thus he observed that as the children of poor parents, working-class girls were raised in an environment in which the law and religious values were shunned. They entered womanhood with no sense of delicacy or propriety, ill-equipped to resist the sexual dangers of adult life. If these young women experienced long periods of unemployment they would be confronted with the "dreaded alternative of starvation or ignominy".¹¹ Not only was he sceptical about their ability to resist prostitution, it was Bevan's contention that unemployment among working women was occasioned by their own character weaknesses. Bevan posed the question, referred to in the previous chapter, in the following way: if a woman left her

¹⁰ J. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, p. 37.

¹¹ W. Bevan, Lecture on Prostitution, p. 8.

position because she was desirous of greater freedom, if she was drawn to the pleasures of alcoholic stimulants found in the public-houses of the city, then who else but herself did she have to blame if she fell into a life of sin?¹²

By the 1860s the most influential commentators on prostitution were medical professionals. Concern about the spread of venereal disease among service men prompted the introduction of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1864. Legislators would have found a convincing case for the state regulation of prostitution in Dr. William Acton's study, Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and Other Large Cities, first published in 1857. Here Acton argued that prostitution would continue to exist and to flourish as long as there was "a demand for the article supplied by its agency."¹³ On the "demand" side of the equation Acton asserted that male sexual impulses, though they might be channelled into athletic sports and intellectual pursuits, could never be completely repressed.¹⁴ Therefore, Acton hoped that medical monitoring of prostitutes would provide safe, heterosexual outlets for the natural desires of men. However, Acton asserted that the ready availability of prostitutes served to intensify male desire--supply began to creat an "artificial" demand. While he

¹² Ibid.

¹³ W. Acton, Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects in London and Other Large Cities, London, 1870, p. 161.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 163.

recognised that "extreme poverty" might compel a woman into the trade, Acton emphasised that more often a woman became a prostitute in response to her own vices: "natural desire; natural sinfulness; the preferment of indolent ease to labour; vicious inclinations strengthened and ingrained by early neglect, or evil training, bad associates, and an indecent mode of life".¹⁵ Describing prostitutes as "painted dressy women flaunting along the streets", Acton insisted that women were driven by desire into prostitution. However, it was not sex but a life of leisure and luxury that they craved.¹⁶ As Marianna Valverde has argued, Acton attempted to reconcile his theory of female sexual passivity with his wish to blame the existence of prostitution on the immoral nature of certain women. Thus he characterised women as devoid of passions in relation to sex but driven by sinful desires for finery.¹⁷

The main proponent for the extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts to Liverpool was also a medical man, Frederick Lowndes, the chief physician of the city's Lock Hospital. Lowndes did not refer to any distinctive characteristics of the place of women in Liverpool while considering why they became prostitutes but instead endorsed the widespread assumption that women descended into prostitution as a

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁷ M. Valverde, "The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse", Victorian Studies 32 (Winter 1989), p. 175.

consequence of their own moral frailties. Predictably Lowndes identified love of dress, laziness, and a weakness for drink as three of the most common causes of prostitution.¹⁸ Further, like Acton, Lowndes accepted that male sexual desires generated a more or less permanent demand for prostitutes. However, in his 1876 treatise Lowndes went beyond abstract assertions to a more specific examination of who used prostitutes in Liverpool and why. Like many other commentators on the subject Lowndes located his study of prostitution within the economic and cultural context of the port. He estimated that on any given day there were between forty and fifty thousand seamen from the mercantile marine in Liverpool. More significant than their actual number was the unattached state of these predominantly young men. Lowndes observed that insufficient wages and an erratic lifestyle restricted the marital prospects of seamen considerably. Thus, just as in a garrison town or naval seaport, in Liverpool there were thousands of men who were compelled to live a celibate life; a situation which prompted Lowndes to conclude "in such a state of matters prostitution will always be found".¹⁹ In making the case for the statutory regulation of prostitutes in Liverpool Lowndes argued that if it was true that an army and navy infected with venereal disease were a significant threat to the military supremacy of Britain, then it was equally true that the

¹⁸ F. D. Lowndes, Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Liverpool, p. 26.

¹⁹ Lowndes, The Extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts to Liverpool and Other Seaports Practically Considered, Liverpool. 1876, p. 26.

economic dominance of the country would be undermined if the health of its mercantile marine could not be ensured. Thus Lowndes urged the Board of Trade to administer the same acts in Liverpool which in garrison towns and naval seaports were enforced by the War Office and Admiralty.²⁰

Employers of local labour also felt that their economic interests were jeopardised by prostitution in Liverpool. At a special meeting of the city's magistrates in March 1859 calls were made for extensive restrictions on the public presence of prostitutes. Mr T.D. Anderson represented the prostitutes of Liverpool as predatory women ready to seduce the most honest of workers and he offered the following justification for the one-sided character of proposed legislation: "Gentlemen employing large numbers of young men had come to him and asked if the magistrates could do anything to prevent young men being stopped at their office doors, waylaid on their way home, and very often ruined".²¹ Mr. Theodore Rathbone echoed his colleague's sentiments and used similar reasoning in endorsing the laws already in force to prevent prostitutes from moving about freely and from sharing public spaces with workers in the city:

The law most wisely decided that these women should not stop in these places for refreshment; nothing could be more dangerous to servants and clerks going there to lunch and witnessing scenes they had no conception of on entering.²²

²⁰ Ibid., p. 59.

²¹ Liverpool Mercury, 8 March 1859.

²² Ibid.

Thus, although the Contagious Diseases Acts were never extended to Liverpool, the same impulse to control prostitutes while leaving their clients relatively untouched was embodied in local legislative initiatives.

Josephine Butler, who became a resident of Liverpool in 1866, led the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts which she recognised as the legal sanctioning of male vice. Butler challenged the premise of the legislation that men were virtually powerless when it came to controlling their own sexual appetites and therefore the state was compelled to intervene in order to protect them from disease-ridden prostitutes. That the Acts targeted only the prostitutes, subjecting them to police harassment and forcing them to submit to a humiliating medical examination was for Butler the epitome of Victorian society's sexual double standards and hypocrisy.²³ Butler argued that prostitutes were not sexual predators but the victims of circumstance in need of rescue not punishment. Testifying before the Royal Commission on the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1871, Butler described two classes of prostitutes. The first class came from poverty-stricken families where the crowded state of their homes had led inevitably to sexual immorality:

In Liverpool, and some other seaport towns I have some knowledge of, there is a mass of people, boys and girls, who begin to be unchaste and vicious from the earliest of years. There is the commencement at once from the huddling together of persons like beasts...They are obliged to sleep together,

²³ See J. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, chapter six.

five or six in one family, and there is no difficulty in tracing the origin of the impurity, and it need not be charged to the wilful love of wickedness in poor children.²⁴

That girls from such 'inhuman' backgrounds turned to prostitution was to be expected, but Butler insisted that under the right influence they could be 'reclaimed' and taught to lead virtuous lives. As Judith Walkowitz has observed, Butler's portrait of the poor women she encountered in Liverpool combined sympathy and social distance: "they were poor creatures, tamed and brought to Christ through her ministrations".²⁵

As a staunch opponent of the Contagious Diseases Acts Butler rejected attempts by the likes of Acton and Lowndes to excuse male lust. And yet male sexual desires were fundamental to her own analysis of the causes of prostitution. The second class of prostitutes described by Butler were the innocent victims of male seduction. These women had "fallen" from a higher class of life; they were the daughters of tradesmen, solicitors and even clergymen. The seducers were most often from a class of 'respectable' gentlemen. Butler was particularly contemptuous of these men who presented themselves publicly as honourable men but led such depraved private lives.²⁶ Butler argued that once a woman had been seduced she was destined for a life of immorality

²⁴ Royal Commission on the Contagious Diseases Acts, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Mrs. J. Butler, q. 12 879, 1871. PP 1871 [C.408] [C.4081] Vol. XIX.1, 29.

²⁵ J. Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, p. 88.

²⁶ Royal Commission on the Contagious Diseases Acts, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Mrs. J. Butler, q. 12 879, 1871.

and despair. She took these "ruined" women into her own home when they were so distraught and physically weak that they no longer had the strength to survive. Butler kept a diary of the experiences of these poor dying women, constructing their tales around the central theme of seduction. The story of one woman, Marion, is typical of Butler's sketches:

After her [Marion's] death her mother came to attend the funeral...I found the mother alone, kneeling by the coffin in an agony of grief and of anger. She said (her body rocking backward and forward with emotion): "If that man, could but see her now! Can we not send for him?" and she added: "Oh what a difference there is in English gentlemen's households! To think that this child should have been ruined in one and saved in another! Yes, it might have been good for 'that man' to have been forced to step down from his high social position and to look upon her then, and to have known the abyss for which she had been drawn, to the verge of which he had led her when she was but a child of fifteen."²⁷

For Butler then prostitutes were necessarily victims. They were the objects of either the corrupting forces of poverty or the lascivious urges of men.²⁸

²⁷ J. Butler, Recollections of George Butler, pp. 191-192.

²⁸ The characterisation of prostitutes as victims enabled Butler to portray herself as a saviour. Walkowitz suggests that Butler's need to be the moral champion of prostitutes was linked to her need to fill the gap in her own life which resulted from the death of her daughter. [Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, p. 88] Following the death of her daughter Butler wrote that she became ...possessed with a irresistible desire to go forth and find some pain keener than my own...I had no clear idea beyond that, we plan for helping others; my sole wish was to plunge into the heart of some human misery, and to say (as I knew I now could) to afflicted people, "I understand. I too have suffered." [J. Butler, Recollections of George Butler, p. 133]

Butler and Lowndes were both theoretically and practically in opposition to one another, representing two sides of a national political debate on how best to deal with the causes and effects of prostitution. Nevertheless, despite their obvious differences, Butler and Lowndes both construed a woman's entry into the prostitution trade as a fundamentally moral question. In reconstructing the discussions relating to prostitution which raged from the 1850s through to the 1880s historians have tended to focus on the two poles of opinion personified by Butler and Lowndes. Yet in the local context of Liverpool, another prominent commentator emerged during this period and it was this voice which insistently interjected that the extent of prostitution in the city was primarily a consequence of material realities rather than a reflection of the vigour of the population's morals. Father James Nugent was born in Liverpool and served as the Catholic Chaplain of the Liverpool Borough Prison from 1863 to 1885. Nugent's daily contact with prostitutes in the jail furnished him with extensive detail about the condition of their lives. Nugent's accounts of his prison work are of particular significance for the purposes of this study because the vast majority of Catholic women who came under his spiritual guidance were Irish-born or the children of Irish parents. Catholic women were disproportionately represented among female inmates in the jail. Further they outnumbered their male counterparts, a condition unique to Liverpool.²⁹ Nugent resisted

²⁹ L.R.O., Liverpool Borough Prison, Prison Minister Report, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1866.

sectarian explanations for the prominence of Irish Catholic women within the criminal population of Liverpool. Instead he focused on their social and economic position which in turn led him to acknowledge that prostitution represented a relatively lucrative employment option for women in the city.

Certainly within Father Nugent's analysis of the causes of prostitution there was a familiar tension between the "environmental" and "moral" aspects. Nugent did identify prostitution as a social evil related directly to issues of sexual immorality. He variously described prostitutes as "dangerous", "abandoned" and "incorrigible". As a Catholic priest Nugent believed that all sexual activity outside of marriage was immoral and so in no way did Nugent challenge the dominant mores of Victorian society. And yet, in the final evaluation of Nugent's views on prostitution, it is reasonable to suggest that he did tilt the balance away from considerations of the morality of the prostitutes themselves towards the material factors which might have led women into prostitution in Victorian Liverpool.

Like many of his contemporaries Father Nugent considered Liverpool's economic climate to be of crucial significance in explaining why prostitution was so widespread. However, Nugent went beyond observations about the prevalence of single men in the city to explore the nature of female employment in the commercial economy. Nugent did recognise that the presence of thousands of sailors in the city at any one time created a vast demand for prostitutes. Before an

1877 Select Committee on Intemperance he described the relationship between sailors and prostitutes in meticulous detail:

Last year [1876] there were 102,759 men shipped in British registered vessels, and there were 100,190 men paid off in Liverpool. The men who are paid off receive sums varying from forty-one pounds to up to fifty pounds...and I do not exaggerate when I say that of sailor's money, over fifty per cent, is spent in drink and prostitution.³⁰

Nugent's understanding of why women entered into prostitution was similarly grounded in an analysis of Liverpool's labour market. When asked why women would turn to vice, Nugent responded with a description of the limited employment opportunities for working-class women in Liverpool:

I think the atmosphere itself is such that it generates it [prostitution], or makes a market for the trade; we have no factories; we have scarcely any employment for young women in Liverpool, therefore there are an immense number of women thrown upon society who have a difficulty getting anything at all.³¹

Nugent emphasised the fact that the monetary rewards of prostitution were more substantial than the wages women might earn in other forms of employment. For example, he estimated that the maximum wage a woman doing sewing work could make was ten shillings a week. Most young women in this type of work tended to make between two and four shillings a week. Whereas a woman who went "to a dancing room and pick[ed] up with a sailor, or the officer of a ship" could easily make up to two or

³⁰ Select Committee on Intemperance, Third Report, Minutes of Evidence, Fr. J. Nugent, q. 8 216, 1877. PP 1877 (418) Vol. XI.759.

³¹ Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Fr. J. Nugent, q. 99, 1882. PP 1882 (344) Vol. XIII.823.

three pounds a week.³² In many respects Nugent's economic realism paralleled the terms prostitutes themselves used to describe their career trajectories. As Judith Walkowitz has observed, the young women interviewed by the London journalist William Stead for his "Maiden Tribute" articles spoke in the unsensational language of sexual barter rather than the melodramatic language of seduction favoured by the interviewer.³³ While their decision to work on the streets reflected the limited and exploitative employment options open to them in cities like London and Liverpool, these women insisted on representing their entry into prostitution as a rational economic choice.

Nugent also drew attention to the importance of street selling for young women in Liverpool in his consideration of prostitution:

Liverpool is very peculiar, for we have what is called the basket girls; girls of from 13 to almost any age, who gain a living by selling in the streets...the basket girls sell fruit and fish, chalk stones, rubbing stones, sand stones and chips...we have another set of girls selling newspapers, fire papers, knitted work, combs, baskets, fuzees and pins[.]³⁴

Nugent described many young street sellers as "honest, industrious girls". He was critical of the Liverpool police who insisted on hauling these young entrepreneurs into police court for "street obstruction". He referred to one seventeen year old girl who had been committed to prison for street obstruction thirty-two times in three years. He

³² Ibid.

³³ J. Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, p. 114.

³⁴ Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Fr. J. Nugent, qq. 98-99, 1882.

cautioned the police as to the fruits their policy of harassment would bear:

During the year there were 308 Catholic women committed for street obstruction. The circumstances connected with some of these cases were truly painful, and poor girls striving hard to earn their bread have been unnecessarily harassed. Need it be wondered at if many of these become discouraged by constant fines or imprisonment, and considering the trifle they earn and the difficulties surrounding their position, are driven in despair to adopt a criminal life.³⁵

However, Nugent warned that it was not only the demoralisation caused by police policy which would prompt the transition from basket girl to prostitute. Moving beyond familiar narratives which linked prostitution primarily to domestic service, Nugent emphasised that the uniquely 'public' character of the economic role of women in Liverpool exposed them at an early age to the more dangerous aspects of street life.³⁶ In

³⁵ L.R.O., Liverpool Borough Prison, Prison Minister's Report, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1874.

³⁶ In his testimony before the 1882 Select Committee, Commander Eaton, who was involved with the enforcement of the Industrial Schools Amendment Act in Liverpool, also commented on the public presence of young girls on the city's streets. He drew attention to a peculiarity of Liverpool's urban geography which he believed facilitated illicit sexual encounters:

There is a thing in Liverpool which does not exist in London or almost any other town, the houses were built so there is a long passage, very narrow, a back entry, and men will take girls up this entry for immoral purposes and give them a few pence or 6d.; and I have known a case where one child has kept watch at one end of the entry while a man took another child up for immoral purposes and brought her back again[.] [Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Commander Eaton, q. 203, 1882.]

Unlike Nugent who recognised the public presence of young girls in Liverpool as, at least in part, a reflection of the importance of street selling for working-class families, Commander Eaton chastised neglectful working-class mothers for exposing their

adapting to the rough environment of the streets, some basket girls suffered a moral decline. Nugent observed: "though she may carry a basket there is very little difference between her and a prostitute, and sometimes these girls are more lawless, obscene, defiant in their language, than even the common prostitute of the streets".³⁷ Frederick Lowndes concurred with Nugent in connecting basket girls with prostitutes in Liverpool. He identified street selling as a dangerous calling in which young women were "subject to the temptations of the streets, exposure to cold and wet, almost driving them to the public house, to intemperance, to associating with the vilest characters all tending to their own degradation".³⁸ Nugent had also identified drink as the factor that linked the two trades together. Nugent suggested that a girl who spent her life on the street might begin in a state of relative innocence but she would slowly become accustomed to drink. He observed that a woman who drank would be more willing to become involved with a man in an "immoral" way. When asked whether there were many juveniles in Liverpool who made a living from prostitution, Nugent offered this response:

As prostitutes, I do not think there are so many girls on the streets, but the number of girls who go with men is very great. Drink prevails so much in Liverpool, and any woman who

children to the dangers of the streets.

³⁷ Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Fr. J. Nugent, q. 99, 1882.

³⁸ F.D. Lowndes, Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Liverpool, p. 21.

gives herself up to drink, does not hesitate, when once she is habituated to it; unfortunately we have a great number of girls of 15 and 16 who are habituated to drink, and that is the case with street traders too.³⁹

It is important to note that Nugent did clearly define prostitution as the exchange of sexual favours for money, differentiating it from other types of sexual impropriety.⁴⁰ The distinction Nugent made between the street trader and the prostitute related simply to what they did; it was not a moral distinction. Indeed, for Nugent drink was the unifying sin from which other types of immorality would be generated. At the same time it should not be forgotten that Nugent prefaced his remarks on street selling with a recognition of the limited employment opportunities for women in Liverpool and an appreciation of the material pressures which pushed women onto the streets first as hawkers and then as prostitutes.

Nugent's somewhat sympathetic acknowledgement of the temptations to steal faced by casual labourers in Liverpool might also have been extended to prostitutes in the city:

³⁹ Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Fr. J. Nugent, q. 147, 1882.

⁴⁰ Barbara Littlewood and Linda Mahood, in their work on prostitution in Scotland, have commented that the manner in which many reformers used the term 'prostitute' was highly variable and vague. For example, a surgeon at the Glasgow Lock Hospital insisted that his female patients were all "prostitutes of one kind or another, that is to say they were women consorting with more than one man". See B. Littlewood and L. Mahood, "Prostitutes, Magdalenes and Wayward Girls: Dangerous Sexualities of Working-Class Women in Victorian Scotland", Gender and History Vol. 3, (Spring 1991), p. 162.

The inducements to crime are always great in a seaport town, but these become more powerful where a large proportion of the population are dependent upon casual employment. Again, the kind of labour along the docks, in warehouses, and the constant handling of valuable merchandise, with the ready facilities for disposing such property, are strong temptations to the needy and ignorant.⁴¹

Prostitutes regularly supplemented the proceeds of sexual barter with other resources taken unlawfully from their clients. In 1838, the Liverpool police estimated that of a total of £15,992 worth of stolen property, £4,430 was the result of prostitutes robbing individuals.⁴² A sleeping man's clothes and money were accessible items for prostitutes to snatch. In 1850 an American ship's captain described to the journalist Charles Mackay what he considered to be a common experience among sailors who were docked in Liverpool:

The man was robbed of all his money and clothes, and had to run down the streets of Liverpool to Waterloo docks, in a cold and fortunately dark winter's morning, without a stitch of clothing, but a woman's apron which the mistress of a disreputable house, somewhat more tender hearted than her lodger, had bestowed upon him.⁴³

Some robbery victims did attempt to exact retribution through the courts. These cases provide evidence, not just of the crimes in question, but also afford examples of what sort of men used prostitutes in Liverpool. Of course the men who filed charges against prostitutes

⁴¹ L.R.O., Liverpool Borough Prison, Prison Minister's Report, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1866.

⁴² Cited in F. Neal, "A Criminal Profile of the Irish", Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Vol. 140, 1990, p. 177.

⁴³ "Labour and the Poor: Letter III", Morning Chronicle, 3 June 1850.

were not necessarily typical of the men who paid for sex in the port. In reporting a robbery a man had to explain how it was that a prostitute had been able to walk off with his pants. Complainants exposed themselves to the censure of the magistrates with no guarantee of retrieving their property. As Mr. Mansfield, a Liverpool magistrate, admitted his predecessors had often dismissed robberies which occurred in brothels reasoning that "it served him [the complainant] right".⁴⁴ It is unlikely that the more 'respectable' clients of prostitutes would have subjected themselves to such public humiliation. Further, the chance of retrieving even part of what had been stolen would have been of greater importance to seamen and labourers than wealthier victims.

Robert Fitzsimmons, a married cooper with children, had to explain his presence in a Gore Street brothel not only to the court but to his spouse as well. In his defense Fitzsimmons explained that he had been in a "state of intoxication" when Isabella and Elizabeth Ditchfield had lured him to a disorderly house. On learning that Fitzsimmons had no money to "satisfy the demands of the brothel keeper" the two women stripped him of his "inexpressibles" and his coat. Fitzsimmons then had to make his way back to his Cumbermore Street home as inconspicuously as possible.⁴⁵ Charles McKean was stripped of more than his clothes in a Banastre Street brothel. McKean arrived in Liverpool in October 1853 having travelled from San Francisco. On his

⁴⁴ Liverpool Mercury, 8 March 1859.

