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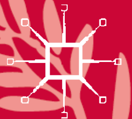
# A MICRO-HISTORY OF VICTORIAN LIBERAL PARENTING

## John Morley's "Discreet Indifference"

**Kevin A. Morrison**



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## John Morley's "Discreet Indifference"

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macmillan

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# Preface

This book explores the theory and practice of Victorian liberal parenting by focusing on the life and writings of John Morley, one of Britain's premier intellectuals and politicians. Reading Morley's published works—much of which explicitly or implicitly addresses this relationship—with and against other writings of the period, and in the context of formative circumstances in his own life, it explores how living one's life as a liberal extended to parenting. Although Victorian liberalism is currently undergoing reappraisal by scholars in the disciplines of literature and history, only a handful of studies have addressed its implications for intimate personal relations. To my knowledge, none have considered the relationship of parent and child.

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Syracuse, NY, USA Kevin A. Morrison

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CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

**Abstract** Victorian liberalism is currently undergoing reappraisal by scholars in the disciplines of literature and history. In recent years, this reconsideration of liberalism has extended to its lived dimensions. How did liberalism look and feel? How was it practiced? Yet despite the now burgeoning corpus of scholarship on the topic, only a handful of studies have addressed the implications of Victorian liberalism for intimate personal relations and none have considered the relationship of parent and child. This chapter provides an overview of liberal parenting, an introduction to John Morley, and a defense of the microhistorical approach.

**Keywords** Victorian liberalism • Parenting • Microhistory • John Morley

Victorian liberalism is currently undergoing reappraisal by scholars in the disciplines of literature and history. Some have limited their discussion to the political party that formally bore the appellation *Liberal* in 1865. Others have focused on the liberal philosophical tradition, which encompasses such nineteenth-century figures as John Stuart Mill, Thomas Hill Green, Leslie Stephen, and Henry Sidgwick. Although historians and literary critics think and write about Victorian liberalism in varied ways, most would agree with the premise that "Liberalism is not a creed but a frame

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of mind" (Morley 1917: p. 127). Thus, in recent years, this reconsideration of liberalism has extended to its lived dimensions. How did liberalism look and feel? How was it practiced? Yet despite the now burgeoning corpus of scholarship on the topic, only a handful of studies have addressed the implications of Victorian liberalism for intimate personal relations. Of these, most have focused on institutional homosocial relations in learned societies, the ancient universities, and London's clubland, or on the figuration of the household as a microcosm of the state in political theory. None have considered the relationship of parent and child.

In fact, there are relatively few scholarly monographs that take Victorian parenthood—liberal or otherwise—as its focus.[1] Instead, parents and parenting have been considered as part of larger and very fine studies of domesticity and family life, femininity, masculinity, and childhood.[2] If recent publications are any indication, however, parenting is beginning to receive due consideration.[3] This book is a contribution to that effort as well as to the ongoing revaluation of Victorian liberalism.

## Liberal Parenting

Liberal parenting is a capacious topic. Because we lack a history of the development of liberal parenting, my account could have considered continuity and change over several centuries. From its Enlightenment beginnings, liberal theory has conceptualized people as state citizens rather than monarchical subjects. As Barbara Arneil notes, this shift has important implications for the status of children. Under an absolute monarchy, adults and children are indistinguishable from each other since they are similarly subject to the sovereign head of state. "As seventeenth-century theorists began to challenge this notion of absolute rule in favour of the citizen who consents to authority as the basis of political power," Arneil writes, "it became necessary to distinguish between those who have the rational capacity to consent to political authority and those who do not" (2002: p. 70). Like women, slaves, or servants, children were believed to lack the reasoning capacities necessary to be citizens. However, in contrast to these groups, children would potentially develop into citizens if parents provided them with opportunities to cultivate their reasoning faculties.

The child was central to John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, which is often considered to be a foundational text of what we now call liberal theory. In this work, Locke rejects the political patriarchalism

defended by political theorist Robert Filmer. According to Locke's characterization of Filmer's position, "*Men are born in subjection to their Parents*, and therefore cannot be free. And this *Authority of Parents*, he calls *Royal Authority*, *Fatherly Authority*, *Right of Fatherhood*" (1690/1988: p. 144, emphasis in original). In contrast to the hierarchy of subjection—the people to the king, the family to the father—that characterizes Filmer's position, Locke insists on the emergence of a rights-bearing individual suffused by rational thought. In Locke's view, a child is simply the imperfect version of a rational and autonomous adult. "Education," Locke contends, is therefore "[t]he first part then of Parental Power, or rather duty," although he acknowledges that this responsibility may be met by a father placing "the Tuition of his son in other hands" (1690/1988: p. 313). Asserting that the mind of a child is a blank slate (*tabula rasa*), Locke argues that parents are responsible for educating their offspring to one day govern themselves through reason and, thereby, to inhabit the world of men. For Locke, parental authority, which has as its primary aim to cultivate the child's reasoning faculty, stems from the father's and mother's duty to care—not from God—and is limited to the stage of immaturity and dependency through which children must pass in order to reach the state of equality.

A history of the development of liberal parenting might also consider Jean-Jacques Rousseau's quite different conception of the parent–child relationship. In *Émile*, Rousseau develops this idea of the parent-tutor as facilitator, who does not dictate what a child should learn, but rather permits a significant degree of autonomy for experiential learning. For Rousseau, the child is neither a blank slate nor an unfree entity to be liberated by reason. Rather, the child has its own capacities for apprehending and understanding the world, and it should be the purpose of education to draw these out more fully. In this way, the child will learn to trust one's own judgments, based on individual experience, rather than defer to the authority of an instructor.

Any study of liberal parenting would, of course, include the work of John Stuart Mill, whose views on the matter were shaped in part by the extraordinary education he received at the hands of his father. In *On Liberty*, Mill sought to delineate the proper division of responsibility for educating children between parents and the state. "Hardly any one indeed will deny that it is one of the most sacred duties of the parents (or, as law and usage now stand, the father), after summoning a human being into the world, to give to that being an education fitting him to perform his

part well in life towards others and towards himself," Mill acknowledges (1859/1977: pp. 301–2). Yet fathers often insisted on their unequivocal right to educate their children in the manner that they saw fit or not to educate them at all. This was one of several "misplaced notions of liberty" that Mill's essay sought to confront (1859/1977: p. 304). For Mill, the refusal to educate one's child or to do so in a desultory manner was nothing less than a "moral crime" (1859/1977: p. 302) that the state should not abide. Although Mill acknowledges that the state has an interest in educating its citizens, he stops short of calling for it to provide compulsory education out of a concern that such an effort would produce a homogenous citizenry. He nevertheless argues that the state has a responsibility to establish the minimum standard to which each child—regardless of whether the instruction he or she received was secular or religious—should be educated. "If the government would make up its mind to *require* for every child a good education," Mill insists, it might save itself the trouble of *providing* one" (1859/1977: p. 302). Parents could, therefore, choose the form of instruction that they preferred, including religious schooling, so long as children "were taught other things" mandated by the state (1859/1977: p. 303). For those parents who cannot afford the fees associated with educating their children, the state should provide relief in the form of grants or, if necessary, defray the cost altogether.

Depending on the historical parameters established for a history of the development of liberal parenting, one might also consider the views of contemporary thinkers. In general, those writing today are less concerned with the forms education should take than in reflecting on the rights of parents and the responsibilities of the state in child rearing. William Galston has argued that "the ability of parents to raise their children in a manner consistent with their deepest commitments is an essential element of expressive liberty" (2002: p. 102). An absence of constraints, imposed on parents by others, is, for him, a necessary condition for leading one's life in accordance with the principles to which one firmly adheres. Eamonn Callan has similarly argued that, for many, parenting is one of the fundamental meaning-making activities of one's life. The way in which a father or mother chooses to parent is an expression of their deepest values and beliefs. Callan therefore argues that it is best classified under the freedom of conscience principle: it is "as important as any other expression of conscience, and the freedom to organize and sustain the life of the family in keeping with our own values is as significant as our liberty to associate

outside the family for any purpose whatsoever" (1997: p. 143). Parents are quite rightly self-interested, Callan believes, insofar as they hope their children will come to share the values and interests they hold so dear and that these will be, in part, the basis of a close and affectionate relationship.

Another road not taken would be to approach liberal parenting synchronically rather than diachronically by seeking to identify trends among a large number of nineteenth-century liberal intellectuals and writers. As I have mentioned, Mill elaborates on the obligations of parents to children in *On Liberty*. The philosopher Henry Sidgwick analyzes filial duty in *The Methods of Ethics* (1884: pp. 159–74). In a series of essays, the political theorist Herbert Spencer explores the ways in which parents can discipline their children without anger and how to properly educate their children (1854, 1858). In *Lectures and Essays*, the historian J. R. Seeley exhorts parents to play an active role in educating their children (1870: pp. 268–71). Novels by liberal intellectuals, such as those by George Eliot, George Meredith, and Anthony Trollope, are also a rich resource for considering the relationships of parent and child. Yet in focusing on a large number of nonfictional and fictional case studies in order to identify broad trends, I might miss the nuances of any single case. "The unifying principle of all microhistorical research," Giovanni Levi contends, "is the belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved" (2001: p. 101). By narrowing my analytical lens to a single family, I am able to consider aspects of liberal parenting that might otherwise be elusive, such as the relationship between theory and practice.

## Man of Letters, Member of Parliament

*A Micro-History of Victorian Liberal Parenting*: *John Morley's* "*Discreet Indifference*" explores the theory and practice of liberal parenting by focusing on the life and writings of a figure who, although relatively neglected today, was of considerable importance to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. John Morley (1838–1923) was a leading man of letters. Editor of several prominent Victorian periodicals, he was also a distinguished essayist and biographer, and a second-generation Victorian liberal political theorist, often seen as a successor to John Stuart Mill. He was also a Liberal politician of significant standing. He was Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone's chief architect of home rule for Ireland legislation, and also served as Chief Secretary for Ireland under Gladstone (1886,

1892–1895), as Secretary of State for India (1905–1910, 1911) in the Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Herbert Henry Asquith's ministries, and as Lord President of the Council (1910–1914).

In his twenties, Morley developed a name for himself as an essayist and reviewer with pieces in, among other outlets, the *Saturday Review* and *Macmillan's Magazine*. His laudatory comments about the novels of George Eliot led to an enduring friendship with the novelist and her partner George Henry Lewes, who tapped Morley to succeed him as editor of the newly established *Fortnightly Review* (Morrison 2018a). From 1867 to 1882, Morley presided over the *Fortnightly Review*, shaping it into the leading venue of intellectual—rather than, as was more common of publications at the time, partisan—opinion. From 1880 to 1883 he edited the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and, from 1883 to 1885, *Macmillan's Magazine*.

Morley was also a prolific writer of biographical scholarship and historical studies. He wrote authoritative biographies of Edmund Burke (1879), Richard Cobden (1881), and Rousseau (1873). His multivolume *Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (1903) remains indispensable to scholars. As H. C. G. Matthew declares, "How often the modern scholar thinks he has found a startling quotation or a new idea, only to have to admit it is already 'in Morley'!" (1986: p. 256). Morley's historical studies of Voltaire (1872), Diderot (1878), Walpole (1889), and Cromwell (1900) were widely read. He also served as general editor between 1878 and 1892, and again from 1902 to 1919, of Macmillan's *English Men of Letters* series, which sought to establish a canon of great writers for the ever-increasing reading public.

But it was his extended essay on political ethics, *On Compromise* (1874), that distinguished him as a liberal intellectual. While an undergraduate at Oxford in the 1890s, Viscount Samuel, the prominent twentieth-century Liberal politician, encountered two texts that exerted a decisive influence over him: Mill's *On Liberty* and John Morley's *On Compromise* (1945: pp. 17–18). The historian Basil Willey has called *On Compromise* "one of the central documents of the Victorian age" (1956: p. 276).

From his perspective as a man of letters, Morley believed that Victorian politics was unduly pragmatic. As a Member of Parliament, he attempted to intervene by bringing ideas to bear on political questions of moment.[4] In a lengthy profile of Morley published in the November 1891 edition of the *Revue des deux mondes*, the French literary critic and anglophile Augustin Filon declared that Morley's considerable achievements in both

literature and politics distinguished him from many of his contemporaries. He was, Filon contends, "the first English leader to have come out of our ranks—us, people of letters—who, in power represents the Idea, just as [the Conservative] Randolph Churchill represents modernised Tradition and [the Liberal unionist] Joseph Chamberlain the popular interests" (qtd. in Morrison 2018b). At a time when Members of Parliament went unpaid for their service, Morley relied on his career as a writer to sustain his career in politics.

It was Morley's parliamentary colleague Augustine Birrell who proclaimed liberalism to be a frame of mind rather than a creed. To Birrell, the content of an individual's opinion mattered less than whether that person truly believed what he or she espoused (1899: p. 128). The source for this assertion, however, was surely Morley, who had, for decades, argued that indecisive beliefs led to unreliable principles and weak convictions (Morley 1874/1997: p. 64). It was incumbent on the self-governing individual to cultivate "an intelligent set of convictions upon the problems that vex and harass society," through abstraction, reasoning and induction, and maintain the "habit of expressing it and supporting it in season and out of season" (Morley 1866: p. 382). Morley believed that "independent convictions," when rigorously formed, faithfully held, and earnestly expressed, would "inspire the intellectual self-respect and strenuous self-possession which the clamour of majorities and the silent yet ever-pressing force of the *status quo* are equally powerless to shake" (Morley 1874/1997: p. 102). Much of Morley's literary output in the latter half of the nineteenth century is concerned with elaborating the contours of this frame of mind.

## Parenting as a Liberal

Intriguingly, a central, but overlooked component of Morley's writings on the liberal frame of mind is the relationship of parent and child. It was also through this liberal frame of mind, which Morley sought to cultivate in himself, that his vision of parenting found its focus.

Thus, reading Morley's published works with and against nineteenth-century advice manuals and political philosophy, and in the context of formative circumstances in his own life, my book explores how living one's life as a liberal extended to parenting. If, as Victorian liberals believed, accepting the views of others as the premise of one's own life fatally compromised one's capacity for self-formation, how should parents raise their

children? How might a liberal commitment to individuated political thought be cultivated in children who looked to their parents for their beliefs? How could an individual reconcile the need to live according to one's definition of the good life with the notion of the family as a communal or corporate unit? The microhistorical approach offers a fruitful means to begin answering these questions.

My premise is that, owing to the early circumstances of his own life, which were widely shared with his contemporaries, Morley developed a philosophy of parenting with "discreet indifference." As I discuss more fully in chapter one, Morley experienced growing religious doubt as an undergraduate at Oxford. His refusal to enter the Church opened up an irreparable breach with his father. Morley was not alone. At a time "of confusion and tumult," as Walter Bagehot termed his age in 1855, "intellectual change has set father and son at variance" (1915: p. 60). As they questioned the religious beliefs with which they had been raised, many of Morley's generation "shared the same fate": intellectual and social isolation and, on occasion, familial ostracization (Houghton 1957: p. 81). Some waited until the deaths of their fathers to reject the beliefs with which they had been raised. Such is the case of Morley's close friend in adulthood and fellow liberal intellectual Leslie Stephen. Just a few years younger than Morley, Stephen attended Cambridge. Elected a fellow of Trinity Hall, Stephen became an ordained member of the Anglican clergy as a deacon in 1855 and priest in 1859. Just a few years after the death of his father, however, Stephen resigned from Trinity. As he put it later in life, he discovered in this period that he had "never really believed" the teachings that he "had unconsciously imbibed" in his childhood and youth. "[T]he formulae belonged to the superficial stratum of my thought," he claimed, and therefore never constituted "fundamental convictions" (quoted in Maitland 1906: p. 133).

While at Oxford, Morley found himself unable to take holy orders in good conscience. As he would later observe of young men who, unlike him, took their vows, "before they have crossed the threshold of manhood," they declare "that they will search no more… They virtually swear that they will to the end of their days believe what they believe then, before they have had time either to think, or to know the thoughts of others… They take oaths, in other words, to lead mutilated lives" (1874/1997: p. 67). Morley chose not to lead such a life. The subsequent experience of being cut off financially from his father was formative. It had profound implications for his developing understanding of liberal subjectivity, opin-

ion formation, and expression. It also shaped his conviction that when self-worth is measured by the approval, praise, or recognition accorded by parents, children are unable to divest themselves of dependency. Consequently, parents should not simply be detached from their children but be fundamentally indifferent to them. When a lack of interest or concern is the foundation of childrearing, liberal parents ensure that their offspring become increasingly individuated and, ultimately, autonomous. The ultimate aim of liberal parenting, as Morley conceived it, was to cultivate in a child the capacity to formulate a reasoned judgment about the way in which one would like to live one's life, and then to act in a manner that would realize this end. For Morley, who was childless, discreet indifference functioned as an aspirational horizon rather than an achieved state. It involved introspection and self-critical practices (on which the subsequent chapters of this book elaborate).

## The Morley Family and Household

Some readers may find it odd that I have chosen to focus a book about liberal parenting on the life and writings of a man who did not father any of his own children. Yet the placing of a child or children into one's primary care inaugurates parenthood and the act of parenting as much as, and often more so than, the progenitive act itself. Over the course of his 58-year marriage to Rose Ayling, Morley would parent a number of children. When they wed on 28 May 1870, Morley became the stepfather to Rose's two children from a previous relationship, Florence and John (whom the couple called Johnson to differentiate between stepfather and stepson), who were eleven and ten, respectively. After the death of John's brother and sister-in-law in India, the couple took it upon themselves to raise their six-year-old nephew, Guy. Because Rose was frequently in ill health and Morley's schedule was always demanding, Ellen Ayling, Rose's sister, frequently stayed with the couple to care for the children. In addition, Morley's sister, Grace, who never married, often assisted when visiting for extended periods. The Morleys also employed several servants. Only a few years after all three had left the house, a new generation of children needed parenting. In 1907, after Johnson was convicted of forgery and sentenced to prison, John and Rose took in his wife and children. Morley, whom the children affectionately called Pater, ensured that they were educated.

Although the Morley household was atypical when measured against the nuclear ideal promulgated at the time, in actuality a complex web of relations under one roof was not at all uncommon. Davidoff and Hall explain that, "by the mid nineteenth century, the family consisted of a head and dependent members, preferably including servants, living within the same dwelling" (1987: p. 361). But the definition of *head* and *dependants* varied widely. Blended families resulting from divorce were rare. But the comparatively high mortality rates in the period meant that stepparenting was a frequent occurrence. Owing to the death of one or both parents, or to lucrative opportunities in the colonies that took parents away from England, aunts and uncles would be called on to raise their nephews or nieces, and grandparents may have suddenly found themselves caring for their grandchildren. Instead of fathers, many children were provided for by "father figures… whether relatives, like uncles or grandfathers, teachers and clergymen, or masters and employers" (Davidoff et al. 1999: p. 148). The phenomenon of "surplus women" in the period meant that many unmarried women, including Grace Morley, lived with their siblings or other relatives. As John Tosh notes, the 1851 census indicates that "the proportion of bourgeois households with co-resident kin was as high as 30 per cent in some towns" (1999: p. 21). Not all of these kin were women, but those who did reside with their siblings tended to participate in childrearing. According to Claudia Nelson, "the belief that the mothering instinct was present in all women, or at any rate all good women, whether or not they had ever given birth, was an article of faith" (2007: p. 143). This belief ensured that there was little anxiety in children being raised primarily by a maternal figure.

## Argument and Evidence

Many nineteenth-century periodicals promised ongoing glimpses into the lives of significant personages by establishing biographical vignettes as a permanent feature. Among the first to systematically throw open the doors to the private residences of public figures was the "Celebrities at Home" series, launched in 1876 by Edmund Yates for *The World: A Journal for Men and Women*, his fledgling six-penny periodical.[5] The stated purpose of Yates's series, which would serve as a prototype of the "at home" genre, was twofold: it would satiate, even as it helped to stimulate, the public's appetite for a glimpse into the "social surroundings and daily lives and labours, the habits and manners, the dress and appearance, of men of mark in the present day," and it would provide future historians with greater

insight into the private lives of significant personages. "The historian of the future," Yates writes in his *Recollections*, will one day turn aside from penning dull or polemical biographies, and examine instead his subject's "daily life and personal habits, the strange household nourished by his charity, his tricks of post-touching and tea-drinking, his general method of tossing and goring all those differing from him in opinion" (1884: p. 332). To distance his approach from undercover investigation and intrusive forms of reportage ("espionage"), or simply the appearance of trading in gossip ("a general disclosure of skeletons in the cupboards"), Yates obtained consent from each individual to be profiled and permitted them to inspect page proofs before their profiles went to press (1884: p. 331). Yates believed that by enabling biographical subjects to play a role in shaping their own "introduction" to the reader, they would recognize how the genre "might be acceptable" to both themselves and the publication (1884: p. 331). They, apparently, did: in just nine years, the series profiled nearly four hundred judicial, political, legal, theatrical, literary, and sports celebrities (Yates 1884: p. 331).

Yates's series, as well as the editorial protocols he established, were quickly emulated. Periodicals were able to boast of privileged access to their subjects' domestic routines and environment. Politicians who consented to being profiled were given an opportunity to participate in shaping public perceptions of themselves and, in some cases, swaying readers' opinions about their policies. Andrew Whitmore Robertson notes the tendency of the new journalism to fuse "the personalities of party leaders with their policies" (1995: p. 130). While biographical vignettes of all kinds proliferated in print, the "at home" feature was particularly successful because it tapped into an emergent belief that domestic interiors reflected the personality, and hence individuality, of their occupants (Cohen 2006: p. 123).

As one of the nineteenth century's most distinguished journalists and politicians, Morley was regularly the subject of biographical sketches. Although I draw on several of these in my study, relatively little information about Morley's personal life can actually be gleaned from them. In fact, with the exception of Morley's own *Recollections* (1917), a work remarkably reticent in discussing personal matters, and Francis Wrigley Hirst's two-volume *Early Life and Letters of John Morley*, published in 1927, scholars have had to wait until the 2000s, when Morley's personal papers were opened to researchers, to learn more about him.