⁴⁵ Liverpool Mercury, 22 February 1860.

first evening in the city McKean was "accosted" by Catherine Wilkinson, "an unfortunate girl". McKean accompanied Wilkinson to a brothel on Banastre Street. Here Wilkinson discovered that fastened around McKean's waist was a buckskin belt containing \$660 in specie, the proceeds of his digging in California. McKean was awakened by his companion at four o'clock and induced to take a drink although Wilkinson herself did not join him. After drinking two glasses of whisky McKean fell asleep. When he awoke both Wilkinson and his money were gone. From the description he gave to the police they were able to apprehend Wilkinson at a beer house on Wilton Street. Wilkinson denied the charge but her landlady gave up a new pair of stays and at the time of her arrest Wilkinson was wearing a new pair of boots. John Wilkes, a man who cohabited with the prisoner, was also found wearing a new suit of clothes. Taken together these purchases were considered to be sufficient evidence to hold Wilkinson over for trial.⁴⁶ In other instances the evidence was judged to be less conclusive. Ellen Smith, Jane Blair and William Moreton were brought before Mr. Rushton charged with having stolen eighty-five pounds from Edward Corcoran while he was in a house of ill-repute on Albion Street. The accused were released as there was insufficient evidence to convict them much to the regret of Rushton who was convinced of their guilt. He added with dismay that the

⁴⁶ Liverpool Mercury, 18 October 1853.

case "afforded an instance of the consequences of profligacy and folly".⁴⁷

James O'Brien, an Irish sailor, sought to make his own satisfaction for a robbery committed against him in Elizabeth Callahan's house of ill-fame in Spitalfields. In the early hours of one June morning in 1863 O'Brien had met a prostitute named Mary Ann Mathers in Lime Street. After treating her to a glass of wine in a public house, he accompanied Mathers back to Elizabeth Callahan's and the two went to bed together. When O'Brien awoke the next morning he discovered that five pounds had been taken from his the pockets of his trousers. Mathers went with O'Brien to the police station where he reported the robbery. On leaving the station O'Brien vowed: "If I don't get satisfaction, I will have revenge; I will have short work of it." Testifying before the Coroner's court, Mathers, who described herself as 'an unfortunate woman', explained that she had lived with Elizabeth Callahan on and off for five years. She admitted that on the night in question, she had waited for O'Brien to fall asleep and had then joined Callahan and a couple of other women for a drink downstairs. She suspected that these two women, who were strangers to her, committed the robbery in the time she was away from O'Brien. O'Brien, however, was convinced that Elizabeth Callahan was the culprit and having

⁴⁷ Liverpool Mercury, 19 April 1850.

purchased a knife from a shop in Dale Street he returned, against the wishes of Mathers, to Spitafields where he fatally stabbed Callahan.⁴⁸

The death of Elizabeth Callahan serves as an important reminder that, despite the financial benefits of the trade, prostitutes were exposed to considerable physical dangers. Their clients might have been ready targets while they slept, but awake they could be violent and abusive. Out on the streets, prostitutes were themselves easy prey. Ellen Burns was viciously assaulted by two seamen, John Manole and Joseph Colt, when she refused to have anything to do with them. Manole and Colt kicked Burns and then slashed her across her cheek inflicting a wound which left Burns permanently disfigured. In sentencing Manole and Colt to six months' imprisonment with hard labour, Mr. Mansfield described the crime as a "most cowardly attack" and insisted that though Burns was "an unfortunate girl" she was nonetheless entitled to society's protection "as long as she offended no one".⁴⁹ Mr. Mansfield's comments left unanswered the question of what, if any, protection Burns might have expected had she decided to go with the two seamen.

Without the testimonies of the prostitutes themselves, the deliberations women made when deciding to enter into prostitution can only be guessed at. How did they weigh the serious disadvantages of the profession--venereal disease, physical abuse, police harassment and the constant threat of pregnancy--against the appeal of the material gains

⁴⁸ Liverpool Mail, 27 June 1863; Liverpool Daily Courier, 23 June 1863.

⁴⁹ Liverpool Mercury, 10 March 1859.

of the trade. The evidence does suggest that prostitution was most often a temporary occupation for the women involved. Of the 170 prostitutes in the Liverpool Borough Prison on census night in 1871, 112 were between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine. The vast majority of the prostitutes were unmarried, though twelve of these prisoners had once been married but were now widowed. While prostitution was primarily a trade engaged in by young single women, there were forty-three prostitutes in the prison who were over the age of thirty, twelve of whom were older than thirty-five. Twenty-five of the prostitutes in prison on that night were married.⁵⁰ Given the commercial environment of Liverpool it seems appropriate to emphasise, as Father Nugent did, that prostitution was an economic choice dictated by extreme need. Indeed, in a city that offered so few employment opportunities even married women could be drawn into the trade.

As Nugent detailed in his testimony a prostitute's standard of living was perceptibly higher than that of other working women in Liverpool. From the profits of their work prostitutes were able to move away from the overcrowded homes of their families into lodging houses where they might occupy of room of their own.⁵¹ Further, most prostitutes lived beyond the patriarchal authority of fathers or husbands. The majority of lodging houses where prostitutes lived were kept by women. Police statistics for the period from 1866 to 1882

⁵⁰ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of England and Wales, 1871. RG 10 3835: Walton.

⁵¹ See C. Stansell, City of Women, p. 190.

reveal that women kept almost ninety per cent of the brothels known to the police and that this figure increased steadily over the period, peaking at ninety-eight per cent in 1880.⁵² The 1851 census furnishes a few examples of lodging houses with residents who identified themselves as prostitutes. Ann Rogers, a single woman, kept a lodging house on Pall Mall. Three of her lodgers were prostitutes all of whom were under the age of twenty-five. Two of the women described themselves as married although they did not appear to live with their husbands. There were, however, two seamen visiting the house on census night. Also in residence was Mary Williams, a general servant, and her infant daughter. Ann Mulvey also kept a lodging house on Pall Mall. She had five single prostitutes living with her, ranging in age from twenty-one to twenty-five years. Mulvey's general servant was a forty-five year old Irish woman. These two Pall Mall brothels were located on a street where there were many lodging houses most of which reported no prostitutes in residence.⁵³ As Judith Walkowitz has noted, in Victorian cities prostitutes lived among the very poor but in different financial and familial conditions and thus formed a distinct female subculture.⁵⁴

Although relationships among prostitutes have often been represented sympathetically by historians, as with other households in

⁵² L.R.O., Annual Police Returns, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1868-1882.

⁵³ Enumerators' Notebooks, Census of Great Britain, 1851. HO 107 2179.3.4: St. Paul's and Exchange.

⁵⁴ J. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, p. 197.

the poor districts of Liverpool, life inside a brothel could be at once supportive and menacing.⁵⁵ Evidence presented at the trial of Mary Ann Sullivan, a prostitute charged with the wilful murder of Margaret Cross, provides a vivid illustration of both the affection and animosity which might exist within a community of prostitutes. Joseph McNamay and his wife, Ann, kept a brothel in Comus Place. On Christmas Day 1859 the McNamays celebrated their baby's christening with the residents of the brothel including Margaret Cross and Mary Ann Sullivan. Martha Davies who also lived in the house testified that she did not join the others in drink having just recovered from a "bed of sickness". Davies remembered that Margaret Cross was drunk when she left the party to return a bonnet she had borrowed from another girl. She came back a few hours later sporting a swollen eye and a bloody lip. Davies swore that she and Sullivan had undressed a drunken Cross and taken her up to bed. A few minutes later, while Davies and her friends were singing, they heard Cross' moans. After investigating they found Cross lying at the bottom of the garret stairs. Davies' version of events was repeated by the accused herself who had lived in the McNamays' brothel for eleven weeks. Julia Ward, identifying herself as an "inmate in Comus Place", told a markedly different story. She recalled that Cross had burst into a room where "several girls were sitting round the fire" and exclaimed that Mary Welsh had attacked her. She pleaded with Sullivan to assist her but Sullivan refused. Mary Ann

⁵⁵ Ibid., chapter ten.

McAvoy, a servant in the house, testified that Sullivan and Cross then began to fight, hurling insults at each other. Cross threw a candle stick at Sullivan who retaliated by grabbing her opponent by the hair and banging her head on the floor. With Cross down on the ground Sullivan kicked her about the head and the chest until Cross was dead. Having killed Cross, Sullivan was prevented from taking her own life by Julia Ward and Margaret Pagan. Mary Ann McAvoy testified that Sullivan and Cross had quarrelled in the past and that on a previous occasion Sullivan had said she "she would kill the deceased and then she would die happy". When Martha Davies was recalled she withdrew her original testimony and explained that she had lied in the first instance because the accused had threatened to beat her if she did not collaborate her story. At the Liverpool Spring Assizes in 1860 Mary Ann Sullivan was sentenced to a life of penal servitude for the wilful murder of Margaret Cross.⁵⁶

The information contained within the depositions of the above witnesses does not touch directly upon the relationship between Joseph McNamay and his lodgers. Although the fact that all the women in the house were invited to the baby's christening does suggest a somewhat friendly association it is not possible to comment upon the authority which McNamay may or may not have wielded over the women. More can be said, however, about the relationships among the prostitutes

⁵⁶ P.R.O., Chancery Lane, PL 27/15/2. Depositions of Martha Davies, Mary Ann Sullivan, Ann McNamay, Julia Ward, Mary Ann McAvoy, Margaret Pagan. Depositions taken 27 December 1859.

themselves. On the one hand the women spoke of enjoying a festive evening together. Reference was also made to connections which existed with prostitutes living outside the McNamays' like the woman who lent Cross her bonnet. These components of the story present a positive portrait of the female subculture of prostitutes. On the other hand there were violent tensions among the women which could have fatal consequences. The reliance of prostitutes on one another for practical support was no guarantee against conflict. In this respect relations among prostitutes were not unlike those among female neighbours in Liverpool's poor communities.

The relationship of prostitutes to their neighbours was similarly ambiguous. In Liverpool prostitutes lived in the same districts as casual labourers and their families as they were equally dependent on the commercial trade of the port for their livelihood. Contemporary commentators were shocked at the tolerance, even sympathy, which members of poor neighbourhoods displayed towards prostitutes. As was discussed in previous chapters, working-class people in Liverpool regulated their sexual lives in accordance with markedly different standards than those of the city's middle class. In this context prostitution was not necessarily regarded as an immoral practice but could be understood as a legitimate strategy adopted by women who might otherwise find it difficult to survive. In his 1850 study of Liverpool's working-class districts Abraham Hume commented that "one of the most painful facts to witness is the sympathy that the poor show for crime, and the apologetic expressions by which they refer to

immoral".⁵⁷ Hume noted with disgust that a prostitute, "the most wicked among the gentler sex", was referred to as an "unfortunate" girl. If she managed to "skin" a sailor, that is to "rob him not only of his money, but of every article of clothing", she was celebrated as a "clever" girl and the sailor's plight dismissed with "served him just right".⁵⁸ One of the practical consequences of this community acceptance was that prostitutes could often find shelter from arrest in the homes of their neighbours. At a meeting of Liverpool's magistrates in 1871 Mr. E. Whitley acknowledged the difficulties faced by the police in suppressing prostitution when making the following observation: "street walkers...were generally of the poorest class, and the moment any information was laid against them they would run away from one house to another, and there was really no means of catching hold of them again".⁵⁹

The toleration of prostitution within working-class districts was premised not just on relatively permissive sexual mores but also on a recognition of the economic contribution prostitutes made to the community. In a neighbourhood of casual labourers prostitutes were among the few groups of the population with a steady income and ready cash to spend. They attracted clientele for local businesses,

⁵⁷ A. Hume, Missions at Home: A Clergyman's Account of a Portion of the Town of Liverpool, p. 16.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ L.R.O., Magistrates' Court Records, Justices Sessions, Gaol and House of Correction, 26 January 1871.

particularly to beer shops and public houses. Further, more successful prostitutes were in a position to provide employment for other working women as charwomen and domestic servants. Children in the neighbourhood could earn much appreciated pennies running errands for the local prostitutes. In his testimony before a 1882 parliamentary committee, Commander Eaton spoke of the difficulty in preventing children from running "in and out of brothels" delivering messages.⁶⁰ Mary Corbally who grew up in the first decades of the twentieth century in a dockland area of Dublin remembered with great affection the charity prostitutes extended to other members of the community:

But the girls were very good, they were generous. They were very fond of the kids. If you went for a message for them you'd get thruppence or sixpence. If they seen a kid running around in his bare feet they'd bring him into Brett's and buy him a pair of runners[.]⁶¹

Despite their financial importance, the acceptance of prostitutes within working-class communities was far from universal. Legislators actively fostered the division between prostitutes and rest of the Victorian poor. As Judith Walkowitz has observed of the Contagious Diseases Acts: "they were used to clarify the relationship between the unrespectable and the respectable poor".⁶² Liverpool's local legislative initiatives to protect "honest" servants and clerks from being seduced

⁶⁰ Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Commander Eaton, q. 191, 1882.

⁶¹ K. Kearns, Dublin Tenement Life. An Oral History, p. 55.

⁶² J. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, p. 192.

by prostitutes in public places served to enforce the same separation. Other Liverpoolians tried themselves to limit their contact with prostitutes. In 1877 eighty-one residents from the neighbourhood of St. Anne Street complained to Head Constable Grieg of the disturbances caused by prostitutes in the area. One of the complainants, Dr. Taylor, explained that there were several prostitutes living in a small number of streets in the district. According to the doctor, these prostitutes left the neighbourhood in the evening to "ply their vocation" in Williamson Square. Returning around midnight, accompanied by sailors, they visited the local refreshment houses causing considerable annoyance to their neighbours.⁶³ Thus, while the drink sellers on St. Anne Street no doubt appreciated the business prostitutes brought to their establishments, other residents resented their presence on the street. Hugh Shimmin in his survey of the courts of Liverpool argued that poor people themselves defined their standards of respectability in relation to prostitution. In an effort to discern why some courts were "given up to prostitutes and their parasites" while others, of exactly the same construction, remained free from vice, Shimmin interviewed an "intelligent" Scotch woman, who explained that she and her neighbours, at considerable expense to themselves, deliberately shunned prostitutes :

In this court we are all trying to keep ourselves decent, and there are no prostitutes amongst us, and on this account we have to pay sixpence a week more for our houses. In other

⁶³ L.R.O., Reports of the Head Constable to the Watch Committee, 21 May 1877.

courts there are nothing but prostitutes and their followers, and we cannot sleep at night for their brawls and carryings on. We have to pay sixpence a week as a tax for trying to live decently.⁶⁴

A prostitute's loss of social standing among some members of the community may have been compensated for by the greater purchasing power she was able to exercise. For several commentators a prostitute's desire for the luxuries her income enabled her to enjoy was taken as evidence of her perverse narcissism and innate immorality. In a paper delivered in 1876 Reverend Ashton Wells asserted that young women wilfully embarked upon a criminal life as a consequence of a "love of dress and amusement".⁶⁵ Many prostitutes did dress better than other working women. Recall the story of Catherine Wilkinson who happened upon a fortune in gold coins. Among her first purchases were a new pair of boots and stays for herself, and a suit for her companion, John Wilkes. Few working-class people in Liverpool could afford such a shopping spree. As the researchers involved in a comprehensive study of prostitution at the beginning of the twentieth century suggested, Wilkinson was not necessarily driven by vanity:

It is probably the desire for good clothes and finery which above else makes the life of prostitution attractive to girls of the poorer classes...Every woman will admit if she be candid that in going about the streets she commands respect not by her good looks or her good manners, but by her clothes. The working-class girl knows this subconsciously,

⁶⁴ H. Shimmin, "What Mr. Stitt might see if he would" in J. Walton and A. Wilcox, Low Life and Moral Improvement in Mid-Victorian Liverpool, p. 197.

⁶⁵ Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science for 1876, p. 374.

her desire for good clothes is a desire for respect...It may seem strange that girls should be moved by self-respect to sell themselves. But the girl who sells herself for this reason exchanges an intangible chastity which commands little respect, for tangible clothes which do command respect.⁶⁶

Middle-class observers regarded a prostitute's dress with such disdain because she was a working-class woman endeavouring to command the admiration reserved for respectable Victorian ladies; it was her temerity rather than her vanity which they so despised.⁶⁷ Thus, despite the inherent dangers of the trade, prostitution was a means of self-support in a city where day to day survival was a constant battle. Further, as Christine Stansell has noted of New York, for working-class women in Victorian Liverpool prostitution was a way of bargaining with men in a situation where holding one's own in a heterosexual relationship was often difficult.⁶⁸

No middle-class commentator in Liverpool, least of all a Catholic priest, could represent the decision to become a prostitute as part of a working woman's search for relative autonomy and respect. However, by positioning his observations about prostitution within an awareness of the lack of formal employment for women in Liverpool, Father Nugent did fundamentally shift the debate away from a moral towards a material explanation for the trade. Nugent was not the only prominent Catholic

⁶⁶ Downward Paths: An Inquiry into the Causes which Contribute to the Making of the Prostitute, London, 1916, pp. 46-48.

⁶⁷ See M. Valverde, "The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth Century Discourse", pp. 169-188.

⁶⁸ C. Stansell, City of Women, p. 172.

to put forward such an analysis. Alderman Holmes' insistence that prostitution "proceeded from the inherent weakness of the human heart", was countered by a Catholic magistrate, Mr. Sheil, who argued that the level of prostitution in Liverpool was a reflection of its political economy. In the course of his remarks before a meeting of the city's magistrates in 1859, several years before Father Nugent assumed his position in the Liverpool prison, Sheil drew the conclusion that many women were "driven to prostitution by the pressure of circumstance, and by no evil inherent in their nature".⁶⁹ In April of that same year, an address written by Bishop Goss on "the social evil" was read before the parishioners of all the Catholic churches in Liverpool. Here, consistent with the dominant assumptions of the time, Goss acknowledged that a few women did "fall" into prostitution "through the silly vanity of luxury and amusement and the ordinate love of dress" and that a number, smaller still, "fell through lust or unruly desires". Yet he appealed to his listeners to look upon the city's prostitutes with sympathy emphasising that most women entered into the trade because they were poor. He offered this reminder: "indigence resulting from insufficient earnings helps to make women into prostitutes as it makes men into thieves".⁷⁰ To understand the reasons why these three spokespeople were so determined to have low wages and unemployment recognised as the primary causes of prostitution one must appreciate

⁶⁹ Liverpool Mercury, 8 March 1859.

⁷⁰ Liverpool Mercury, 4 April 1859.

the ethnic and religious character of the population of prostitutes in Liverpool and the challenges this posed to the Catholic church. These problems were particularly pressing for Nugent, as he was both a religious leader and a member of the criminal justice system.

In his paper delivered before the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, J.T. Danson confidently proclaimed of Liverpool: "Our prostitutes (as our criminals and paupers) are nearly all Irish; and by far the great part of our female crime is committed in palpable connexion with this sad 'social evil'."⁷¹ On the same occasion, Reverend Thomas Carter, the Anglican Chaplain of the Liverpool Borough Prison also commented on the disproportionately large number of Irish women committed to prison and claimed that most of these women were prostitutes.⁷² Reverend Campbell, the rector of Liverpool, had made similar assertions before a Select Committee on Poor Removal in 1854. He cited a police report which revealed the "unpleasant" fact that of the 1,123 prostitutes summarily punished for being disorderly in the streets in 1853, 295 were Liverpool-born and 497 were Irish.⁷³ Available police and prison statistics appear to confirm contemporary perceptions of the ethnicity of prostitutes in Liverpool. In 1872, several years after largest influx of Irish people

⁷¹ Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science for 1858, London, 1859, p. 367.

⁷² Ibid., p. 365.

⁷³ Select Committee on Poor Removal, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Rev. A. Campbell, q. 4 993, 1854.

into Liverpool, 1056 of the 3968 women apprehended for prostitution offences were Irish-born.⁷⁴ In his 1886 study, Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Liverpool, Frederick Lowndes endorsed these earlier claims insisting that Irish women "furnished the largest proportion of prostitutes" in the city.⁷⁵ The doctor also reiterated certain observations of Liverpool's Irish prostitutes which he had previously made in 1876 when arguing for the extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts to the port. In an attempt to demonstrate that Liverpool's prostitutes were just as depraved and just as in need of regulation as prostitutes in Devonport and Portsmouth, Lowndes drew attention to the condition of Irish prostitutes in the northern streets of the city, a district commonly referred to as 'Blackman's Alley'. According to Lowndes, the brothels in this area catered to the black seamen, stewards, and cooks who regularly landed in the port. By consorting with black men Irish prostitutes convinced Lowndes that they were "mere masses of rottenness and vehicles of disease".⁷⁶ Thus, it was the widespread belief that Irish prostitutes not only dominated the trade

⁷⁴ L.R.O., Annual Police Returns, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1872. In contrast to ethnic character of prostitution in Liverpool, Francis Finnegan notes that Irish women contributed very little York's trade. Further, she argues that despite prevalent anti-Irish prejudices in the city it was never suggested that Irish women were in any way responsible for the particular problem of prostitution. [F. Finnegan, Poverty and Prejudice. A Study of Irish Immigrants in York, 1840-1875, Cork, 1982, p. 134.]

⁷⁵ F.D. Lowndes, Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Liverpool, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁶ F.D. Lowndes, The Extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts to Liverpool, p. 31.

but that they represented the "lowest and most degraded" class of prostitutes in Liverpool. In this respect anxieties concerning the sexuality of Irish women in Liverpool were intensified by racist fears of black men.⁷⁷

Irish women were similarly positioned within New York city's prostitution trade. Of the 1238 women who responded to Dr. William Sanger's survey of prostitution in the city, 706 were Irish-born.⁷⁸ Interestingly, Liverpool figured prominently within Sanger's explanation for this striking statistic. Sanger imagined that the most virtuous girl having left a secluded village in Ireland succumbed to vicious influences before she even arrived in New York but while she waited for her ship to sail from the great seaports of Great Britain:

Take Liverpool, for instance, the port whence the largest number of emigrants come to us, and which contains one prostitute for every eighty-eight inhabitants, and the wonder will be, not that so many are contaminated but that so many escape.⁷⁹

In 1857 the Catholic Institute Magazine published an analogous portrait of the experiences of Irish girls and young women who arrived in Liverpool. In a piece entitled "The Outcasts of Society" the magazine accused Irish prostitutes already settled in the city of pulling new arrivals down to their own abominable level by exploiting the naivete and loneliness of their prey:

⁷⁷ See A. McClintock, Imperial Leather, for a discussion of the racialised representations of prostitutes in Victorian London.

⁷⁸ W. Sanger, The History of Prostitution, p. 460.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 461.

If a luckless girl comes over, without father or mother, and if she have no relation to meet upon landing, she will in all probability be accosted by some of these harpies who, pretending to have come from the same part of Ireland as the young stranger, will offer to procure for her safe and respectable lodging, and thus easily deceiving one so unaccustomed to travel, and so ignorant of the world, will soon succeed in plunging her into abyss of misery, from which, alas, there is seldom any escape.⁸⁰

Thus Liverpool was of pivotal significance in the way many observers constructed the life histories of Irish prostitutes throughout the diaspora.

The Catholic Institute Magazine began the discussion of prostitution by warning its readers that the subject was an especially "humiliating and painful" one for Catholics in England as so many of their female co-religionists were involved in the trade. And yet the authors thought it was a problem which required recognition by "all who love the Catholic church" and hoped that the publication of the piece would inspire a practical response.⁸¹

As the Catholic Chaplain of the Liverpool Borough Prison the prominence of Irish women among the population of prostitutes in the city was a particularly pressing concern for Father Nugent. Accordingly Nugent actively involved himself in developing and implementing remedies for the situation. On no occasion did Nugent deny the charge that Irish women constituted the majority of prostitutes in Liverpool. In his 1866 report Nugent acknowledged that of the 3551 female prisoners in the

⁸⁰ Catholic Institute Magazine, Vol. III, 2 (1857), p. 54.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 53.

jail 2253 were Catholic. Of these Catholic women, 1386, or almost sixty-two per cent were Irish-born.⁸² Ten years later, before a parliamentary select committee, Nugent estimated that eighty per cent of the women under his charge had either been born in Ireland or were the daughters of Irish parents, noting that by the late 1860s the latter had begun to outnumber the former. He commented on the fact that most of female committals were repeat offenders: "Their ages vary and they are mostly young, but they are constantly recommitted, so that whilst I have 5,000 cases of female committal during the year probably that number would represent only 700 individuals." He also observed that the women he attended to in the jail were committed primarily for disorderly behaviour in the streets which would most often mean for drunkenness and for prostitution.⁸³ In his report for 1872 Nugent conceded that of the 7794 females committed that year, 5334 had been Catholics. Nugent confessed that this statistic was personally humiliating to him and attributed the marked increase of the number of women under his care to a "vigorous system adopted by the police in checking 'street walking'" in an effort to clear the city of a "dangerous class of abandoned women".⁸⁴

⁸² L.R.O., Liverpool Borough Prison, Prison Minister's Report, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1866.

⁸³ Select Committee on Intemperance, Third Report, Minutes of Evidence, Fr. J. Nugent, qq. 8195- 8198, 1877.

⁸⁴ L.R.O., Liverpool Borough Prison, Prison Minister's Report, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1872.

Not only did Nugent not deny the connection of Irish Catholic women to prostitution in Liverpool, he did not even suggest that the police and the magistrates responsible for their prosecution might have discriminated against these women. Nor did he question the prejudices which might have been reflected in the observations of men like J.T. Danson or Reverend Carter. However Nugent was quick to distance himself from sectarian explanations for why so many Irish women turned to prostitution. Nugent, a fanatical teetotaler, repeatedly emphasised that much of the crime committed by Irish Catholic women stemmed from their propensity to drink:

...drink is frightfully on the increase in Liverpool among women, more especially amongst girls from fifteen to twenty years of age. If an ignorant girl once takes to drink and comes constantly to gaol, she soon casts off all sense of shame, becomes bold and defiant in vice, and abandons herself to every form of crime.⁸⁵

However, even as he chastised his female charges for their drunkenness, he also identified the material factors that induced them to adopt a life of crime always insisting that unemployment was the primary cause of prostitution: "these prisoners belong to a class who have no settled employment, who have to get bread as best they can, and who are dependent on casual labour".⁸⁶ Nugent described the specific pressures which pushed Irish women, as immigrants, into prostitution. Responding

⁸⁵ L.R.O., Liverpool Borough Prison, Prison Minister's Report, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1866.

⁸⁶ L.R.O., Magistrates Court Records, Justices Sessions, Gaol and House of Correction, The Roman Catholic Chaplain's Report, 26 October 1871.

to the charge that women arrived in England having been prostitutes in Ireland, Nugent replied:

A great number of Irish girls do drift on to the streets; they come to England, imagining that they have only to come to England, and there is bread for them directly; innocent girls come here expecting that they can get situations immediately; they have no money, no friends, and they fall into these houses but I find few girls indeed come over from Ireland who have been prostitutes in Ireland.⁸⁷

The previous chapters have explored the unique challenges Irish women confronted in trying to secure positions in Liverpool. Sectarian prejudices coupled with an unfamiliarity of the city compounded the difficulties all women faced when searching for steady employment. Thus Nugent recognised that it was their peculiarly vulnerable position within the port's economy which pushed such large numbers of Irish women into the prostitution trade.

Nugent did acknowledge another path that might lead an Irish woman into prostitution. He observed that a woman who conceived a child outside of marriage in Ireland faced the wrath of her home parish and was forced to emigrate to Liverpool. Upon arrival in the city a young Irish woman, unable to find employment, turned to prostitution. Nugent gave the following account of a "fallen" Irish woman's passage into prostitution:

...you perhaps know what we have to complain of, and what I have complained of to the bishops and clergy in Ireland; it is this, that in Ireland, if a girl falls, she cannot remain in a parish or district to which her parents belong...public

⁸⁷ Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Fr. J. Nugent, q. 110, 1882.

opinion is so strong against anything of that kind, and then the girl is forced out into the world; she comes to Liverpool; sometimes her seducer may give her a pound or two, and she comes to a strange country, nameless and friendless, and burdened with a child; then she leads a life of prostitution.⁸⁸

Interestingly, in the above description Nugent made a rare reference to the link between seduction and prostitution. However, he identified the intolerance of the Catholic church in Ireland as being as much to blame for the fate of these women as the act of seduction itself. Further, Nugent's anecdote was fundamentally different from the classic narratives of seduction. The traditional story told the tale of a young girl who, having been corrupted by the lecherous older man, became paralysed with guilt and shame. The loss of her chastity left her vulnerable to immoral temptations, and prostitution became her inevitable fate. Nugent, however, recounted the tale of a young woman pushed out of a religiously strict community for violating its rigid sexual standards. Her turn to prostitution was the consequence not of a weakened moral state, but the result of having been left with no material resources and few employment opportunities.

Just as in the cases of Frederick Lowndes and Josephine Butler, Father Nugent's representation of the causes of prostitution was designed to further a specific political agenda. By universalising male sexual desires and questioning the moral and physical health of the prostitutes who responded to those needs, Lowndes was able to promote the introduction of the Contagious Diseases Acts in Liverpool.

⁸⁸ Ibid. qq. 108-109.

Josephine Butler's challenge to that same legislation was supported by an analysis of prostitution as an expression of the sexual privileges and hypocrisy of Victorian gentlemen. Father Nugent's emphasis on the material factors which generated both a supply and a demand for prostitutes in Liverpool allowed him to acknowledge the prominence of Irish women within the trade while at the same time disputing sectarian explanations for that phenomenon.

Nugent's proposals for restricting prostitution in Liverpool were part of a broader religious and social project undertaken by the Catholic church in Liverpool during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The nature of this enterprise will be considered in extensive detail in the following two chapters. The overall dynamic of the Church's work among Liverpool's Irish residents is, however, evident in Father Nugent's relationship to the prostitutes who came under his charge. There was a willingness to recognise the social problems which were deemed to plague the Irish community while at the same time developing strategies and institutions which would both alleviate these difficulties and isolate the city's Catholics in a religiously exclusive culture.

The methods to be used to suppress prostitution and the possibilities of eradicating the trade were fiercely debated in Victorian Liverpool. The connection between prostitution and other forms of vice was commonly made. Many, like Father Nugent, identified the profusion of beer shops and public houses in Liverpool's working-class neighbourhoods as the greatest source of sinful behaviour. The

Liverpool Vigilance Committee, an anti-vice and pro-temperance organisation, exerted concerted pressure on the Watch Committee and the City Council to issue a strict directive for the police to rigorously prosecute publicans. Father Nugent, however, seems to have focused his energies on converting working-class Catholics to the benefits of temperance. Perhaps Nugent's most direct attack on what he considered to be the causes of prostitution in Liverpool was his involvement in a temperance campaign inspired by the earlier example of Father Mathew in Ireland. The campaign, the effort of a Catholic leader to provide a Catholic solution to a problem prevalent among Catholics in the city, began in 1872. Regular Monday meetings were attended by thousands of people. Branches were set up throughout the north end of Liverpool where most Irish Catholics lived. Every person who took the abstinence pledge would be visited regularly by local branch members creating networks of Catholic teetotalers.⁸⁹ Nugent extended his project into the prison itself. In 1872 he reported that he had begun to administer the total abstinence pledge and that between the months of March and September of that year 1219 prisoners--460 men and 759 women--had taken the pledge. Nugent estimated the sixty-five per cent of that number remained faithful to the promise they had made.⁹⁰ However, despite these

⁸⁹ See Nugent's testimony Select Committee on Intemperance, Third Report, Minutes of Evidence, 1877.

⁹⁰ L.R.O., Liverpool Borough Prison, Prison Minister's Report, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1872.

claims of success Nugent acknowledged that, as a strategy against prostitution, temperance was not wholly effective.

While Nugent was willing to concede the "humiliating" fact that the prison was overcrowded with Catholic women, he vowed to make every effort to combat the causes of crime through the intensive religious training of those under his supervision: "The basis of all reformation is religion, and this same divine power must influence those who have to deal with prisoners."⁹¹ Nugent was in no doubt as to the magnitude of the task he was undertaking. He complained that prostitution and drink were most prevalent among "young women, who are of a certain class who never go to church or chapel".⁹² Thus in addition to celebrating the numbers of those who took the pledge, Nugent also recorded the results of his efforts to bring religion into the lives of his prisoners:

I have regularly discharged my duties in the prison as laid down by the rules for my guidance, giving two services and sermons on Sundays, and special instruction each Wednesday morning. At Easter 67 men and 80 women received Holy Communion.⁹³

Nugent's commitment to religious training helps to explain why he consistently advocated longer prison sentences for prostitutes as a particularly effective method of restricting the trade. In the first instance he believed that if a young woman was forced to endure several

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ L.R.O., Liverpool Borough Prison, Prison Minister's Report, Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1876.

months' imprisonment then she would be reluctant to continue her life of prostitution:

...it is nothing for a girl to come to prison for less than 14 days, but when a girl under twenty gets a month or two months, or three months, if she gets it in the early stages, probably it is the last time she comes[.]⁹⁴

Nugent, however, was convinced that longer prison sentences would not only act as a deterrent to prostitution, but also provide an opportunity for him to lead Catholic women onto a religious path. Interestingly, Nugent believed that prostitutes could receive an appropriate religious education while in prison. In contrast, for many reformers, the rescue home was the most suitable location for the process of moral regeneration.

Nugent was certainly appreciative of the moral and practical benefits of the work done by institutions dedicated to the reclamation of prostitutes. Indeed, the Catholic church internationally had an extensive history of establishing refuges for women and girls. As Sherrill Cohen has observed, the various types of asylums created by the Church for women in early modern Europe, from refuges for convertite (prostitutes) to preventative conservatories for girls had an important long-term impact on Western societies. For example, in the late eighteenth century when the practically-oriented Anglican philanthropist, Jonas Hanway, founded the London Magdalene House, it

⁹⁴ Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Fr. J. Nugent, q. 128, 1882.

was to the earlier Catholic institutional models that he looked.⁹⁵ The laws regulating Liverpool's Female Penitentiary, established at a meeting of the Philanthropic Society in 1809, also reflected the central components of Catholic asylums. The institution was built to provide for the "prompt protection to those unfortunate women who shall be desirous to return to the Path of Virtue".⁹⁶ The home was to be staffed by Christian ladies who were responsible for the supervision of the inmates in their "religious instruction and the formation of moral and industrious habits".⁹⁷ The ultimate aim of the penitentiary was to retrain repentant prostitutes so that they might become respectable members of society. The work regime was rigorous with inmates employed at domestic work and in the laundry in an effort to "qualify them for service". In addition to practical training inmates were subject to intense religious and moral instruction. Through this teaching it was hoped that former prostitutes would abandon more subversive notions of womanhood and embrace Victorian class and gender values. As Linda Mahood has insisted: "Magdalene homes were not apolitical institutions, but deliberate agencies for remaking working-

⁹⁵ S. Cohen, The Evolution of Women's Asylums since 1500. From Refuges for Ex-Prostitutes to Shelters for Battered Women, Oxford, 1992, p. 127.

⁹⁶ L.R.O., Liverpool Female Penitentiary, Minute Book, 22 December 1809.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

class culture."⁹⁸ Cases which were celebrated in the annual reports of the Liverpool Female Penitentiary clearly reflected this agenda:

It is especially encouraging to find those who have been inmates of the Penitentiary by their excellent conduct, reinstating themselves into society, and your Committee can report that during the year two women left their situation, which they had held for eighteen months each, to settle in homes of their own as the wives of respectable men--it is a cheering fact that in both instances their mistresses returned to the Penitentiary for successors to their places.⁹⁹

Despite such claims of success, significant numbers of penitents left the penitentiary before being adequately "reformed", a process which was deemed to take two years. Other women were dismissed from the home for defying the strict codes of behaviour demanded by the staff. For example, forty-three of the sixty-four inmates admitted in 1856 left the penitentiary before completing their term of residence.¹⁰⁰ Although women entered the penitentiary voluntarily by application to the Matron the language employed when they removed themselves from the home often gave the impression that they were serving a mandatory sentence. In March 1860 the Liverpool Mercury reported that Elizabeth Whittle and Eliza Rimmer had been brought before the magistrate charged with "absconding from the Penitentiary" carrying away clothing belonging to the institution as they went. The two had pawned the shawls they had worn while in the home. Both girls were sentenced to three months'

⁹⁸ L. Mahood, The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century, London, 1990, p. 118.

⁹⁹ L.R.O., Liverpool Female Penitentiary, Annual Report, 1876.

¹⁰⁰ L.R.O., Liverpool Female Penitentiary, Annual Reports, 1855-1877.

imprisonment, although, in effect their only crime was petty theft.¹⁰¹ Perhaps the confusion of the language used in this instance stemmed from the fact that women convicted for prostitution offenses were commonly referred to the refuge by prison officials upon the completion of their sentences.

Despite the sympathy Father Nugent might have had for the work of the Female Penitentiary he refused to direct women under his charge to the institution. Although the Penitentiary accepted applicants of all religious denominations and invited ministers from various Christian churches to lecture the penitents, Sunday services were reserved for clergymen from the Church of England.¹⁰² For this reason Nugent refused to consider the Penitentiary as an option for Catholic women. In 1870 he complained to the Liverpool magistrates that

...a large number of women have applied to me previous to their discharge from this prison to be sent to a refuge where they might change their lives and redeem their character. Some weeks I have had as many as six or eight applications--I have been totally unable to assist them, as there has been no vacancy in any Catholic institution.¹⁰³

Nugent was particularly frustrated with his inability to assist these women because he believed them to be "sincere in their desire to abandon a life of vice" into which they had fallen not through "wilful

¹⁰¹ Liverpool Mercury, 30 March 1860.

¹⁰² L.R.O., Liverpool Female Penitentiary, Minute Book, 22 December 1809.

¹⁰³ L.R.O., Magistrates' Court Records, Justices Sessions, Gaol and House of Correction, Letter from Father Nugent, 27 April 1870. My emphasis.

depravity" but "through bitter necessity". He feared that "without character, without food or shelter" many women would be forced to return to "their old haunts and habits" on their release from prison.¹⁰⁴ Despite the rather desperate condition of many Catholic female offenders Nugent refused to pursue any alternative in which they risked coming under the influence of other religious organisations.

When there were vacancies in the Catholic institution Nugent certainly took advantage of them. In 1858 the Good Shepherd Sisters arrived in Liverpool and established their first home on Netherfield Road, which was then on the outskirts of the city. After a short stay there they moved to Mason Street in Edge Hill. In the early 1860s the Sisters shifted to a larger location in Ford. The move was facilitated, in part, by Nugent who had helped raise £2,870 for the cause.¹⁰⁵ The Congregation of the Buon Pastore (Good Shepherd) had a history which stretched back into the seventeenth century. The order had been established to reclaim young girls who had been morally corrupted.¹⁰⁶ As the Catholic Weekly Times noted in 1870, nowhere was the work of the sisters more appreciated than in Liverpool where there were "so many thousands of lamentable objects of their compassion".¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ C. Bennett, Father Nugent of Liverpool, Liverpool, 1949, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰⁶ M. Gibson, Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860-1916, New Brunswick (N.J.), 1986, p. 72.

¹⁰⁷ Catholic Weekly Times, 23 April 1870.

In many respects the regime within the Good Shepherd Convent mirrored that of Liverpool's Female Penitentiary. Penitents obtained admission to the convent by recommendation from a priest, or a well-known Catholic. Some were forwarded from Protestant institutions when their religion was discovered. Once admitted to the Catholic institution these "unfortunates" were taught stern lessons on the value of modesty, obedience and industry. They wore grey uniforms and white caps, keeping their backs to any visitors to the home. During the long hours of labour in the convent's laundry a strict rule of silence was enforced among the penitents as this was considered to be most conducive to "good order and better work".¹⁰⁸ Proceeds from the laundry were lucrative enough to render the home virtually self-supporting. As the Catholic Weekly Times proudly observed, some of the laundry's most valued customers were the leading Protestant families of the neighbourhood.

Despite the significant similarities between Catholic and Protestant refuges, there were fundamental differences as well. The rigorous religious education which the Good Shepherd Sisters administered was intended to transform the women under their charge into devout Catholics. While the moral distinction between the Christian ladies who operated the Female Penitentiary and the objects of their reclaiming efforts was crucial to the strategies pursued by the Female Penitentiary, in Catholic institutions the gulf between the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

agents and objects of reform was not only more pronounced, but religiously more significant. As Maria Luddy has observed of these refuges the "purest" women looked after the most "impure".¹⁰⁹ In celebrating the work of the Good Shepherd Sisters among the prostitutes of Liverpool the Catholic Weekly Times commented on the benefits which resulted from this relationship of opposites:

The world has little mercy on the outcasts itself has made, and were it not for the gentle interposition of the noble ladies--whose purity is enhanced and undefiled by contact with their fallen sisters--they would have little hope of help and comfort in this life, and no encouragement to look for divine forgiveness in the next.¹¹⁰

While the language used by the Catholic Weekly Times suggested a sisterly relationship, the indisputable authority which the nuns wielded over the penitents in the convent was more accurately described as parental. The harshness of the discipline exercised by the Good Shepherd Sisters induced some women to leave the institution prior to completing the recommended two years in residence. Maria Matthews and her child entered the Anglican-run House of Charity in London on 7 August 1850. Matthews, an Irish-born Catholic, had been found leading "a sinful life" in the streets of London, was brought to the home by a respectable gentleman. Given her occupational status the administrators determined that Matthews needed to be moved to a "more definitely

¹⁰⁹ M. Luddy, "Prostitution and Rescue Work in Nineteenth Century Ireland", in M. Luddy and C. Murphy (eds.) Women Surviving. Studies in Irish Women's History in the 19th and 20th centuries, Dublin, 1990, p. 69.

¹¹⁰ Catholic Weekly Times, 23 April 1870.

penitential establishment". On discovering that Matthews was Catholic, they transferred her to the Good Shepherd Convent in Hammersmith. A few days later Matthews returned to the Soho home claiming that the system within the convent was "too rigorous". Matthews vowed that if she was not readmitted into the House of Charity she would be forced to revert to her "sinful career". Eventually Matthews was induced to return to the convent, the nuns having promised to provide for her child's maintenance and education.¹¹¹

The nuns who operated the convent at Ford maintained that the majority of penitents were "thoroughly reformed" on leaving the home. At the same time, however, the Sisters complained that popular prejudices against former prostitutes "fixe[d] on them so indelibly" that it was extremely difficult to procure places for them despite their years of good conduct.¹¹² Similarly, although Father Nugent did refer many prisoners to the convent he also pursued alternatives which removed women from Liverpool to locations where their chances of finding suitable employment were significantly better. As he recorded in a report to the city's magistrates in April 1871:

During the last 1/2 year I have been enabled with assistance afforded by the Prisoner's Aid Society and other charitable help to send three of the Catholic female prisoners to Canada and to place 7 prostitutes in the Asylum of the Good Shepherd at Ford, to restore 3 other unfortunates to their friends in Ireland or other parts of England and place 2 others in service. A large number have likewise received temporary aid

¹¹¹ House of Charity, Case Book, 1847-1851.

¹¹² Catholic Weekly Times, 23 April 1870.

or have been assisted with a means of earning an honest living.¹¹³

Indeed, despite the concerted efforts of organisations like the Good Shepherd Sisters, and his own attempts to reform prostitutes within the prison, Nugent was sceptical about the future of former prostitutes who remained in Liverpool. Nugent's pessimism was once again connected to the material conditions which drew such large numbers of Irish women into prostitution to begin with:

I would wish to call attention to the helpless and hopeless condition of a large class of women, who each morning issue forth from the prison gates. Good resolutions may be formed, but how can these stand against the stern realities of life?¹¹⁴

Ultimately Nugent remained convinced that the effects of moral and religious reform could only be sustained if women were offered opportunities for 'respectable' employment. To this end Nugent recommended that the labour of Catholic women under his charge might be "utilised with profit to the country if they were transferred to manufacturing districts."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ L.R.O., Magistrates' Court Records, Justices Sessions, Gaol and House of Correction, Prison Minister's Report, 27 April 1871.

¹¹⁴ Select Committee on Intemperance, Third Report, Minutes of Evidence, Fr. J. Nugent, q. 8 214, 1877.

¹¹⁵ L.R.O., Liverpool Borough Prison, Prison Minister's Report, Liverpool City Proceedings, 1876. Paradoxically, commentators from the industrial north of England considered factory work to be among the principal causes of prostitution in the area. As J. Reade of Leeds explained:

I have been a member of the Committee of the Guardian Asylum for about twenty years, and I verily believe that nearly one-half of the unfortunate females who have been questioned by me were seduced by an intermixture of the

The various components of Nugent's approach towards tackling prostitution in Liverpool are vividly illustrated by the following account of one of his success stories in the Liverpool prison. On first encountering this particular young woman he found her more like an animal than a human being. But he challenged her ferocity with kind and gentle words and she soon began to respond allowing Nugent to set about saving her from ruin:

I found this girl did not know of the existence of God, could not say a prayer, did not know a letter in the alphabet. I promised her that if she behaved herself she would at once be placed under instruction, would be taught her prayers, and learn to read and write. Fortunately she was under a long sentence. She learned to read and write, was instructed in her religion, and became most exemplary in her conduct. She was placed in the laundry, where she proved herself useful and industrious. I saw that she was a girl of great character and firmness, and if the opportunity was afforded she would prove herself a good and useful woman. At the expiration of her sentence I provided her with an outfit, and found the means for her to leave the country. She is now doing well in Canada. I saw her there in 1879 holding a most responsible situation[.]¹¹⁶

It was Nugent's conviction that to turn a woman permanently away from prostitution it was not only necessary to teach her the basics of writing, reading and religion, and to cleanse her of intemperate habits, but to place her in an environment which would provide her with stable employment alternatives.

sexes in the factories, and not a few cases where girls were seduced during working hours! [Quoted in W. Logan, An exposure from personal observation of Female Prostitution in London, Leeds, Rochdale and especially in the city of Glasgow Glasgow, 1843].

¹¹⁶ Cited in C. Bennett, Father Nugent of Liverpool, p. 48.