In what follows, I reconstruct the narrative of Morley's life principally through his letters, diaries, and journals. Although Morley died in 1923, these papers, which are archived at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, have only been available to researchers for less than fifteen years and derive from two principal sources: Morley, whose last will and testament designated his nephew, Guy, as the recipient of his letters and diaries (1923: p. 1), and his sister, Grace. Soon after Morley's death, Hirst, whose published liberal views secured him a research assistantship on Morley's monumental *Life of Gladstone*, approached Guy about publishing a selection of his uncle's letters intermingled with intermittent commentary (1927: pp. xvi, xvii). Assenting to this proposition, Guy convinced Grace to turn over more than 500 letters written to her by Morley between 1874 and 1918. In 1927, Hirst published his two-volume *Early Life and Letters of John Morley*. He planned, but never completed further volumes. Toward the end of his life, Hirst deposited in the British Library letters and documents pertaining to Morley's career in government, but he retained papers of a personal nature. After his death, these remained in private hands until 2000, when they were received by the Bodleian as part of the Hirst papers. The library staff spent several years cataloguing the papers before making them available for examination.

A number of biographical studies of Morley, published in the mid-twentieth century, were, therefore, either incomplete or inaccurate. But they have nevertheless provided an important foundation on which to build.[6] Patrick Jackson's *Morley of Blackburn: A Literary and Political Biography of John Morley* is the only work thus far to examine these newly available materials. While invaluably correcting many persistent errors in the narrative of Morley's life, Jackson nevertheless repeats some unsupported claims that typify earlier works. Although I have not written a new biography of Morley, I will reassess extant narratives of his life and correct certain misperceptions that have been continually rehashed by scholars, including those surrounding his relationship with his father, Jonathan, and John's relationship with his stepchildren and nephew.

Chapters 2, 4, 6 and 7 document how he was parented and how he defined himself as a parent. Chapters 3 and 5 analyze Morley's many writings on, or concerned with, parenting and parenthood: from ephemeral essays written in his twenties to biographical and historical studies written in his thirties and forties. Morley wrote the early essays, which he published anonymously in the *Saturday Review* and shortly afterward anthologized in *Modern Characteristics* (1865) and *Studies in Conduct* (1867), before his marriage to Rose. These can be mined for insights into his

upbringing and youth. By contrast, his more mature studies, including *Voltaire* (1872), *Rousseau* (1873), *Diderot and the Encyclopaedists* (1878), *Edmund Burke* (1879), as well as his political treatise *On Compromise* (1874), were written after becoming a stepfather to Florence and Johnson and father figure to his nephew, Guy. Thus, while also informed by his experience as a child, these texts were written while Morley was attempting to put into practice his own approach to parenting. These works, which often gesture to the longer history of the development of liberal parenting, enable one to situate Morley's philosophy and practice of parenting.

With this book, my aim has been to provide readers with a new way to think about the relationship of Morley's life—at least insofar as its narrative can be reconstructed from the available evidence—to the many historical and biographical subjects that interested him. I also hope that it further illuminates the ways in which Victorian liberals attempted to live their liberalism.[7]

## Notes

1. Of extant foundational studies, many focus on motherhood or fatherhood in fiction. See Sadoff (1982); McKnight (1997); Dever (1998).
2. See, for example, Davidoff et al. (1999); Davidoff and Hall (1987); Frost (2008); Nelson (1995); Wohl (1978); Nelson (2007); Thorne and Yalom (1992); Tosh (1999); Waters (1997).
3. In addition to important essay collections such as Broughton and Rogers (2007), McKnight (2011), and Rosenman and Klaver (2008), several monographs have also recently appeared, including Jenkins (2016), Sanders (2009), and Strange (2015).
4. Looking back on his own efforts as editor of the *Fortnightly Review* to introduce ideas into public life, Morley writes: "The notion of anything like an intervention of the literary and scientific class in political affairs touched a certain jealously which is always to be looked for in the positive and practical man" (1900: pp. 343–4). It should be noted that Morley was antipathetic to science. When he refers to a single class of literary and scientific men, he means something along the lines of an intelligentsia, with science here denoting theoretical or intellectual inquiry.
5. On the history of this feature, see Yates (1884: pp. 330–3), Cohen (2006: pp. 122–3) and Easley (2011: pp. 137–233).
6. See, for example, Staebler (1943) and Knickerbocker (1943).
7. "If biography is largely founded on a belief in the singularity and significance of an individual's life and his contribution to history," writes Jill Lepore, "microhistory is founded upon almost the opposite assumption: however

singular a person's life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness, in how that individual's life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole" (2001: p. 133).

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CHAPTER 2

# At Variance: Father and Son

**Abstract** This chapter revisits the extent to which John Morley's rift with his father, which stemmed from his refusal to take holy orders, influenced his literary production. Instead of examining Morley's writings as a means of assuaging the grief over his father's rejection of him, or as being manifestly unconcerned with this personal rift at all, which are the two positions generally staked out by scholars, this chapter suggests instead that the breach with his father raised questions of moral philosophy to which Morley would continually return in his writings. The incident spurred a lifelong interest in the ethics of parent–child relationships.

**Keywords** Father/son relationships • Religious unbelief • John Stuart Mill

In 1908, after a long and distinguished career in the House of Commons and leading roles in the cabinets of both William Ewart Gladstone and Henry Campbell-Bannerman, John Morley was designated a peer and transferred to the House of Lords. Henceforth, he would be known as Viscount Morley of Blackburn. As the recipient of a newly created peerage, Morley was expected to choose the place name with which his viscountcy was to be associated. He initially proposed Tyne, but the College of Heralds determined that "a river is not a place." One might conclude that in this original choice of title Morley was attempting a nod to the

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Newcastle electorate, who had returned him to Parliament for the first time in 1883. Yet, because the River Tyne connects Northumberland with Yorkshire, the counties from which his mother and father respectively hailed, there was likely deeper personal meaning to his proposal. In any case, Morley settled instead on the Lancashire factory town where he was born on 24 December 1838.

Blackburn may at first seem like a rather odd choice. Morley left the town at the age of 13 and rarely returned. Its significance to him, however, had little to do with himself. Although Morley's parents moved to the seaside town of Lytham in their final years,[1] Blackburn was intimately connected with the professional accomplishments of his father. The son of a nonconformist tradesman in West Riding, Yorkshire, Jonathan Morley was able to enter the medical profession and establish a successful surgical practice in Blackburn. He hoped that John—the first Morley to receive a university education—would extend the family's intergenerational vertical mobility by becoming a clergyman. Jonathan's expectations, and particularly the manner in which they were to be fulfilled, ultimately led to an irreparable break with his son. When he learned of John's growing religious doubts and refusal to take holy orders, the senior Morley cut off his son's financial support in his third year at Oxford University. The two never reconciled. Morley would surely have thought of his father's ambitions for him as he assumed the viscountcy. Indeed, as a critic of the unelected upper chamber, Morley had no particular interest in a peerage; the noble title mattered so little to him that he declined to accept a corresponding coat of arms. Yet he deliberated extensively over the combination of surname and place name.

Scholars have speculated on the extent to which this rift with his father affected Morley. D. A. Hamer suggests that Morley—who would develop deep emotional attachments to, in his words, "men vastly my superiors" in intellect if not in age, including John Stuart Mill, Joseph Chamberlain, and Gladstone (Morley 1917: p. 163)—sought to fill a void in his life by courting the attention and friendship of father figures (Hamer 1968: p. 26). Hamer also contends that the "profound emotional shock" of this crisis influenced the topics to which Morley would gravitate "in the following ten or so years," which often centered on clashes between fathers and sons (1968: p. 1). By contrast, John Powell argues that personal conflict is a conceivable, "but by no means necessary frame in which to cast Morley's writing." Powell continues: "it seems more reasonable to assume that he was troubled, got over it and carried on with his life" (1997: p. 2).

Patrick Johnson, who has provided the most authoritative biography of Morley to date, largely agrees with Powell, finding it "questionable" that the quarrel had lasting influence.

In this chapter, I will revisit the question of this episode's impact on Morley. Instead of examining his writings as a means of "relieving the pain and grief and of remedying the psychological disturbance" of his father's rejection of him (Hamer 1968: p. 1), or as being manifestly unconcerned with this personal rift at all (Powell 1997: p. 2), I wish to suggest instead that the breach with his father raised questions of moral philosophy to which Morley would continually return in his writings. In short, what interested him were the ethics of parent–child relationships.

## I

Jonathan Morley was born on 11 April 1808 in the village of Mytholmroyd, Yorkshire. His nonconformist parents were small-scale manufacturers and tradespeople. Jonathan's father and uncle produced woolen cards, the instrument used to convert tufts of wool into usable fibers. They also provided cotton to local weavers, who fashioned cloth on handlooms that the brothers subsequently sold in a trading stall at Piece Hall in nearby Halifax (Hirst 1927: I, p. 7; Knickerbocker 1943: p. 11). Although they were not prosperous, Jonathan's parents fell within the lower strata of the middle class. Seizing on new opportunities available to such families, they arranged for their son to undertake a surgical apprenticeship in North Shields, where he met and married Priscilla Mary Donkin, the daughter of a local shipowning family. After the birth of their first child, Edward, in 1828, the couple moved to Blackburn, where Jonathan established a prosperous surgical practice. While residing in the town, they had three additional children who lived beyond infancy: John, William (1840), and Grace (1842).

In the late 1830s and 1840s, the wider county of Lancashire was a mix of nonconformism, Catholicism, and Anglicanism, although it remained strongly marked by its puritan past. Blackburn, however, was an Anglican stronghold. The affluent, churchgoing mill owners, who comprised a large portion of the electorate, consistently returned Tory candidates to Parliament. As Patrick Jackson remarks, "These were the circles that Morley's father moved in" (2012: p. 3). That he was able to mingle in this society was in part owing to the increasing professionalization of medicine, which provided new opportunities for the sons of tradesmen to improve on the occupational status and social class of their parents. But it

was also because he switched religious affiliations. Although Jonathan was raised a Methodist, he began attending the Anglican parish church in Blackburn. Morley recalls that "he turned, without any formality that I know of, from chapel to church" (1917: p. 5). The impress of nonconformism, however, ran deep. His father was "negligent of... [Anglican] ordinances, critical of the local clergy," and, owing to his strong evangelical disposition, "impatient" with the Oxford Movement, with its emphasis on reserve in religious matters and the vesting of priestly authority in the clergy, as well as with liberal theologians whose views were beginning to be influenced by German biblical scholarship (1917: pp. 5–6). The extent to which Jonathan's conversion to Anglicanism was motivated by social considerations can never be known, but it did enable his surgical practice to flourish. Priscilla remained throughout her life an ardent "John Wesleyan," as Grace frequently referred to her (Hirst 1927: I, p. 7).

With their shared evangelical leanings, Jonathan and Priscilla's views on parenting appear to have largely coincided. In the Morley household, piety, seriousness, and duty were stressed each day of the week. These virtues were particularly emphasized on Sunday, which was sanctified for the contemplation of eternity. Morley recalls, "The rigours of Sabbatical observance forced on us a literary diet that neither enlightened the head nor melted heart and temper" (1917: p. 6).[2] He does not elaborate on this passing remark, but in their autobiographical or semifictional writings Morley's contemporaries depict a range of constraints and prohibitions. These included the absence of hot food at mealtimes; a ban on reading newspapers and other nonreligious literature as well as on pastimes such as drawing or needlework; and a refusal to countenance idle conversation. As part of the Pontifex family's rigorous observance of the Sabbath in Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, the children are prohibited from using their toy train and their paint boxes. They are permitted one Sunday "treat": choosing the evening hymns (Butler 1903/1917: p. 107). W. B. Trevelyan recalls that he even knew "a schoolboy scolded for giving an apple to his pony" on a Sunday (1903: p. 105). In Samuel Smiles's household, catechism and memorization of passages from the Bible took place first thing in the morning, and recitation was the last activity to occur at night. In between were family prayers and three different church services—each sermon lasting more than an hour (Smiles 1956: p. 20). When works of art did adorn the walls of a home, they might be turned over on Sunday "lest," as Ian Bradley summarizes the general view, "their bright colours should distract... [the] children from their contemplation of man's sinful

state" (1976: p. 183). For many, as the art critic John Ruskin wryly observes, "the horror of Sunday" was so palpable that it would "cast its prescient gloom as far back in the week as Friday" (1885–9/1908: p. 25).[3]

By Morley's own admission, his father exerted tight control over the household and authority over his dependents. In addition to vigilantly suppressing indulgence, which was seen by many evangelicals as necessary to ensuring that one's offspring did not associate pleasure with either material excess or physical idleness, Methodist childrearing focused on conquering the child's self-will. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism in the eighteenth century, argued that children's development depended on strict parental discipline. In "On the Education of Children," Wesley contended that a child comes into this world with a highly developed sense of self-will that a parent's first task was to cure:

> A wise parent… should begin to break their will the first moment it appears. In the whole art of Christian education there is nothing more important than this. The will of the parent is to a little child in the place of the will of God. Therefore studiously teach them to submit to his will when they are men. But in order to carry this point, you will need incredible firmness and resolution; for after you have once begun, you must never give way. (Wesley c.1783/2016a: p. 102)

In order to render children compliant, Wesley advocated corporal punishment from an early age. He pointed to biblical support for this approach in the Old Testament. In "On the Obedience to Parents," he specifies that parents should not "'spare the rod, and spoil the child,'" but should instead "break their will betimes; begin this great work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, or perhaps speak at all" (Wesley c.1783/2016b: p. 110). Morley does not say whether he or his siblings were corporally punished. It is likely that he did not need to do so; his original readers would have understood what he meant when wrote of his father, "As domestic disciplinarian he was strict" (1917: p. 6).

Many historians and biographers have concluded that Morley's relationship with his father, even at the best of times, was strained. Jeffrey Paul Von Arx insists that Jonathan was an oppressive figure who subjected his son to Anglicanism, the Church of England, and Christianity in order to better the family's social position (1985: p. 125). Patrick Jackson has more recently claimed that Morley was "never… close to his father, an unattractive character whose harsh evangelical theology and social ambition he

found uncongenial" (Jackson 2012: p. 5). Both overstate the case. In his memoir, Morley presents his father as a man of upright character who, although quite demanding in his interactions with others, possessed a friendly and cheerful side. Of "homely stock," Jonathan also possessed a love of learning and managed to obtain, without formal schooling, "a working knowledge of Latin and French" through self-instruction (Morley 1917: p. 5). His love of books had the greatest effect on Morley, who writes, "I long possessed the pocket Virgil, Racine, Byron, that he used to carry with him as he walked to the houses of handloom weavers on the hillsides round" (1917: p. 5). Morley's lifelong practice of taking long walks in the countryside, often with a book of verse or prose in hand (Morrison 2018b), was likely derived from accompanying Jonathan on these outings.

Morley also speaks of his father's nurturing side, although in less emotional than practical terms. He ensured that John was educated in Latin, Greek, and scripture at the nonconformist Hoole's Academy of Blackburn, where his son excelled. Recognizing unusual intellectual promise, Jonathan sent him to the non-religiously affiliated University College School in London before arranging for him to be enrolled at Cheltenham College. Founded in 1841 as a proprietary grammar school affiliated with the Church of England, Cheltenham provided boys of middle-class families with a principally classical education and comprehensive religious instruction that would prepare them for tertiary education at the ancient universities.

The cost of sending John to Cheltenham was considerable. Since he could not easily afford it, Jonathan made it possible for his son to attend at "personal sacrifice" (Morley 1917: p. 6). From Cheltenham, Morley was awarded an Open Scholarship at Lincoln College, which provided a small number of students from public schools with the opportunity to study at Oxford University on the basis of having passed a rigorous exam. Its matriculation register reads: "J. Morley, son of J. Morley, born at Blackburn, Dec. 24, 1838, Admitted Scholar, Nov. 5, 1856" (Lincoln 1856: p. 149).

There is scant evidence of Morley's relationship with his father while at university. Any letters between them have been lost. But among the family's general correspondence, archived at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, there remains a single letter to William, who, at the age of 19, was striking out on his own by entering the cotton merchant trade. While it is impossible to generalize about parenting practices on the basis of a single letter,

the letter is much more than simply an "injunction to read part of the Bible every day," as one scholar has put it (Jackson 2012: p. 3). To his son, Jonathan writes in personal terms about the salvific effects of scripture: "at fifty-three yrs. of age, and looking back through a life of much trial, and labour, and suffering—filled very often with strong passions—and appetites and affections hostile to every good, I can most profoundly bless God (the author of the Book) that the truths of revelation have still held me as with strong cords, and sent me again and again to the only source and fountain of all good; and so I have again and again been delivered from Hell." It is hard to think of these lines as emanating solely from a harsh disciplinarian. In order to persuade his son to read the Bible, Jonathan acknowledges his own failings and temptations with rather startling candor. Rather than issuing a commandment, he recommends that his son turn to the book that has given him "my greatest solace." "May its blessed truths make you 'wise unto salvation,'" he lovingly writes. After recommending that William start with the New Testament, with which he is already familiar, Jonathan suggests proceeding from Matthew to the Acts "and then in succession the Epistles" (1860: n.p.). It is inconceivable that Jonathan would not have similarly interacted with the child who, for many years, apparently held his highest regard. Indeed, when John was accepted at Lincoln College, Jonathan saw this as whimsical confirmation of the clerical path he had staked out for him. Morley, it turned out, was assigned Wesley's former lodgings.

While his father may have offered religious encouragement while he was at Oxford, John was exposed to a number of influences that eroded his faith. James Cotter Morison, a tutor at Lincoln College, introduced Morley to the teachings of Auguste Comte (Morley 1917: p. 6), who argued that religious belief was simply a stage in the evolution of humankind toward a "positive" era in which empirical science would be accepted as the only means of obtaining truth.[4] The far greater influence, however, was John Stuart Mill. By the time that Morley arrived at Lincoln, the controversy provoked by the Oxford Movement—which culminated in the shocking conversion of John Henry Newman, the prominent theologian and vicar of the University Church of St Mary, to Roman Catholicism in 1845—was a distant memory. Newman's "star," Morley recalls of this period at Oxford, had set, while the "sun" of Mill "had risen" (Morley 1874/1997: p. 100). Indeed, Frederick Arnold, who matriculated at Oxford in the same year as Morley, remembers that his friend repeatedly carried a volume of Mill's writings with him wherever he went. Of Mill's

recently published essay outlining the liberating practices of free thought and individuality, *On Liberty*, Arnold recalls that Morley knew most of it "by heart" (1889: p. 215).

Other volumes by Mill that Morley carried around with him would have included *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) and *A System of Logic*, which students studying Classics had been reading since its publication in 1843 (Capaldi 2004: p. 186). The volume offered a critical examination of Christian theology, especially the purported existence of miracles. It was also the basis of "the great controversy" being played out on campus between Mill, who advocated empirical rationalism, and William Hamilton, who promoted intuitionalism (Morley 1917: pp. 8, 12). Hamilton believed that the intuitive faculty enabled one to recognize in the physical world a fundamental spiritual reality and to instinctually distinguish between right and wrong without regard to observation or experience. Mill argued that knowledge was only gained by precise observations derived from the evidence of the senses. In 1858, Morley attended the Christian apologist Henry Longueville Mansel's Bampton lectures on religious thought and its limits. Mansel rebuked Christianity's rationalist detractors, principally Mill, by drawing on Immanuel Kant to argue that "belief cannot be determined solely by reason" (1875: p. 85). In fact, it is simply impossible to determine whether certain religious propositions are objectively true, because the human mind lacks the capacity to apprehend them. The essential truth of theology, he concludes, always eludes rationality. Morley found this High Church defense of Christianity wanting.

Morley may also have read Mill's essay "Civilization," originally published in April 1836, two years before his birth, in *The London and Westminster Review*, and reprinted in *Dissertations and Discussions* (1859). The essay considers the "consequences of advancing civilization," particularly as evidenced "in modern Europe, and especially in Great Britain," such as the emergence of a fully commercialized society and an expanding franchise (Mill 1859/1977a: pp. 121, 120). In less civilized societies, he contends, individuals rely principally on themselves for their achievements as well as the protection of their persons and property. As societies become more advanced, however, individuals increasingly rely on the "general arrangements of society" rather than on one's own "exertions" (Mill 1859/1977a: p. 129). Power, therefore, passes "from individuals to masses" and contributes to "greater and greater insignificance" being accorded to "the weight and importance of an individual" (Mill 1859/1977a: p. 126). In highly advanced societies, "the individual is lost

and becomes impotent in the crowd," Mill laments, "and... individual character itself becomes relaxed and enervated" (1859/1977a: p. 136). Progress, he concludes, is not an inherent feature of society, which necessitates that societies find ways to facilitate a "greater and more perfect combination among individuals" and to devise or strengthen "national institutions of education, and forms of polity, calculated to invigorate the individual character" (1859/1977a: p. 136).

Because Mill sees thoughtful and individuated opinion as the essence of character, he lambastes the ancient universities for failing to cultivate the intellect of its pupils. Indeed, "Civilization" offers a scathing analysis of prevalent forms of instruction and a severe critique of these educational institutions as representative of the sinister interest of the Anglican Church: the phrase was coined by Jeremy Bentham in reference to "Interest, when acting in such a direction and with such effect as to give birth to falsehood" (1838–1843: VII, p. 385). Mill draws on John Locke's discussion of "principling"—a practice that accustoms pupils to accept the beliefs of someone else on the basis of that person's authority alone—in his *Essay on the Conduct of the Understanding* to argue that schools and universities within his own time are habituating students to never question their instructors on matters of religion, morality, politics, and philosophy. The requirement that at graduation university students subscribe to the 39 articles—the doctrinal tenets of the Church of England—was simply an extension of this practice (1859/1977a: p. 141). Instead, Mill insisted, people should be free to "choose doctrines for themselves" (1859/1977a: p. 146).

If Morley read "Civilization," he would have undoubtedly agreed that making graduation dependent on subscribing to the 39 articles, or accepting "a particular set of opinions" (Mill 1859/1977a: p. 141), was the opposite of cultivating intellect. Even if he did not read it, Morley would have come across a very similar argument in *On Liberty*. What society needs, Mill argues in that later text, is not for people to give "dull and torpid assent" to existing opinions, but, rather, through rational consideration of diverse points of view, to obtain a deeply felt conviction that animates one's whole being—or what he calls a "living belief" (1859/1977b: pp. 248, 247). Imbibed from his parents and reinforced at various educational institutions, Morley's faith was not, he concluded, a living belief. When Morley articulated his growing religious doubts to his father and conveyed his unwillingness to take holy orders, Jonathan refused to provide him with further financial support. Unable to manage the fees for a

fourth year reading Greats, or even to meet his basic needs on scholarship alone, Morley accepted an undistinguished "Pass" degree in Classical Moderations in 1859. He then moved to London in search of work.