From the evidence used for this chapter, there is no way of knowing whether the experiences of prostitutes in Liverpool were significantly marked by their religion and ethnicity. Certainly, Irish women were economically more vulnerable than other women in Liverpool and therefore more likely to enter into prostitution. However, this was a difference in degree rather than kind. Yet it is possible to speculate that the practical effects of the distinctive Catholic construction of prostitution did distinguish the experience of Irish Catholic women once they became the objects of the reform strategies. Not only did they receive a distinctly Catholic education, some, like the young woman described above, were also given free passage to Canada and a job once they got there. Further, if this woman was aware of the total package on offer when she approached Father Nugent it might shed a rather different light on the remarkably quick transformation of the young girl savage into the pious respectable woman. Further, whereas the agenda of Father Nugent is undeniable, it is possible to suggest that Irish Catholic prostitutes in the Borough Prison were more than just acted upon and that they were able to extract tangible benefits for themselves while at the same time apparently conforming to the priorities of church leaders. It is to the particular dynamics in the relationship between Irish Catholics and the church in Liverpool that the next two chapters turn.

Chapter Six

Irish Catholics and the Church in Liverpool

This chapter explores the place of the Catholic church within the poor Irish neighbourhoods of Victorian Liverpool and considers the nature of Catholic identity in the city. In 1870 there were 138,000 Catholics in Liverpool, roughly 114,000 of whom were Irish-born or the children of Irish parents.¹ The sheer size of the Irish Catholic population provided the impetus for the rapid growth of the church in Liverpool. Between 1846 and 1870 the number of parishes in Liverpool rose from six to eighteen, and the number of priests in the city increased from twenty-one to sixty-four.² Though the influx of Irish-Catholic immigrants into Liverpool afforded the basis for this massive expansion, it posed some serious challenges for the church as well. The strategies developed by the church to bring Irish Catholics under its influence in Liverpool and the response of these immigrants and their families to the interventions of religious leaders in daily life are discussed below.

In his reader, The Irish Diaspora, Donald Akenson charges that Irish Protestants have, too often, been ignored by British historians. While he concedes that the lack of reliable evidence makes it difficult to accurately calculate the percentage of Protestants among the Irish-

¹ Lowe, The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire, p. 114.

² Ibid., p. 113.

born in England, he suggests that researchers have been methodologically lax in conflating the categories of "Irish" and "Catholic" in their work.³ In this study an attempt is made to escape Akenson's censure not through sophisticated statistical analysis, but through a specific examination of how the church attempted to reach those immigrants who were Catholic. It was in the course of this ideological project, which emphasised the historic connections between Ireland and Catholicism, that a religiously exclusive Irish identity in Liverpool was promoted. Recall that in the context of public debates concerning poverty and crime, the Protestant press of Liverpool, for the purposes of mobilising sectarian sentiments, often represented "Catholic" and "Irish" as synonymous. Similarly, Liverpool's Catholic leaders attempted to mobilise the national pride of their Irish co-religionists to further the political interests of the church in England. How Irish Catholics in Liverpool responded to the church's efforts and how they interpreted and expressed their religious and ethnic identities is examined throughout this chapter. The next chapter focuses on the centrality of gender relationships to the church's project. Both chapters suggest that questions of identity are poorly answered if treated as exclusively statistical problems.

The majority of English Catholics in Liverpool differed from Irish Catholics not only in terms of ethnic origins and socio-economic status, but also in respect to their standards of religious observance.

³ D. Akenson, Irish Diaspora, p. 191.

The relatively wealthy English Catholic minority in Liverpool had deep roots in the city and traditions of rigorous religious practice. Of the Catholics who arrived in Liverpool during the late 1840s and early 1850s, a great many, coming as they did from the poorest classes of agricultural labourers in Ireland, brought with them customs and superstitions which did not conform to the standards of strict religious observance then demanded by the clergy both in Ireland and in England. In Ireland a revival of religious commitment among Catholics was fundamentally linked to the social and economic changes consequent upon the Famine. Although Catholicism had begun to contest the strength of popular religion among the rural poor of Ireland before the Famine, widespread improvements in devotional practice were secured in the second-half of the nineteenth century. The militant, austere and deeply pious brand of Catholicism which came to dominate the Irish church was closely associated with the concerns and interests of middling farmers, who emerged as the most powerful class in Ireland following the Famine.⁴ While the devotional revolution in Ireland was grounded on a rural social structure, church leaders in Liverpool characterised the problems they faced in moulding Irish immigrants into devout and disciplined Catholics as fundamentally urban. The Catholic Chaplain of the Liverpool Borough Prison, Father Nugent, insisted that the material conditions in which the city's Irish Catholics lived

⁴ See E. Larkin, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-1875" American Historical Review 77, (1972), pp. 625-652. See also S. Connolly, Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, New York, 1982; and L. Hollen Lees, Exiles of Erin, ch. 7.

undermined their efforts to conduct themselves in accordance with a rigorous religious or moral code:

Many of them [inmates under Nugent's charge] are from the lowest quarters of the town, from densely populated localities, where a number of families are crowded together in courts, and often where several families are huddled together in the same house. In such an atmosphere self-respect, morality, and the sacredness of family life are soon destroyed.⁵

It was Nugent's belief that had these same people remained in the Irish countryside they would have been "religious, simple, warmhearted and generous".⁶ The natural virtues of the Irish people, could not, however, withstand the corrupting influences of a bustling port:

Transplant them from the pure and innocent pursuits of country life to the atmosphere of a busy overcrowded city, and you blight the freshness of the virtues, remove wholesome restraint of pastoral care and abandon an otherwise religious people to the influence of neglect, indifference, and unbelief; and though they may still cling to their faith, they may soon begin to neglect its practice.⁷

In 1872 Hugh Henrick, a staunchly nationalist writer, concurred with Nugent's observations. He listed the loss of faith among Irish immigrants as yet another crime for which British domination of Ireland was to blame:

But in Liverpool more perhaps than elsewhere in England, vast numbers of our people have sunk into a condition of misery and vice. Much of that is due to intemperance; but the main

⁵ L.R.O., Magistrates' Court Records, Justices Sessions, Gaol and House of Correction, The Roman Catholic Chaplain's Report, 26 October 1871.

⁶ Liverpool Mercury, 18 March 1867.

⁷ Ibid.

cause is the withdrawal of the restraining power of home influence--the direct result of foreign rule in Ireland.⁸

The visitation sermons delivered by Bishop Goss furnish a catalogue of the deleterious habits of Irish Catholics in Liverpool which church leaders were determined to eradicate. In the first instance, the church attempted to quell certain popular traditions which immigrants had imported from Ireland. For example, in February 1865, before the mainly Irish parishioners of St. Anthony's church on Scotland Road, Bishop Goss denounced those who participated in wakes.⁹ Wakes were condemned not only as occasions for excessive merriment and drunkenness but also as an irreverent challenge to the authority of the church in one of life's more sacred moments--death. Unlike other popular religious celebrations, the wake was not tied to an agricultural calendar which, as Brian Clarke has noted, made it more resilient to the disruptions of immigration.¹⁰ The efforts of Catholic leaders to prohibit wakes as excuses for "riot and disorder and unchristian behaviour", were appreciated by Liverpool's law enforcers. In sentencing Henry Johnson to two months imprisonment in 1859 for stabbing John Gregory at a wake on Haley Street, Mr. Mansfield

⁸ H. Henrick, The Irish in England, Liverpool, 1872, p. 18.

⁹ L.C.A., RCLv, Bishop Goss' Visitation Diaries, 5 February 1865.

¹⁰ B. Clarke, Piety and Nationalism: Lay Voluntary Associations and the Creation of an Irish-Catholic Community in Toronto, 1850-1895, Toronto, 1993, p.47. For a traveller's description of a Munster wake in the early 1840s see D. O Muirithe, A Seat Behind the Coachman, pp. 59-60.

chastised Irish families who ignored the advice of the Catholic clergy by attending wakes when they "ought to be impressed with more serious and religious thoughts--a dead person lying in the house".¹¹

Drink and the sins which accompanied it were the most common objects of Bishop Goss' censure. In June 1867, the Catholic men and women of the Eldon Street church were warned that drunkenness would inevitably result in the "neglect of their parental duties, the murders of their children by overlying, quarrels and brawls".¹² Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Westminster during the last quarter of the century, believed that drunkenness among Irish Catholics in England and Scotland was the principal cause of their drifting away from the church. He insisted that among poorer parishioners drunkenness was responsible for "far more than half their poverty and misery, and nearly all their crime and neglect of religion and its duties".¹³ In Liverpool Bishop Goss was particularly concerned about the condition of Catholics in St. Anthony's parish whose drinking habits frequently brought them into police courts. The faith of those who were then confined to jail or industrial school was imperiled by the restrictions placed on priests in such institutions where "bigotry still

¹¹ Liverpool Mercury, 3 March 1859.

¹² L.C.A., RCLv, Bishop Goss' Visitation Sermons, 20 June 1867.

¹³ E. Purcell, Life of Cardinal Manning, Vol. II, London, 1896, pp. 591-592.

flourished".¹⁴ Goss identified other "Protestant" influences which were to be resisted by Catholics in Liverpool. Those present at St. Joseph's church on 22 January 1865, were instructed not to marry Protestants. Further they were not to allow scripture readers into their homes.¹⁵

While Goss directed his various audiences to resist Protestant influences, he also encouraged them to conscientiously attend to their own religious duties. Goss was particularly concerned that the religious allegiance of young Catholics be secured. Parents were ordered to ensure that their children regularly attended mass, be registered at Catholic schools, and be presented for confirmation.¹⁶ Adults were also told to go to mass every Sunday, although Goss was not satisfied with those parishioners who attended an afternoon or evening mass when no sermon was heard. The Bishop assumed that such undisciplined men and women chose to go to a later service so that they might "lie in bed till a late hour and then have time for amusement and dissipation".¹⁷ Poor Catholics were also urged to express their commitment to the church by donating generously to diocesan and parish collections. As Thomas Burke noted in his 1920 history, the building of Catholic schools and churches in Liverpool during the second half of the nineteenth century was funded primarily through the "pennies of the

¹⁴ L.C.A., RCLv, Bishop Goss' Visitation Sermons, 5 February 1865.

¹⁵ Ibid., 22 January 1865.

¹⁶ Ibid., 5 February 1865.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12 June 1864.

poor".¹⁸ While Burke celebrated how nobly the poor had responded to this financial responsibility, Bishop Goss' visitation sermons provide examples of the rather belligerent fund raising tactics employed by church leaders. In 1864 Goss scolded the parishioners of St. Alban's church, located in the heart of the north-end docklands, for not giving more generously. He went to some trouble to calculate that on average each person who attended mass at the church gave less than 1/4d. to the 1863 diocesan collection. This figure caused Goss to question whether parishioners of St. Albans church believed in earnest that "God would repay a hundred fold" for if they did they would surely not be content with "so paltry a contribution for such great objects as the training of priests, the maintenance of poor schools and the erection of new Churches".¹⁹

Finally the church urged its parishioners to adopt conservative social values. For example, in 1867 at St. Patrick's church, Goss ranted against the injustices of labour militancy.²⁰ Thus the church promoted a particular Catholic identity among its Irish parishioners. To be a good Catholic was to be religiously devout, socially respectable and politically moderate. However, while Bishop Goss' sermons provided a framework of the church's intentions towards Irish Catholics in Liverpool, the success of this project of religious

¹⁸ T. Burke, Catholic History of Liverpool, Liverpool, 1910, p. 123.

¹⁹ L.C.A., RCLv, Bishop Goss' Visitation Sermons, 12 June 1864.

²⁰ Ibid., 9 June 1867.

regeneration and social reformation rested largely on the efforts of local priests.

Parish priests were to play a central role in the church's efforts to reach Irish Catholics. Unlike most places in the north of England, the church in Liverpool employed a large number of Irish priests with the hope that their parishioners might be more favourably disposed to the instructions of a fellow countryman.²¹ As Pat O'Mara remembered it in 1934, this strategy had some success in Liverpool. Father Twomey, a priest in St. Vincent's church, was admired by his parishioners because he expressed as much passion caring for them as he did loving Ireland and hating the English.²²

The first responsibility of priests in Liverpool was to promote religious conformity among their parishioners by carefully monitoring attendance at mass and registration of children at Catholic schools. In 1877 Mr. Hawkes, a Unitarian missionary working in the north end of Liverpool, expressed his admiration for the success enjoyed by priests in drawing poor Irish Catholics to churches in the district:

The priests are indefatigable in their efforts to secure attendance, and have so great a leverage arising out of the doctrinal importance of being present at mass, they succeed very largely. I am struck with admiration, and a half envious feeling, when I see the troops of barefooted, ragged folks-- women wearing shawls over their heads, men in their working

²¹ Lowe, Irish in Lancashire, p. 122.

²² P. O'Mara, Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy, p. 50.

clothes, boys and girls, mixed with better to do people flocking to service.²³

The absence of a parishioner from mass one Sunday would be answered by a visit from the priest in the course of the following week. The system of weekly visitations provided the priest with an opportunity to extend his influence beyond issues of religious practice. Indeed it was his role in regulating the daily lives of poor Catholics in Liverpool which was celebrated by secular authorities in the city. Entering the homes of those in his district a priest gained an intimate knowledge of much that was going on around him. As Thomas Burke's uncle recalled of Irish-born Bernard O'Reilly who, from 1852 to 1873, was a priest at St. Vincent de Paul's church located in the south dockland area: "Father O'Reilly was able to tell not only the names of the parishioners who attended Sunday Mass but the number of days each dock labourer had secured work, their earnings, their wants and failings".²⁴ The authors of "Squalid Liverpool", who were guided through the streets and courts of the city's slums by a number of Catholic priests, were impressed by the ability of these men to extend their moral influence down to the "lowest depth of squalid Liverpool":

He will enter a wretched little room, and, addressing the inmate by name--for he had a wonderful knack of remembering these hunger-pinched faces--will say, "Now, Mrs. Murphy, how often have I told you not to have that bucket of dirty clothes steaming in your room? Put it out at once." To another he will say, "Pat, why are you not at work this

²³ L.R.O., North End Domestic Mission, Nineteenth Annual Report (1877).

²⁴ T. Burke, Catholic History of Liverpool, p. 127.

morning? Don't let me find you idling again." It is his business to preach and enforce cleanliness, industry and sobriety upon his parishioners quite as much as abstract matters of faith.²⁵

As the above description suggests, the intrusion of a parish priest into the domestic sphere had particular implications for Catholic women. The relationship between priests, as religious leaders and agents of social control, and female parishioners in Liverpool will be explored in extensive detail in the following chapter. For the purposes of this discussion it is important to note that priests appeared to exercise considerable authority within the port's Catholic community. Indeed, it was widely held that the priest was the most effective power for the imposition of the laws and moral standards of Liverpool's respectable classes on Irish immigrants. As a number of the city's magistrates said of Father Roche, priest at the Holy Cross church, he was worth "twenty constables in the district".²⁶

Steven Fielding argues in his study of Irish-Catholic identity in Manchester that, despite their reputation, priests were neither omnipotent nor omnipresent.²⁷ Priests in the poor, predominantly Irish, parishes in Liverpool worked under the burden of inadequate resources. Bishop Goss, offered words of sympathy and praise to Rev. Rower of St. Anthony's when the priest threatened to resign:

²⁵ "Squalid Liverpool", reprinted from the Liverpool Daily Post, 1883, p. 38.

²⁶ D. Murray, The Story of the Holy Cross Centenary, 1849-1949, Liverpool, 1948, p. 42.

²⁷ S. Fielding, Class and Ethnicity, Buckingham, 1993, p. 44.

I can well understand the depression which the heavy liabilities of St. Anthony's must cause to a zealous priest...I hear witness, as I heard it at the time of the visitation, that you have greatly improved the condition of the church both temporally and spiritually & I trust that you will persevere in the course.²⁸

Even the revered Father Nugent was, on occasion, resentful of the constant difficulties he confronted in his work among poor Irish Catholics in Liverpool. In a letter answering a variety of charges levelled against him by the city's justices, Nugent wrote rather defensively that he had sacrificed financial security and social standing only to be "tied down to the daily routine and depressing atmosphere of prison life". Nugent noted as well that he spent most of his time outside the prison in the lower parts of the town "labouring to deliver the working classes from the slavery of drink" hoping to "educate them in the habits of self-control and self-devotion"; for his efforts he had earned little else but "influence with the people".²⁹ Working among poor Catholics in Liverpool could be more than just tiring and demoralising, priests were at considerable risk of contracting diseases from those under their care. The dangers confronted by priests in the course of their duties, particularly during the Famine years when so many Irish immigrants arrived in Liverpool already stricken with typhus and dysentery, elevated them to the status of martyrs in the eyes of many. In 1847 alone ten priests

²⁸ L.C.A., RCLv, Bishop Goss' Letter Books, Goss to Rev. Rower, 12 August 1865.

²⁹ L.R.O., Magistrates' Court Records, Justices Sessions, Gaol and House of Correction, Statement from J. Nugent, 27 January 1876.

died from illnesses they had caught while administering religious rights to Irish immigrants.³⁰ In his history, first published in 1910, Thomas Burke both chronicled and reinforced the reputation of Liverpool's priests which stemmed from their actions during the late 1840s and early 1850s:

They lay at nights on chairs and sofas in their clothes, awaiting the sick calls which never failed to come, fearful lest the time spent in dressing might mean the loss of the Sacraments to some poor wretch lying in his dismal hovel. To the townspeople such heroism conveyed the reason why Catholics revered the office of the priest; for Catholics it knit fresh bonds between them and the clergy.³¹

Priests who confronted similar risks in the 1880s were honoured in the pages of "Squalid Liverpool". While the investigators admitted to some discomfort with Catholic doctrine, they could not help but be impressed with these "fearless men".³²

The saintly image of Liverpool's priests, won as their bodies succumbed to disease, was diligently guarded by Catholic leaders. As the correspondence of Bishops Goss and O'Reilly reveal, priests were subject to a variety of human failings; their earthly transgressions being carefully monitored and managed so as not to jeopardise their standing among Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

When several people complained to Bishop Goss that, on a November night in 1856, they had observed Father Newisham of St. Anthony's church

³⁰ F. Neal, Sectarian Violence, p. 94.

³¹ T. Burke, Catholic History of Liverpool, p. 87.

³² "Squalid Liverpool", p. 36.

under the influence of drink, Goss was as much concerned by the fact that Newisham's bad behaviour had been witnessed as he was by the priest's drunkenness itself. In a letter to the offending priest Goss scolded: "They were not more than two or three yards, at times, distant from you and they heard persons remark as you stumbled along--What a sight! That's a Catholic priest. He is going to fall."³³ In 1875 Bishop O'Reilly was called upon to mediate a dispute between two of the priests at St. Anthony's church on Scotland Road. Wexford-born Patrick Murphy, rector of the church, appealed for the Bishop's intervention when the performance of another priest, William Bradshaw, was brought into disrepute. Among the charges levelled against Bradshaw was the intimation that he was too familiar with the servants. A female servant complained that on entering Bradshaw's room he had "caught her hands in his, and afterwards tipped her under the chin". Other accusations came from the parishioners themselves who objected to Bradshaw's abrupt manner and lack of Christian generosity. One poor woman had come to Fathers Murphy and O'Reilly to inform them that Bradshaw's coldness had driven her to seek the services of Father Beggan from Our Lady on Eldon Street:

On last Sunday night she came with a sick call. Fr. Bradshaw went the next day "behaved outrageously" and told the sick man to get up and go to his chapel". On Thursday she handed him a sick note in the sacristy--he never spoke to her, he went that day "and was worse than before".

³³ L.C.A., RCLv, Bishop Goss' Letter Books, Letter from Goss to Canon Newisham, 28 January 1857.

What made the woman's story all the more worrying was that Father Bradshaw's sick visits had been witnessed by a Protestant man who remarked "that he never saw such conduct in a priest before". Father Murphy himself had been "scandalised" by the harshness with which Father Bradshaw answered calls from the poor of which there had been many during the "hard" days of 1874. Servants who had witnessed Bradshaw's behaviour had "cried at the way the poor have been treated, and in some instances they have given their own money".³⁴ In conclusion Murphy suggested to Bishop O'Reilly that Bradshaw's manner was so inappropriate as to threaten the success of the church's mission in such a poor parish.³⁵

William Bradshaw answered Murphy's charges with accusations of his own. He believed that Murphy's appeal to the Bishop had been motivated by self-interest.³⁶ The rector, in Bradshaw's opinion, had poisoned the minds of the servants against him. Knowing this Bradshaw had "sought to conciliate them [the servants] by trifling playfulness". Apparently these friendly gestures had been misinterpreted by impressionable staff members who, in an effort to please Father Murphy, had complained "without seeing or reflecting on the consequences of their impudence". Bradshaw added that Murphy himself was often "closeted for long

³⁴ L.C.A., RCLv, Correspondence 1850-1894, Letter from Father P. Murphy to Bishop O'Reilly, 14 January 1875.

³⁵ Ibid. (separate letter).

³⁶ Ibid., Letter from Father W. Bradshaw to Bishop O'Reilly, 31 March 1875.

periods" with the same servant who had impugned Bradshaw's character. Further, Bradshaw charged, Murphy was known to drink large amounts of whisky rendering him unfit for mass on such days. Bradshaw, somewhat snivelling in tone, even complained to the Bishop about Murphy's toilet habits. Indeed, Bradshaw's counter claims against Murphy had the character of a child pleading with a parent to side with him against a rival sibling.³⁷ O'Reilly, however, was apparently unimpressed by Bradshaw's protests, or perhaps he judged Murphy's charges to be of greater significance involving as they did parishioners and even a Protestant witness. Whatever his reasoning, O'Reilly decided to discipline Bradshaw, restricting both his duties and privileges in the church.

This correspondence is referred to not only to demonstrate the fallibility of priests despite their godly reputation, but also to introduce the role of Catholic parishioners in structuring their relationship with religious leaders. While priests certainly did exercise considerable authority within the Irish Catholic community in Liverpool, parishioners themselves helped to determine what was demanded from the clergy and they actively enforced those expectations. The complaints against Father Bradshaw were raised by parishioners who assumed that they would be treated with tenderness and generosity when they turned to a priest. When confronted with behaviour which failed to meet these standards they did not hesitate to complain or to go

³⁷ Ibid., Letter from Bradshaw to O'Reilly, 30 March 1875.

elsewhere. Raphael Samuel's study of the Catholic church in nineteenth-century London provides a vivid picture of the close relationship between a priest and his flock which could be realised within an Irish mission. The priest's role as religious leader earned him respect. If he executed his duties with kindness he could win the affection of his parish as well.³⁸ Many priests in Liverpool did become favoured members of the community. The funeral procession of Rev. John Dawson, who died of fever in 1887, was a mile long. Dawson, a native of Ireland, had worked for many years at St. Alban's church in Athol Street. He was known for the generosity he showed to the poor, particularly his "fellow countrymen". Interestingly, it was Dawson's willingness to offer material as well as spiritual support to his flock which brought him the most ardent admiration: "for those out of work he used all his influence to secure employment, feeling that in enabling them to obtain their daily bread he was performing a real work of mercy."³⁹ Indeed, a priest's status often reflected his willingness to offer assistance in the more secular aspects of neighbourhood life. In his 1934 autobiographical account of growing up in an Irish Catholic community in Liverpool, Pat O'Mara recalled an encounter between Father Wilson and Mrs. Sweeny, a money-lender, as she lay dying. A woman brave enough to borrow from the dreaded Mrs. Sweeny was forced to buy an amount of

³⁸ Samuel, "The Roman Catholic Church and the Irish Poor", in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds.), The Irish in the Victorian City, p. 275.

³⁹ Catholic Family Annual and Almanac for the Diocese of Liverpool, 1888.

putrid fish as interest. The debt, including the cost of the rotten fish, needed to be repaid by the next Saturday. Father Wilson refused to give Mrs. Sweeny absolution on her death-bed until she reimbursed her customers in full. Mrs. Sweeny was concerned enough about her eternal future to comply.⁴⁰ Mrs. Sweeny, like many Catholics, had conflicting feelings about her religion. On the one hand she did not let the church's strictures against money-lending prevent her from making a profit in this life; on the other hand she believed enough of the church's teachings not to jeopardise her standing in the next. The incident also reveals the way in which a priest's influence in the community rested on his willingness to intervene over such profane matters as rotting fish.

In his compelling study of the creation of an Irish Catholic community in nineteenth-century Toronto, Brian Clarke has argued that the most serious manifestation of lay independence was the willingness of Catholics to marry non-Catholics.⁴¹ The issue of mixed marriage forced the clergy to stretch church doctrine to fit individual circumstances. The attitude of Liverpool's Catholic hierarchy towards these marriages was clear. In 1868 the Holy See instructed the Bishops of England that a marriage between a Catholic and one who did not profess the Catholic faith was forbidden: "The Church has always reprobated mixed marriages and looked upon them as unlawful and

⁴⁰ O'Mara, The Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy, p. 66.

⁴¹ B. Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p. 51.

pernicious." However, the same letter conceded that on occasion dispensation for such marriages would be granted "for grave reasons" if necessary pledges were given by the parties involved; even still the union would cause the church "great grief". For mixed marriages to be recognised by the church the ceremonies had to be performed in the Catholic church. Non-Catholic parties had to promise that their spouse would be free to practise their religion. Catholic brides and grooms had to pledge their determination to convert their partners to the "true faith". Finally, and most importantly, both parties had to vow that children born of the marriage would be raised as Catholics.⁴² Thus the church was forced to recognise that mixed marriage would continue to occur with or without its consent. However, the above conditions allowed the church to accept these marriages while maintaining its influence, particularly on the lives of future generations. As Timothy O'Mahony, an auxiliary bishop in Toronto, explained to his superior: "I may secure all if the marriage take place; I am sure to lose all if it is not performed".⁴³ Perhaps similar reasoning informed Father Ryan's decision to marry Connaught-born Bridgett Hylands and Joe "Black" Diamond in Liverpool. As previous chapters have discussed, relationships between Irish women and men of other ethnic groups were not uncommon in Liverpool. Pat O'Mara remembered that while his devout relatives "abhorred the practice of intermarriage" they were compelled

⁴² Catholic Family Annual and Almanac for the Diocese of Liverpool, 1888.

⁴³ B. Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p. 51.

to keep their opinions to themselves, such unions being so prevalent. When Bridgett Hylands presented her new husband, Joe "Black" Diamond, to her father, Paddy, he reacted violently by tossing Joe out of his house. He proceeded to beg his daughter to throw herself into the Mersey insisting that given the circumstances the "Good Lord" would forgive this sin of suicide. Bridgett refused to follow her father's wishes. She left with her husband and shortly afterwards the couple moved to Cardiff and opened a boarding house. Before leaving Liverpool Bridgett confided to Mary O'Mara, Pat's mother, that Father Ryan had agreed to marry the mixed-race couple reasoning that, "If Joe's face is black, his heart is white!"⁴⁴ It was presumably Joe's "white heart" which fostered Father Ryan's confidence that Bridgett's offspring would not be lost to the church.

Marriages between Catholics did not always conform to the strict religious standards of the church. In such instances parish priests sought the advice and approval of their superiors in regards to the union. Unfortunately the boxes of correspondence of Liverpool's bishops from 1850 to 1894 do not always contain references as to how the Bishops responded to these procedural questions. However, the priests' enquiries do illustrate the willingness of the clergy to respond to dilemmas prompted by local circumstances. Ann McCoy, a parishioner of St. Alban's church, applied to Father Clarkson to marry her to a fellow Catholic, John Foley. McCoy approached her priest close to her

⁴⁴ P. O'Mara, Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy, pp. 11-12.

confinement hoping to be married before the baby's birth. McCoy had previously been married to a man named Charles Soo in St. Nicholas' Protestant church. McCoy's first marriage to a Chinese man reflected once again the richness of associations between ethnic groups in Liverpool. McCoy had three children with Soo. However, her husband had since left her and was apparently living in America. In his appeal to Bishop O'Reilly, Father Clarkson went to great lengths to demonstrate the illegitimacy of McCoy's first marriage. He emphasised McCoy's claims that Soo was "a real China man" although he had "cut off his ponytail before the marriage". McCoy insisted that her first husband had never been baptised and that he did not even believe in the existence of God. As they were living together in his district Clarkson wondered whether he might marry McCoy and Foley privately.⁴⁵ In 1890 Father Chambers of St. Mary's church on Highfield St brought to the attention of Bishop O'Reilly the circumstances of one Catholic couple in his parish. Mary Chandler and James Regan sought permission to be married in St. Francis' church during Lent without the publication of Banns. The couple wished to keep their marriage a secret because they had been living together with Regan's family for several years. They feared that their character would be destroyed if their unmarried state was discovered by their neighbours. Father Chambers was sympathetic to

⁴⁵ L.C.A., RCLv, Correspondence 1850-1894, Letter Father Clarkson to Bishop O'Reilly, 3 June 1890.

their plight proving himself to be more forgiving than some of his parishioners.⁴⁶

If the clergy's flexibility was an important tool for keeping Liverpool's Irish Catholics under the influence of the church so too was the ethnic identity of the city's priests. As Thomas Burke noted: "The common link of nationality enabled priests and people to work much more harmoniously than was possible with clergy of English birth".⁴⁷ However, church leaders did more than just invoke the birth-place of some of their members to appeal to Irish parishioners, they actively tried to imbue the identity of the Irish in Liverpool with a specifically Catholic meaning. Radical expressions of Irish nationalism, like Fenianism, were denounced as detrimental to the true cause of Ireland. "Secret societies are accursed of God", Dr. O'Brien warned the annual meeting of the Catholic Young Men's Society in 1861: "Irish safety is in the cross which Ireland has born with pride; and when the church holds it not forth on the path of Irish progress, be sure the traveller has lost his way, and the pitfall of ruin awaits him on the journey."⁴⁸ O'Brien urged members of the society to take pride and comfort in Ireland's affinity with other Catholic nations and to look to the Pope as the true defender of Ireland. At that same meeting

⁴⁶ Ibid., Letter from Father Chambers to Bishop O'Reilly, 1 March 1890.

⁴⁷ T. Burke, Catholic History of Liverpool, p. 236.

⁴⁸ L.R.O., Catholic Young Men's Society, Second General Conference Report, 1862.

there were delegates from the four branches of the Society in Liverpool representing almost one thousand members. The delegates were instructed to prohibit any political discussions within their groups. Instead the young men were encouraged to channel their energies into intellectual pursuits and religious devotion.

Father Nugent, whose parents were Irish-born, was a master at identifying with the cause of Irish nationalism while at the same time celebrating Catholicism as the salvation of the Irish people. His St. Patrick's day sermon of 1867 delivered at St. Anthony's church epitomised this talent. Addressing an "attentive" congregation of men and women belonging to the labouring classes "tidily and decently dressed", Nugent explained that while Ireland's poverty was, politically, an unmitigated evil, religiously, it had been a blessing. Without a doubt British imperial policy in Ireland had cruelly driven millions of people from the land of their birth. At the same time, however, these reluctant immigrants had "gone to evangelise the world". With specific reference to Liverpool Nugent noted that, in the course of just a few decades, the number of Catholics in the city had increased from a few hundred to no less than 150,000.⁴⁹ Despite the

⁴⁹ "St. Patrick's Day in the Churches", Liverpool Mercury, 18 March 1867. The significance of Irish immigration to the growth of the church in England was not always recognised. As Steven Fielding has argued, historical accounts of the mid-nineteenth century Catholic revival, or the "second spring", focused on the conversion of intellectual Anglicans, and the renewal of the faith of English-born Catholics rather than acknowledging the importance of the influx of their Irish co-religionists. [S. Fielding, Class and Ethnicity, pp. 40-41.] For example, an article published in the first edition of the Catholic Institute Magazine in 1855 made no

piety of Nugent's interpretation of Irish history, his references to British policy in Ireland were enough to infuriate one reader of the Liverpool Mercury who charged that the sermon had expressed sentiments which were "the very breath of sedition". Nugent's words were all the more dangerous spoken as they were at a time of Fenian unrest. The correspondent urged the priest to consider his influence and offered this reminder:

The Irish are a tractable race in the hands of those in whom they have confidence, and Englishmen have a right to expect that priests should not promulgate from the pulpit notions which are not merely false but mischievous in their tendency.⁵⁰

Contrary to the letter writer's opinion, however, Father Nugent played a restraining role within the Liverpool's Irish Catholic community. While he was consistent in his recognition of the causes of Irish nationalism, he was similarly committed to channelling nationalist sentiments into religious devotion rather than political radicalism. The national heroes celebrated by Nugent were invariably Catholics who sacrificed for their faith, not militants who were willing to die for their country. In 1874 at a meeting of the Liverpool Total Abstinence

mention of the Irish contribution to the Catholic revival in England. [Catholic Institute Magazine, Vol. 1, no. 1, 1855.] In the context of the national political debate the Catholic church emphasised its "Englishness" so that it might represent itself as the true church of the land. [L. Brady, T.P. O'Connor and the Liverpool Irish, London, 1983, p. 36.] On a local level, however, church leaders stressed the links between Catholicism and Ireland in an effort to appeal to their immigrant parishioners.

⁵⁰ Liverpool Mercury, 21 March 1867.

League Nugent honoured the religious fidelity of the Irish people by recalling the story of an Irish miner with whom he had become acquainted during a recent visit to the Isle of Man. This miner walked fourteen miles to attend the mass performed by Nugent. Following the service he trudged home so that he might convince his companions to accompany him back to the church to take the pledge. What other race of people, Nugent asked his Liverpool audience, was capable of such self-sacrificing devotion?⁵¹ Cardinal Manning, who set up the League of the Cross in London in the early 1870s just as Father Nugent began his temperance crusade in Liverpool, also used the national pride of his parishioners as a means of persuading them to refuse drink. Preaching on St. Patrick's Day at St. Patrick's church in Soho Manning urged his audience to take the pledge and to keep it "for the honour of God and the salvation of their souls; for the sake of their children and their homes; for the love and good name of Ireland".⁵²

Irish Catholics were continually advised that the most effective means of demonstrating national pride was through individual self-improvement. The temperance movement was the practical expression of this edict. In an effort to motivate Irish men and women to take the total abstinence pledge, Catholic leaders highlighted the opportunities which English society provided for those who could remain sober. A report of the 1875 opening of the League Hall in Liverpool celebrated

⁵¹ Catholic Weekly Times, 14 August 1874.

⁵² Quoted in E. Purcell, Life of Cardinal Manning, p. 601.

the new found respectability of those in attendance and emphasised the relationship between religion and temperance: "the hand-and-hand working of sobriety and the practice of our holy religion". The Earl of Denbigh, in his address, commented that "Irishmen, whose natural intelligence and genius fitted them to obtain and hold the highest positions, if only they kept sober".⁵³ According to this logic, the most effective means of challenging ethnic and religious prejudice was to conform to the dominant standards of respectability. At the same time the inclusion of these "respectable" values as an essential component of an Irish Catholic identity served to reinforce the otherness of the community.⁵⁴

The church's efforts to reform the social behaviour of Irish immigrants in Liverpool did to a large extent conform to prevailing middle-class attitudes towards the working class. However, the church's primary concern was to foster the growth of a 'respectable' Catholic working class which could be mobilised to further the political interests of the institution in Britain. In an 1870 lenten sermon entitled "The Church and the Working-Class" delivered at St Patrick's church to a congregation constituted largely of labourers and their families, Father Nugent clearly articulated this project. He offered

⁵³ Catholic Weekly Times, 15 January 1875.

⁵⁴ J. Belchem, "The Immigrant Alternative: Ethnic and Sectarian Mutuality among the Liverpool Irish during the Nineteenth Century", in O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts (eds.), The Duty of Discontent: Essays for Dorothy Thompson. See also S. Fielding, Class and Ethnicity, New York, 1995, p. 57.

this advice to his audience: "No human power can elevate the working classes until the working class are first taught their duty to God, to their family, and to society." This statement was followed by the insistence that a secular education system could never fulfil this task. Thus the cause of working-class amelioration was linked directly to the church's determination to maintain separate Catholic schools.⁵⁵ Steven Fielding has suggested that the church recognised parish schools as the most effective means of creating and maintaining a separate Catholic identity.⁵⁶ The schools were staffed by religious personnel, many of whom had little educational training. When it was established in 1864 the teachers at St. Peter's Boys School on Seel Street were all Irish Christian Brothers.⁵⁷ The school later became famous as Pat O'Mara's alma mater. Separate girls' schools were managed by nuns. Religious lessons which informed pupils of the history, rules, and innate superiority of their religion were given special prominence within the curriculum of Catholic schools. St. Joseph's school, which was attended by girls who lived in the parish lying on the east side of Scotland Road, was visited by the Marquis of Ripon and Monsignor Fisher in August 1878. In his address the Marquis counselled the students that education would be a crucial factor in assuring success in the future,

⁵⁵ "The Church and the Working Classes", Liverpool Mercury, 19 March 1870.

⁵⁶ S. Fielding, Class and Ethnicity, p. 61.

⁵⁷ L.R.O., St. Peter's Boys School, Log Book, 3 October 1864, Contained within the D'Andria Collection.

however, he added that a happy life could only be secured if they embraced their religion. "Religion", he concluded, "must crown all".⁵⁸ The importance of schools for this decree was reflected in the devotion priests displayed in ensuring that parents in their districts sent their children to the appropriate institution. A government inspector reported that during the course of one week in 1865 the attendance at St. Peter's school rose from 40 to 60 students owing to the priest visiting parents in the parish.⁵⁹

While the purpose of Catholic schools was clear, as with other aspects of the church's project, there were no guarantees of success. School officials continually complained of poor attendance among their pupils. A number of students at St. Peter's school, for example, determined that Fridays ought to be treated as holidays.⁶⁰ In 1869, following All Saints' Day, an official holiday, several St. Peter's boys convinced their parents that the whole week had been designated as vacation time.⁶¹ Teachers appreciated that material deprivation could affect a child's performance at school. Students registered at St. Peter's school, located in proximity to the southern docks, found it difficult to supply themselves with exercise and copy books.⁶² However,

⁵⁸ L.R.O., Bishop Goss Roman Catholic Primary School, Log Book. 31 August 1878.

⁵⁹ L.R.O., St. Peter's Boys School, Log Book, 9 January 1865.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 12 October 1869.

⁶¹ Ibid., 2 November 1869.

⁶² Ibid., August 1870.

teachers were less sympathetic to other manifestations of their pupils' poverty. The Christian Brothers of St. Peter's were convinced that the insubordinate behaviour so often displayed by the boys under their charge was a reflection of the depraved environment from which they came. The "rough lads" brought pipes and tobacco to the school so that they might enjoy a smoke by the fire. When parents complained of the practice one teacher countered with this charge: "If they [the parents] prevented their children running in the streets at night there would be less danger of their learning to smoke".⁶³ When a young boy was heard uttering a profanity, bad language no doubt learned at his mother's knee, it was suggested by one teacher that it was "impossible to find among the children of the poorer classes in Liverpool an innocent child".⁶⁴ In 1883 the staff of the school earned the "fullest sympathy and commendation" of one government inspector for their efforts to "civilise and elevate" the "rough lads" under their influence.⁶⁵

Memories recorded in Pat O'Mara's autobiography offer some hints as to how successful St. Peter's school was at shaping a uniquely Catholic identity among the boys of Seel Street. In pre-World War One Liverpool, O'Mara's tutors, whom he remembered being as English-trained, promoted a sense of "Britishness" among their students. While they refused to extend any praise to the English, they did encourage

⁶³ Ibid., 19 November 1869.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4 February 1870.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1883.

their predominantly Irish students to look upon the Welsh and the Scots as brothers and to sympathise with the cause of the British Empire.⁶⁶ At the same time, students received the emphatic instruction to defend the Catholic church above all else, no matter what their Protestant neighbours at St. Michael's school on Pitt Street might say. In the end, O'Mara recalled, it was in the company of his family that his school lessons confronted the most passionate challenge: "But we children at school, despite the intense religious atmosphere of the Catholic school, were rather patriotised and Britishised--until we got back to our shacks, where we were sternly Irishised."⁶⁷

Pat O'Mara's memories of the diverse influences shaping his boyhood identity point to the question of how successful the church was in compelling its adherents to comply with its institutional interests. As much of this chapter has suggested, Irish Catholics in Liverpool consistently challenged the authority of the church and refused to accept its teachings unconditionally. Thus, despite the concerted efforts of Catholic leaders to reform the social and religious habits of the Irish in Liverpool, they achieved only limited success. In 1877 Father Nugent was asked to testify before a parliamentary select committee investigating intemperance. Having worked to reform the drinking habits of Catholic Liverpoolians for many years Nugent presented himself as a qualified witness. One of the examiners asked

⁶⁶ P. O'Mara, Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy, pp. 74-75.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

Nugent whether the behaviour of the Catholic working-class, which now included the Liverpool-born offspring of the Famine Irish, had improved through the course of the 1860s and the 1870s. The witness responded with profound pessimism: "I think they have become more degraded. We have got a population who have grown up in ignorance".⁶⁸ Though they failed to become the type of Catholic men and women religious leaders had so determinedly worked for, Irish immigrants and their children did attempt to negotiate a place for themselves within the church. For example, while they might not have been present at their parish church every Sunday, on occasions of particular religious significance attendance figures in the Catholic churches of Liverpool were impressive. In 1885 a journalist with the Liverpool Review gushed over the scenes he had witnessed at St. Anthony's church on a late February day during the season of Lent. The church was crowded as the reporter entered. The sight prompted him to comment that, as striking as their sheer numbers, was the character of the people who filled the pews and aisles:

Inside the church was literally packed by the denizens of the vast parish--full of Irish Catholics--good, bad and indifferent..The congregation consisted of working men in their working clothes; of aged women in their white caps; some of them in black caps; of stalwart and cleanly basket girls with their abundant tresses bunched at the back of their heads; of women with infants in their arms or children by the hand; and above all of women with shawls on their heads.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Select Committee on Intemperance, Third Report, Minutes of Evidence, Fr. J. Nugent, q. 8313, 1877.

⁶⁹ Liverpool Review, 28 February 1885.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, there are a variety of possible explanations for why women were so prominent at church services; one of the most compelling reasons was the material resources which might be secured from Catholic relief agencies if one appeared at mass. Even so, aggregate numbers of persons attending weekly mass during the Victorian period rose only slightly.⁷⁰ The smallest improvement in levels of attendance among Catholics, however, compared favourably with what the Protestant churches in Liverpool experienced which might explain the awe expressed in the Liverpool Review.⁷¹

In his study of Liverpool's sectarian politics from 1868 to 1939, Philip Waller observes that historians have been fascinated by the apparent contradiction of a city which exhibited sectarian fervour without widespread religious observance.⁷² Sectarianism did function in certain positive ways within both the Protestant and Catholic communities. Religious politics fostered a strong sense of identity grounded in the neighbourhood rather than the workplace. As was discussed in the first three chapters of this thesis, neighbourhoods in the port often assumed an ethnic character. Thus a poor street in

⁷⁰ W. Lowe, The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire, p. 119.

⁷¹ Mr. Hawkes, Minister with the North End Domestic Mission, noted that attendance in Protestant churches compared most unfavourably to that enjoyed by local Catholic churches. It was his observation that if a fair proportion of the district's Protestants attended worship the churches would be far too few, as it was those that existed were practically empty. [L.R.O., N.D.M., Annual Report (1877), p. 6.]

⁷² P.J. Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism, p. 26.

Liverpool, like Scotland Road, was known both as an Irish and a Catholic area. In his exploration of Protestant-Catholic riots in Edwardian Liverpool John Bohstedt suggests that collective action was facilitated not only by neighbourhood ties but by the social organisations attached to the rival churches, membership in which did not necessarily involve strict religious practice.⁷³ Given the links which held the respective communities together, and given the social structures which promoted rioting as an effective form of resistance in Liverpool, it is perhaps not surprising that when sectarian tensions were at their most intense the antagonism manifested itself in violent street battles.

The negative forces which represented "Catholic" and "Irish" as synonymous were discussed in chapter one. Recall that in the public discourse concerning poverty it was the Tory press, led by the Liverpool Courier, which employed ethnic and religious slurs interchangeably. This chapter has considered the creation of an Irish Catholic identity by focusing primarily on the efforts of the church to mobilise nationalist sympathies to further the interest of the church. The church encouraged its adherents to gain self-respect from their Irishness and their Catholicism while religious leaders persistently tried to shape the meaning of both identities. However, as has been suggested above, ethnic and religious pride was not always expressed in

⁷³ J. Bohstedt, "More than One Working Class: Protestant-Catholic Riots in Edwardian Liverpool", in J. Belchem (ed.), Popular Politics, Riot and Labour, pp. 203-210.

terms or ways which pleased the church. Sectarian riots were the most public display of parochial conceit but such sentiments were also exhibited in the daily lives of Liverpool's poor. The pride and the prejudice which characterised the politics of identity in Liverpool are colourfully illustrated in the following exchanges taken from police court reports.