Morley's loss of religious belief and the breach this caused with his father was undoubtedly painful. It also had significant material implications. Although a large number of students at the ancient universities still expected to find ecclesiastical preferment after obtaining a good degree, these institutions were also increasingly preparing undergraduates for the civil service. Without his father's ongoing financial assistance, however, this option was unavailable to John. After a brief stint in Paris with a pupil whom he was tutoring, Morley moved to London. A legal career seemed promising, but after registering as a trainee barrister under noted historian and jurist Frederic Harrison, he realized that he lacked the funds to continue down this path. Morley thus experienced several impecunious years in which he did little more than subsist off the meager earnings of essays and reviews. In a speech in 1888, he recalled his early living conditions in the metropolis. One of the first rooms he rented overlooked a Holborn courtyard: "I shall never forget, I can never forget, the doings of that London court while I was endeavouring to read. The horrors of life under my window would have impressed themselves on any man's mind" (quoted in Hirst 1927: I, p. 33).

Although Morley struggled to support himself, there is very little evidence to suggest that this was because Jonathan had acted "wrathfully" in cutting off his son's allowance (Hamer 1968: p. 1). If this had been the case, one might also expect to find John excluded from his father's will, which divided monetary resources and possessions equally among his three sons, while also providing for his wife and daughter (1862: n.p.). Francis Wrigley Hirst, who served as a research assistant on Morley's monumental *Life of Gladstone*, suggests that it was Morley who was, in fact, "too proud after the quarrel with his father to ask for help from home" (Hirst 1927: I, p. 33). To be sure, Jonathan was gravely disappointed with his son's decision. He was undoubtedly concerned with the fate of John's immortal soul. There were significant social ramifications as well. Just as he had improved on his parents' social standing, Jonathan hoped that his own son would, by becoming a clergyman, further the family's ascent. The mobility of John's brothers was horizontal: Edward had followed in his father's footsteps to become a surgeon, while it was apparent that William, although in the late 1850s not yet a cotton merchant, would be a tradesman.

Thus, Jonathan was highly invested in the outcome of his son's education. His expectations need not be interpreted solely in a negative light. For many couples, the very act of having children is, and remains, a conscious choice to live as part of a collective unit with shared rituals, activities, values, and beliefs. In fact, for many people, childrearing is the central meaning-making experience of their lives. Because religious expectations, including the sharing of values and interests, informed the relationship between evangelical parents and their children, a child's loss of faith could be experienced by the parent, or be interpreted by others, as a failure in childrearing. "After all, one of the signs of successful evangelical parenting," Frank Turner points out, "was the rearing of a child who would experience conversion and acceptance of faith in Christ and then lead a Christian life that would result in a similar nurturing of a succeeding generation" (1990: p. 25). In fact, the familial bonds and affections were often deeply embedded in religious expectations.

Because parents feel that their offspring are extensions of themselves, many also consciously or unconsciously presume a parental right over a child that is grounded in proprietarian logic. In *On Liberty*, Mill contends that the assumption that parents have a right over their children is predicated on a "misapplied" understanding of liberty: "One would almost think that a man's children were supposed to be literally, and not metaphorically, a part of himself, so jealous is opinion of the smallest interference of law with his absolute and exclusive control over them" (1859/1977b: p. 301). Mill makes these comments in the context of a discussion about the proper division of responsibility between parents and the state for educating children. Although he did not believe that minors could be autonomous, Mill worried that parents, by exerting unrestrained power over their children, were limiting the opportunities for their offspring to develop finely tuned mental faculties. These ideas profoundly resonated with Morley.

Within five years of arriving in London, he wrote an essay titled "New Ideas," published in the October 1865 issue of the *Saturday Review*, which reflects on the state of contemporary receptivity to novel thoughts or suggestions. In this essay, he argues that, while the vast majority of people agree that new ideas are necessary to prevent society from stagnating, most are unwilling to entertain such ideas when they are first articulated. One might expect resistance from the general populace, but it is, in fact, the learned in society who generally greet new ideas with either cynicism or indifference. Although the vast majority of new ideas, Morley

contends, should rightfully be discarded, it does not, therefore, stand to reason that they should be considered. By way of analogy, Morley points to parents who believe that strengthening their children means exposing them to various forms of hardship. These parents believe "their point is gained if, out of a large family, they can show you one survivor with exceptional strength and health and powers of endurance" (1865: p. 140). In the same way, new ideas are tested by being mistreated or rebuked. Yet progress, he cautions, will not occur in spite of ourselves. If society advances, it will only be because greater numbers of people have resolved to be on the lookout for new ideas. Since the ignorant and those who daily toil for mere subsistence are in no position to be attentive, the learned must shed their cynicism and indifference, or else a new idea has very little chance of making its way into the world.

Recently elected to Parliament as Liberal member for Westminster, John Stuart Mill read and admired "New Ideas" and invited Morley to meet with him. The two became close. Morley regularly attended the Saturday evening dinner and discussions at Mill's cottage in Blackheath Park. After retiring to Avignon, Mill spent time with Morley on occasional visits to London at the latter's residence in Surrey. The two discussed a range of philosophical issues as well as public policy. After Mill's death, many looked to Morley as the exponent of his teachings for a second generation of liberal thinkers.[5]

Psychologically inflected biographies of Morley have suggested that he found in Mill a substitute father who could provide the kind of guidance and encouragement that—owing to his avowal of religious skepticism—he could no longer receive from Jonathan. But he met Mill several years after the death of his father, which complicates a tidy thesis of substitutive love. Certainly, Mill opened new worlds to him. After the death of his mentor, Morley wrote to Helen Taylor, Mill's stepdaughter, that "I owe in a hundred ways to one whose memory will always be as precious to me as to a son." He declared that Mill was "the best and wisest man that I can ever know" and that "no one sympathises with your affliction more profoundly and sincerely than I do" (1873: n.p.). Although Morley's intellectual debts to Mill are most visible in *On Compromise*, which I will consider in chapter five, they are also evident in the periodical essays he published in the *Saturday Review* and that were subsequently bound together in volume form. These essays suggest that, regardless of whether he served as a substitutive father figure in Morley's life, John Stuart Mill served as an important intellectual stimulus for thinking about the relationship between parent and child.

## Notes

1. In his hefty biography, Patrick Jackson writes that Morley's "mother and sister withdrew to Lytham, on the Lancashire coast, on the retirement and death of Morley's father" (2012: p. 1). This is incorrect: Jonathan died on 24 April 1862 in Lytham, where the family had recently relocated.
2. On the Evangelical observance of the Sabbath, see Wigley (1980: pp. 6–63) and Bradley (1976: pp. 183–6).
3. It is misleading, although not wholly inaccurate, to focus solely on the rather gloomy recollections of Morley, Ruskin, and others. Many Evangelicals felt otherwise. Brewin Grant, for example, looked forward to Sundays because he would awaken to find a plum bun next to his pillow (1869: p. 13). Others remember Sunday as a special time, particularly between mother and child (Bunting 1859: pp. 99–100). See also Annan (1984: p. 16); Cunningham (1975: p. 200); and Cecil ([1854]: pp. 144–5).
4. I discuss Morley's relationship to Comtism more fully in Morrison (2018a).
5. Some contemporaries even proclaimed that he was "Mill's representative on earth" (Collini 1991: p. 103; Biagini 2011: p. 6).

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CHAPTER 3

# From "Unremitting Attention" to "Discreet Indifference"

**Abstract** This chapter examines Morley's early essays on domestic themes in his *Modern Characteristics* (1865) and *Studies in Conduct* (1869), with particular attention to his remarks on parenting. Most studies of Morley pay little attention to these works. Insofar as he wrote and published these essays before his marriage and the responsibilities of childrearing, they certainly reflect a more youthful approach to a topic not yet tempered by experience. Nevertheless, they show Morley attempting to work out a philosophy of parenting consistent with his more mature views on the subject.

**Keywords** *Modern Characteristics* • *Studies in Conduct* • *Saturday Review* • Periodical writing

In 1861, a friend of Morley's from his undergraduate days made him a proposal. Frederick Arnold had stayed at Oxford to read Greats and graduated a year after Morley. After relocating to London, Arnold took the reins of the struggling *Literary Gazette*, which had run through a string of editors seeking to revive the flagging periodical. Knowing that Morley was struggling to make a living, Arnold asked him to join the editorial staff. When Arnold found himself stymied in his efforts to increase the circulation of his publication, he arranged for Morley to succeed him (1889: pp. 218–19). The *Literary Gazette* merged with a competitor a year later

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and ceased publication in 1863. But John Douglas Cook, who was editor of the *Saturday Review* and scouting for "writers of complete freshness and first-rate ability," noticed Morley and asked him to be a contributor (Escott 1923: p. 706). Between 1863 and 1867, Morley published about six dozen pieces in *The Saturday Review*.

This chapter examines many of these essays, which Morley subsequently collected and published as *Modern Characteristics* (1865) and *Studies in Conduct* (1867). He would later distance himself from these volumes, however, suggesting that its essays were juvenilia and written under the pressure of a weekly deadline. Although John Stuart Mill admired *Modern Characteristics* (which included "New Ideas") and presented a copy to the London Library, Morley thought "that no one should be held responsible for opinions written before forty" (Hirst 1927: I, p. 48). In fact, he was apparently particularly concerned about opinions written before the age of thirty. Soon after the publication of *Studies in Conduct* (in his 29th year), he asked the publisher, Chapman and Hall, to withdraw the volume from circulation. Most studies of Morley pay little attention to these works, referring to them as "ephemeral" or as "light and innocuous" (Jackson 2012: p. 27; Von Arx 1985: p. 127). Insofar as he wrote and published these essays before his marriage to Rose, and therefore before he assumed the responsibilities of childrearing, they certainly reflect a more youthful approach to a topic not yet tempered by experience. Nevertheless, they show Morley attempting to work out a philosophy of parenting which is consistent, as later chapters will document, with his more mature views on the subject.

## "Domestic Autocracy"

One of Morley's earliest essays for the *Saturday Review* that took home and family life as its central concern was published on 25 June 1864. "Domestic Autocracy" considers a noticeable change of atmosphere in the domestic realm. There is a marked decline in vigorous paternal autocracy, Morley contends, and advocates of this approach to family life may dwindle to the same numbers as those who believe in robust political tyrannies. Except for Thomas Carlyle, he quips, few still believe in benevolent dictators—referencing the sage's penchant for ostensibly great and strong leaders to whom a populace offers its worship. Even if the world "could ensure a permanent supply of them," Morley notes, "we have learnt that government has other ends than the most vigorous possible despatch of public

business” (1865: p. 82). Similarly, within the home, more people are beginning to recognize that while controlling the family’s affairs closely creates an outward appearance of neatness and propriety, chaos ensues and unseemly behavior is unleashed the moment the tightly held reins are at all slackened:

> We no longer wonder how it is that the sons of men of the most rigid piety so often turn out the most incorrigible scamps, and that the daughters of devout mothers grow into the boldest flirts and friskiest matrons. It is now a pretty generally admitted error to attempt to force all young minds into the same attitude, or confine them to one posture.... (1865: p. 82)

Morley’s political analogy may appear to suggest that he solely blames fathers for such outcomes. But mothers are as guilty as fathers in fostering an autocratic household. Through “strenuous and minute efforts,” the mother attempts “to make her children all that they should be” (1865: p. 82). She often finds, however, that her children fall well short of the ideal into which she is determined to shape them. Children disappoint parental expectations, and sometimes scandalously flout familial or social mores, Morley avers, because they have not internalized any of the values or beliefs to which they have been compelled to subscribe. They do not possess what Mill calls “living belief[s]” (1859/1977: p. 247).

Although both parents contribute to this state of affairs, Morley is principally concerned with fathers. There are, of course, biographical reasons why this would be the case. But Mill’s *On Liberty* had persuaded him that the relationship of fathers to their children raised ethical questions, such as how fathers might facilitate their children becoming autonomous adults, as well as policy implications, including the role of the state in educating the young. He came to believe, along with Mill, that “one of the most sacred duties” of parenting is to ensure that one’s offspring receive an education: “after summoning a human being into the world, to give to that being an education fitting him to perform his part well in life towards others and towards himself” should be of the utmost consideration (1859/1977: pp. 301–2). In practical and legal terms, however, fathers bore this particular responsibility (Mill 1859/1977: p. 301). According to Mill, while educating one’s children “is unanimously declared to be the father’s duty, scarcely anybody, in this country, will bear to hear of obliging him to perform it” (1859/1977: p. 302). Thus, fathers routinely deny their child an opportunity to receive expansive “instruction and training

for its mind." Instead, the child is given either very narrow sectarian instruction or is trained only to subsist (1859/1977: pp. 302, 303). When Mill called on the state to ensure that children are educated to the same standard, he insisted that examinations on philosophy, religion, politics, or other contentious topics not address the truth or falsity of opinions but simply expose pupils to the existence of various views.

Morley believed that the failure to introduce children to a variety of opinions caused unnecessary familial tensions down the line when, in late adolescence or early adulthood, they behaved in strange or wildly uncontrolled ways:

> nobody is ever surprised to hear that a lad who was only allowed to read one set of books, and was compelled to read them in season and out of season, who never had any opportunity of traveling out of one narrow circle of ideas or infringing a tedious monotony of habits, has made free will with the till, or run away with the housemaid, or got into the fastest set in the university and ruined himself for life. (1865: p. 82)

Although he does not explicitly state it, Morley is surely referencing religious instructional books. (He alludes to the biblical injunction, "Be prepared in season and out of season.") Raised under such myopic conditions, a young male will naturally rebel against parental instructions and religious values, since these are not convictions at which he has arrived through the process of weighing different opinions.

At the root of the problem, Morley asserts, is male egotism: "People who hold very strong views on any subject have a tendency as deep as human nature to urge everybody else to share them," he notes (1865: p. 85). The deeply held beliefs of most fathers tend to override any other practical or philosophical considerations. In this way, fathers rear their children with "unremitting attention." But just as egotism can assume different forms, so too can this parenting style be expressed differently. Morley differentiates between three types of fathers. The first two, the petty autocrat and the domestic emperor, share many similarities. Both want to see their opinions govern the workings of the household and the behavior of its members; yet substantial differences between them exist. Of these two types of fathers, the most common and troublesome is the petty autocrat.

"The autocracy of an emperor is not often personally vexatious; it is that of the mayor and the sous-préfet which galls the spirit and frets away

the life of a nation," Morley amusingly observes (1865: p. 87). This figure, who has little opportunity to have his way in the wider world, tends to become highly involved in household functioning and management. "One sees a man, who in public is as humble and unassuming as nature fitted him to be, no sooner get into his own house and with his wife and children, than he undergoes some miraculous process of expansion which transforms him into a portentous combination of Bluebeard and Solon," Morley wryly, but rather darkly, asserts (1865: p. 87). Dependents of the petty autocrat offer their listless assent to his authoritative and unimpeachable judgments on this astoundingly wide array of matters. Although they do not dare contravene his pronouncements, his wife and children do not wholeheartedly embrace his views as their own.

The dependents of such a man will, therefore, naturally greet any difference of opinion, even if unsound, with wonder and amazement. Because they have never been given the opportunity to consider options, his dependents will be unusually receptive to these other points of view. As they contemplate alternatives, they might grow discontented with their narrow lot and, while complying with his demands, register their dissent through sarcastic remarks or explicitly articulated exasperation: "The lover of constitutional government looks upon these symptoms of a rising of popular spirit with as much satisfaction as he does upon the right of public meeting and a free press," Morley contends. "He knows that the time will come when what the despot hates as insubordination will develop itself into a wholesome spirit of independence and self-reliance" (1865: p. 88). The more robust of petty autocrats will resist the challenges to his authority with fierce determination, even if this necessitates reducing his household to a state of total subjection. In these instances, the petty autocrat will "insist upon personally regulating the minutest details" (1865: p. 87). He becomes the "sole and immediate arbiter" of each facet of family life, from "religion and politics down to the colour of his wife's bonnet strings and the amount of starch that is put in the family linen" (1865: p. 89). If the goal of such a father is to have everyone and everything conform to his wishes, then under these conditions surely he will be successful.

It is hard not to think that Morley had his father in mind when he delineated the characteristics of the second type of father. The domestic emperor does not exert control over his family by managing the tiniest details of the household: "The egotist on a grand scale," Morley writes, "who flatters himself that he has discovered the great first principles by which all human conduct ought to be guided, is a far more agreeable per-

son to live with than the fidgety egotist" (1865: p. 87). Instead of bonnet strings and starch, this type of father is principally concerned with the education of his children. His fervent wish is that his offspring will grow up to be knowledgeable and morally upright individuals, and he is "impatient of whatever, in his own view, does not directly and palpably tend to this end" (1865: p. 84). Such a father sees sectarian education as the best means of obtaining his prized outcome. But he fails to recognize "the great truth that oneness of end is compatible with diversity of means" (1865: p. 84). That is to say, if intelligence and virtue are the goals, religious education is not the sole means to its attainment.

Challenges to the domestic emperor's authority tend to occur during his offspring's adolescence or young adulthood. Eruptions of a "rude nature" are common during these stages. Fathers of this type pester their children into conformity with their values, resulting in either a "chronic fractiousness or a confined priggishness." By being obsessively concerned with such behavior and fixated on its immediate correction, domestic emperors make life a great affliction to themselves (1865: p. 84). This is particularly unfortunate, he notes, because, insofar as they believe themselves to have in their possession the prescription for living the good life, such fathers often possess "a force and directness of mind which, were it not alloyed with an excess of the autocratic element, would furnish the best conceivable base for that unconscious assimilation of character which always takes place between the young and those to whom they are accustomed to look up" (1865: p. 84).

Morley concedes that until a certain age children need to have decisions made for them. Yet the point of parenting, he argues, must not be to raise passive, obedient, and therefore dependent children. With recourse to another political analogy, Morley argues that "*laisser faire* is in most things as much the prime rule of family government as it is of politics" (1865: p. 89). Just as states must set limits on the behavior of its citizens, so the paterfamilias must establish the parameters of conduct in a family. Just as states provide some services to its citizens, so there are certain responsibilities that a paterfamilias has to his dependents. Nevertheless, the father who "values the future of his children," rather than the present-day satisfaction of having others be obedient to him, will "fit them for the transition, which must come, from paternal subjection to independence" (1865: p. 89). Thus, for Morley, the actions of parents, and especially fathers, should be guided by the maxim *pas trop gouverner* (do not govern too much). In fact, the pernicious effects of governing too much are felt by

both father and children. The former grossly misjudges his "exact stature in the scale of the universe," while the latter find their "spirit of self-government and individuality" extinguished (1865: p. 90).

Morley argues that there is another form of parenting that is rarer but much more effective. Indeed, while "absolutism is always preferable to anarchy," Morley insists, there is no reason why either of these two alternatives should prevail (1865: p. 90). Childrearing with "discreet indifference is one of the rarest gifts," he contends (1865: p. 84). Most fathers are unable to approach childrearing in this way because of the insistent claims of the self: "only in the most highly trained minds does the egotism of fervent convictions fail to over-ride all other considerations" (1865: pp. 84–5). Yet, Morley argues, the nonchalant father has a far better chance of seeing his values embraced by his children. When a lack of interest or concern with outcomes is the foundation of childrearing, fathers can ensure that their offspring become increasingly autonomous, while also making the values and opinions by which they have chosen to live their lives of interest to the next generation. Lack of concern also minimizes for the father the psychically destabilizing effects of emotional tumult that inevitably follow from a posture of unremitting attention.

When self-worth is measured by the approval, praise, or recognition accorded by parents, children are unable to divest themselves of dependency. Consequently, Morley contends, fathers should not simply be detached from their children but, over time, become fundamentally indifferent to them. Employing yet again a political analogy, Morley writes:

> Perhaps the most reasonable scheme of the gradual development of infantine liberty is something like this:—First, a stage of minute and intensely centralized despotism, until the subjects have got over the sixth or seventh year of life. Then a monarchy, still absolute, but with a diminution of the centralization, and an extension of the sphere of self-government... After fifteen or sixteen, the monarchy becomes limited, until finally the society becomes republican, and the autocrat assumes the dignified character of guide, philosopher, and friend. (1865: p. 90)

Thus, fathers should assume a stance of discreet indifference at an appropriate stage of the child's development. It should be clear from this context that, in Morley's use of the term, *indifference* does not mean that fathers should cultivate a lack of interest, concern, or sympathy for their children. Rather, he suggests that the parent should be unbiased, impar-

tial, and disinterested, and should not exhibit a preference for a specific outcome or for one person in his child's life over another. In providing counsel to his child, he should be fair, even-handed, and just.

## On Childrearing: Pleasure

A number of Morley's essays in *Modern Characteristics* and *Studies in Conduct* can be read as addressing different aspects of childrearing. Mill thought it a "moral crime, both against the unfortunate offspring and against society," that many fathers did not ensure that their children received mental "instruction and training" (1977: p. 302). Morley likewise believed that parents are "clearly guilty of a heavy social offence" when they "gratify their tastes at the expense of more solid objects," including the education of their children (1865: p. 18). Many people, he laments, scoff at the notion of living modestly out of a mistaken belief that simplicity is nothing more than a synonym for destitution or unkemptness. Yet, at its best, he felt, simplicity "is a negative virtue" (1865: p. 18). Morley was undoubtedly thinking of the privations his father willingly experienced to ensure that he was educated at Cheltenham College when he wrote that "a proper thriftiness and frugality" can be quite praiseworthy when undertaken to achieve a familial or socially efficacious goal (1865: p. 18).