In the first chapter of this thesis it was argued that the police court of Victorian Liverpool was a type of theatre. The daily dramas played out in the court did more than reflect the politics of class, gender, ethnicity and religion in the city. Before an audience of some men and even more women from outcast Liverpool, the court's cast of characters helped to construct and articulate the terms of those very relationships. In 1868 the Porcupine ran a number of somewhat satirical pieces exploring the goings on in the police court. Although some of the proceedings described in the series were fictitious, like all cogent satire there were many references to real events. The exchange between Kitty Muldoon and Margaret Thompson, for example, echoed, to a large extent, an actual case which came before the court in 1850.⁷⁴ According to the Porcupine of 12 December, in front of the magistrate, Muldoon accused Thompson of having scratched her face, pulled out significant amounts of her hair, torn her dress, blackened her eye and knocked out a tooth. The injuries were apparently inflicted in a public house known for serving five gill to the quart of ale. In answer to the

⁷⁴ Liverpool Mercury, 19 March 1850.

charges Thompson admitted that she had been intoxicated when she met Muldoon, adding that getting drunk was "part of her everyday life". In the course of their encounter Muldoon called Thompson a "blood red Orangewomen", a charge which the defendant did not deny but instead responded with: "I am ever a Tory and hurrayed for Church and State." Muldoon became more upset when Thompson cursed Mr. Gladstone, the then Prime Minister noted for his Irish sympathies. Thompson went so far as to swear that the Liberal leader was "Archbishop of the Jesuits". The defendant concluded her attack by sending the Pope to a "hotter place than a coal mine". Not content to take such insults passively, Muldoon countered that the Pope was, fortunately, in "a higher place" where he was "more out of your [Thompson's] way there as you would never be likely to come near him".⁷⁵

How would Catholic leaders have responded to Muldoon? Muldoon was, on the one hand, not unfamiliar with the interior of a public house, a fact which men like Father Nugent would have looked on with disdain. On the other hand, the supreme leader of the Catholic church found in Muldoon a fierce champion. Muldoon might seldom have attended mass at her parish church and yet she clearly defined herself as a Catholic.

Another exchange recorded in the Porcupine says even more about popular sectarian politics in Liverpool during the late 1860s. What began as an exposé of police incompetence went on to suggest that justice was perceived as partial by those who appeared before the

⁷⁵ Porcupine, 12 December 1868.

court. Mr. Raffles, the stipendiary magistrate, was known to complain of what poor witnesses the police made. For example, most policemen were uncertain of what constituted disorderly behaviour. One insisted that an accused was guilty because he had used "unseen language". The officer was questioned by a colleague who insisted the proper term was "obscene". Having been corrected the witness asserted that the prisoner had indeed used "very obscene language". Then, somewhat triumphantly, he offered this "conclusive" evidence: "Why sir he said he was a Fenian". The comments made by the bumbling police officer suggest that ethnic discrimination may well have affected the way Liverpool's law enforcers administered justice. Other witnesses expressed similar assumptions in their testimonies. A defence attorney, attempting to establish the credentials of a character witness appearing on behalf of his client, asked the simple question "What are you." The man immediately responded, "I am a Roman Catholic sir; and I'll never deny my religion if I have to be hanged for it."⁷⁶ While this character was an object of ridicule in the pages of the Porcupine, in a simple statement he expressed both the pride and prejudice which were attached to being Catholic in Liverpool.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 28 November 1868.

Chapter Seven

Women and Catholic Charities

This chapter expands upon many of the themes developed previously in the thesis. Liverpool's peculiar class structure and the resultant difficulties which confronted the port's elites were explored in chapter one. It was argued that casualism made it difficult for employers to assert direct control over their employees in the work place. In this context philanthropic work provided Liverpool's wealthier citizens with an opportunity to influence the behaviour of the poor who were otherwise beyond their hold. This chapter continues the discussion of philanthropy by considering the significance of charitable organisations as components of the Catholic church's strategy to reach poor parishioners in Liverpool. Chapter six examined the relationship between the Catholic church and the Irish community in Liverpool. It was suggested that the poverty typifying life in the majority of the city's parishes spawned both moral and religious habits which frustrated the attempts of Catholic leaders to exert control over immigrants and their families. Material deprivation gave rise to a related threat considered in detail here. As Hugh McLeod has observed, in cities where there were well-established Protestant and secular relief bodies, the church worried that its poorer members would be wooed away from its sphere of influence by the promise of relief from

others.¹ This chapter focuses on the distinctive agenda of Catholic charities through an examination of the work of two: the parish-based Saint Vincent de Paul Society and the Liverpool Catholic Children's Protection Society. Both of these organisations operated in competition with well-established evangelical Protestant institutions, revealing yet another dimension of religious rivalry in the port.

While Catholic charities used the offer of relief as a means of furthering the church's religious and social project, the recipients themselves attempted to manipulate the politics of relief to their own advantage. Highlighting the agency of those who applied for assistance allows Irish women to be reinstated at the centre of this study. The material resources provided by relief agencies were a valuable component of the survival strategies of the urban poor.² In their battle to "make ends meet" women approached welfare bodies more frequently than men. The regular contact charitable workers had with poor women did give them a chance to affect the behaviour of their female clients. Throughout this thesis it has been argued that Liverpool's commercial economy created particular problems for women, while at the same time generating a specific brand of gender politics. The emphasis placed on the moral character of women in determining the standing of their

¹ H. McLeod, "Building the 'Catholic Ghetto': Catholic Organisations 1870-1914", in W.J. Shield and D. Wood (eds.), Studies in Church History: Voluntary Religion, Oxford, 1988, p. 422.

² P. Mandler, "Poverty and Charity in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis: An Introduction", in P. Mandler (ed.), Uses of Charity. The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth Century Metropolis, pp. 7-8.

households was clearly reflected in the relief policies of a number of agencies. As will be discussed below, Catholic charities developed unique strategies in relation to their female applicants which reflected the church's two-fold agenda to influence and isolate poor Irish Catholics in Liverpool. For their part, Irish women were resolute in their efforts to secure those types of relief which best suited their needs, while at the same time appearing to meet the requirements of their benefactors.

In his 1867 treatise, Social Benefits considered with reference to the Organisation of Effort in Work of Benevolence and Public Utility, William Rathbone identified philanthropy as an effective means of bridging the gulf between classes in Liverpool and thus protecting society from the threat of moral contamination. By requiring applicants to conform to a particular definition of "deserving" in order to receive relief, charitable work provided Liverpool's leading citizens with a chance to reform the behaviour of working-class people who otherwise lived outside their influence.³ At the same time, given that poverty itself was often represented as a moral condition, Liverpool's 'benevolent' citizens were particularly anxious that poor people not be able to take advantage of relief policies. As Francis Bishop's Domestic Mission insisted, the effects of "prodigal alms-giving" were far more grievous than the consequences of occasionally denying relief to

³ W. Rathbone, Social Duties considered with reference to the Organisation of Effort in Work of Benevolence and Public Utility, pp. 14-15.

deserving applicants.⁴ The desire to prevent the poor from exploiting Liverpool's charitable provision was the principal motivation for the establishment of the Central Relief and Charity Organisation Society in 1863. By co-ordinating the relief work of the city's charities through a rigorous visitation system it was hoped that the practices of professional beggars, who sought assistance from every available channel, would be circumscribed. As the Society's first annual report proclaimed:

Your committee have every reason to report favourably on the operations of the society; it has not only been successful in relieving a large amount of distress amongst our poorer townsmen... but it has been the means of exposing the nefarious practices of those who made a business of mendicity[.]⁵

One regret expressed by those present at the inaugural meeting of the Society was that the city's Catholic leaders were adamant in their refusal to participate. Rathbone's comments captured the mood of the meeting on the subject: "he was very sorry that a Roman Catholic would not be upon the Committee for he thought it would have given it a much more catholic appearance if there was one of these gentlemen upon it".

⁴ L.R.O., Liverpool Domestic Mission (hereafter L.D.M.), Annual Report (1848), p. 9.

⁵ L.R.O., Liverpool Central Relief and Charity Organisation Society, (hereafter C.R.S.), Annual Report (1863-1864). It is interesting to note that the centralisation of charitable work occurred in Liverpool six years before the establishment of the Charitable Organisation Society in London. See the pioneering work, M. Simey, Charity Rediscovered: A Study of Philanthropic Effort in Nineteenth-Century Liverpool (Liverpool, 1992) [first published 1951], for an extensive discussion of the innovative nature of relief work in Liverpool.

He added that because "the largest portion of the poor in Liverpool were of the Roman Catholic persuasion...they ought to have some assistance from that body in the united society." ⁶ However, although the Society was an avowedly secular body, Catholic leaders were suspicious of the "proselytising" influences they considered to be at work in the organisation. Further, Catholic leaders felt no need to join the Society, claiming that "they supported their own poor".⁷

The controversy over the lack of Catholic involvement in the Central Relief Society reflected the fundamentally sectarian nature of the politics of philanthropy in nineteenth-century Liverpool. While this sectarianism was the subject of considerable discussion among Victorian commentators it was left largely unexplored in Margaret Simey's seminal work, Charitable Effort in Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century, later retitled, Charity Rediscovered.⁸ However, as the liberal journal, The Porcupine, commented, with some disdain, it was often sectarian competition which spurred on philanthropic initiative in Liverpool:

⁶ L.R.O., C.R.S, Minutes of the Public Meeting, 23 January 1863.

⁷ L. Feehan, "Charitable Effort, Statutory Authorities and the Poor in Liverpool c. 1850-1914", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1987, p. 100. Feehan notes that the attitude of Catholic leaders towards the Central Relief Society eventually softened, although rank and file relief workers were still reluctant to refer their Catholic clients to the Society.

⁸ M. Simey, The Charitable Effort in Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century (Liverpool, 1951). Republished as M. Simey, Charity Rediscovered" A Study of Philanthropic Effort in Nineteenth-Century Liverpool (Liverpool, 1992).

It would be better still if philanthropic people of all creeds and opinions would consent to forget their differences in a united effort to do a public good...[but] distasteful as these sectarianisms are to us, they are tolerable when they merely flavour good works. We would rather the ears of corn should spring up in the fields labelled "Romanist" "Protestant" "Sceptical" or "Heathen", than that there should be no harvest; and rather see charitable deeds stamped with the watchwords of rival churches than see the world without such indications of goodwill amongst men.⁹

Indeed, as John Belchem has argued, the capacity to provide extensive charity for the poor was central to the distinctive notion of citizenship constructed by Catholic leaders in opposition to the British "master narrative" of Protestant constitutional liberty.¹⁰ At the same time the agency of the Catholic poor themselves in influencing the development of Liverpool's network of charities should not be overlooked. As shall be discussed below, it was the willingness of the poor to turn elsewhere which encouraged Catholic leaders to provide more generous and varied forms of relief for their less fortunate parishioners.

In many respects, the relief policies of Catholic charities were designed to treat the same social ills as other charitable organisations in Liverpool. However, the determination of the Catholic church in Liverpool to "support their own poor" must also be understood as part of the broader religious project undertaken by the church and

⁹ The Porcupine, 20 October 1866.

¹⁰ J. Belchem, "The Immigrant Alternative: Ethnic and Sectarian Mutuality among the Liverpool Irish during the Nineteenth-Century", in O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts (eds.), The Duty of Discontent: Essays for Dorothy Thompson, p. 243.

reviewed in the previous chapter. The establishment of an exclusively Catholic relief network reflected the church's determination to guard poor parishioners from the influence of other religious agencies. From the published records of the Liverpool Domestic Mission it becomes clear that in hard times, particularly in the late 1840s and 1850s, some poorer Catholics were indeed willing to barter their faith for material assistance. The Mission itself was guided by the non-sectarian principle that any faith, even Catholicism, was better than no faith at all. Perhaps at this juncture it should be briefly noted that the Domestic Mission's Annual Reports, intended for public circulation to promote the charity and solicit donations from supporters, represented the work of the mission in the most appealing light and reflected the sympathies of potential backers, many of whom were wealthy liberals determined not to be associated with the sectarianism of popular politics in Liverpool.¹¹ The discrepancies between the published material and the private records of charitable institutions will be explored in relation to the Liverpool Sheltering Home, an organisation for which both types of sources have survived.¹² Nevertheless, Francis

¹¹ See J. Belchem, "Introduction", in J. Belchem (ed.), Popular Politics of Riot and Labour, p. 12.

¹² Excerpts taken from the journal of Reverend MacIntyre, Bishop's counterpart at the Belfast Domestic Mission, suggest a more prejudiced attitude towards Catholics:

Monday 5th [September 1853] visited Bell's Lane of Smithfield. This is a very low place...the majority here are Roman Catholics and appear as bigoted as they are ignorant. Some of them refused to take tracts. [P.R.O.N.I., D1558/2/3, Reverend MacIntyre's Visits to the Poor of Belfast, 1853-1856, Belfast Domestic Mission,

Bishop, Minister of the Mission from 1848 to 1856, was apparently deeply critical of attempts to buy the conversions of Catholics with the offer of relief. In one of his reports--typically patronising in tone--Bishop remembered an encounter he had with a Catholic woman which he believed epitomised the hypocrisy bred by the purchasing of conversions:

I had been attending a dying woman, in a miserable hovel in a court in New Bird St., when, as I was going to leave, a woman from an upper room made her appearance on the stairs, and expressed a wish to speak to me. In reaching the room, she said to me in a whisper, putting at the same time her forefinger up--"Whisht! My husband bid me ax your riverence, when ye came here next, what the gains would be if we turned over to 'yer side?" I was not a little astonished at the undisguised bluntness of the proposal, but immediately told her,--also in a whisper, out of respect for her fears...that if one farthing would get a thousand to "turn", I would not give it. The poor creature started, and stared at me with utter bewilderment, evidently wondering what sort of Protestant I would estimate such conversions so cheaply.¹³

p. 13.]

Tuesday 18 [October 1855] Lower Cuxton St. Called in No. 23 Roman Catholics. Boyle is the name, very "bigoted".

The woman of the house said that their's is the true church. I asked her how she knew. She said she knew very well but kept the ground of her conviction to herself. I enquired if she ever read the Bible. She said read her own Bible..there was no such book in the house. [*Ibid.*, p. 55]

Far from respecting the devotion of these Catholics to their church, MacIntrye dismissed their faithfulness as bigotry, in contradiction with the professed stance of the Liverpool Domestic Mission on the matter. Perhaps this difference is simply a reflection of a deeper sectarian division in the northern Irish port than in Liverpool. However, given that these diary entries were intended for MacIntyre's private use he was at liberty to express his personal opinions of the poor Catholics he encountered on his visits, a freedom not shared by Bishop in his published reports.

¹³ L.R.O., L.D.M., Annual Report (1849), p. 34.

Bishop proudly reported that the woman was finally persuaded of the inappropriateness of her original question and returned home feeling suitably ashamed. The woman's concern that her conversation with Bishop not be overheard by her neighbours suggests that many Catholics must have regarded such conversions with scorn.¹⁴ To risk such derision the woman was no doubt fairly confident that she would be able to strike a bargain with Bishop. The Minister himself recognised that a few Irish Catholics did take advantage of sectarian prejudices in the distribution of aid and offered this sympathetic account of their reasons for doing so:

I would be doing a great injustice to the Catholic poor to suppose such instances as these to be common among them: I believe they are comparatively rare, and that the majority would rather die than barter their conscience. And before we blame too severely [those who do], we should know what it is to endure a winter's cold almost without clothing, fire, and food, and to see material relief so often connected with the profession of a particular faith.¹⁵

Just as poor Catholics were able to take advantage of the sectarian politics of relief giving in Liverpool, they were also able

¹⁴ In his memoir of growing up in an impoverished family in 1930s Limerick, Frank McCourt recalls that residents in his neighbourhood continued to ostracise people whose relatives had accepted Protestant charity during the Famine almost a century before:

There are families that are ashamed of themselves because their forefathers gave up their religion for the sake of a bowl of Protestant soup during the Famine and those families are known ever after as soupers. It's a terrible thing to be a souper because you're doomed forever to the souper part of hell. [F. McCourt, Angela's Ashes. A Memoir, New York, 1996, pp. 132-133.]

¹⁵ L.R.O., L.D.M., Annual Report (1849), p. 35.

to play on the concern of men like Francis Bishop to appear above religious prejudice. For instance, in 1858 the North End Domestic Mission, an off-shoot of the Liverpool Domestic Mission, was established on Bond Street between Vauxhall and Scotland Roads. Its purpose was to bring "the spirit of Christianity to the homes of the neglected" ¹⁶ in an area populated largely by "unskilled labourers and their families" the vast majority of whom were "Irish and Roman Catholic".¹⁷ Like its parent organisation the North End Mission separated deserving from undeserving candidates for relief through extensive home visiting. However, the system of assessment broke down during the harsh winter of 1878 when thousands of casual labourers were thrown out of work. Mr. Hawkes, the Minister, overwhelmed by applicants, was forced to distribute relief notes indiscriminately. Although he might have reduced his case load by nine-tenths by "referring the different religionists to their own clergy" he resisted doing so as this "would have savoured strongly of the very sectarianism we strive to melt away".¹⁸ However, after the crisis of 1878 had passed, Mr. Hawkes felt compelled to reorganise his work as applicants continued to arrive at the door of the Mission which had come to be regarded as "a kind of relieving office to which all had the right to come and demand help". The Minister resolved to offer relief only to

¹⁶ L.R.O., North End Domestic Mission, (hereafter N.D.M.), Minutes of the General Meeting of Subscribers, 1859.

¹⁷ L.R.O., N.D.M., Annual Report (1877), p. 5.

¹⁸ L.R.O., N.D.M., Annual Report (1878), p. 10.

women who were without the support of a male breadwinner through widowhood, desertion, or unemployment. This new policy prompted angry charges of sectarianism. Thus, while Mr. Hawkes felt justified in so limiting the offer of relief, he recognised that "it was almost impossible to avoid being misunderstood, and the vast majority being Roman Catholics, many thought that it was on that account that they were refused notes".¹⁹

In response to the willingness of Irish Catholics to turn to competing religious organisations for assistance, some of which demanded their conversion to Protestantism, Catholic parish churches in Liverpool made a determined effort to provide a relief network which would isolate poorer parishioners from the city's other charitable agencies. An examination of the work of the St. Mary's conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society from 1868 to 1877 vividly illustrates the mechanisms used by parish-based charities to secure the allegiance of poor Irish Catholics and to reform their religious and social behaviour in the process. Further, it reveals the extent to which the parishioners themselves used the conference as a valuable community resource.²⁰ In contrast to other philanthropic initiatives, the

¹⁹ L.R.O., N.D.M., Annual Report (1879), p. 5.

²⁰ L.R.O., St. Vincent de Paul Society, St. Mary's Conference, (hereafter S.V.P.), Minute Book (1868-1877). Unfortunately, this is the only record of the St. Mary's Conference which has survived. However, it is a remarkably rich source documenting the relief work of the conference as it was recorded at its weekly meetings. St. Mary's Church on Highfield St. was originally established in the eighteenth century to cater to spiritual needs of a small Catholic population. By the second half of the nineteenth century, however,

charities attached to Catholic churches were funded by the poor for the poor. As was noted in the previous chapter, considerable pressures were placed on working-class Irish Catholics to donate to church collections. The parishioners of St. Mary's Church regularly contributed to the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, in anticipation that the charity might offer them tangible benefits. Thus, in addition to the funds it received from the Central Council of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the St. Mary's conference received significant support from church collections.²¹ There was, therefore, less of a social distinction between the benefactors and the clients of the St. Vincent de Paul Society than was the case with other charitable institutions. Indeed, many who contributed to the work of the St. Mary's conference might at some point apply to it for relief themselves.

The work of the conference was executed by a small group of laymen, mainly of Irish descent, who referred to themselves as "brothers". The St. Vincent de Paul Society offered these men the opportunity to exercise considerable religious and social influence

the church had become the religious centre for a largely Irish population in one of the most squalid and densely populated parts of town. See J. Davies, "Parish Charity: The Work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Mary's Highfield St., Liverpool, 1867-1868", North West Catholic History Vol. 17, (1990), p. 37.

²¹ In December 1871, for example, the conference received almost £3 from the church collection box. [L.R.O., S.V.P., Minute Book, 12 December 1871.]

within the parish.²² And yet in terms of their social position the brothers were closer to the people they assisted than were other relief workers. Indeed, William Stevens, who once served as a brother of the conference, was forced to apply for relief from his former associates when in 1869 he found himself in "a very bad condition".²³ Similarly, James Hogan, who had been a member of the Society in Dublin, was unable to find work on his arrival in Liverpool. He was granted two shillings and sixpence by the brothers.²⁴ The distinctiveness of the charitable relationship embodied in the work of the St. Mary's conference is revealed through a comparison with the Catholic Benevolent Society. The Benevolent Society, established early in the nineteenth century, was resuscitated in 1855 having been almost extinct. The organisation raised money among wealthier Catholics, "linked by one faith" to the poor and sick of the city.²⁵ Funds were donated to parish priests to be distributed as they saw fit. The social status of those who contributed to the Society was revealed one of its annual reports:

We know not of ourselves, and may never know or feel, the combination of want and disease; but the Providence which has placed us in a different position, has given us to know and

²² B. Aspinall, "The Welfare State within the State: The Saint Vincent de Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920", in Shields and Wood (eds.), Studies in Church History, Oxford, 1988, p. 447.

²³ L.R.O., S.V.P., Minute Book, 9 November 1869.

²⁴ Ibid., 22 March 1871.

²⁵ L.R.O., Catholic Benevolent Society, Annual Report (1811).

feel that we are but obeying His dictates when we are alleviating the miseries of others.²⁶

Neither the financial supporters nor the charity workers of the St. Mary's conference of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society were so well insulated from the threat of destitution.

The work of the St. Mary's conference was carried out exclusively by men, while nearly two-thirds of all those who received help from the conference were women. Like parish priests, the brothers were able to peer into the domestic space of a household through the course of their visits. In this respect church members were exposed to scenes which most philanthropic men were able to avoid. In turn, Catholic women were subject to a male invasion of their homes. Judith Walkowitz has argued that in the late Victorian period female philanthropists, who gained ready entry into their clients' homes, constituted themselves as people who saw more than men because they saw the domestic side of poverty.²⁷ Conversely, within Liverpool's Catholic community, it was philanthropic men, both lay and clerical, who could claim this intimate knowledge.²⁸

²⁶ L.R.O., Catholic Benevolent Society, Annual Report (1863).

²⁷ J. Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, p. 55.

²⁸ Catholic leaders often urged nuns to make home visits to the poor. In one sermon Father Nugent recommended that the Sisters of Charity visit the homes of the poor "to encourage the use of the whitewash and the washing of the children". Nugent was especially optimistic of the results which might come from such encounters as many of the Sisters were from "some of the best families, including Lord Herrie's daughter, Miss Middleton. [Liverpool Mortality Sub-Committee, Report and Evidence, 1865-1866, 1866, p, 207.] Despite such efforts nuns seem to have been most active in the schools of the parish and do not figure prominently in Victorian chronicles of life in the streets and homes of Liverpool's Irish immigrant

As shall be discussed below female recipients of relief from the Saint Vincent de Paul Society were able to turn this relationship to their own advantage. However, in the first instance, when the brothers, regardless of their personal status, visited an applicant to determine the worthiness of the case, they entered the home as outsiders in a position to judge. Jimmy McLoughlin, who grew up in a Dublin tenement house in the first decades of the twentieth century, recalled what a demeaning experience it had been for his mother, a charwoman, to ask for help from the "Vincent men":

I remember my mother crying when she'd be asking them to give us money for food. It was a thing she didn't want to do. We always had men--you called them the 'gentry'--and they went into your home to examine your condition before they'd give you anything. They'd come in and sit down and ask 'why are you asking for help?' They always had this upper class attitude, snobbish...I remember my mother often crying.²⁹

The policies of the St. Mary's conference directly reflected the importance of charities to the Catholic project of religious regeneration. Consistent with the official theory of poor relief and the practices of other philanthropic agencies, the conference organised its charitable work on the premise that there existed in society the deserving and the undeserving poor.³⁰ In the context of the relief work

community.