Morley can be seen here to be claiming for liberalism the Evangelical principle of thrift. In so doing, he emphasizes the positive aspects of frugality. "The wise and careful outlay of money," he writes elsewhere in *Modern Characteristics*, signifies self-government (1865: p. 79). Instead of giving in to one's whims and impulses, the liberal individual exhibits self-control by sacrificing immediate gratification for the obtainment of a more enduring reward. Thrift, Morley contends, is "one of the most arduous modes of self-control" (1865: p. 73). Its successful enactment in the daily life of the liberal individual, therefore, reflected "a really lofty moral excellence" (1865: p. 73). Self-control, Morley was keen to point out, was not the equivalent of Evangelical self-denial: "The proposition that all pleasant things are right is untrue, but it is certainly not so radically untrue as the more popular proposition that most pleasant things are wrong" (1865: pp. 8–9). Those who refused all sorts of pleasures on the grounds that remaining vigilant against worldliness would save one's own soul checked "all blitheness and freedom of spirit" ("Capacity" 9).

Throughout *Modern Characteristics*, Morley regularly considers the relationships among pleasure, amusement, and the family. On the one hand, there are parents whose own desires are satiated at the expense of their children receiving an expansive education. On the other hand, there are many parents for whom pleasure and amusements are anathema to proper living. “The Capacity for Pleasure,” published in the 21 April 1866 issue of the *Saturday Review* and reprinted in *Studies in Conduct*, notes that in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, pleasure was seen as, at worst, indicative of godlessness and, at best, “a necessary evil, incident to our fallen race” (1867: p. 2). Ventriloquizing those who subscribed to the “Immortal-Soul argument,” Morley asks: “Is it worthy of an immortal being to dance the *deux-temps*, or play a rubber of whist, or look at another immortal being trying to break his neck on a trapeze?” (1867: p. 2). Those who did not agree with arguments about the deleterious effects of pleasure nevertheless tended to share the views of a popular religious writer:

> There cannot, Hannah More allows, be in amusement more entirely harmless in itself than the practice of frequenting public walks and gardens on a Sunday. “But,” she adds, “I must appeal to the honest testimony of our own hearts, if the effect be favorable to seriousness; do we commonly retire from these places with the impressions which were made on us at church in their full force?” (1867: p. 2)

These definitive arguments against pleasure, Morley avers, no longer have much currency in British society. While such attitudes have not been totally vanquished, their influence is confined to increasingly smaller circles. Even among the truly devout and pious, pleasure is no longer seen as invariably at odds with religious obligations and an increasing number of amusements are tolerated or even encouraged.

Yet, Morley contends, there remains a persistent belief that engaging in pleasurable activities essentially fritters away one’s time. Even those who “have shaken off most of the unreasonable prejudices which were instilled into them” by teachers in their childhood, nevertheless “are constantly found to have retained the old view about pleasure” (1867: p. 1). Or, rather, this old view becomes transmogrified: the argument that pleasure is lethal to salvation becomes an argument that pleasure is “fatal to getting on in the world” (1867: p. 4). This is the mantra of the philistine for whom pleasure is seen as hostile to the acquisition of wealth. In response to anyone who asks about pleasure, Morley observes, “the relentless

drudge" will reply "that his pleasure is in unceasing work" (1867: p. 6). The philistine may deal less harshly than the religious zealot with a person who pursues amusements, but an inveterate distrust or abhorrence of pleasure remains.

This notion is inculcated in children from a very early age: "From our school-days upwards we are taught," Morley writes, "first by masters and discipline, and afterwards by the temper which we find prevailing in the world outside, that if anything is pleasant it is pretty sure to prove to be wrong" (1867: p. 7). Thus, sport is justified on the grounds that it is necessary for a robust physical existence rather than because it is pleasurable. According to the "commonplace pedagogue," who has not yet slipped the notion that "mortals are sent here as to a place of sore chastisement and mortification," reading is good if it is dreary and difficult (1867: p. 8). Yet, Morley asks, why do these same people not recognize that "it is possible to be just as immoderately and evilly addicted to work as to indulgence, and that an equal amount, though of a different kind, of mischief may accrue to one's family from excess in one direction as in the other"? (1867: p. 8). In fact, Morley argues, one should experience a quantity of pleasure each day. This is "one of the secrets of happiness in life," he contends (1867: p. 7). Teachers and parents should be as eager to cultivate in young ones a cheerful and lighthearted capacity for pleasure as for the rote memorization of historical facts and personages (1867: p. 9).

In this essay, Morley writes as a Millian liberal against philistine earnestness. But to an emerging liberal discourse concerned with the cognitive practices by which independent thought is produced and individuated opinion articulated, Morley adds an emphasis on pleasure. To be sure, he acknowledges, "people should be trained and encouraged to be upright, self-controlling, industrious, and magnanimous." Instead of capitulating to philistine morality, Morley is obliquely referring here to character in Mill's terms: "A person whose desires and impulses are his own—are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture—is said to have a character" (Mill 1859/1977: p. 264). For Mill, as for Morley, the term *character* refers to a specific moral achievement.[1] Nevertheless, Morley contends, there is no reason why the man of character needs to be dowdy and serious: "there is every bit as much reason why the faculty of being jolly, of finding an eager pleasure in all sorts of objects and pursuits, should be trained and encouraged" (1867: p. 9).

## On Childrearing: Aims and Ambitions

To the extent that Victorian moral education was intended to strengthen what were seen as naturally virtuous proclivities and to quell sinful passions, it rarely made room for the cultivation of cheerfulness and joyousness. This "has always been the weakest" part of moral education, Morley laments (1867: p. 9). The individual "who goes through the world with sober solemn jowl, is always thought to be showing a deeper sense of the worth of life," and to be realizing one's faculties, than the person with a "hilarious elasticity of nature" (1867: p. 10). It is, in fact, on moral grounds that many parents congratulate themselves for having a child whom they believe to possess extraordinary potential.

In "Youthful Promise," published in the 17 March 1866 issue of the *Saturday Review* and reprinted in *Studies in Conduct*, Morley observes that most parents have believed their son to exhibit, at some stage of his development, unusual capacity. Yet parents typically find that their son, on reaching full maturity, can boast only very modest achievements. Fortunately, Morley notes, most parents do not experience disappointment at these outcomes. Over time, their ambitions for their son—as well as the child's ambitions for himself—are revised downward. "The father who gives a tip to his boy for getting to the top of his class is apt to entertain a vague and complacent conviction that he is rearing an archbishop or a chancellor or a great author," Morley writes. "But ten years later he is amazingly pleased to learn that his lad evinces a genius for book-keeping by double-entry, and for mounting his high stool with punctuality" (1867: pp. 102–3). Why? Because the most ambitious professional goals can only be achieved through forceful and protracted effort, for which very few have the agility and stamina. Thus, "[w]hat at first would have seemed a pitiful aim indeed slowly assumes the proportions of a crowning success" (1867: p. 103).

The problem, Morley argues, is that both parent and child have confused "conduct with capacity" (1867: p. 103). A child is judged to be promising on the basis of one or two moral qualities that he exhibits. For example, a child may be "industrious, persevering, docile, well-mannered," or he may "always know his lessons," and never be "insolent or quarrelsome" (1867: p. 104). On this basis, parents imagine great things for him. "So-and-so, under five-and-twenty, is a person of great promise," Morley writes, by way of explaining the logic at work, "which, being interpreted, means that he is industrious and of good morality, and decently intelligent" (1867: p. 109). Yet, Morley argues, dismissiveness of the opinions of others

may, in the right circumstances, be considered "a very wholesome and promising characteristic" in a young man (1867: p. 105). Sometimes, however, "sheer bad habits," such as routinely flouting propriety, is taken by some to designate "spirit and originality" (1867: p. 106). This, too, Morley asserts, is flawed. Neither good nor bad habits in themselves, he concludes, "are the cause or the measure of that native vigour of mind which lies at the root of the most conspicuous and glittering of the successes of life" (1867: p. 106). How one responds to the demands of life in the years after one has left the home, he believes, is the crucial test of capacity.

This raises the question of character. Those who believe in William Wordsworth's dictum that "the child is father of the man" are surely right, Morley avers, as "we are born with peculiar temperaments and our own individual predispositions" (1867: p. 106). But character, he insists, is not merely synonymous with habits and behavior. In later work, Morley makes clear his belief that character, if it was a relation of inner essence to outer environment, emerged first as the self's "creature" and then as its "master" (Morley 1872/1923: p. 98). In "Youthful Promise," he defines character as "the compound product of predispositions and experience" (1867: p. 106). "You cannot," he insists, "predict anything of the product until you know something of the second of these factors, and even then it is unsound to argue that the combination of what seem like the same temperaments with what appears to be the same sort of experience will always be identical" (1867: p. 107). Consistent attendance at religious worship or unswerving obedience to the instruction of one's parents or college tutors, therefore, cannot be considered indicative of extraordinary accomplishments to come. In fact, boys "who have been angels with pure white wings up to one-and-twenty not seldom develop—by a process, we suppose, of natural selection—into imps with horrid horns and hoofs before they have left home a twelvemonth" (1867: p. 107). The true indicator of promise, Morley argues, is not exemplary behavior but mental intrepidity. Resolute fearlessness "is one of the most vital conditions of that eminent success which people urgently desire for their sons," yet it is "that at which men of promise ordinarily stop short of fulfillment" (1867: p. 108).

## "Vague Aims"

Several of Morley's essays address the differences in how sons and daughters are, and should be, raised. In an era of greater education and mobility, the imaginations of both young girls and young boys stimulate a great

variety of ambitions and desires. "People allow themselves to dream more, and their dreams make them work all the harder," Morley writes in "Vague Aims," a 10 September 1864 essay later published in *Modern Characteristics* (1865: p. 41). Among young men, these dreams can include fame or professional accomplishment along the lines explored in "Youthful Promise." Just as parents assume promise on the basis of moral qualities exhibited by their children, young men themselves often believe great things are in store for them solely on the basis of "conceit and rash confidence" as well as "ignorance of the conditions of success generally" (1867: p. 110). With unrealistic expectations about the ease with which professional distinction will be won, young men enter the world only to find themselves lacking the intellectual intrepidity to realize their goals.

In "Vague Aims," Morley notes that such fantasies of accomplishment are not exclusive to the nineteenth century, although changing conditions have done much to further stimulate them. In his own period, a "more curious sort of castle-building" has emerged; the "strange feature of this new restlessness is the utter uncertainty of its object" (1865: p. 43). Those afflicted with this restlessness can say neither why they are dissatisfied nor what they hope to achieve. "A man who has grown rich, and been blessed with a quiver full of grown-up daughters, will be at no loss to know what we mean," Morley claims.

> His daughters seem to have everything within their reach that can make life enjoyable—money, good looks, refined tastes, and a reasonable prospect of eligible husbands. To a certain extent they are contented; but the key to their whole life is to be found in a set of vague aspirations which, though invisible on the surface, underlie everything they do or think about. What these aspirations amount to is something quite indefinable. (1865: p. 44)

It is not the hope, Morley notes, of "knowing lords or country magnates," which motivates many "ordinary" young ladies. For these women, Morley insists, "are anxious to be great people on their own account" (1865: p. 44). Their possession of indefinite social aims "are the natural product of a culture that has no position and no outlet" for them (1865: p. 44).

The same, however, is not true of young men. The son of a merchant, Morley notes, can do as he pleases. If he wishes to carry on his father's legacy, he will take over the business. If he prefers to enjoy the fruits of his father's labor, he will become a Horse Guard or Foot Guard, take up a relatively undemanding professional position, or simply lounge around all

day. By contrast, although daughters may receive the best education for which their fathers can pay, there are no careers open to them. Yet such an education is bound to make them discontented with a rather narrow and constrained domestic life:

> The father keeps them generously supplied with pocket-money, and cannot imagine the mind which a handsome quarterly cheque paid punctually, and without reduction for income-tax, will not fill with perennial satisfaction. The mother sagely discourses as if their world of ideas and habits and prospects were exactly co-extensive with her own, and they listen with dutiful attention. Sometimes perhaps they venture to air their little stock of mental novelties before their elders, but they soon find that it is as inexpedient as ever to pour new wine into old bottles. (1865: p. 45)

Under these circumstances, Morley observes, young women begin to nurture nebulous purposes. They begin to imagine a future "whose only clearly distinguishable feature is its total difference from the present." "They resolve either to do good, or to earn fame, or to fight their way to some higher social position." "This is vague and hazy enough," he continues, "and very probably may come to nothing" (1865: p. 45). Without clearly defined means of, or purposes for, self-actualization, young women will simply be left discontented with the present but unable to realize a different future for themselves.

In the next chapter, I will consider how Morley's reflections on parenting became refracted through the experience of caring for children.

## Notes

1. Utilizing the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Lauren Goodlad persuasively explains Mill's intended meaning: "moral qualities strongly developed or strikingly displayed; distinct or distinguished character; *character worth speaking of*" (2008: p. 14).

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CHAPTER 4

# Theory and Practice I, 1870–1883

**Abstract** This chapter focuses on the early years in which Morley assumed responsibility for parenting his wife's two children from a previous relationship as well as his nephew, whom he adopted. It documents how Morley attempted to put theory, which he formulated in his writings of the previous decade, into practice. Unearthing new details about the family's second residence, the chapter also shows, by reconstructing the spaces of his home, how Morley's liberal ideas were lived and elaborated within a physical environment.

**Keywords** Stepparenting • John Stuart Mill • Education

John Morley and Mary Rose Ayling lived together for an indeterminate period before marrying on 28 May 1870. At the time of their nuptials, he was 31 and she was 29. Rose—as she was called by those closest to her—had two children from a previous relationship: Florence and John Ayling, aged eleven and ten, respectively, at the time of the wedding. The couple never had any children of their own.

This fact has inevitably invited speculation. It is possible that they were unable to conceive, but this is by no means the only plausible reason. After several years of relative penury, Morley had only recently gained his financial footing. After writing a couple of very laudatory reviews of George

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Eliot's work in 1866, Morley became friends with the English novelist and her partner, George Henry Lewes. In 1867, Lewes offered Morley an extraordinary opportunity. Since 1865, Lewes had been serving as founding editor of the *Fortnightly Review*. The periodical had been established "to further the cause of Progress by illumination from many minds" ([Lewes] 1865: n.p.), along the lines of the *Revue des deux mondes*, for which, Matthew Arnold had lamented just a few years earlier, there was no English equivalent (1864/1962: p. 270). Morley assumed the editorial reins in 1868. A year later, he made his first political run for office in a by-election at Blackburn but was roundly defeated.

With Morley's political aspirations beginning to take shape, and a steady income only recently secured, which would make parliamentary service possible at a time when members were unremunerated, the couple may have concluded that it was not yet timely to have children of their own. From Mill, Morley came to believe that "causing the existence of a human being, is one of the most responsible actions in the range of human life" (Mill 1859/1997: p. 304). To bring a child into this world, Mill argued in *On Liberty*, was not a private right. To the contrary, couples had a social obligation to place themselves on proper financial footing before having children. Although his Malthusian-inspired remarks were chiefly concerned with the financial circumstances of the poor, he acknowledges that people of all classes are prone to the self-regarding and selfish action of having children without the means to properly sustain a family.

In the case of the Morleys, there was the immediate expense of establishing a home together. Then there was a long-term financial commitment. As an avowed believer in the responsibility of parents to provide for their children's mental "instruction and training" (Mill 1859/1997: p. 302), Morley immediately began paying for the education of Johnson—as Rose's son was called in the household—and, later, of Florence. In 1874, following the death of his brother, William, Morley also assumed financial responsibility for (and, subsequently, guardianship of) his nephew. By the time these monetary obligations began to ease, the couple would have been in their mid-to-late thirties at a time when Morley was contemplating another run for Parliament.

Biographers and historians have tended to characterize Morley's home life as, if not unhappy, at the very least rather unsatisfying. By flouting social mores and living with Rose out of wedlock, and then marrying her on impulse, Stanley A. Wolpert suggests, Morley paid a lifelong political and social price (1967: p. 14). One consequence, Robert Rhodes James

notes, was that he was passed over for a key cabinet position more than two decades later. The Earl of Rosebery, who served as Foreign Secretary between 1892 and 1894, once remarked that Morley had hoped to succeed him in that role. This would be "an impossible appointment," Rosebery averred, because Morley had "anticipated the ceremony of marriage" (qtd. in James 1963: p. 310). More recently, Patrick Jackson argues that the marriage between John and Rose gives "the appearance of a duty, conscientiously assumed" (2012: p. 10). To Morley, Jackson suggests, Florence and Johnson were a "financial responsibility" (2012: p. 10). In Jackson's estimation, this investment had poor returns: "Florence became a nun," while Johnson pled "guilty to the forging of bills (some in the name of his stepfather, John Morley)" in 1907. For Morley, now serving in the cabinet, the public spectacle of his stepson's court appearance, writes Jackson, "was the climax of a long succession of embarrassments," including ongoing speculation about Johnson's and Florence's parentage (2012: p. 11). Morley's nephew, Guy, Jackson asserts, was similarly—although much less dramatically—a disappointment.

This and subsequent chapters will contest such assessments. By the time that he accepted responsibility for raising Florence and Johnson, Morley had written all of the essays that were principally concerned with parenting. While he found parenting difficult at times, especially in bridging the differences between theory and practice, there is little evidence to suggest that he saw this responsibility as unwelcomely thrust upon him. Instead, consistent with his Evangelical upbringing, Morley would have seen himself as possessing not only a high moral duty to provide for his family, but also as the center of its activity. Indeed, Morley would have seen fatherhood as a benchmark in one's valuation of domesticity—and we know he greatly cherished home life. In his daily practice, liberalism became a religion of the home, just as Evangelicalism had been in his earlier years.[1]

## The First Family Home

In 1870, Morley leased Flexford House, a fair-sized and fully furnished dwelling constructed in the early Victorian period on the northern slopes of the Hogs Back in Surrey. Italianate in architectural style, the house was "well-appointed," one visitor recalled (Sully 1918: p. 131). But a fully furnished, well-constructed house did not enable Morley to place his stamp on the place. Thus, the following year, he rented a smaller and fairly undistinguished farmhouse nearby. The chief selling point of Pitfield

House was the spectacular views it afforded.[2] It stood on the peak of the other end of Hogs Back, where it slopes down toward Farnham. Francis Wrigley Hirst, who visited the property in the 1920s, noted that the house was "bleak and exposed," with neither a tree nor a bush nearby, yet this is what constituted "its peculiar glory" (1927: I, p. 193). John Stuart Mill, who visited Surrey whenever he was in England, thought the view from Pitfield Down, which the family called the house, "the finest in the south of England" (Hirst 1927: I, p. 193): "On the north side you look, beyond Flexford and Ash Green, away over wide stretches of apparently flat country to the Epsom Downs," Hirst writes. "Far more lovely is the prospect from the garden on the south side to the heights of Blackdown and Hindhead, the Hampshire Downs, and the rich weald of Surrey and Sussex" (1927: I, pp. 193–4). The house no longer stands, having been demolished when the A31, which runs from Guildford to Bere Regis in Dorset, was made a dual carriageway in the 1960s.

Shortly after buying the lease to Pitfield Down, Morley undertook expensive and months'-long construction work to expand the house.[3] When completed, it consisted of two parlors and five bedrooms. These renovations ensured that each member of the family had his or her own bedroom; the fifth bedroom was shared by two live-in servants. One parlor was used by Rose and Florence, the other served as a gentleman's library. At a hand-carved oak pedestal desk with frieze and borders, Morley penned *Voltaire* and *Rousseau*.[4] The dominant analytical lenses of gender and class might be employed here to provide equally plausible or intersecting accounts of the home's spatial arrangements. It is tempting to see the distinction between Morley's parlors as reflecting widely held assumptions about the sexual geography of the home. According to this logic, certain rooms were to be designated as masculine or feminine (Kerr 1871: pp. 94, 107, 136–8). Similarly, shared sleeping arrangements were a working-class reality against which a middle-class ideal of bodily remoteness was increasingly constructed (Marcus 1999: p. 105). As Judith Flanders points out, the demand for additional rooms in a house "meant that most rooms became, of necessity, smaller" (2004: p. 9). For many, privacy was more highly prized than space. The additional space often facilitated greater social distance between parents and children, which led to more formalized interactions (Dyhouse 1986: p. 29).

The prominence accorded to the ideal of physical remoteness in some historical accounts of the period, however, belies the ways in which this ideal was often unrealized in practice. Until her marriage to Prince Albert

in 1840, for example, Victoria shared a bedroom with her mother (Wilson 2014: p. 299). Morley's middle-class contemporaries, Alfred Bennet and Edmund Gosse, slept with their parents. Bennet was allocated a bed adjacent to his mother's and father's. Until the age of seven, Gosse slept in the same room as his parents. After the death of his mother, Gosse continued to sleep in his father's bedroom until the age of eleven (Flanders 2004: p. 38). In other words, although as a single mother from the working class, Rose would likely have shared a bed with one or both children prior to the marriage, one cannot neatly argue that by designating a separate bedroom for each family member, Morley was attempting to impose middle-class order on working-class sleeping arrangements.

Solely privileging the analytical lenses of class or gender would obscure Morley's own spatial intentions. In the year prior to his marriage, Morley read Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, in which his mentor argued that the home should be a place in which the individuality of its residents was nurtured. Implicitly, this could only be achieved through spatial reconfigurations. In *Principles of Political Economy*, which Morley read while an undergraduate at Oxford, Mill made a stirring case for spatial privacy by linking it to the autonomous development of character. "Solitude, in the sense of being often alone," Mill argues, "is essential to any depth of meditation or of character" (1965: p. 756). Insofar as it enables the aspiring liberal individual to cultivate one's "inward nature," spatial isolation has individual as well as collective utility; hence, "a world from which solitude is extirpated, is a very poor ideal" (1965: p. 756). In places of serene isolation, Mill believed, individuals could cultivate their character and form reasoned opinions on issues of moment.

Mill's views on privacy and solitude resonated with Morley. Raised in an Evangelical household, Morley would have immediately recognized that the home could be spatially arranged so that its inhabitants would experience, instead of God's saving grace, the realization of liberal individuality. Although his father had converted to Anglicanism, Jonathan remained at his core a dissenting Christian. His mother, Priscilla, was a lifelong Methodist. Evangelical nonconformists stressed the autonomous development of the individual soul. Embracing the notions of personal transformation and individual salvation, and deemphasizing social modes of religious expression, Evangelical nonconformists believed religion to be fundamentally domestic. The home—rather than the church or the chapel—was to be the site for Dissenting Christianity's most noteworthy

devotional practices, such as introspection, self-scrutiny, and individual biblical study (Rosman 1984/2011: pp. 97–118).[5]

*Modern Characteristics* (1865), published prior to *The Subjection of Women* (1869), was highly influenced by Mill's earlier discussion of solitude in *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) and provides some insight into how Morley may have thought about the arrangement of the interior spaces of a home. Unlike *The Subjection of Women*, *Modern Characteristics* understands solitude in masculine terms as a principle of heroic agency. A significant number of "clever and likeable men," Morley insists, "seem to demand a certain amount of solitude" (1865: p. 121). Morley rejects the idea that a wife is "the most desirable companion... [a husband] could have at all times and under every circumstance." "Nobody wants to have his wife in his chambers or at his counting-house," he contends, referring to architectural spaces within as well as outside the home wherein a man could reasonably expect to be alone (1865: p. 116). Although Morley does concede that women and men should be left to "pursue pleasure after their respective tastes" (1865: p. 116), this seems more like a faint capitulation to rather than a robust defense of Mill's argument for "liberty of tastes and pursuits" in *On Liberty* (Mill 1977b: p. 226).

*On Compromise* (1874), which I discuss more fully in the next chapter, was written in the years after Morley had read *The Subjection of Women* and gained practical experience in managing a household. It offers a more sophisticated and nongendered understanding of solitude. Although his discussion of liberty within the household is limited to husbands and wives, it may be understood in a general sense as relating to any member of a household who has reached a mature age (sometime in the late teens when, Morley insists, children should be free to think and act for themselves).[6] Morley argues that "the painful element in companionship is not difference of opinion, but discord of temperament" (1874/1997: p. 129). Husbands and wives need not hold the same beliefs. Instead, it is important that "each of them should hold his and her own convictions in a high and worthy spirit" (Morley 1874/1997: p.129). Morley can be seen here as insisting more fully on one of Mill's three types of liberty: "framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow" (1977b: p. 226).

Thus, Morley developed deep attachments for Pitfield Down, which he found conducive to the nurturance of his individuality. Sometimes he would sit on the southern-facing porch to take in the view of the garden and the vista beyond. At other times, he would work in the hillside garden

itself. As John Tosh notes, gardening, which early nineteenth-century religious writers saw as potentially perilous, became by midcentury an activity that "brought a man into closer touch with nature, while the results if his labours refreshed the soul and delighted the eye." Tosh continues: "That gardening should have been seen in this light is some measure of the emotional needs which the home was called upon to fill" (1999: p. 33). Liberated from the views of Hannah More, whose writings he encountered in childhood and would subsequently excoriate in *Modern Characteristics*, Morley also delighted in family walks through the neighborhood.[7]

Yet the family's time in Surrey was short-lived. Rose's health began to decline and they were advised to leave the area. When the Morleys moved to Tunbridge Wells in 1873 in search of medicinal spring waters for Rose,[8] John kept the lease on Pitfield but underlet it to James Augustus Cotter Morison, his tutor at Oxford (License 1873). "I cannot bear giving it up," he confessed to his friend Fredric Harrison (quoted in Hirst 1927: I, p. 238). The couple moved to Brighton in 1875 in search of therapeutic sea breezes, and then to Wimbledon in 1879. In 1886, they settled in London, where they would reside until 1903. Yet Pitfield Down was still very much on his mind. "I like the civilized fashion of one's own house best," he wrote to his sister, Grace, on 9 August 1886, soon after the couple moved into a semi-detached house in the metropolis (n.p.).

## Becoming a Stepfather

Throughout the 1870s, Morley was highly preoccupied with the educations of Johnson and Florence. Cognitive liberalization depended on learning and instruction. Yet many schools trained pupils not in how to think but rather in what to think. Morley was concerned with the prevalence of what Mill called (after John Locke) "principling," the practice of public school instructors inculcating in pupils a particular set of opinions (1859/1997: p. 141). He also deplored the denial of liberty that was then entailed by the system of fagging, then rampant in public schools. James Mill, whose utilitarian writings Morley had studied, decried this institutionalization of bullying, which he likened to "slavery" (1817/1969: p. 102). Resembling the medieval code of knight and squire, fagging placed junior pupils at the service of senior pupils.

By the time Morley formally became Johnson's stepfather, he had also read John Robert Seeley's essays on educational themes. In an essay that he contributed to a collection on church policy in 1868, later republished

in his *Essays and Lectures* (1870), Seeley argued that fathers were negligent in delegating the education of their sons to others. Of fathers, Seeley writes: “He hands over to others the child’s education, his mind, his soul. He reserves to himself the finance department” (1870: p. 269). Seeley thought, instead, that the father should work closely with the headmaster of his son’s school and supplement formal lessons with instruction at home: “there is much in education which cannot be delegated, very much which can only be done at home, and a good deal which can be done only by the father” (1870: p. 270). The delegation of his son’s education, Seeley warned, had consequences far beyond those immediately discernible. To the extent that the father sees the fulfillment of his parental duty solely in providing for his family, “he practically surrenders his claim to filial affection” (1870: p. 270). When all that he provides his son is money rather than “sympathy, personal care, and intimate friendship,” the father should only expect “[d]istant respect” in return (1870: p. 270).

Instead of sending his stepson to boarding school, Morley initially hired James Sully, then a 28-year-old just returned from a stint in Europe but later a notable psychologist, to tutor Johnson (Sully 1918: p. 132). During this period, Morley appears to have spent time educating Johnson as well. After a couple of years, Morley decided to send his stepson to day school, an arrangement that shielded Johnson from the social pressures to conform that were common at residential schools. In the evenings, Johnson stayed with Ellen Ayling, Rose’s sister.

As late as 1877, while Johnson was attending vocational classes, Morley was still encouraging his intellectual development. In December, he had given the 17-year-old a copy of Thomas Henry Huxley’s recently published *Physiography*. On 14 December, Morley wrote to Huxley:

> My stepson here was reading it the other night: I said, “Isn’t it better to read a novel before going to bed, instead of worrying your head over a serious book like that.” “Oh,” said he, “I’m at an awfully interesting part, and I can’t leave off.” (1877d: n.p.)

Since he could not characterize Johnson as “bookish,” Morley thought this was an excellent “testimonial” to the effectiveness of the book, which sought to instruct readers on the interconnections of various phenomena.

Through much of the century, the education of children was thoroughly divided along gendered lines. For many middle-class families, the

ideal daughter was a "sheltered flower, a creature whose role in the home was to adorn it and assist in its maintenance" (Gorham 1982: p. 11). The home rather than school was the primary site of instruction. Although wealthier members of the middle class might send their daughters to boarding schools or academies for limited durations, the curricula of these institutions stressed "social values and objectives" rather than "academic goals: girls were educated with their marriage prospects and the ideal of 'cultivated homemaker' in mind" (Dyhouse 1986: p. 37). Of course, in actual practice, most would have found the ideal of "sheltered flower" unattainable. Others found it undesirable.

In 1865, as I discuss in chapter two, Morley lamented the state of female education as well as the lack of opportunities available to them. In 1869, writing the anonymous leader for the *Morning Star*, he praises his fellow liberal Seeley for advocating changes to female education. However, Morley insists, the proposed improvements do not go far enough. The problem, he argues, resides in the very notion of male and female education as being different:

> Many studies upon which young men waste a good deal of time are elevated into fictitious importance by the exclusion of female students from their pursuit; and women's minds are left in certain departments blank and stolid for want of that learning in moderation with which men are inundated in superfluity. So also with peculiarly feminine studies. Some are absolutely frivolous. Others, of a useful as well as ornamental kind, are allowed to fritter away an excess of time and attention. Others, such as drawing and music, are unnecessarily tabooed in male education for no better reason than they so largely occupy girls... It will be found upon adequate investigation that the instruction of men and women on such absolutely different systems as now prevail is prejudicial alike to the strength and gracefulness of our average cultivation. (quoted in Monkshood 1907: pp. 130–1)

Committed to cultivating liberal individuality in Florence as well, Morley sent her in 1873 to be educated under Marie Souvestre, the daughter of prominent French novelist Émile Souvestre, outside of London. Known for her rigorous academic standards and agnosticism, Madame Souvestre had recently settled in the metropolis after a stint in Florence, Italy, where she had run a finishing school for girls. Souvestre quickly became a prominent member of London's liberal intellectual scene, which included Morley. In contrast to similar institutions of the time, Souvestre's stressed independent thought, open inquiry, and social responsibility.

Patrick Jackson sees Morley's concern with education as simply an extension of the "financial responsibility" he had assumed for his stepchildren. He notes that Morley adopted his nephew, but not Florence and Johnson. The latter two, therefore, "retained their mother's maiden name as a continuing social embarrassment" (2012: p. 10). Other biographers as well as historians have occasionally speculated on Florence's and Johnson's biological father. Without any evidence, J. W. Robertson Scott claims that Rose had been in an abusive marriage and fled with her children to Morley's doorstep. By agreeing to house them, Scott writes, Morley willingly assumed the social stigma that would follow. The couple only married, Scott insists, after Rose's first husband died (1952: pp. 54–5). Yet the classical scholar Maurice Bowra remembers a very different account told to him by Margot Asquith. While at Oxford between 1819 and 1922, Bowra frequently dined with Herbert Henry and Margot Asquith, who had been friends with Morley for many years. He recalls Margot as saying that she once asked Morley about Johnson's father, to which Morley reportedly answered, "I don't know, and I doubt if she does" (1967: p. 202). The remark is grating.

Nevertheless, it suggests that Morley would have had a very difficult time adopting his stepchildren. In fact, there was no formal mechanism for transferring parental status from a biological parent to another who had committed to raising the child prior to 1927 in Britain, when the first legislative act regulating adoption in England and Wales was passed. Although informal adoption did exist, these arrangements were ad hoc and, in the event that one or both biological parents were alive, conferred no legal rights on those undertaking the adoption. A biological parent could therefore demand partial custody of one's child or children at any time (Keating 2009: pp. 27–38). If the stepchildren's biological father was either unknown or known to be alive, there would have been no surety in informally adopting them.

When Johnson married for the first time in 1889, he listed his father as "John Ayling, farmer, deceased" and his mother as "Rose Ayling, m.s. [maiden surname] Ayling" on the marriage registry. In 1902, when he married again, Johnson provided the same information. On this basis, and given how unlikely it was that both parents had the same last name without being related, John W. Bicknell and C. L. Cline speculate that Johnson's father may have been a cousin (1973: p. 29). However, just because Johnson provided these details does not make them true. Rose may have told him that his father was named John and that he died. Or

Johnson may have perpetuated a convenient family story of a previous marriage (which Scott recounts) rather than the embarrassment of being a "bastard." Only very unconventional people at the time would have admitted to being born out of wedlock.

## Becoming an Adoptive Father

In 1874, Morley received devastating news. The naked body of his brother, William, had been found on the ledge of municipal offices that adjoined Watson's Esplanade Hotel, where he had been staying, in Bombay. William, who had been employed as a cotton merchant by Robinson and Company in Madras, had lost his job four years earlier when the firm closed down. The same year his wife, Maria, who had accompanied him to India, had also succumbed to illness and died. Undoubtedly owing to a combination of stress and grief, William had become prone to bouts of drunkenness in the years that followed. In the early morning hours of 23 July, according to William Maule, the hotel's manager, Morley's brother had apparently "gone to the flat roof of the hotel" from where he had fallen a considerable distance (Maule 1874a: n.p.). He was found unresponsive several hours later. William had run up a huge debt to the hotel, including room and board, liquor, and cash advances (Maule 1874b: n.p.), which Morley cleared.

Because India was thought to be an unhealthy climate in which to raise children, William and Maria had sent their children to live with their maternal grandparents in London. The 1871 census shows all three living at No. 67 Lytham House (Census Office 1871). The eldest, known to the family as Willie, was born in London. The other two, Guy and Ethel, had been born in India. At the time of their father's death, the children were nine, five, and four, respectively. While the younger ones remained at their grandmother's home, Willie was attending Ascham School in Bournemouth. Morley immediately assumed these expenses and corresponded regularly with the headmaster about his nephew's progress. He also committed himself to paying for Guy's education. Frederic Harrison, who worried about the considerable expense Morley would incur in educating four children, offered to loan money to his friend. But Morley thought everything would work out and, writing to Harrison on 14 January 1875, he noted that "The education of my two stepchildren will be over in a couple of years; and the education of my brother's children will not be a considerable item before that time. My income this year will

hardly be less than £1300, of which £800 are without writing. It would be shameful if I could not pay my way, and arrange these new obligations on that sum" (1875: n.p.). In addition to his editorship of the *Fortnightly Review*, which provided the bulk of his income, Morley was also actively publishing throughout the 1870s.

Between 1874 and 1877, Guy would occasionally stay with John and Rose in Brighton, where they were living at the time. Grace (who never married) moved back and forth between her brothers' residences and would often visit as well. Their time together, Morley lamented, was fleeting, and Guy would inevitably return to his grandparents. By 1877, Johnson was staying with Rose's unmarried sister Ellen in London, where he was taking vocational classes to enter the publishing trade. He would return home for breaks. As an unmarried young woman, Florence might have been expected to be reliably at home. But in the fall of 1877 even she was often absent. George Meredith had asked her to help him with his work. "I am very grateful for fair Florence," he wrote to Morley on 16 November (quoted in Cline 1970: p. 551).[9] Morley found himself yearning for a more bustling household. In a letter to Grace dated 6 October 1877, he pensively notes, "The people that I like are always going away—you, the little people, etc." (1877a: n.p.). That same month, Morley and Rose, who consulted extensively on the matter, resolved to approach Maria Ansdell, Guy's maternal grandmother, with an offer to informally adopt their nephew.

Throughout October and November, Morley kept his sister apprised of developments in this matter. When Morley and Rose initially approached Maria, she rebuffed them: "I am very fond of the poor chap, and so is Rose, for that matter," he wrote to Grace on 21 October. He thought it would be "good for the boy, and a pleasure for our house," if they could raise him (1877b: n.p.). Referring to a residential school, Morley continues: "The boy will certainly be happier in our house than at a boarding house, and I fancy I know more about children than when I had to do with young Johnson and Florence, and should be less stiff—tho' now I am on most pleasant terms with these two babes" (1877b: n.p.). In November, Morley wrote to Grace to say that Guy would "brighten us up," since his stepson, now 17, would soon be setting out on his own. After the departure of Johnson, he wistfully avers, "we should want another schoolboy in the house" (1877c: n.p.). Maria's reservations included how Rose would treat Morley's nephew, and she was also likely concerned about splitting up Ethel and Guy. Morley, however, was convinced that Guy would be

better off with him and Rose. "I think the little fellow will turn out well, in spite of the horrible irreligion of the household into which he is coming," Morley says in jest to his still-devout sister. "He will not feel it quite so joyful, without Ethel and without Johnson—but it will certainly be superior to boarding school" (1877c: n.p.).

A month later, however, Maria had a change of heart. Morley and Rose travelled from Brighton, where they were residing at the time, to meet with her. On 22 December, Morley wrote to Grace to say that Guy's grandmother had greeted them warmly: "she had thought it all out for herself, and came to the conclusion that it was best on various grounds." She thought that Guy would have "a better start in the world" with Morley as a father figure. Further, he writes, "it seemed fair that I should have one of my own kith and kin." Morley goes on to say that "[n]o one has any right to grudge me the pleasure of having a lad of my own name and stock (a bad stock enough, no doubt) to bring up." Patrick Jackson argues that with this statement Morley betrays a preference for his own flesh and blood. Yet Morley makes this comment in the context of Maria's earlier hesitations about releasing Guy into his care, and her subsequent reflections on why Guy's living with his aunt and uncle would be a better arrangement. Having spent some time with Rose, Maria also concluded that his aunt "would do kindly by him, in which she is certainly not mistaken" (1877e: n.p.). Rose's active involvement in these negotiations should cast further doubt on the notion that Morley privileged raising his own blood-related nephew to the detriment of his stepchildren.

## Family Time

By 1878, the Morley household consisted of John and Rose, Florence, Guy, and several servants. Ellen and Grace would often stay with the family for extended periods and assist in childrearing. When Grace was not with them, John would provide her with updates on his stepchildren and nephew. In one letter, dated 26 February 1878, Morley, writing in an affectionate tone, spontaneously observes: "and here comes little Guy from school" (1878: n.p.). In this same letter, he notes that "The little fellow gets on famously; he is improving in manners, and his work is no trouble to him whatever. I fancy he now and then has a sudden longing to see his grandmother, but he is happy as the day is long, and we all grow more fond of him every day." He also reports on a trip to London, where Johnson and Guy were reintroduced. Johnson, whom Morley remarks

always looks "bright and clean," "was extremely pleasant and kindly, and Guy took a great fancy to him" (1878: n.p.).

Although Morley's schedule was demanding, family time was a priority for him. But Morley's letters to Grace in the late 1870s and early 1880s also regularly comment on time spent with his wife, stepchildren, and nephew. "'T is Sunday night, and my excellent family have all retired after a cheerful day," he happily tells Grace on one occasion (1881: n.p.). As John Gillis notes, the concept of family time originates in the Victorian period, the expression designating those frequent daily occasions when all members of the family gathered together. Evangelical members of Morley's generation, himself included, had grown up respecting the Sabbath. As Gillis documents, however, the setting aside of one day a week was less about a family ensuring that it had time together and more about distinguishing godly households from worldly ones (1989: p. 220). By the 1870s, families were gathering nightly to read together, converse, visit with others, or spend time around the piano.

One great event in the household took place in March 1878. In a letter to his sister dated 26 February, Morley exudes, "the mighty deed is done, and the grand piano bought." Noted musicologist George Grove helped Morley to select the "wonderfully beautiful instrument." Morley confesses that at £125 it is "an extravagance" but it will "give me and you and all of us a good deal of pleasure" (1878: n.p.). Rose, who did not attend finishing school, never learned to play, but Florence and Grace both enjoyed entertaining the family. There is no evidence that Morley, who thought that music was "unnecessarily tabooed in male education," ensured that either Johnson or Guy had lessons, although he would later send his nephew to an educational institution at which music was a vital part of school life.

In addition to music-making, the family vacation is another form of connecting. For many Victorians, mountains and the seaside were particularly conducive settings where the pace of life slowed. On 27 August 1887, Morley wrote to Grace to recount their European holiday. Although Johnson stayed behind in England, Rose, Guy, Florence, Morley, and Ellen Ayling, along with Frederic and Ethel Harrison, went to the Alps. On one day, Harrison, Rose, Ellen, and Florence "went on a glacier expedition." Although Rose enjoyed the experience, Morley amusingly recounts that "to Ellen and Florence the result was disastrous": despite having worn "dark spectacles," the glare of the sun "was too much for them," and their faces were burned "until they became dark spectacles

themselves." On another day, led by a guide and "armed with axe and rope," Rose and Guy set off on a "mountain expedition" that involved an overnight stay at "a hut high up," so they could ascend to the peak at 4:00 a.m. (1887: n.p.). Although Morley does not appear to have participated in these outings himself, he greatly enjoyed gathering at the end of the day with the members of his family to hear about their various experiences.

Of course, letters cannot be considered determinative evidence of how Morley thought about home life. Although they may provide insight into a writer's mind, they can also be misleading. The writer may simply be telling the recipient what he or she hopes or expects to hear, or may exaggerate details to cast oneself or others in a better light. There is, however, something deeply personal about Morley's letters to Grace. Having read hundreds of letters from Morley to various correspondents, I am struck by how reticent he is to ever discuss his private life, even with his closest friends. In letters to Frederic Harrison and George Meredith over many decades, for example, Morley only occasionally mentions his family.

Diaries and journals are another source of evidence. Among John Morley's papers archived at the Bodleian are ten Letts diaries, which he kept between 1882 and 1892, and fifteen journals, which cover a single month in 1882 and the period from 1891 through 1896. Letts was and remains a major producer of diaries.[10] By 1862, they were selling them in 55 different formats: from diaries designed for students to those meant for ladies and warehousemen (Steinitz 2011: p. 64).

Morley's diaries are similar to what we might now call a day planner, insofar as each page has a preprinted date and corresponding day of the week, with ample room for notes. Unlike today's planners, however, Victorian diarists made their jottings at the end of a day. These diaries, therefore, offer "a personal record of what interested the diarist, usually kept day by day, each day's record being self-contained and written soon after the events occurred, the style usually being free from organized exposition" (Matthews 1950: p. xv). Historians often define journals as "personal recordings that focus on internal rather than external concerns" (Hanson and Donahue 1996: p. 172). Morley's journals were essentially blank-paged notebooks, which he used infrequently to jot down his thoughts on mostly work-related matters. When he does make an entry, he records the day of the week as well as the date.

It is impossible to know whether Morley's diaries or journals were shared and, therefore, whether they are revelatory of his private thoughts. As Helena Michie notes, "Some would argue that all diaries, even those

that the writer has taken great care to keep hidden from others, have a component of publicity as they articulate for an imagined audience the most secret of events and opinions" (2006: p. 40). But in their candor and detail, Morley's diaries and journals are similar to his letters. They confirm that he derived much pleasure from family time. One 1883 diary entry records his satisfaction with a family evening at the theater. After "long hours" at the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the editorial reins of which he had recently taken over, he particularly relished an evening with Rose, Florence, Johnson, and Guy. "Went to the theatre... with my family," he notes one January evening in 1883, to see a "charming" performance of Shakespeare's "Much Ado about Nothing" (1883a). Another entry in March that year refers to an outing with Rose, Florence, and Ellen (1883b).

Morley's diaries and journals also provide insight into the tensions and contradictions that he experienced as a father figure. I explore these issues in Chap. 6. First, however, I turn to the historical studies, biographies, and liberal political treatise that Morley wrote during the decade in which he was highly engaged in parenting.

## Notes

1. I discuss a different phase of Morley's domestic practice of liberalism elsewhere (Morrison 2018).
2. Morley leased Pitfield House from Charlotte Carolina Georgiana Howard of Greystoke Castle, Cumberland (Memorandum 1870).
3. Writing to Frederic Harrison on 25 June 1871, Morley notes that while watching the contractors realize his vision, "the superiority of their career to mine struck me daily." The remark was not facetious. "A clever joiner is the noblest work of God," he said admiringly, albeit—as an atheist—playfully (1871: n.p.).
4. Acquired soon after his marriage to Rose, the desk was used by John until his death ("Sale" 1924: n.p.).
5. As Boyd Hilton notes, the "all important contractual relationship is directly between each soul and its maker (1988: p. 8). Intercessionary forms, dissenters believed, interrupted this relationship.
6. For a further elaboration of Morley's understanding of parenting in stages, see Chap. 2.
7. More once contended that even "harmless" pleasures, such as walks, detract from humankind's noble purposes. As Morley humorously notes, even croquet "would in her opinion have been a monstrous and disorderly piece of libertinism" (1867: p. 3).