²⁹ Quoted in K. Kearns, Dublin Tenement Life. An Oral History, pp. 30-31.

³⁰ See A.J. Kidd, "'Outcast Manchester': Voluntary Charity, Poor Relief, and the Casual Poor 1860-1905", in A.J. Kidd and K.W. Roberts (eds.), City, Class and Culture. Studies of cultural production and social policy in Victorian Manchester, Manchester, 1985, pp. 48-73. As Kidd notes for private charities in Manchester,

of the conference "deserving" was given a strict religious meaning: relief was granted only to Catholic applicants who could demonstrate that they attended to their religious duties. The arbiter of religious observance was the priest, and his authority was significantly extended through the operation of the charity. Some applicants were personally recommended by the priest. Elizabeth Flood, a widow, was described by Father Shepherd in a letter to the brothers as a "deserving object of relief".³¹ Similarly, Father Fazakerly appealed directly to the brothers on behalf of Bridget Sury who had recently been widowed.³² Other applicants were required to produce documentation from one of the parish priests attesting to their attendance at mass. Although many commentators considered the requisite endorsement of the priest to be the surest way of separating the deserving from the undeserving poor, occasionally applicants would attempt to manoeuvre their way around the requirement. Mary Hughes, presented the brothers with what they suspected to be a forged certificate from Father Stevens. They refused to assist her until she provided them with proper documentation of her attendance to her religious duties.³³ Occasionally, differences over what constituted strict religious practice emerged between the brothers and an applicant. One applicant, despite being in poor health, had his

applicants received relief not as a right, but as a privilege if they could satisfy the specific criteria of deserving.

³¹ L.R.O., S.V.P., Minute Book, 1 September 1868.

³² Ibid., 9 November 1870.

³³ Ibid., 3 March 1868.

relief stopped when he admitted, in early May, that he had last attended mass on Easter Sunday. For many Irish Catholics such an admission would have been evidence of religious commitment, but it left the brothers unimpressed.

The brothers of St. Mary's added to the list of Catholic women's domestic responsibilities the task of ensuring the religious allegiance of future generations. As will be discussed in greater detail below, a Catholic woman was held accountable for the spiritual well-being of her entire household. Mrs. Annie Ryan, a widow with four children, received regular relief from the conference for over a year. Then, in November 1870, the brothers decided to suspend her assistance until she produced a note from the priest showing that she attended to her own religious duties and that she sent her children to a Catholic school. Mrs. Ryan apparently satisfied the brothers' conditions and by December 1870 her relief was resumed.³⁴

In order to receive relief from the St. Mary's conference applicants were required to be practising Catholics. In addition, applicants had to be sober and willing to work. The conference was an active agency in reinforcing the dominant values of Liverpool society while at the same time isolating its clients in an exclusively Catholic relief network. The drinking habits of Irish Catholics were a source of considerable anxiety for the church. Of particular concern was the reputation Irish women had for enjoying a drink as much, if not more,

³⁴ Ibid., 9 November - 21 December 1870.

than their menfolk. The representation of Irish women's propensity to drink as the cause of their families' poverty was considered in chapter one. In a religious context, it was feared that women, while expected to fill their homes with the spirit of religion, would, through drink, contaminate the lives of their households with vice. Thus, alcohol was deemed to have gender specific consequences. As Father Nugent warned, it was Catholic women's drunkenness which threatened to destroy "the sacred character of family life...changing wives and mothers into brutal savages". Not surprisingly, then, the St. Mary's conference rigorously monitored the drinking habits of its female, as well as its male, applicants. For example, in 1870, Mr. Raffles, the Stipendiary Magistrate, wrote to the brothers asking them to relieve the Murphy family. The brothers visited the family and found them to be in a most destitute condition. However, they handed the case over to Father Pozzie when he informed them that both Mr. and Mrs. Murphy were addicted to drink.³⁵

In the course of their enquiries to establish the character of applicants, the brothers took information not only from the priest, but from an applicant's neighbours as well, assuming neighbours to be familiar with the details of each others' lives. In such instances, the intimacy, which served as the foundation of neighbourhood sharing networks, was at best a mixed blessing.³⁶ Neighbours did not always

³⁵ L.R.O., S.V.P., Minute Book, 26 October 1870.

³⁶ Offering evidence before the Mortality Sub-Committee, Mr. Thomas Roberts, a relieving officer, while he recognised the need

endorse the claims of applicants. Indeed, sometimes the disparaging comments of neighbours could be decisive in the conference rejecting a request.³⁷ The brothers did not seem to question the reliability of second-hand information and did not appear to suspect their informants of having their own motives for casting doubt on the character of a neighbour. Elizabeth McElroy was denied relief when Brother Sheridan discovered from her neighbours that she had lost her Poor Law parish relief through drink.³⁸ By interviewing neighbours the brothers were able to extend their influence beyond the applicants themselves. For example, while investigating the application of Mrs. Walsh, a widow with five children, Brother Furlong became acquainted with her lodger, Mrs. Morris. Mrs. Morris had been married to a Catholic man, who had since deserted her, and her three children had been baptised Catholics. The Morris children were students at a Presbyterian school, and their

to collect information from an applicant's neighbours was somewhat sceptical about the veracity of the data received on these occasions "when we make inquiries about people, it is with the greatest difficulty that we can get any information. We actually have to bribe parties to give us information". [Liverpool Mortality Sub-Committee, Report and Evidence, 1865-1866, 1866, p. 164.

³⁷ For a discussion of the ambivalent character of gossip in working-class women's lives see M. Tebbutt, "Women's talk? Gossip and women's words' in working-class communities, 1880-1939", in A. Davies and S. Fielding (eds.), Workers Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939, Manchester, 1992, pp. 49-73.

³⁸ L.R.O., S.V.P., Minute Book, 5 January 1869.

mother resisted Brother Furlong's pleas to transfer them to a Catholic one. The brothers referred the case to the local priest.³⁹

Mrs. Barber, a widow, was first recommended to the brothers by Father O'Brien in November 1873 and she received food and fuel tickets from the conference throughout December. Then in early January Brother McMahon reported that Mrs. Barber had been seen in a very drunken state, both before and after Christmas. Mrs. Barber was guilty of another sin. She was, apparently, in the habit of attending mothers' meetings held at the Presbyterian church on Vauxhall Road. The brothers accepted this information unchallenged, although it is not difficult to imagine that the informant might have taken advantage of the situation to settle an unrelated score with Mrs. Barber. Nevertheless, the charge, whatever its validity, that a client of the St. Vincent de Paul Society received assistance from another religious organisation, especially as the relief was tied to the promotion of specific maternal values, provoked an angry response on the part of the brothers. They immediately determined to stop her assistance. What is more, they took the unusual step of trying to get back from the undeserving Mrs. Barber the relief she had already received.⁴⁰

Applicants who were in receipt of relief from other religious charities were considered undeserving of assistance by the conference. Interestingly, the brothers were willing to supplement the parochial

³⁹ Ibid., 25 January 1871.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25 November 1873 - 5 January 1874.

relief which many of their clients received. Mary Barratt, who was described by the brothers as "very badly off", supported herself and her five children on a weekly income of one day's work, one shilling and sixpence from the parish, and food and fuel tickets from the St. Mary's conference.⁴¹ In contrast, the Central Relief Society, as a rule, would not offer relief to anyone who was receiving parochial aid.⁴² There existed between the Central Relief Society and Poor Law authorities a complementary relationship. The Poor Law was intended to serve as a safety net for the destitute and a sanction against the "undeserving" poor. The Society extended aid to the "deserving" poor, who, though in temporary need of assistance, were otherwise frugal and industrious. It was hoped that contact with the Society would save the deserving poor from the demoralising effects of pauperism.⁴³ The brothers of the St. Mary's conference maintained a fundamentally different attitude towards people on parochial assistance because their definition of the "deserving" poor was primarily a religious one. For them the danger lay not in the demoralising effects of institutionalised relief but in the proselytising effects of Protestant charity.

However, consistent with the views of Poor Law officials and the administrators of the Central Relief Society, the brothers of the St.

⁴¹ Ibid., 6 May 1873.

⁴² L.R.O., C.R.S., Rules of the Society, 23 January 1863.

⁴³ A. Kidd, "'Outcast Manchester'", p. 52.

Mary's conference considered a willingness to work to be a defining characteristic of the deserving poor. Just as the workhouse test was designed to weed out the indolent from the destitute, the Central Relief Society devised its own labour test. In 1869 the Society established manufacturing workshops, creating employment for thousands of male workers thrown out of work as a result of trade stoppages. Yet during the first year of the scheme's operation, only 450 of the 1048 men who had been referred to the workshops accepted the employment; a fact which, the Executive Committee concluded, illustrated "the importance of providing a labour test whereby the idle and mendicant classes might be prevented from imposing upon the charitable public".⁴⁴ Parish-based Catholic charities were in no position to implement such elaborate work programmes. Instead Catholic relief workers, in distinguishing those who could not work from those who would not work, were forced to rely upon the information they gathered from the local priests and from their own visitations. Recognising the casual nature of most employment in Liverpool, the brothers of the St. Mary's conference readily gave unemployed applicants the benefit of the doubt. In March 1870 Anthony O'Brien applied for relief from the conference. He said he had worked only three and a half days in five weeks. He and his five children received one shilling and six bread tickets from the brothers.⁴⁵ In January 1874 Josiah Reynolds wrote to the brothers

⁴⁴ L.R.O., C.R.S., Annual Report (1869).

⁴⁵ L.R.O., S.V.P., Minute Book, 15 March 1870.

requesting relief. He explained that he had not had work for six weeks and that he and his family were in a most destitute state. Mr. Reynolds' story was confirmed during a visit by Brother McMahon and the family were given five shillings, as well as bread and coal tickets. Two weeks later, however, the Reynolds family left Liverpool.⁴⁶ Indeed, the brothers provided funds for applicants to leave the city and return to Ireland if they were without employment.⁴⁷ James Farrel had been in Liverpool for only three weeks when, unable to find work, he applied for assistance from the St. Mary's conference. The brothers gave him money towards the cost of his passage home to Drogheda.⁴⁸ Similarly, Patrick Nugent approached the brothers with his desire to return to Ireland. The brothers purchased his ticket and saw him off.⁴⁹ Instances such as these provide an important reminder that Liverpool did not always offer Irish immigrants the opportunities they sought. The reluctance of the St. Vincent de Paul Society to rigidly define "deserving" as "industrious" reflected, as Brian Clarke has argued, the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 20 January 1874.

⁴⁷ In the first half of the nineteenth century Ribbon Societies offered similar benefits to migrant workers. See J. Belchem, "'Freedom and Friendship to Ireland': Ribbonism in Early Nineteenth Century Liverpool", International Review of Social History, 39 (1994), pp. 43-45.

⁴⁸ L.R.O., S.V.P., Minute Book, 30 November 1870.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 22 - 28 July 1874.

Society's recognition that such a practice would only alienate the poor and so jeopardise its religious mission.⁵⁰

The brothers of the St. Mary's conference were not only sensitive to the problems of casualism, they recognised the gendered nature of poverty as well. Indeed a unique relationship developed between the brothers and their female clients as both sides tried to negotiate the requirements for the receipt of relief. To a large extent Catholic instructions on the nature of womanhood, by championing an essentially domestic, self-sacrificing ideal, echoed those of Protestant evangelicals. However, the Catholic church imbued its image of womanhood, and especially of motherhood, with an explicitly Catholic meaning: good Catholic women had to attend to their own religious duties and as mothers were required to ensure the religious allegiance of future generations. Reverend Bernard O'Reilly's celebrated book, The Mirror of True Womanhood: A Book of Instruction for Women, typified Catholic leaders' attitudes towards women.⁵¹ The influential text, which went into thirteen editions, provided comprehensive directions to women as to how they might fulfil their domestic vocation. In a chapter entitled "How the Home can be made a Paradise", O'Reilly called on poor women to follow the example of Mary:

⁵⁰ B. Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p. 117.

⁵¹ Rev. Bernard O'Reilly, The Mirror of True Womanhood. A Book of Instruction for Women, Dublin, 1883. The book was first published in America but it was praised by Catholic priests throughout the Irish diaspora who had to cater to the spiritual needs of parishes constituted largely by working-class immigrants.

But our concern is now with the wife, the daughter, the sister of the labouring man and the poor man; we wish them to understand what royalty of spirit can and ought to be theirs, in order to be true imitators and true children of that great Mother who knew how to make the poor home of Joseph so rich, so bright, so blissful, so lovely in the eyes of men and angels.⁵²

While O'Reilly emphasised the centrality of women in securing the material and spiritual welfare of their families he reminded them that their's was a strictly domestic role:

What every Christian country needs most are these great-souled wives, mothers, and sisters, in the dwellings of our over-burdened labourers; women for whom the roof above them and the four walls which enclose them are the only world they care to know, the little paradise which they set their hearts on making pleasant, sunny and fragrant for the husband.⁵³

Cardinal Manning actively promoted this domestic vision of true womanhood. For all the causes Manning supported, he doggedly refused to offer his backing to the "shrieking sisterhood" who fought for the social rights of women. One of Manning's biographers, Edmund Purcell, insists that Manning refused to even meet with "the importunate members" of the movement, not because he questioned the value of women but because he considered the hearth to be their rightful place.⁵⁴ If, within their homes, women did not accede to the wishes and authority of their husbands terrible tragedies would result. As O'Reilly warned in his companion volume, True Men We Need Them, wives who "never learned to govern either their temper or their tongue" were guilty of driving

⁵² Ibid., p. 24.

⁵³ Ibid., p, 24.

⁵⁴ Purcell, Life of Cardinal Manning, p. 653.

even the most sober and hard-working labourers to intemperance.⁵⁵ Thus a woman who failed to turn her home into a paradise and herself into a model wife and mother would be held responsible for the husband's vices and the corruption of her children. Negligent Catholic women not only jeopardised the welfare of their families, in places like Liverpool they threatened the success of the Catholic project itself.

The relief policies of the St. Mary's conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society were designed to bridge the vast gulf between the idealised vision of womanhood propagated by men like Reverend O'Reilly and the realities of Irish Catholic women's lives in a poor parish of Liverpool. As was discussed earlier, the brothers of the St. Mary's conference carefully monitored the religious and moral behaviour of their female clients in an attempt to mould them into good Catholic wives and mothers. At the same time, the brothers were forced to concede that the realities of these women's lives made it next to impossible for them to conform to the domestic image of true Catholic womanhood. As the first three chapters of this thesis revealed, few women in the Irish neighbourhoods of Liverpool lived their lives within the four walls of their homes as Reverend O'Reilly had advised. For a poor woman the task of maintaining her family on scanty wages compelled her to join forces with her neighbours and this was necessarily a public enterprise in which she challenged the isolation of the domestic sphere. For many Irish women the streets not only provided the

⁵⁵ B. O'Reilly, True Men We Need Them. A Book of Instruction for Men in the World, Dublin, 1878, p. 80.

foundation of sharing networks, but the site where they could earn their livelihood as well. Recall that Irish women, of all ages, were particularly prominent within Liverpool's population of street sellers and hawkers. Certainly the reputation of street sellers' behaviour in Liverpool defied the central components of Catholic teachings on womanhood, and yet the St. Mary's conference actively encouraged many of its female applicants to engage in the trade. To understand this apparent contradiction it is necessary to recognise the sectarian nature of philanthropic work in Liverpool, and to appreciate the unique relationship that developed between the brothers and their female clients.

The majority of women who applied to the charity had, through widowhood or desertion, been left to fend for themselves and their children. The brothers considered street selling to be a viable means for these women to generate an income. Mrs. Hoolihan applied for relief in February 1868. She had been widowed fifteen months earlier and had two young boys, aged eleven and nine, to care for. The brothers voted to give her seven shillings and sixpence so that she might buy some fruit to sell.⁵⁶ Widow Callaghan applied for relief in April 1873. She had been left with seven children and the family was in great distress. The brothers granted her the relatively generous sum of £1 to enable her to earn a living.⁵⁷ Mrs. Catherine Grant was also a widow. When she

⁵⁶ L.R.O., S.V.P., Minute Book, 24 February 1868.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 16 April 1873.

first approached the charity in February 1874 she was in delicate health. She was then granted weekly support of sixpence and two bread tickets for six weeks. She returned to the charity in the spring of 1876. On this occasion the brothers decided to give her money to "buy stock to supply her basket". By December of that year Catherine Grant had again fallen on hard times. She returned to the charity for assistance and was given five shillings to supply her basket once more.⁵⁸

The St. Mary's conference also granted entrepreneurial assistance to married women, particularly when their husbands were unable to work. When William Denison, who had first been recommended by the sacristan of the church, and who was periodically out of work, applied to the brothers for relief in 1870, he was given five shillings to enable his wife to start dealing in Paddy's Market.⁵⁹ Interestingly, the brothers encouraged Denison's wife to work outside the home, not merely as a supplementary income earner, but as a substitute breadwinner. Martin and Mary Gougherty were frequently in need of assistance from the St. Mary's conference. In April 1872 Martin, having gone into the workhouse hospital, Mary approached the brothers in considerable distress. In addition to the bread tickets she was given she also received five shillings to invest in stock for trading. Mary's dealing, while bringing in vital earnings, could not on its own sustain the household.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 17 February 1874 - 5 December 1876.

⁵⁹ L.R.O., S.V.P., Minute Book, 26 April 1870.

On occasions when Martin's rheumatism was so severe as to prevent him from working, the couple received bread and coal tickets as well as blankets.⁶⁰ The practice of giving married women money to engage in street selling fundamentally undermined the prescribed domestic role of women. In providing this assistance the brothers implicitly recognised the disjuncture between the ideal marital roles preached for by church leaders and the reality of married life for poor Irish Catholic couples in Liverpool.

The Central Relief Society also recognised the need for many working-class wives to work. However, like other Victorian social reformers, the Society's leaders only sanctioned the types of employment which married women could pursue within the domestic sphere.⁶¹ For example, the Society loaned Thomas Holbrock £6 to enable his wife "to purchase materials to carry on her trade of dressmaking". The loan was to be paid back at a rate of ten shillings per month.⁶² Eliza Anderson received a grant of fifteen shillings to assist her in her trade of staymaking.⁶³ There is some evidence to suggest that the type of aid offered by the Central Relief Society did not necessarily correspond to the needs of the women themselves. Mary Ann Farrer was

⁶⁰ Ibid., 9 April 1872 - 10 October 1876.

⁶¹ S. Alexander, "Women's Work in nineteenth-century London: a study of the years 1820-1850," in E. Whitelegg (ed.), The Changing Experience of Women, Oxford, 1982, p. 33.

⁶² L.R.O., C.R.S., Annual Report (1873).

⁶³ L.R.O., C.R.S., Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 16 January 1874.

brought before the Stipendiary Magistrate, Mr. Raffles, after she pawned the sewing machine lent to her by the Society.⁶⁴ The destitution of widows and deserted wives was also recognised by other relief agencies in Liverpool. In 1870 the Central Relief Society, noting a lack of "suitable" employment opportunities for women in Liverpool, began a programme of transferring single mothers and their families to the manufacturing districts of Lancashire. The Society took particular pride in the initiative arguing that for its participants the move from Liverpool meant the difference "between poverty and comfort, between indigent dependence and respectable independence".⁶⁵

Perhaps the explanation for the differences in the approaches towards female poverty adopted by the brothers of the St. Mary's conference and administrators of the Central Relief Society is rooted, once again, in the politics of religion. Many Catholic widows did leave Liverpool through the Central Relief Society's scheme. Although the Society's leaders vehemently denied charges of proselytism, it is not difficult to imagine that Catholic leaders might have feared that the faith of the women transferred out of Liverpool would be lost.⁶⁶ Thus, the St. Mary's conference encouraged women to engage in street selling even though the trade pushed them out of the domestic realm and exposed them to the dangers of the public world. However, because the brothers

⁶⁴ L.R.O., C.R.S., Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 7 February 1873.

⁶⁵ Liverpool Daily Post, 27 March 1875.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

linked their assistance to the fulfilment of strict religious and moral criteria, the influence of the church in the lives of the women they assisted in Liverpool was more secure than it might have been in other parts of Lancashire.

The unique relationship between the St. Mary's conference and its clients enabled women to put their needs directly to the brothers which allowed the recipients themselves to shape the type of assistance they were granted. For example, in many instances women who applied for relief purposefully requested small amounts of capital to invest in street selling. When Mrs. Fitzpatrick approached the brothers in May 1873 she specifically asked for money to enable her to engage in street selling so that she might support herself and her young son who was ill with smallpox. She was granted four shillings.⁶⁷ Catherine Trudden had a long relationship with the brothers of the St. Mary's conference. In July 1871 when, in great distress, she first applied for relief she was granted five shillings to enable her to gain a livelihood. In the summer of 1873 Catherine Trudden, this time in poor health, told the brothers "if she could get a small trifle to deal she would be very thankful". She then received five shillings. Early in 1875 Catherine Trudden suffered an injury which prevented her from working. In April she was visited by Brother Goodman who found that she had recovered sufficiently to resume work. He reported to the brothers that her home was "comfortable" and recommended that she receive five shillings to

⁶⁷ L.R.O., S.V.P., Minute Book, 21 May 1871.

start dealing. Brother Goodman's motion was carried.⁶⁸ The negotiations which were conducted between the time that the applicant made her request and the brothers granted her relief can only be guessed. What part did the women of St. Mary's play in convincing the conference to afford them the type of material support which would necessarily push them out into the public sphere? Perhaps a moment from Frank McCourt's childhood, though it occurred in Limerick during the 1930s, might shed some light on how these hidden discussions proceeded. Women who applied for assistance from the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Limerick were instructed to wait "respectfully" on the steps until the someone could attend to them. One day, standing outside the office, Angela McCourt met Nora Molloy who, contrary to the wishes of the men of the Society, sat on the steps savouring a cigarette while she awaited her turn. Such indecorous behaviour prompted an angry scolding from Mr. Quinvilan who threatened to withhold relief from Nora. Not intimidated Nora charged back that she would just take herself off to the Quakers who were sure to give her help. As Quinvilan began to respond with furious accusations of "souperism" he was silenced by one of his colleagues who observed: "If we left it up to you we'd have the poor of Limerick jumping into the arms of the Protestants." Thus, having enjoyed her smoke, Nora Molloy walked away from the Society steps with a ticket for three pairs of boots for her children.⁶⁹ Women were singled out for

⁶⁸ Ibid., 18 July 1871 - 15 April 1875.