8. Hirst documents Rose's occasional health crises (1927: I, pp. 231, 238; II, p. 8).
9. This practice continued for several years. In 1882, for example, Morley notes that Florence had spent a week with the Merediths, who lived in Surrey (1882: n.p.).
10. Steinitz (2011) discusses the history of Letts's diaries.

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CHAPTER 5

# Historical and Political Writings

**Abstract** Throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, while Morley was actively involved in childrearing, he wrote several significant historical studies and biographies. Each of these texts explore in their respective ways aspects of parenting or parenthood. This chapter analyzes several of these texts to consider how Morley's views on the relationship between parent and child became more philosophically informed as he immersed himself in the writings of eighteenth-century French intellectuals and penned his famous treatise on liberal ethics.

**Keywords** Rousseau • Voltaire • Diderot • *On Compromise* • Father and son

Throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, while Morley was actively involved in childrearing, he wrote several significant historical studies and biographies, including *Voltaire* (1872), *Rousseau* (1873), and *Diderot and the Encyclopaedists* (1878). In 1879, his second book-length study of Edmund Burke appeared in Macmillan's *English Men of Letters* series, for which he served as general editor. In 1874, he also published *On Compromise*, an extended essay on political ethics that sought to defend John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* against its principal detractor, James Fitzjames Stephen. Each of these texts explore in their respective ways aspects of parenting or parenthood. This chapter analyzes several of these texts to consider how

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Morley's views on the relationship between parent and child became more philosophically informed as he immersed himself in the writings of eighteenth-century French intellectuals and penned his famous riposte to Stephen.

## Morley on Voltaire and Rousseau

In his studies of the French *philosophes*, Morley set for himself the principal task of showing how their writings laid the groundwork for the French Revolution. John Stuart Mill had once contemplated writing a history of the French Revolution. When he abandoned his plans, he turned over his notes to Thomas Carlyle (Mill 1873/1981: p. 134), whose three-volume work on the subject, published in 1837, established him as the leading authority on French political thought. But Morley believed that the Sage of Chelsea's "famous diatribes against the Bankrupt Eighteenth Century" stood in need of correction (1917: p. 82). Morley thus began with essays on Joseph de Maistre, who had attacked the eighteenth-century rationalists, as well as Condorcet and Turgot, to whom he (and Mill before him) attributed some aspects of Victorian liberalism. He then turned to the three great French Enlightenment-era thinkers.

Although the amount of biographical information in his volumes on Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot varies, Morley nevertheless reveals himself to be consistently interested in historical approaches to parenting, as well as how these men were either fathered or conducted themselves as fathers. Indeed, Morley seems to have thought of the Enlightenment as a period comparable to the age in which he was living when "intellectual change," as Walter Bagehot described the mid-nineteenth century, placed father and son at variance (Bagehot 1915: p. 60). Thus, in *Voltaire*, Morley notes that in his youth, the philosopher already possessed a "bold, vivacious, imaginative disposition," which naturally came into conflict with his father, whose temperament was far more stolid. The two quarreled over Voltaire's future. While the father wanted his son to pursue a legal career, Voltaire was himself insistent on becoming a writer (1872: p. 45). "To be a man of letters in France in the middle of the eighteenth century," Morley hastens to add, was not at all comparable to being a writer in Victorian London. The man of letters was "the official enemy of the current prejudices and their sophistical defenders in the church and the parliaments." Thus, Morley continues, "Parents heard of a son's design to go to Paris and write books, or to mix with those who write books, with the same

dismay with which a respectable Athenian heard of a son following Socrates, or a respectable modern hears of one declaring himself a Positivist" (1872: p. 121).

Insisting on historical differences and dissimilar means of undermining the sophistry of their day, Morley nevertheless draws parallels among parental attitudes in ancient Athens, eighteenth-century France, and nineteenth-century England. In so doing, he alludes to the position in which he found himself, when he declared his loss of religious faith to his father. Although in 1859, Morley was not yet as closely aligned to positivism as he would be in the decade that followed, the writings of Comte were nevertheless a factor in his decision not to pursue an Anglican priesthood. On leaving Oxford for London, he became enmeshed in Comtist circles that included Frederic Harrison, George Eliot, and George Henry Lewes (Morrison 2018). He found himself, therefore, in a position similar to Voltaire's.

Yet unlike Voltaire, Morley did not position himself against the religious sophistry of his time by advocating sexual licentiousness. In fact, Morley notes, this flouting of mores among Enlightenment-era thinkers is, historically, highly unusual: "What austerity was to other forward movements, license was to this" (1872: p. 145). He speculates that the reason why sexual licentiousness was common among progressive thinkers of the time was that chastity "was one of the most sacred of the pretensions by which the organized preachers of superstition claimed the reverence of men and women." Consequently, promiscuity became a tactic by which to strike a fatal blow against the church. This, Morley concludes, demonstrates "the peril of having morality made an appendage of a set of theological mysteries, because the mysteries are sure in time to be dragged into the open air of reason, and moral truth crumbles away with the false dogmas with which it had got mixed" (1872: p. 145).

In his comments on sexual morality, whose necessity he wants to establish on ethical rather than religious grounds, Morley reveals some of the beliefs that would govern his own approach to parenting:

> Our identity does by no means consist in a historic continuity of tissues, but in an organic moral coherency of relation. It is this, which alone, if we consider the passing shortness of our days, makes life a whole, instead of a parcel of thrums bound together by an accident. Is not every incentive and every concession to vagrant appetite a force that enwraps a man in gratification of self, and severs him from duty to others, and so a force of dissolution and dispersion? (1872: p. 147)

Here Morley seeks to disentangle liberal individualism from the libertine possessive individualism that he attributes to Voltaire and his contemporaries: "It might be necessary to pull down the church," Morley continues, "but the worst church that has ever prostituted the name and the idea of religion cannot be so disastrous to society, as a gospel that systematically relaxes self-control as being an unmeaning curtailment of happiness" (1872: p. 147). In fact, Morley, following Mill, identifies one's own unbridled desires as an impediment to self-development, which childrearing is ultimately designed to facilitate. Defending the family unit against sexual licentiousness, Morley argues that self-regard is the basis on which libertinage was justified. Yet, he continues, self-regard destroys the state and libertinage destroys the family.

In his publications throughout the 1860s, Morley had consistently advocated against the view that the truth or falsity of a published opinion could be discerned with reference to the character of its author (1867). Instead, one must understand the relationship of a given opinion to "the main transaction" of the time in which it was written (1865: pp. 206–15). Nevertheless, with his volume on Rousseau, published in 1873, Morley knew that he had to address head-on the sexual recklessness of his biographical subject. When Rousseau's domestic partner, Thérèse Levasseur, told him that she was pregnant with their first child, the father-to-be determined not to keep the baby. He took the newborn from its mother and deposited the child in a box at a foundling asylum. During their years together, the couple, shockingly neglectful of "any precaution," produced five children. As Morley summarizes it, on each occasion, "the same easy expedient was again resorted to, with the same heedlessness on the part of the father, the same pain and reluctance on the part of the mother" (1873: I, p. 118). These well-known details of Rousseau's life, Morley argues, should not dissuade readers from studying his works, particularly *Émile*, "the most influential treatise on education that has ever been written" (1873: I, p. 95). Appealing to a broadminded readership interested in the manysidedness of human character, Morley argues for an "open and liberal" approach to Rousseau rather than one that would render judgments in terms of "absolute approval or disapproval" (1873: I, p. 6).

It is, of course, terribly ironic, Morley notes, that the philosopher who regarded parental influence as the most important factor in the education of children had himself abandoned five of his own offspring. Yet, Morley believes, "deep mystic aspiration" can coexist with and be concealed by "the vile outer life of a man" (1873: I, p. 129). Thus, a reader of Rousseau

must be willing to accept those aspects of his thought that are valuable while in no way condoning the facets of his life that are reprehensible.

Although he does not wish to absolve Rousseau of his wrongdoing, Morley nevertheless argues that one must "remember that a great many other persons in that lax time, when the structure of the family was undermined alike in practice and speculation, were guilty of the same crime" (1873: I, pp. 126–27). Unlike his compatriots, however, Rousseau "did not erect his own criminality into a social theory, but was tolerably soon overtaken by a remorse which drove him both to confess his misdeed, and to admit that it was inexpiable" (1867: I, p. 127). Moreover, Morley continues, in remonstrating the "clergymen, sentimentalists, and others" of his own time, there are many who "if they do not advocate the despatch of children to public institutions, still encourage a selfish incontinence … which turns the family into a scene of squalor and brutishness." In fact, Morley concludes, it is hard to understand which is more criminal: "to produce children with the deliberate intention of abandoning them to public charity, as Rousseau did, [or] … to produce them in deliberate reliance on the besotted maxim that he who sends mouths will send meat, or any other of the spurious saws which make Providence do duty for self-control, and add to the gratification of physical appetite the grotesque luxury of religious unction" (1873: I, p. 128). Rousseau, whose actions were vile, at least arranged for the children to receive care. Religious propagandists, however, encourage their laity to produce children without regard to the poverty and filth to which they will be condemned.

In his chapter on *Émile*, Morley considers the relationship of parent and child through the prism of education. By some estimations, his analysis of Rousseau's landmark text is "stiff and formal" because Morley "knew so little about children" (Knickerbocker 1943: p. 156). This is a problematic assertion for two reasons. First, of course, Rousseau, who abandoned his own children and had very little knowledge of children generally, nevertheless managed to pen "a charter of the freedom of childhood" (Knickerbocker 1943: p. 156). Second, Morley had never been more engaged with children than he was while writing on Rousseau: since his marriage to Rose three years earlier, Morley was actively involved in raising his stepchildren.

The figure of the child, Morley notes, in introducing his subject, often represents the possibility of a future against the social and political status quo. Because the Enlightenment was characterized by hope in the future of humanity, Rousseau was particularly interested in using the child to

think through “what man is, and what can be made of him” (1873: II, p. 193). With his emphasis on the notions of cultivation, growth, and development in education, Rousseau broke with extant mechanistic theories. His novel also became a landmark text that placed instruction in the hands of parents and, therefore, located it in the familial realm rather than the classroom. By insisting on the important role played by parents, Rousseau was also arguing that education occurs in infancy. This was in striking contrast with the idea that education begins in adolescence under the instruction of religious and university authorities: “The improvement of ideas upon education, was … one phase of the great general movement towards the restoration of the family,” Morley writes. “Education now came to comprehend the whole system of the relations between parents and their children, from early infancy to maturity” (1873: II, p. 195). Parents began taking more affectionate interest in their children and, in doing so, became closer to each other (1873: II, p. 201). They also increasingly rejected church dogma about the “Fall of man.” Instead of seeing education as the means of eradicating wickedness, it began to be viewed as the process by which human potentiality could be drawn out and actualized.

Rousseau’s novel was revolutionary because it departed even from the radical thought contained within other Enlightenment-era texts. Some intellectuals of the time held that character was a process of acquisition. Education was seen as the means by which instructors could facilitate an adolescent’s characterological attainments. By contrast, Rousseau believed that “inborn temperament” was the foundation of character (1873: II, p. 206). Instead of directing a child, the parent-tutor should provide the youngster with maximum scope for experiential learning by intervening as little as possible in the “free working” of its innate temperament (1873: II, p. 207). Under such conditions of liberty, a child’s upbringing would be freed as much as possible from the constraints of social custom.

In Rousseau’s estimation, the loving parent who provides this opportunity for one’s child trumps even the most learned instructor to whom the task of education might otherwise be delegated. To those who would argue that moral values must be instilled in children, Rousseau counters that humankind inclines toward goodness. In fact, nature—a rural setting is, for Rousseau, the ideal environment for a child to develop—provides moral instruction, which the young will apprehend if left to its own devices. Moreover, the child will apprehend these lessons when it is ready

to receive them. Adults who insist on providing moral instruction to children in advance of when their minds are capable of receiving such lessons simply force them to grow up far earlier than nature intended. Because the reasoning faculty in children is the last to be developed, Rousseau contended, it cannot be the first instrument that parents employ in trying to raise their children. Being told why a certain course of action may be good is far different from being inclined to pursue it. Rousseau acknowledges that sometimes parents and instructors will need to create situations in which children spontaneously learn right from wrong. But "the child … ought always to be led to suppose that it is following its own judgment or impulses, and has only them and their consequences to consider." Of necessity, "the hand and will of the parent or the master" must always be concealed, for the natural inclinations toward goodness to be drawn out (1873: II, p. 213). If a child ever became "conscious of the pressure of a will external to its own," resentments, and perhaps even a rejection of the moral lesson to be learned, would follow (1873: II, pp. 213, 212). But if the lessons are successful, the child "shall grow up with firm and promptly acting habit" (1873: II, p. 209). At a later stage, when the mind is more fully developed, these lessons can be reinforced through reason.

Morley's disagreements with Rousseau provide some insight into his own approach to parenting. While he shares Rousseau's view that children should learn by "example, and the more living instruction of visible circumstance" (1873: II, p. 208), he rejects the notion that the parents' guiding hand should be concealed. These artificially contrived situations, devoid of authority, where the cultivation of moral conduct would supposedly occur, ill-prepared children for the reality of life ahead of them. "Rousseau was quite right in insisting on practical experience of consequences as the only secure foundation for self-acting habit," Morley acknowledges. Nevertheless, he continues, "he was fatally wrong in mutilating this experience by the exclusion from it of the effects of perceiving, resisting, accepting, ignoring, all will and authority from without" (1873: II, p. 215).

To develop a sure moral character in the young, parents should appeal to their innate "desire to please." This, he contends, is a much more secure "basis than the conclusions of an embryo reason" (1873: II, p. 211). As children mature, "the grounds on which action is justified or condemned may be made plain" (1873: II, pp. 211–12). Rousseau, Morley contends, made a great mistake in assuming that the "effects of conduct upon the

actor's own physical wellbeing [are] the only effects honoured with the title of being natural." He continues:

> Surely, while we leave to the young the widest freedom of choice, and even habitually invite them to decide for themselves between two lines of conduct, we are bound afterwards to state our approval or disapproval of their decision, so that on the next occasion they make take this anger or pleasure in others into proper account in their rough and hasty forecast, often less hasty than it seems, of the consequences of what they are about to do. One of the most important educating influences is lost, if the young are not taught to place the feelings of others in a front place, when they think in their own simple way of what will happen to them, if they yield to a given impulse. (1873: II, pp. 214–15)

Morley is insisting here, then, on the importance of a child knowing what brings the parent pleasure or displeasure. Children will learn to distinguish between right and wrong through the expressions of approval or disapproval that their actions elicit by those to whom they look up. Such training is important for the early stages of one's life, before the period of independence, when a person must choose one's own life path.

Morley also worried about leaving too much to the emotions. For, unless right conduct is thoroughly instilled at an early age, "a man grows up with a drifting unsettledness of will, that makes his life either vicious by quibbling sophistries, or helpless for want of ready conclusions" (1873: II, p. 209). Morley argues that although a well-developed capacity for rational thought "is truly the tardiest of human endowments," as Rousseau observed, "it can never be perfected at all unless the process be begun, and, within limits, the sooner the beginning is made, the earlier will be the ripening" (1873: II, p. 205). Thus, parents should acquaint children with the reasons why one course of action may be bad while another is good. Since "the critical and testing points of character" often occur at moments when rational thought must be employed, it is vital that parents ensure that their children possess "trained intelligence, and the habit of using it" (1873: II, p. 205).

From these criticisms of Rousseau's theories, Morley then moves into a discussion of his own beliefs regarding the ways in which properly formed character can be cultivated. First, he insists, one must raise a child to possess "a resolute and unflinching respect for truth," which includes "the simple habit of correct observation, down to the highly complex habit of weighing and testing the value of evidence" (1873: II, p. 227). Rousseau,

Morley remarks, thought very little about these capacities beyond insisting that they not be developed too early. Second, Morley continues, "a rightly formed character" includes "deep feeling for things of the spirit which are unknown and incommensurable" (1873: II, pp. 227–8). This may seem surprising coming from an avowed agnostic. But Morley hoped, at this stage of his intellectual development, when he was still somewhat under the sway of Comtism, that one day the sense of God's holiness would be replaced by a similar reverence for the "brotherhood of humanity seen and unseen" (1873: II, p. 277). The third crucial factor, of which Rousseau made "little use," is "a passion for Justice" (1873: II, p. 228). Because self-interest was the foundation of his moral philosophy, Rousseau considerably narrowed the sphere of justice. "You may begin at a very early age to develop, even from the primitive quality of self-love, a notion of equity and a respect for it," Morley writes, "but the vast conception of social justice can only find room in a character that has been made spacious by habitual contemplation of the height and breadth and close compactedness of the fabric of the relations that bind man to man, and of the share, integral or infinitesimally fractional, that each has in the happiness or woe of other souls" (1873: p. 232).

With Mill as his guide, Morley believed that children should be raised with a social conscience, the stirrings of which would prompt them to contribute in ways, both large and small, to progressive reform. "They need to be taught," Morley insists, " that they owe a share of their energies to the great struggle which is in ceaseless progress in all societies in an endless variety of forms, between new truth and old prejudice, between love of self or class and solicitous passion for justice, between the obstructive indolence and inertia of the many and the generous mental activity of the few." "This," he concludes, "is the sphere and definition of the social conscience" (1873: II, p. 235). The parent and the instructor alike should "associate those virtues of fortitude, tenacity, silent patience, outspoken energy, readiness to assert ourselves and readiness to efface ourselves, willingness to suffer and resolution to inflict suffering, which men of old knew how to show for their gods or their sovereign" with the "good causes of enlightenment and justice in all lands" (1873: II, p. 235). But, Morley laments, the ideal laid out in *Émile* was "quietism": for the eponymous character "to possess his own soul in patience, with a suppressed intelligence, a suppressed sociality, without a single spark of generous emulation in the courses of strong-fibred virtue, or a single thrill of heroical pursuit

after so much as one great forlorn cause" (1873: II, pp. 235–6). Rousseau ultimately isolates the individual to a sphere of solipsistic reverie.

Nevertheless, Morley argues, the value of the text is not in the specific facets of its argument but in its overall effect. "It filled parents with a sense of the dignity and moment of their task," he avers (1873: II, p. 250). But it went further still: its appeal to "parental affection" awakened a desire on the part of mothers and fathers "to cherish the young life in all love and considerate solicitude" (1873: II, p. 250). At educational institutions, it unleashed "floods of light and air into the tightly closed nurseries and schoolrooms" (1873: II, p. 250). Indeed, it spurred the democratizing impulse to expand education beyond the narrow confines of the elite (1873: II, p. 254). In this respect, Rousseau is more akin to nineteenth-century liberalism than John Locke, who was ultimately concerned with the "instruction of young gentleman and gentlewomen" (1873: II, p. 254). *Émile*, Morley contends, was nothing less than "the charter of youthful deliverance" (1873: II, p. 253).

## The Pursuit of Truth

Between *Rousseau* and *Diderot and the Encyclopaedists*, Morley published *On Compromise* (1874). In this work, he speaks at length—no doubt informed by the falling out with his own parents—about the challenge of pursuing truth when it can "inflict keen distress on those to whom we are bound by the tenderest and most consecrated ties" (1874/1997: p. 114). The book was eagerly received by a whole generation who, like Morley himself, had abandoned the religious beliefs of their parents. Although *On Compromise* has been analyzed for the moral principles it advances, little attention has been paid to it as a document that attempts to work out the responsibilities that children and parents have toward each other.

In this text, Morley devotes a chapter to the issue of religious conformity, or agnosticism, and considers the question of whether one should freely express views that are at variance with those of others. He notes that in politics, the republican is free to express his view: "although he will have to face the obloquy which attends all opinion that is not shared by the more demonstrative and vocal portions of the public" (1874/1997: p. 112). In religion, however, "the preliminary stage has scarcely been reached—the stage in which public opinion grants to every one the unrestricted right of shaping his own beliefs, independently of those of the people who surround him" (1874/1997: p. 113). The formation of one's

own opinions should be undertaken disinterestedly, individually: "Truth is the single object," he insists (1874/1997: p. 114). However, the expression of one's opinion, Morley argues, is another matter, since all those with whom the individual associates will be impacted. Indeed, religious skepticism has significant implications for the members of one's family who still believe in older faiths: "When we come to declaring opinions that are, however foolishly and unreasonably, associated with pain and even a kind of turpitude in the minds of those who strongly object to them," Morley notes, "then some of our most powerful sympathies are naturally engaged" (1874/1997: p. 114). One must necessarily question whether duty to truth trumps all other considerations.

Before addressing this issue directly, Morley is keen to refute the notion that Victorian religious skepticism is in any way associated with moral turpitude. Although he does not make the connections with his earlier work on Voltaire and Rousseau explicit, it is obvious why he would wish to differentiate his own approach from theirs. The criticisms and strategies of the Enlightenment-era thinkers were of their time. By contrast, "the modern attack, while fully as serious and much more radical, has a certain gravity, decorum, and worthiness of form" (1874/1997: p. 115). Instead of assaulting Christianity, the agnostic subjects it to rational scrutiny in order to elucidate it:

> And what is more, he explains it by referring its growth to the better, and not to the worse part of human nature. He traces it to men's cravings for a higher morality. He finds its source in their aspirations after nobler expression of that feeling for the incommensurable things, which is in truth under so many varieties of inwoven pattern the common universal web of religious faith. (1874/1997: p. 115)

Far from the provocations of his Enlightenment forebears, the modern skeptic, by approaching religious creed in this way, is able to speak of Christianity with tolerance and in deference to history. One can object to Christianity without reviling it.

It should be clear, then, that Morley is no less a moralist because he has lost his religious belief. For him, "virtuous disbelief" is as realizable as "virtuous belief" (1874/1997: p. 117). In fact, he contends, the modern freethinker is not wholly skeptical at all, for he sets out to appropriate the best and most durable "elements of the old faith, to make the purified material of the new" (1874/1997: p. 116). Morley likens him to a builder

who attempts to construct "a new creed by which men can live" (1874/1997: p. 117). "The builders," he continues by way of this analogy, "will have to seek material in the purified and sublimated ideas, of which the confessions and rites of the Christian churches have been the grosser expression." Religious skepticism is not so much a tearing down as it is "a development, a re-adaptation, of all the moral and spiritual truth that lay hidden under the worn-out forms" (1874/1997: p. 117). Less a new build than a thorough renovation.

Morley is adamant, however, that the incorporation of Christianity's greatest elements into the new faith is not akin to a compromise with it. To the extent that one compromises with Christianity, the religious skeptic simply prolongs the old order. Morley writes:

> Those who are incessantly striving to make the old bottles hold the new wine, to reconcile the irreconcilable, to bring the Bible and the dogmas of the churches to be good friends with history and criticism, are prompted by the humanest intention. One sympathises with this amiable anxiety to soften shocks, and break the rudeness of a vital transition. (1874/1997: pp. 117–18)

However, Morley continues, the new faith shares with the old one a significant element: it "brings not peace but a sword" (1874/1997: p. 117).

Disbelievers can do much to lessen the severity of the negative responses to their proclamations. As the avowal of heretical opinions becomes more common, undertaken by those with courage and conviction, "believers would be less timorous" (1874/1997: p. 121). "It is because they live in an enervating fool's paradise of seeming assent and conformity," Morley avers, "that the breath of an honest and outspoken word strikes so eager and nipping on their sensibilities" (1874/1997: p. 121). Thus, it is incumbent on those who disbelieve to say so and explain their reasons why. In fact, "the prosperity of the opinion itself" is at stake (1874/1997: p. 114). The devout would then be compelled to greatly fortify or reject the grounds on which their beliefs rest.

The matter of sharing one's unbelief with other members of the family is particularly complex. Insofar as the new faith "brings not peace but a sword," family members are set against each other: "it is the son against the father, and the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law" (1874/1997: pp. 117–18). The result is, necessarily, "a tale not of concord, but of households divided against themselves" (1874/1997:

p. 117). Precisely because dissent from religious belief need not be associated with immorality, one's father no longer has "this disbelief thrust upon him in gross and irreverent forms." He need not believe that his agnostic son "must necessarily be profligate" (1874/1997: pp. 120–1). But should he be told at all? According to Morley, one's parents are the only individuals from whom disbelief may be justifiably concealed: "the pain inflicted by the avowal of unbelief," he acknowledges, may require that one be "silent where otherwise it would be right to speak" (1874/1997: p. 121).

Providing further insight into his own approach to parenting, Morley argues that children should be raised in "the utmost liberty both of thought and speech." Instead of being principled in dogma, they should be taught how to form opinions in which they can truly believe. Parents should also ensure that children thusly taught to form opinions in the right manner are also led to recognize that "if one opinion is true, its contradictory cannot be true also, but must be a lie and must partake of the evil qualities of a lie, yet always set them the example of listening to unwelcome opinions with patience and candour" (1874/1997: p. 121). These parents are the "wisest." They are also limited in number. Many cannot bear to hear religious opinions at variance with their own. "Where it would give them sincere and deep pain to hear a son or a daughter avow disbelief in the inspiration of the Bible and so forth, then it seems that the younger person is warranted in refraining from saying that he or she does not accept such and such doctrines" (1874/1997: pp. 121–2). But, Morley insists, duty to truth requires that this reserve only be employed in cases of "genuine attachment to the parent." Outlining more fully the conditions in which keeping silent may be appropriate, Morley continues:

> Where the parent has not earned this attachment, has been selfish, indifferent, or cruel, the title to the special kind of forbearance of which we are speaking can hardly exist. In an ordinary way, however, a parent has a claim on us which no other person in the world can have, and a man's self-respect ought scarcely to be injured if he finds himself shrinking from playing the apostle to his own father or mother. (1874/1997: p. 122)

Coming from a son who caused his own parents great pain, the passage appears to be as much an apology as a statement of practical advice.

Following a brief discussion of religious conformity between spouses, Morley then returns to the parent and child relationship to consider it

from a different angle. How does an unbelieving parent respond to the questions of one's child, who will naturally be exposed to prevailing religious beliefs and customs? "It is, of course, inevitable, unless they are brought up in cloistered seclusion, that they should hear much of the various articles of belief which we are anxious that they should not share," Morley acknowledges (1874/1997: p. 122). Thus, a parent may find oneself on the receiving end of probing questions about the creation of the universe, the veracity of miracles, the historical validity of Jesus and the likelihood that he did all that was attributed to him: "Plainly the right course is to tell them, without any agitation or excess or vehemence or too much elaboration," Morley counsels, "the simple truth in such matters exactly as it appears to one's own mind" (1874/1997: p. 132). But too many parents "like to satisfy their intellectual vanity by scepticism" while simultaneously making "their comfort safe by external conformity." "That a man who regards it solely as supreme literature," he continues, "should impress it upon the young as the supernaturally inspired word of God and the accurate record of objective occurrences, is a piece of the plainest and most shocking dishonesty" (1874/1997: p. 132). The young should be raised, he insists, to know the truth as we can apprehend it and no more. In a statement that reinforces one of the elements of rightly formed character he championed in *Rousseau*, Morley exhorts: "Let his imagination and his sense of awe be from those springs, which are none the less bounteous because they flow in natural rather than supernatural channels. Let him be taught the historic place and source of the religions which he is not bound to accept, unless the evidence for their authority by and by brings him to another mind." By raising children in this manner, Morley contends, they will more likely evince "the true spirit and leanings of religion" than if they had been indoctrinated into beliefs they could not really comprehend by people who did not themselves genuinely believe in them (1874/1997: p. 133). In other words, a moral code—picking up on concerns explored in *Voltaire* and *Rousseau* as well—does not derive from a set of precepts but from a sound frame of mind.

In Morley's view, unbelievers, whether child or parent, have a social responsibility to express the truth that they have uncovered. Dissembling or concealing, except in the case of the child who wishes to spare the pain of a beloved parent, not only shirks that responsibility but impedes progress.

## A Note on Diderot

In 1878, Morley completed his final volume on the French *philosophes*. I end with a very brief consideration of Morley's work on Diderot because it provides further evidence of his interest in the family, this time as an aesthetic rather than a philosophical issue.

As with his earlier writings in the decade, Morley again evinces a significant interest in the interactions between parent and child. In Diderot's case, Morley underscores that the desire for personal autonomy came into conflict with the "true affection" he possessed for his father. Rejecting law or medicine, the professional paths laid out for him, Diderot found himself without financial support. He "was thrown on his wits" in Paris and forced to provide for himself (Morley 1886: p. 15). Morley sees Diderot—and this is true of how he perceived Voltaire and Rousseau as well—as a new kind of teacher and director of society. These self-made men of letters, Morley contends, "constituted a new order," and "their rise signified the transfer of the spiritual power from ecclesiastical hands" (1886: p. 16). Such men necessarily came into conflict with their fathers either on philosophical matters or practical concerns.

Where Voltaire preferred a direct assault on the institutions of his time, Diderot sought to idealize bourgeois values against those held by corrupt functionaries of church and state. In contrast to neoclassical theatrical conventions, Diderot sought to focus on everyday life as it was experienced by characters who possessed psychological depth. He pioneered a new mode of theatrical writing, "serious comedy" as opposed to "gay comedy which is neighbour to farce" (1886: pp. 322–3). "Serious comedy" focused on problems in the domestic realm that would be resolved when characters recognized and made amends for their errors. Although Morley lauds Diderot's efforts to examine human character through a lens that anticipates realism, he judges them to be idealizations, not actualities. Thus, in *Le Père de famille* (1758), the good father of the family attempts to persuade his son not to enter into a relationship with a working-class girl, while the authoritarian uncle intends to use force to prevent it from occurring. By the end of the play, the father's approach is vindicated. Although the drama is focused on the familial realm, there are larger implications about the proper mode of governance. In their overt didacticism, Morley believes, Diderot's plays yank "the spectator by the sleeve … urgently shouting in his ear how attractive virtue is" (1886: p. 325). Although he admired the underlying impulse, Morley preferred more subtle forms of persuasion.

In his own family drama, to which we will turn in the next chapter, Morley often found that the art of persuasion could be a very limited resource.

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CHAPTER 6

# Theory and Practice II, 1883–1900

**Abstract** This chapter focuses on Morley's attempts to parent his step-children and nephew as they transitioned into adulthood—a time at which, Morley reasoned, children should be responsible for their own life paths. It documents how Morley moved between the positions of intimacy and distance as he aspired to parent with discreet indifference and assume the role of guide and friend. The chapter examines some flashpoints in liberal parenting, including differences between Morley and the children whom he raised over matters of education and religion.

**Keywords** Stepfatherhood • Familial conflict • Education

On 31 July 1882, Morley accompanied Rose and a party traveling with her to the Euston train station from Berkeley Lodge, their residence in Wimbledon between 1879 and 1886. Johnson had moved to Edinburgh, where he was working at a printing firm, and Rose was to spend the next several days with him. In his diary that evening, Morley notes that he saw his wife and "the three youngsters" off: "very nice: the pity of my life has been and is that such friendly unions have never been cultivated" (1882e: n.p.).[1] He does not name the youngsters who accompanied Rose, but they are likely to have been Florence, Guy, and perhaps Guy's sister, Ethel, who spent much time with the Morleys during this period. Twelve years later,

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Morley confided to his diary: “The truth is, I need to have work on hand, and am only imperfectly constituted for the pure joys of the hearth” (1894a: n.p.). Such statements would seem to reinforce a long-standing perception among biographers and historians that Morley found domesticity unsatisfying. But to isolate these instances from the many other occasions when Morley speaks of home life as emotionally enriching is highly misleading.

Morley certainly felt himself to be uniquely estranged from the other members of his family who, it seemed to him from a distance, effortlessly blended together. A further remark in his diary entry for 31 July 1882 suggests why this might have been the case. After recording the departure of Rose and the three youngsters for Scotland and ruminating on his affective ties with others, Morley writes: “These partings, trivial as they are, are a sweeter softened portent of the last parting of all.” He continues wistfully: “They are the image of the final scene, when we are left shivery on the platform” as our loved ones are carried away into the night by “irresistible” forces (1882e: n.p.). From mid-century, Evangelicals, whether Anglican or dissenting, began to deemphasize the atoning death of Christ and the concomitant need for individuals to guard against sin lest God’s judgment should consign them to hell. Instead, they promulgated an incarnational theology (or the belief that God incarnated himself in the person of Jesus Christ and that all human beings contained traces of the divine) that offered unconditional and unequivocal assurances of a family’s celestial reunion (Jalland 1996: p. 273). The members of his own family retained, to varying degrees, their religious faith. Although several of his closest friends were religious skeptics, including Mill and Leslie Stephen, the overwhelming majority of British Liberals with whom he associated were generally religious believers and often Evangelical. Morley would have experienced his inability to accept the consolation of a heavenly afterlife as isolating.

Although Morley believed that there was something constitutionally wrong with him, which made him unable to immerse himself fully in the “pure joys of the hearth,” his anxieties about home life were, in fact, widely shared but rarely discussed. Many men found it difficult to reconcile the customary understanding of masculinity as heroic agency with the demands of domesticity. Beyond dispensing “guidance,” exerting “authority” when necessary, and providing ongoing “financial support,” which were widely held to be the key components of fatherhood (Nelson 2007: p. 44), men were often unsure of the role they should play in a domain frequently vaunted as feminine. Thus, when Guy threw a fit because his

uncle insisted that he study, Morley thought “it was necessary to teach him a lesson” and “sent him to bed.” In a letter to Grace written after the incident, he confesses that, after dispatching Guy to his room, Morley felt “sorry for the poor chap” (1879b: n.p.). But he was obviously much more comfortable maintaining discipline than in directly addressing his nephew’s emotional display with him.

Men negotiated these formidable stresses and tensions in different ways. John Tosh has suggested that there were four types of fathers in Victorian England: absent, tyrannical, intimate, and distant. The absent father made only occasional interventions into the lives of his children, usually bestowing gifts and candies but rarely providing the kind of leadership or discipline that nineteenth-century gender ideology assigned to men. This lack of involvement freed the father from the “prospect of failure in an activity which seemed a good deal less predictable than their professional or business life” (Tosh 1999: p. 95). Of the other three types, protecting and providing for one’s family—regardless of a man’s social class—were key components of their masculine self-definition. Harsh and inflexible, tyrannical fathers used violence to enforce their authority. Such fathers were relatively rare but, as Tosh notes, “are dear to the hearts of the debunking post-Victorians” (1999: p. 95). Between these two extremes were the intimate and the distant father. The distant father was not demonstrative. He expressed his affection in terms of stern directives and cold reproofs that he felt would provide a solid moral foundation for the child. By contrast, the intimate father made his children the center of his emotional universe. In so doing, he often walked a fine line. Intimate fathers were consciously aware that too much involvement in their children’s lives could easily lead to their being effeminized in the eyes of their spouses, families, or associates. They were also aware that excessive involvement in the lives of their children could lead to rivalry with their wives, who might perceive intimate fathers as interfering in their culturally-sanctioned responsibilities.

It can be useful to think in terms of patterns. However, for many men, these were not so much fixed positions neatly juxtaposed with one another as they were stances that one might take up depending in part on circumstances. Differences among children in terms of gender, age, or temperament might draw out dissimilar forms of engagement from fathers. Men may have started out as one type of father but evolved into another. In Morley’s case, nearly eight years passed between the time he formally became a stepfather to Johnson and Florence and when he adopted Guy.

Morley certainly thought he would parent differently: "I fancy I know more about children than when I had to do with young Johnson and Florence, and should be less stiff—tho' now I am on most pleasant terms with these two babes" (1877: n.p.). Thirty years passed between the period in which he raised three children and when, after calamity struck the family in 1907 and his stepson was jailed for ten years on charges of forgery, Morley and Rose took in Johnson's wife and children. As I discuss in the next chapter, he played a principal role in their upbringing.

Even if Rose had been consistently well, Morley's Evangelical upbringing would have made the passivity of absent fatherhood distinctly unappealing. But his spouse's frequent illnesses necessitated Morley's presence rather than absence. Members of the household often experienced his presence as "semi-detached" to use Tosh's phraseology (1999: p. 97). A semi-detached presence was the principal characteristic of distant fathers, who "held back from an easy confidence or a rough-and-tumble familiarity," Tosh writes, "believing that their role was to prepare their children for more formal relationships and more rigid expectations" (1999: p. 98). As his diary entry of 31 July 1882 suggests, Morley understood the effect that this distance had on his own emotional life. It is less clear whether he appreciated the effect this posture of distance had on his nephew or stepchildren.

Yet this approach to parenting is only one part of the story. Morley was also actively involved in the upbringing of all three children. He sat with Florence as she drew or played the piano. He went on long walks with Johnson. He would often sit with Guy and read to or with him. He attended his nephew's football matches and his stepgrandson's school events. On one occasion in 1889, he recorded in his diary: "Enjoyed seeing my tribe lounging and sauntering on the lawn" (1889b: n.p.). As this chapter will demonstrate, Morley moved between positions of intimacy and distance as he aspired to parent with discreet indifference.

## Parenting in Stages

Although Morley refers to his father in his *Recollections* as a strict disciplinarian (1917: p. 6), he does not say whether he was ever subjected to corporal punishment by him. Given his parents' religious backgrounds, it is likely that they employed caning or flogging. It is not definitively known whether Morley employed these methods himself as a parent. It is likely that he did not. Believing that human character is largely shaped by external forces,

Mill, Morley's intellectual mentor, deplored the practice: "It is assumed and goes uncontradicted that a punishment which is brutalizing and degrading to grown men is quite fit and proper for helpless infancy... quite proper to be administered at discretion by men called fathers in the secrecy of their own houses" (1850/1986: p. 1178). Morley did not write anything so explicit, but one can obtain a glimpse of his views on the practice from his *Life of Gladstone*, in which recounts the Grand Old Man's time at Eton. The headmaster meted out punishments to the boys in trouble using "the appointed instrument of moral regeneration... the birch rod." He was known, Morley snidely remarks, to have "on heroic occasions... flogged over eighty boys on a single summer day; and whose one mellow regret in the evening of his life was that he had not flogged far more" (1903: p. 28).

Morley may not have physically punished his stepchildren or nephew, but the environment was stringent. According to Hirst, writing in 1927, Guy "still vividly remembers the austerity of his own upbringing and the severe discipline of his uncle's household" (1927: I, p. 48). This suggests that Morley struggled to adhere to the advice he dispensed to others: *pas trop gouverner* (do not govern too much). In *Modern Characteristics*, Morley used a political metaphor to divide parenting into stages: "minute and intensely centralized despotism until... the sixth or seventh year of life"; followed by seven to eight years of an absolute monarchy, but with "an extension of the sphere of self-government"; then a limited monarchy of short duration, around the ages of fifteen or sixteen; before, finally, republicanism, when "the autocrat assumes the dignified character of guide, philosopher, and friend" (1865: p. 90). Theory was, however, often easier than practice.

## Guy

Morley was surely right that he would be less stiff with Guy than with Johnson and Florence. His letters to Grace often playfully associate young Guy with creatures from the natural world. "He is as bright and blithe as a bird," Morley writes on one occasion (1879b: n.p.); he is "as lively as a squirrel," he notes on another (1881: n.p.). When Guy was (what we would now call) a preteen, Florence was entering adulthood. At this time, restlessness, along the lines Morley identifies in "Vague Aims," the essay I discuss in Chap. 3, was setting in. This led to clashes within the household (to which I will return). By contrast, Guy was "no trouble whatsoever," Morley reports to his sister. He "gets on capitally with us... evidently inheriting his mother's kindly easy temperament" (1879b: n.p.).

Morley and Rose, when her health permitted, were actively involved with Guy's upbringing. They attended his football matches, including one in which he played "valiantly," noted Morley (1879a: n.p.). They ensured that he regularly visited his maternal grandmother, sister, and older brother. On one occasion in 1879, Morley, Rose, and Guy joined the Ansdells for dinner at their home: "pleasant enough" was Morley's verdict on the evening (1879e: n.p.). They regularly welcomed Ethel and Will, Guy's siblings, into their home as well.

As he had done with Johnson, Morley sought to ensure that Guy received the best education possible while shielding him from the social aspects of schools. In March 1879, he spoke to the headmaster at Westminster School, where he arranged to enroll him after the Whitsun holidays. Formed in 1877 through the amalgamation of four proximate schools in central London, the United Westminster Endowed Schools admitted boys of good character on the basis of merit. To be a day student, boys had to reside with a parent or guardian within the vicinity. Morley arranged for Guy to stay with Rose's sister Ellen (as Johnson had before him) during the academic term. In this period, Ellen became "as good as a mother" to Guy (1892: n.p.). As the date for his nephew's matriculation neared, Morley proudly took "Guy to the tailor, to be measured for his first Eton jacket and trousers" (1879b: n.p.). This was, in Morley's eyes, a distinctive rite of passage.

Morley hoped that his nephew would achieve academic distinction at Westminster. If the first 12 to 16 months were any indication, Guy showed great promise. In October 1879, Morley notes to Grace that "Guy is flourishing and greatly improving" (1879e: n.p.). A year later, he boasts that "Guy is doing well" (1880: n.p.). By 1881, there were signs that Guy was beginning to struggle with his studies. In 1882, Morley began to lament that "not much was to be hoped for in the direction of intellectual distinction" (1882b: n.p.). Although Morley does not recognize it, Guy appears to have been struggling under the weight of his uncle's expectations. He also missed his siblings, especially Ethel, to whom he had grown close after the death of their parents.

Morley picked up on the growing distance between them. He confided to Grace that while Guy is "full of desire to please... his *mind* is away from us, except in some degree from Rose, and some degree from Johnson" (1882b: n.p.). Rose, like Ellen, was a maternal presence. Because he was a number of years older, Johnson could play a paternal role but without responsibility for providing authority, guidance, or discipline.

After he moved in with the Morleys, Guy would occasionally broach the subject of permanently returning to his grandmother. One can well imagine that the ordinary tensions, which flare up at times in any parenting situation, might have led Guy to say something to the effect that he wished to return to Lytham House. In advance of Guy returning home from term, Morley wrote to his sister to say that he was anticipating, with a mixture of anxiety and resolve, a further dispute between himself and Guy: "I have made up my mind to say to him: 'You are now old enough to decide for yourself: if you will to go back for good to Lytham House, you shall be free to do so... talk it over with your grandmother: let me know: but when it is decided, then no more nonsense" (1882b: n.p.). Morley acknowledges to his sister that Guy has now entered into (in his terms) a period of limited monarchy. Intending to facilitate Guy's taking tentative steps toward autonomous decision-making, he encourages his nephew to test his conviction that he wishes to live at Lytham House by discussing it with his grandmother. Once he has done so, Morley insists, Guy must make a choice, and once that choice has been made, he must be resolute ("no more nonsense").

In the event, Guy apparently resolved to stay with his uncle and aunt. When he returned home on a school break in April 1882, Guy brought bad news with him: he had performed poorly in a significant exam, which led Morley to believe his nephew did not have "much chance at Westminster" (1882a: n.p.). Morley recorded in his diary that the two spoke about Guy's failure nearly two weeks after he had arrived home (1882b: n.p.). This suggests both a reluctance on the nephew's part to confront the inevitable disappointment of his uncle, and a hesitancy on Morley's part to deal with the emotional consequences of Guy's failure. When Guy ultimately returned to school in June, Morley noted to himself that his nephew did "not seem very happy or blithe" (1882c: n.p.). To Grace, he pointed out that the failure was "bad," and that Guy's score had been lower than that of a classmate who had "always been below him" (1882d: n.p.). There is, Morley lamented, "not much to be hoped for in the direction of intellectual distinction." He continues: "It is a disappointment to me, but there is nothing [more] to be said about it" (1882d: n.p.). The results of Guy's examination meant that he could not continue at Westminster.