⁶⁹ F. McCourt, Angela's Ashes. A Memoir, pp. 64-65.

relief because they were especially vulnerable to the ravages of poverty, because they were integral to the Catholic project, and because they were regularly exposed to a variety of Protestant influences.⁷⁰ And while this situation provided the brothers of the St. Vincent de Paul Society with an opportunity to mould their female recipients into good Catholic wives and mothers, it also allowed the applicants to force the brothers to respond to the realities of poor women's lives in Liverpool.

While philanthropists of all religious denominations dedicated a great deal of their energy towards improving the material and moral conditions of women's lives in Liverpool, many remained frustrated with the limited results they enjoyed. These disappointments were often focused on the condition of children with poor parents. Poverty, whether the consequence of unemployment, low wages, or improvident habits - with most charities tending towards the last explanation - undermined the futures of young Liverpoolians depriving them of the necessities of life and exposing them to a host of moral dangers. Officials of the Liverpool Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children recorded that in one year 568 children came into their care having suffered from neglect. At the same time it was estimated that in only fifty of those cases was neglect the result of the poverty. The immorality and cruelty of parents were considered to be more significant causes of child neglect than the lack of money for food and

⁷⁰ B. Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p. p. 114.

shelter.⁷¹ However, such lines were not so easily drawn. The condition of three children was brought to the attention of the Society by a Relieving Officer who believed they were being cruelly neglected by their father but it could not be proved that his wages would enable him to adequately support his offspring.⁷² In the last decades of the nineteenth century, a number of schemes were developed to remove children from the perilous streets and corrupt adults of Liverpool and relocate them in Canada where they might be transformed into productive members of the Empire. Joy Parr's book, Labouring Children, is the most comprehensive study of child emigration to Canada. Nevertheless, Parr leaves the significance of Catholic emigration programmes largely unexplored.⁷³

The following examination of the politics of child emigration from Liverpool, however, reveals yet another intriguing story of sectarianism in the philanthropic arena. The discussion begins with an investigation of the Liverpool Sheltering Home, which, though operated by evangelical Protestants, was an avowedly non-sectarian institution. From a closer examination of the work of the home a more complicated picture emerges suggesting many of the reasons why

⁷¹ L.R.O., Liverpool Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Annual Report (1885).

⁷² L.R.O., Liverpool Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Annual Report (1883).

⁷³ J. Parr, Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924, London, 1980, p. 35. Here Parr argues that evangelical child savers used emigration more widely than other Protestant denominations or the Catholic church.

Liverpool's Catholic leaders felt compelled to initiate their own emigration programme.

The Liverpool Sheltering Home was founded in 1872 by Louisa Birt. Birt worked closely with her sister, Annie Macpherson, the evangelical pioneer of child emigration. The Home, located first on Byrom Street and later on Myrtle Street, devoted its energies to sending destitute children across the Atlantic Ocean initially to Nova Scotia and then increasingly to Knowlton, Quebec, where Macpherson operated a distribution home. The rationale of child emigration was aptly described in the 1873 Annual Report of the Sheltering Home:

These children had in this country such vile surroundings and associates, such utterly neglectful and sinful relatives, that if they had pulled through a fearful miserable and hateful childhood, the ordeal would be so terrible, that their riper years would have been utterly blighted, and they would, as a rule, have become, not your servants in any shape, but your street loafers and prison habitues, a moral contamination and public trouble...It is positively necessary to disassociate them entirely, taking them in childhood, to our own countrymen and women in our colony[.]⁷⁴

The charity's supporters believed that for orphaned and abandoned children, emigration was a way of replacing the families they had lost. However, many of the children who were sent overseas were not orphans. Of the forty cases covering the years 1874 to 1880, taken from the Sheltering Home records held at the University of Liverpool Archives, only nine of the children in the sample were orphans.⁷⁵ In six of the

⁷⁴ L.R.O., Liverpool Sheltering Home, Annual Report (1873).

⁷⁵ U.L.A., Barnardos Collection, Liverpool Sheltering Home Registers, 1872-1880.

cases the child's natural mother was dead. Their fathers, though marginally better off financially than most widows in Liverpool, faced problems caring for their children, especially younger ones. Further, men who did remarry were not always able to negotiate a place for children of previous marriages in their new families. In 1878 Robert Blunt left Liverpool because his widower father had remarried and his step-mother was unwilling to care for him.⁷⁶ Twenty-five of the children from the sample were living with single mothers. The Sheltering Home Records were referred to earlier in this thesis because they provide vivid illustrations of the extreme lack of formal, well-paid employment in Liverpool. Six-year-old Rosina Graham was only two when her father, a sailor, died. Her mother went out with "a bit of stuff in a basket" but a bad leg kept her from regular participation in the trade and she was unable to support herself and her child.⁷⁷ Sarah Robinson's mother was unable to support her children after the death of her husband, a dock labourer, in 1878. By the spring of 1880, Mrs. Robinson tramped from town to town with her children depending on the money she received from singing on the streets.⁷⁸ Such situations help to explain why single mothers figured so prominently in the records of the Home.

The records of the Sheltering Home do not clearly demonstrate how children came under its care. In some instances children were brought

⁷⁶ U.L.A., Barnardos Collection, Liverpool Sheltering Home, D6
ii a.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

to the institution by scripture readers, town missionaries, and Bible women. It is difficult to know what encounters preceded the arrival of children in the home. Were parents, particularly single mothers, pressured by these uninvited visitors to consent to have their children transported overseas. There was certainly a vast social gulf between the "respectable" agents of the Sheltering Home and the residents of Liverpool's poor neighbourhoods. Moreover, the Home's supporters would have claimed moral superiority over the objects of their concern as well. When an "aristocratic-looking" lady appeared in front of Pat O'Mara's house, his mother was warned by a neighbour that "the Shelterin' 'ome lady's outside after you". Mrs. O'Mara confidently responded that she was working and so she had nothing to fear from the woman. Though the mysterious visitor turned out to be a unknown relative, the fear and resentment felt towards the suspected Sheltering Home worker suggests a good deal about their reputation among women struggling to raise children in Liverpool. In their case records charity workers made no effort to conceal their contempt for many of the mothers with whom they came into contact. Charles Whalley was sent to Canada in August 1874. There is no detailed record of the events leading up to this voyage although apparently Whalley's widowed mother drank.⁷⁹ Annual reports often contained excerpts of letters from children who had been sent to Canada. The correspondence chosen for the purposes of publicity often say more about the goals of the Home than

⁷⁹ U.L.A., Barnardo's Collection, Liverpool Sheltering Home, D6 ii a.

the experiences of the emigrants. The new life of one correspondent appeared to live up to the highest expectations of the charity. The child was "quite happy in a good home" and having embraced the religious values of the Sheltering Home felt comfortable judging his natural mother accordingly: "may God protect my poor mother from drinking...tell my mother to turn to Jesus".⁸⁰

In some instances parents themselves brought their children to the Home. Bruce Bellingham argues that mothers and fathers who turned to such outside agencies did not "abandon" their children. Poor parents, he suggests, sometimes "surrendered" their children in the hope of securing a better future for them.⁸¹ Annie Woodvine's father, a dock labourer, died just three days before she sailed for Canada on 21 March 1876. Annie's mother was extremely poor and she worried that her daughter would end up in the workhouse or on the street and so she brought Annie to the Home.⁸² As this thesis has suggested this fear was not without foundation. Indeed, the hope that female emigrants would become "servant girls" in the colony was consistent with other reform projects directed towards young women in Liverpool.⁸³ Similarly, there was no guarantee that these expectations would be fulfilled. Frances

⁸⁰ L.R.O., Sheltering Home, Annual Report (1873).

⁸¹ B. Bellingham, "Waifs and Strays: Child Abandonment, Foster Care, and Families in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York", in P. Mandler (ed.), Uses of Charity, p. 136.

⁸² U.L.A., Barnardos Collection, Liverpool Sheltering Home, D6 ii a.

⁸³ L.R.O., Liverpool Sheltering Home, Annual Report (1873).

Birchall, one of nine children who were living with their widowed mother in great distress, was admitted to the Home in April 1878. Frances was said to be of the age when she was "likely to be lost". She was sent to a Mrs. Connolly in Granby, Ontario. Less than a year later reports were received that she had left her placement having proved "very impertinent and obstinate".⁸⁴

The relationship between parents and the staff of the Sheltering Home assumed great significance when the religious politics of the charity were called into question. The work of the Liverpool Sheltering Home was often praised for its "non-sectarian" nature. Rules for admission into the Home clearly stated that no case would be refused solely on the basis of religious denomination.⁸⁵ At the Annual Meeting of the Home in 1881 the Mayor of Liverpool offered a strong endorsement of the institution and urged all Christians who wished to "alleviate, to protect, and to save poor children who hovered about the streets", to support the Home, assuring them that "[r]eligious instruction was given to those who were rescued, but there was no attempt to proselytise".⁸⁶ The opening of the Catholic Emigration Home in 1882 was lauded by Sheltering Home officials as a "great source of comfort to us, easing us of the perplexing difficulty of not knowing what to do

⁸⁴ U.L.A., Barnardos Collection, Liverpool Sheltering Home, D6 ii a.

⁸⁵ L.R.O., Liverpool Sheltering Home, Annual Report (1876).

⁸⁶ L.R.O., Liverpool Sheltering Home, Annual Report (1881).

with many cases which naturally belong to them to care for and save".⁸⁷ However, despite this public image, a survey of the private case records exposes a tension within the purported religious policy of the Home. No effort, for example, was made to place Catholic children with Catholic families in Canada and in practice a good Christian home became synonymous with a good Protestant home. Further, the religious identity of those children who had been baptised in the Catholic church was often contested within the institution. Before the Annual Meeting in 1882 the Bishop of Liverpool, in commending the "entirely" non-sectarian character of the Home, added "To take those poor boys and girls and ask then whether they belonged to the Church of England, the Roman Catholic or other religious denominations, would, at their tender age, be nonsense".⁸⁸ At what age then did children become aware of their own religious affiliation? The case notes of a fifteen-year-old boy, Michael Geraghty, who arrived at the Home in 1880 from an orphanage in Ballina, County Mayo, suggest that the staff considered a young person of his age competent to determine what religion he was. Geraghty's parents were both "Romanists". His father had died some years earlier and his mother was "badly off". The boy attended a mission church in Ireland and in his file it was noted: "he knows nothing of the Roman Catholic religion except from observation and his considered himself altogether Protestant". In April 1880 Geraghty was placed in a "good

⁸⁷ L.R.O., Liverpool Sheltering Home, Annual Report (1882).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Christian home" in Canada.⁸⁹ On occasion Catholic children who were settled in Protestant homes in Canada expressed resentment at the loss of their religion. William D'Arcy at the age of ten was admitted to the Sheltering Home in 1880. His father had lost his job as an excise officer due to drunkenness and his mother was left to support six children. In 1886 the Home received what it considered to be a "very ungrateful letter" from D'Arcy. The emigrant proclaimed his Catholicism and insisted that he would have no "more elementary epistles from your domain".⁹⁰

Whether or not they feared for the faith of their children, Catholic parents and relatives did surrender their children to the Liverpool Sheltering Home. These decisions suggest that questions of material well-being were held above those of religion. The mother of Arthur and Alfred Hastie, a widow, could earn just a few shillings a week as a charwoman and she was unable to support herself, let alone her children. She was a Catholic and had been to the priest to ask for help but apparently none was forthcoming. She persisted in asking the Sheltering Home to admit her two sons. Both she and the boys' grandmother signed a consent form acknowledging that Alfred and Arthur were entering a Protestant Emigration Home which would send them to Nova Scotia where their Catholicism was unlikely to survive.⁹¹ Catholic

⁸⁹ U.L.A., Barnardo's Collection, Liverpool Sheltering Home, D6 ii a.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

parents who gave up their children to the Home not only had to wrestle with their own consciences but risked the scorn of the Catholic community as well. The father of John, Patrick and Mary Maloney confronted competing pressures from his Adlington Street neighbours and the officials at the Home as to what to do with his children. In October 1875, following the death of his wife, Mr. Maloney brought his three young children to the Home. The three, who were in a "very neglected condition, half starved and only a few rags suspended to their bones", were all admitted and scheduled to leave for Canada in the third week of March. However, early in March Maloney banged on the door of the Home requesting that his children be returned to him. Louisa Birt, who had been there to greet Maloney, told a Committee meeting that he had been accompanied by two "strong-looking Irishmen" who, Birt believed, were ready to take the children by force. The father alone was allowed into the Home where he confessed that he did not wish to remove his children but the priest and his Catholic neighbours had warned him that if he left his children in a Protestant institution he would face eternal damnation. Dismissing the fears of his community, Birt convinced Maloney to allow his children to emigrate arguing that "the law would protect him, and God was stronger than his enemies" and reminding him of the hopeless situation of his children being both poor and motherless. In the end, Maloney maintained custody of Patrick and Mary while John was sent to Canada. Apparently oblivious

of her own bigotry, Birt urged the committee to release a statement condemning such "Romanist" attacks.⁹²

Rumours of such cases infuriated the Catholic church in Liverpool. Once again the choices made by the Catholic poor in the context of competing religious interests fuelled the development of another agency in the city's extensive Catholic welfare network. Catholic child emigration from Liverpool had been initiated by Father Nugent in 1870. This work was centralised and expanded with the establishment of the Liverpool Catholic Children Protection Society. Echoing the social mission of the evangelical schemes, this Catholic organisation regarded emigration to Canada as a means of rescuing children from the moral and social dangers of urban Britain by placing them in stable Christian homes, and so transforming them into productive nation builders. However, the central objective of the Society was to preserve the religion of child emigrants and to limit the "proselytising" influences of Protestant emigration schemes:

As one of the strongest reasons for the establishment of this Society was the fact that other organisations were already at work placing out children in America, very many of them Catholic, who, so placed, were certainly lost to their religion, the Committee have made the preservation of the religion of the children the basis of their action, and their chief aim.⁹³

⁹² L.R.O., Liverpool Sheltering Home, Committee Minute Book, 7 March 1876; U.L.A., Barnardos Collection, Liverpool Sheltering Home, D6 ii a.

⁹³ Liverpool Catholic Children's Protection Society (L.C.C.P.S), Annual Report (1884). The published reports of the L.C.C.P.S. were made available to me by the staff of the Nugent Care Society in Liverpool. I am especially grateful to Andy Wood

Unfortunately, individual case records for the children sent to Canada by the Society are not available to historians. However, it is certain that the willingness of parents to take advantage of resources like the Liverpool Sheltering Home led to the establishment of an exclusively Catholic emigration programme.

In the first fifty years of its operation, the Liverpool Catholic Children's Protection Society sent several thousand young Liverpudlians to Canada. Given the religious nature of its project, the Society preferred to settle children in western Quebec and eastern Ontario where strong Catholic communities existed. As Catholic leaders considered the bonds of religion to be more important than a shared language they placed significant numbers of children in French-speaking homes.⁹⁴ A letter published in one of the Society's reports speaks of the determination of young emigrants, coming from the urban

for his assistance. Child saving organisations in Ireland were guided by similar sectarian prejudices. Interestingly, a Catholic orphanage in Dublin considered Liverpool to be a safe haven for children threatened by proselytising forces. In 1881 five-year-old William Muldoon and his two-year-old brother, Thomas, were brought to the St. Bridgit's Orphanage by their widowed mother, Margaret. The boys' father, a private soldier from Enniskillen, was dead and their mother asked the Sisters to care for her sons while she searched for work in Liverpool. The Sisters took in William and Thomas noting that "the proselytisers made great efforts to get these children by making very tempting offers to the mother". By 1883 Margaret was secure enough in Liverpool to have her sons sent over to join her. [St. Bridget's Orphanage, Holy Faith Convent, Registers, Vol. 3, 21 May 1881. I am indebted to Jacinta Prunty for arranging my access to this source.]

⁹⁴ J. Parr, Labouring Children, p. 48.

slums of Liverpool, to adapt to the vastly different circumstances in which they found themselves in French-speaking rural areas of Canada:

I thank you for sending me to Canada, for I am very comfortably situated out here, I am learning to be a farmer. We have very cold weather in winter after we have a good fall of snow...I am learning how to speak French, and I think I am improving.⁹⁵

The lives of other children in Canada did not come so close to reaching the Society's expectations. In the report of 1886 it was admitted that at least twenty Canadian employers found the emigrants to be unsatisfactory, complaining of their laziness and "notorious" lack of honesty. While regretful of these cases the report's authors offered this somewhat cynical reminder:

Considering the class from which they were taken on this side, and the surroundings of their childhood, it is perhaps only to be expected that some of the children should not realise the full hopes of their benefactors.⁹⁶

There was, apparently, no guarantee that by removing children from the "debasing and demoralising surroundings" of Liverpool's poor neighbourhoods the damage already done to their characters could be reversed.

The Annual Reports of the Society do not afford any insights into the deliberations of parents who chose to have their children sent to Canada. For those who turned to the Catholic Society was the preservation of their children's faith a primary consideration? Was it hoped that child emigrants would remain in contact with relatives in

⁹⁵ L.C.C.P.S., Annual Report (1896).

⁹⁶ L.C.C.P.S., Annual Report (1886).

hoped that child emigrants would remain in contact with relatives in Liverpool possibly acting as the first link in a migration chain or was a permanent break expected? The lives of children in Canada were profoundly different from their experiences in Liverpool. Some children tried hard to bridge this gulf, negotiating a place for themselves in two ethnically distinct families:

...I am going to get confirmed very soon, and I want you to find out where my mother lives...Please send directions of my mother's house and street on a card so that I may not forget them. Please tell my mother that I am very happy and not to fret about me...and I am very glad to say that I have a good père and mère.⁹⁷

Other evidence implies that children were encouraged to distance themselves from their previous lives with their new guardians assuming parental rights over them. One French-Canadian woman wrote to the Society promising to raise her "daughter" with much affection and in strict accordance with the laws of the church:

"I will raise Mary as my own child. I love her as my own. This winter I will send her to a Convent school just across the way almost; for I see Mary is very talented in every way."⁹⁸

What of Mary's natural mother? She was probably a poor woman of Irish descent who, in however small a way, would likely have been subjected to the reforming efforts of the church throughout her life in Liverpool. When she consented to have her daughter sent to Canada, the

⁹⁷ L.C.C.P.S., Annual Report (1894).

⁹⁸ L.C.C.P.S., Annual Report (1899). Child emigrants were commonly treated as servants and apprentices in their new homes. See J. Parr, Labouring Children.

church no doubt judged her to be a disappointing example of a Catholic parent. The role of bringing up Mary was thus reassigned to a woman who appeared to conform more closely to the idealised image of Catholic motherhood. On the other hand, the fact that, even in the late 1890s, Mary had to be removed from Liverpool in order to become a faithful member of the church suggests the failure of the Catholic project itself. Indeed, at the turn of the century life in Liverpool remained as hostile to the fulfilment of "true womanhood" as it had been fifty years earlier when this story began.

Conclusion

This study has explored the material realities and the ideological representations of social relationships in Liverpool from the late 1840s to the early 1890s. The low and insecure wages of casual labourers in Liverpool made it next to impossible for families to survive on a single male wage. However, the commercial port provided few formal opportunities for women and children. Many of the strategies developed by working-class women as they attempted to make ends meet caused them to breach the public/private divide and so challenge dominant conceptions of appropriate gender roles. The ideology of domesticity was fundamental to how middle-class men and women defined themselves in Victorian Britain. This ideology dictated that women, by nature, were suited to domestic life. Within the private sphere women would be able to express their superior nurturing instincts. However, in an effort to fulfil her role as a homemaker a working-class woman in Liverpool was compelled to join forces with her neighbours and to engage in a variety of practices which propelled her into the public sphere. The prominence of women on the streets of Liverpool was a source of considerable anxiety among the city's middle-class citizens. Irish women were especially prominent in Liverpool's outdoor trades: street selling and prostitution. What is more, they were determined defenders of their space on the streets. Consequently Irish women assumed a focal position within middle-class discourses concerning the unstable nature of gender roles in the port. The habits of Irish women were represented as the antithesis of bourgeois feminine virtue. Indeed

the unruly character of female immigrants was offered as justification for the exclusion of the Irish from the ranks of the respectable poor in Liverpool. Irish women were thus at the centre of political representations and practices which defined the immigrant community as separate from the host society.

The Irish in Liverpool were defined as "other" through popular prejudices which came from outside the immigrant group. At the same time Irish immigrants were drawn together by shared cultural beliefs and traditions. This thesis has been primarily concerned with the role of the Catholic church in defining and reinforcing the distinctiveness of Irish Catholics in the city. The church attempted to reach those immigrants who were Catholic by emphasising the historic connections between Ireland and Catholicism. It was through this ideological project that a religiously exclusive Irish identity in Liverpool was promoted. This thesis has argued that the church encouraged its adherents to gain self-respect from their Irishness and Catholicism while religious leaders persistently tried to shape the meaning of both identities. It has been suggested here that Irish immigrants actively tried to negotiate a place for themselves within the church, accepting some of its teachings while disregarding others. Indeed ethnic and religious pride was often expressed in terms which challenged the authority of the church.

Women were given a central place within the Catholic church's

project to influence and isolate Irish immigrants in Liverpool. To a large extent Catholic instructions on the nature of womanhood, by championing an essentially domestic, self-sacrificing ideal, echoed those of Protestant evangelicals. However, the Catholic church imbued its image of womanhood, and especially of motherhood, with an explicitly Catholic meaning: good Catholic women had to attend to their own religious duties and as mothers were required to ensure the religious allegiance of future generations. This thesis has argued that the expansion of an exclusively Catholic welfare network was a means of monitoring the religious and moral behaviour of female clients in an attempt to mould them into good Catholic wives and mothers. However, like other middle-class reformers, church leaders were forced to contend with the material realities of Irish women's lives which made the fulfilment of true womanhood extremely difficult. Further, the church feared that the poverty of Irish women and their families left them vulnerable to the "proselytising" influences of Protestant charities. Irish women were able to manipulate these concerns to spur on the development of relatively generous and flexible relief policies. They were resolute in their efforts to secure those types of relief which best suited their needs, while at the same time appearing to meet the requirements of their Catholic benefactors. Indeed a theme which has run through all seven chapters of this thesis is that, though they were at the centre of numerous moral reform projects in Liverpool, Irish women were more than just acted upon. They were constant in their efforts to affect the terms of association with those above them.

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