Before enrolling Guy at Westminster, Morley had contemplated sending his nephew to Clifton College, a preparatory school in Bristol. On 28 August 1879, he wrote to the college secretary to ask for a prospectus

(Morley 1879c: n.p.). Founded in 1862, Clifton was an independent boarding school with an imposing campus. Although Morley hoped to avoid sending his nephew to boarding school, Clifton College was appealing for a number of reasons. Divided into two courses of instruction, the curriculum stressed either preparation for universities or the civil service examination: "The College will consist of two departments... In the one department, the course of instruction will have special reference to the universities, and will comprise all the subjects usually taught at a public school; in the other department the study of the Classics will not be discontinued, but greater prominence will be given to Mathematics, History and Composition" (*Clifton College Prospectus* 1861: p. 24). The latter course would have attracted Morley's interest, since Guy had performed so poorly on his examinations in the classics. Music, which was not generally a feature of most public schools, was a vibrant part of Clifton life (Fox and Lidell 1962: pp. 95–128). This would surely have been attractive to Morley, who lamented, as I document in Chap. 4, that music was "unnecessarily tabooed in male education" (quoted in Monkshood 1907: p. 130). But most importantly, perhaps, it was politically and theologically liberal (Thorn 1962: p. 157; Scott 1962: p. 6). The minimal religious instruction that it provided was acceptable to Morley and in keeping with his belief, as I discuss in Chap. 3, that children should be exposed to a variety of opinions lest they rebel in early adulthood.

Guy matriculated at Clifton in September 1882. He was a pupil in School House, which was overseen *ex officio* by the headmaster, J. M. Wilson. The house tutor, or assistant housemaster, was W. W. Asquith, the brother of the future prime minister, under whom John Morley would serve as secretary of state for India. Indeed, Clifton had a number of associations with the leading lights of the Liberal Party (C. S. Knighton, personal communication, 4 August 2017).

Over the next year, when Guy was home on holidays, Morley helped him with his studies. Although Morley was a sporadic diarist, he records in 1883 three sequential nights of reading with Guy for half an hour to an hour while his nephew was on break (1883a, b, c). Three years later, however, Morley reported to Grace that his nephew continued to struggle academically. "It is vexatious," he confessed, "but we must make the best of it" (1886: n.p.). Guy left Clifton in December 1886 and moved back in with the Morleys.

Home was now in London. After his election to Parliament in the by-election of 1883, Morley continued to commute into the city from

Wimbledon, where the couple had been residing since 1879. But his schedule became increasingly demanding and the travel increasingly wearisome. They settled on Elm Park Gardens, a terraced housing complex, near the Gloucester Road tube station. Morley described it as "a great pack of dwellings" (quoted in Hirst 1927: II, p. 277). The French writer Augustin Filon, who visited Morley in 1890, thought that the houses were indistinguishable from one another: "a hundred similar houses, four storeys high, with steps leading to a portico and three front windows" (quoted in Morrison 2018b). The Morleys stayed at Elm Park Gardens for nearly twenty years and resided at two different addresses: no. 95 (1886–96) and no. 57 (1896–1903).[2]

When he returned home that winter, Guy was contemplating the law as a profession. Morley recognized that Guy had now entered the final stage of maturation, which he characterized as republicanism, but he nevertheless struggled with letting go of the reins: "Guy is going to be a solicitor: I cannot say that I like it, but I don't know what else to do," he wrote to Grace in January 1887. He was greatly sorry that Guy did not possess "more push and ambition" (1887a: n.p.). By November of that year, however, he recognized that Guy, having found something of interest to him, was "flourishing." Consistent with his belief that the autocrat must ultimately assume the dignified character of guide, philosopher, and friend" (1865: p. 90), Morley reported to Grace that he and Guy "have now settled into a fast friendship, which is nice" (1887b: n.p.). Professional satisfaction gave Guy a buoyant personality: "he is very popular with the whole household" (1887b: n.p.).

Soon thereafter, Guy struck out on his own and secured accommodations as a lodger. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall note, lodging within another person's home "became associated with a stage for the young" (1987: p. 361). He studied the law and, in 1891, entered into a relationship with a woman to whom he proposed. In a letter to Grace dated 28 March 1891, Morley lamented the situation as "sad folly." "I have told him so, in mordant terms," Morley avers. He pressed Guy to facilitate a meeting between himself and "the young lady's father, before more is due" (1891a: n.p.). Knowing that Guy was not yet in a position to provide for a family, Morley ruminated: "I wonder what life would have been like, if I had been fortunate enough to have, say, even two sensible and sacrificing relatives" (1891a: n.p.). The comment is hypocritical given the circumstance of his own marriage, as Morley would in time come to acknowledge. Nearly three months later, on 18 June, Morley reported to

Grace that the wedding was scheduled for 7 July: "I've not seen his girl yet, but I don't much like the *financial* signs. We'll see." He ends his discussion of Guy's marriage by cheekily stating, "Why not come and see the next generation make a start" (1891b: n.p.).

Whether Morley was successful in putting an end to the relationship is unclear, but Guy did not marry in July 1891. Morley makes no mention of a wedding in his July diaries, letters, or correspondence, and Guy is not registered as having been married in that month or year. Guy would spend the next several months serving as his uncle's amanuensis on business trips, which suggests (but does not prove) that he was recovering from a broken relationship.

In 1892, Morley's letters refer to a relationship between Guy and a Welsh woman named Jean, three years his junior. It remains unclear whether Jean was a new romantic interest or the woman to whom Guy had previously proposed. In any case, as he had the previous year, Morley apparently expressed disapproval. On 8 September 1894, Morley records in his journal that he had received a letter from Guy a day earlier, with significant news:

> he is to be married at the beginning of November, and then to go to South Africa for honeymoon. So vanishes that hope. For seventeen years I have done the best I could for him, body and soul. Now off he flies, and what is worse, we part rather bad friends than good. (1894a: n.p.)

Morley thought that Guy should establish himself professionally and disapproved of the marriage. He neither attended the wedding nor attempted to see him before they departed on their honeymoon. "He is pleasant, but careless and selfish," Morley writes, before, in a moment of self-reflexivity, confessing that he is "sick of these commonalities, alike in myself" (1894c: n.p.). On 15 December 1894, Rose met Guy and Jean at the port to wish them a safe journey to Cape Town. In his journal, Morley records that he did not go. "I suppose that I ought to have gone, but my nerves were not up for it," he writes (1894d: n.p.).

## Florence

By sending Florence to Madame Souvestre's school (discussed in Chap. 4), Morley sought to provide his stepdaughter with the best education available to young women. Because the educational institution stressed independent thought, open inquiry, and social responsibility, many women were left unprepared for the reality of their lives after gradu-

ating. Because Victorian women were expected to fulfill domestic obligations and social duties, most finishing schools sought to prepare them to assume the roles of wife and mother. Once their educations were complete, daughters of middle-class families returned home, where they would put their lessons to use until, or if, they married. For some of Madame Souvestre's pupils, returning home would have been a disappointment.

Fathers played a significant role in the educational lives of their daughters. Sometimes they provided a direct education. As M. Jeanne Peterson points out, fathers often enjoyed providing their daughters with instruction on their favorite subjects (1989: p. 37). If they were not directly involved in educating their daughters, fathers nevertheless often made the arrangements and, of course, paid for instructional fees. Before he sent Florence to Madame Souvestre's, Morley paid for her to receive music lessons, and he often sat with her while she played the piano (1894b: n.p.). He also tried to introduce various topics to her on his own, but found that his schedule stymied regular efforts at doing so. "I have not the time for giving her systematic training," he laments (1879b: n.p.).

Morley hoped that Florence might do something with her life. As I discussed in Chap. 3, he believed that many young women lacked a clearly defined means of, or purposes for, self-actualization. But he does not appear to have encouraged her to pursue anything specific, and opportunities for women remained limited. When she was younger, Morley sent Florence to assist George Meredith with his work. He hoped that the experience would be intellectually enriching. After Florence returned home from Madame Souvestre's, Morley was struck by how much she still needed to learn. "We half think of letting Florence study at the classes for higher education in London for the poor child knows nothing," he wrote to Grace on 10 April 1879. Throughout the late 1860s and early 1870s, the University of London had taken tentative steps toward allowing women to sit for examinations on the same basis as men. In 1878, it became the first institution of higher education to do so (Harte 2000: p. 132). They went so far as to speak with Ellen about housing Florence during the periods in which classes would be in session. However, she never enrolled.

After receiving an education, many middle-class daughters were expected to join their mothers in fulfilling the family's social duties, which included participating in the ritual of making calls. But Rose, owing to her erratic health as well as individual temperament, does not appear to have regularly engaged in the practice. By the time that Florence was in her late

teens, she was partially educated, but without a definite interest or life plan. At home, she passed the time by playing the piano and painting (1889a: n.p.). In Morley's terms, she had entered the stage of life in which she was responsible for herself. Yet it would have been inappropriate for a single woman of the family's social standing to live on her own. Thus, unlike Johnson and Guy, Florence remained within a home that functioned according to rules and routines that she did not set.

When Florence was twenty, a serious incident occurred between her and Grace, who was on one of her lengthy stays. Writing to his sister, Morley explains:

> Florence has clearly been guilty of a most scandalous piece of absurdity, and it is kinder of you than she deserves, to pass it over. Your course, however, is most humane, most considerate, and most worthy of a charitable soul. To me the whole business is as painful as can be. It fills me with disgust for the folly and the ill-behaviour of my own household, for of course a goose like Florence cannot be held responsible. It is but a poor return to you after your kindness to her in times when nobody else was kind to her. And it is but a poor return to me after the anxiety and outlay of a long illness, to behave so vilely to my sister. However, dear Grace, people have very short memories. It makes one sick to heart to think of the gracelessness of men and women… I have expressed my strong resentment to the "parties" concerned… [and will] long remain sorry that you have had annoyance inflicted on you from my house. (1879e: n.p).

Referring to "the folly and the ill-behaviour" of his household as well as to the "parties" involved ("for of course a goose like Florence cannot be held responsible"), Morley implicitly blames Rose for the upsetting episode. What precisely occurred between aunt and niece goes unrecorded. Without a definite purpose for her life, yet having reached an age at which, Morley thought, she should be responsible for her own opinions and choices, Florence was undoubtedly experiencing unresolvable internal tensions. One can well imagine that perhaps on one of these occasions Florence lashed out at Grace and said something hurtful.

In 1893, Florence, searching for greater meaning and purpose in her life, found her calling. In a journal entry dated 10 October of that year, Morley records the following: "Nice walk with E. [Ellen] in the afternoon. Talked about the new horror in my household. F.'s [Florence's] announcement that she is going into a convent… [It] is a cloud of deep blackness in my very soul. Or is it so? Are these things so afflicting? Or

is the affliction artificial and cultivated?" (1893: n.p.). Morley had gone to great lengths to ensure that his stepchildren and nephew were not subjected to "principling," or oriented to accept a set of beliefs on the basis of their instructor's authority alone. He had them tutored at home, sent them to day schools, and, in the case of Guy, to a liberal college. He was confident that Florence's headmistress, Madame Souvestre, would be a proper influence since she was an atheist. Nevertheless, at some point, his stepdaughter, utilizing the critical thinking skills inculcated at the school, embraced Catholicism. There is no indication among Morley's papers when this took place. As the chief architect of home rule for Ireland legislation, and as Gladstone's chief secretary for Ireland in 1886, Morley spent much time in Dublin in the 1880s. His family accompanied him, and Florence likely found her new faith on one of these extended stays.

For Florence to declare her devout religious belief was challenging enough for Morley to accept. For her to embrace Catholicism and declare her intention to live a life of prayer and contemplation was nothing short of—in his terms—horrific. Although he rejected theological religion, he believed that Protestantism had, at least, indirectly contributed to the spread of rational thought. In *Voltaire*, he argues that the eponymous French Enlightenment writer had praised English liberty without recognizing its source in Protestantism: it "was indirectly the means of creating and dispersing an atmosphere of rationalism, in which there speedily sprang up philosophical, theological, and political influences, all of them entirely antagonistic to the old order of thought and institution" (1872: p. 86). While various Protestant sects had committed offenses against independent thought, Morley believed that Protestantism had nevertheless, in the main, "loosened the conception of authority and of the respect proper for authority" to a significant degree (1872: p. 59).

Although Morley guarded his private life, as he gained political stature, he was frequently the subject of sympathetic biographical sketches in the late 1880s and early 1890s. One of these, published in an 1899 edition of the *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* and signed "By a Member of Parliament," opens with the writer calling on Morley one Sunday afternoon at no. 57 Elm Park Gardens. After making an observation about the interior of Morley's residence ("his roomy but simple house"), the colleague, writing of himself in the third person, notes that he is startled by the unexpected sound of a female voice:

> [He] thought he heard a noise as of singing, and of that particular kind of singing, with its regularity, its softness, its tender melancholy, which suggested the hymn. He could scarcely believe that such Sabbath-like and orthodox sounds could belong to the household of a man who passes for one of the leading assailants of orthodoxy of his epoch, and ventured to make an inquiry—a somewhat bold proceeding with a man so essentially reserved as Mr. Morley. The answer was that the singing came from a relative, who belonged to the orthodox faith. It was a curious contrast—that muffled, tender echo of the conventicle from a believing woman's voice in the room below, and this man of thought, surrounded by weapons of literature and philosophy, by which he had made war on all the little and great Bethels of the world, in the quiet room up-stairs. ("John Morley" 1899: p. 874)

In the visitor's account, the woman is partially rendered through an indistinct and delicate, perhaps even derivative ("echo"), sound: the intonation of a religious hymn. Morley, on the other hand, is not just a man who thinks, comparable to a woman who sings. Rather, Morley *is* his thought. Indeed, he is a "man of thought." Moreover, the woman is linked to a group ("conventicle") and thereby to a shared faith, while Morley is depicted as formulating his individual conviction from the principled milieu of the library. Staging a gendered contrast between the fragility of religious faith and the virility of reasoned belief, this passage yokes the terminology of warfare to the cognitive practices of critical reason and reflection.

By allowing Florence to practice her faith in his atheistic home, Morley avoided sectarian or religious conflict. "We wonder whether duty to truth," Morley wrote in *On Compromise*, alluding to the rift with his father, "can possibly require us to inflict keen distress on those to whom we are bound by the tenderest and most consecrated ties" (1874/1997: p. 114). In this way, lived liberalism could introduce "new practices" without insisting that everyone be "made at once to submit to the[ir] reign" (1874/1997: p. 138). If contestations of opinion were to be waged within a household, the proper place for them was in the solitary confines of the domestic library, where they could be mentally adjudicated. In fact, when Grace determined that she would say something to Florence about her intention to join a convent, Morley objected:

> I think it would be more sensible of you to leave Florence's religion alone. It is her own business, not yours. If I were to tell you what I think of your

> own church, I should count on your being very wroth. Let people do what they like, and believe what they like, and go into convents if they like... (1899: n.p.)

Having meditated on the issue since his initial conversation with Ellen about Florence's conversion to Catholicism, Morley recognized that the roles had now been reversed. He was in the position of a father whose child had announced beliefs radically different from his own, and he was determined not to allow this difference to affect his relationship with Florence.

Florence's first bid to join a convent failed. In 1898, she tried again but was also unsuccessful (Morley 1898: n.p.). In 1900, Florence moved to Drumcondra, near Dublin, to become a novice at the Convent of Our Lady of Charity, High Park. Apparently, Grace continued to protest this move by her niece, but Morley, Rose, and Ellen were at "peace" with her decision. On 29 March 1901, Morley wrote to Grace to acknowledge that Florence's path in life, while "painful," "cannot be decided by our own preferences" (1901: n.p.). He seems to have recognized that Florence's deliberate choice to live as a nun—to practice a "radical chastity"—reflected her own attempt, foolhardy as he may have thought it, to live autonomously, despite his parliamentary colleague's effort to contrast her shared religious rituals with Morley's isolated cognitive practices.[3] A few weeks later, on 17 April, a ceremony of profession took place at High Park. Florence Ayling became, in religion, Sister Mary Agatha ("Irish" 1901: p. 9). The development was printed in newspapers throughout the British Isles.

In the decade that followed, Johnson would make the news as well, but for far more despairing reasons. It is to Morley's adult relationship with his stepson that I now turn.

## Notes

1. In his diaries, Morley occasionally makes use of shorthand. In this particular entry, he employs a symbol for the word *been* that I have not reproduced.
2. I discuss the Elm Park Gardens residences at greater length elsewhere in the context of Morley's efforts, following the departure of Guy and Johnson from the home, to establish an impersonal domesticity, which sought to render the abstractions of detachment part of a meaningfully lived experience. See chapter three of Morrison 2018a.
3. I borrow the phrase radical chastity from Blake 1983: p. 108.

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CHAPTER 7

# Generations, 1900–1923

**Abstract** Morley's relationship with his stepson Johnson Ayling was more complicated than his other parental relationships. Although biographers have assumed that Morley, because of their blood tie, instinctually preferred his nephew to either of his stepchildren, it was actually his stepson who sought Morley's regular counsel and showed the greatest promise for a career in government. This chapter examines Morley's relationship with his stepson, who became embroiled in a scandal that resulted in his imprisonment. Suddenly and unanticipatedly, Morley had to assume responsibility for five of his stepgrandchildren.

**Keywords** Stepgrandparenthood • Generational differences • Religion • Politics

Morley's relationship with Johnson was more complicated than his relationship with either Guy or Florence. Although biographers have assumed that Morley, because of the blood tie, instinctually preferred Guy to either of his stepchildren, it was actually Johnson who showed the greatest promise for a career in government. Far more temperamentally suited to the role "of guide, philosopher, and friend" (1865: p. 90) than father figure, Morley relished his time with Johnson once his stepson had come of age. The two frequently discussed politics and policy. It was, therefore, enormously painful to Morley when, instead of public service, the bankrupt

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Johnson was thrust into the limelight when he was arrested on charges of forgery and subsequently attempted to kill himself. This chapter examines Morley's relationship with Johnson, the scandal that resulted in his stepson's imprisonment, and the sudden and unanticipated responsibility that Morley assumed for rearing his stepgrandchildren.

## Johnson: Professional and Personal Success

In 1879, Johnson moved back home following his stay in London, where he took vocational classes to enter the publishing trade. He was hired as a printer at Gilbert and Rivington, a printing firm in Clerkenwell specializing in foreign-language publications. Although Morley had hoped that his stepson would be intellectually rather than practically inclined, he nevertheless spoke about Johnson's character and work ethic during this period with great pride. In March, Morley enthusiastically reported to his sister that Johnson had "gotten a rise of *£20* in his salary, making *£50* now" (1879a: n.p.) On 10 April 1879, he wrote to Grace to say that he met the foreman at Johnson's place of employment and that the man had given his stepson "the best character for intelligence & aptitude—to say nothing of resolute sticking to things" (1879b: n.p.). Recognizing Johnson's capacity to excel in the trade, the firm arranged for him to spend some time in Germany, where he learned about foreign printing presses. Morley concluded that Johnson was "getting on excellently well" in the world (1879b: n.p.).

In late 1881 or early 1882, Johnson moved to Scotland to work for R. &. R Clark, a publishing house in Edinburgh.[1] He continued to make frequent trips home and Morley enjoyed these "cheerful and pleasant" visits (1882a: n.p.). Although Johnson's stays were necessarily brief, with much of the time being spent together as a family, Morley always ensured that the two shared a meal or undertook a "pleasant stroll," so that he could offer his stepson advice and counsel (1883b: n.p.). On one occasion, the two apparently talked about the possibility of Johnson entering politics by making a run for a parliamentary seat in Whinburgh in the county of Norfolk (Morley 1882b: n.p.). After a particularly enjoyable visit, when the date of Johnson's departure for Scotland drew near, Morley recorded in his diary: "Johnson's coming parting from us,—very heavy on my mind" (1883a: n.p.). A year later, when it was time for his stepson to head back to Scotland, Morley wrote, "gave Johnson his dinner—parted from him sadly enough" (1884: n.p.).

Over the next several years, Johnson's personal life prospered. He entered into a serious relationship with Catherine Clark Morrison, who went by the diminutive *Kitty*. In the spring of 1889, the couple announced their intention to marry. In the months leading up to their June wedding, Rose was highly occupied with the arrangements (Morley 1889a: n.p.). On 20 May, Morley saw Rose off for Scotland, where she would spend the next several weeks helping Johnson and Kitty prepare for the nuptials (1889b: n.p.). Florence left 11 days later (1889c: n.p.). On 6 June, Johnson and Kitty were married at St Andrews Parish Church. Morley did not attend the ceremony.

Although Morley thought it the "pity" of his life that others managed to cultivate the "friendly unions" he could only observe from a distance, he often chose to absent himself from major family events (Morley 1882c: n.p.). On the eve of Rose and Florence's return from Scotland, Morley wrote in his diary, "End of my solitude: it has served me well, and I am glad to feel that I have still the making of a good hermit in me" (1889e: n.p.). Although Morley evidently had a certain preference for isolation, he nevertheless sought some measure of balance. Only a few days earlier, he had invited Guy, Ellen, and his nephew Fred (son of his brother, Edward) to the house. In his diary, Morley records that he enjoyed the time they spent together in the backyard, thereby punctuating his solitude with sociability (1889d: n.p.). On 8 June, Florence and Rose ("my family") returned home. He delighted in "news of the wedding" (1889f: n.p.).

Becoming entrenched in Edinburgh, Johnson made fewer trips to visit his mother and stepfather. In 1890, Johnson and Kitty had a son, John Charles. A year later, their daughter, Isabella, known as Sybil, was born. On multiple occasions, Rose and Florence made the journey to Scotland. As usual, Morley stayed behind. Once the isolation that he sought transformed into loneliness that he could not bear, Morley would wander over to the neighbors to "relieve my solitude" (1897: n.p.). When Johnson did visit the Morleys, his stays were short. But he ensured that his children spent time with John and Rose, who enjoyed their role as grandparents. In 1896, just after they moved to No. 57 Elm Park Gardens, Morley wrote to Grace: "We have little Sybil for a fortnight; a good little girl; quite a ray of sunshine in the house. Johnson came and carried her off last night—to our great regret" (1896: n.p.). On 24 September 1895, Kitty gave birth to another son, Francis Taylor Ayling.

Throughout the 1890s, Johnson and Kitty established themselves as preeminent members of their community. In the fall of 1889, he was hired

by T. & A. Constable, the venerable publisher and bookseller that served as Queen Victoria's printer in Edinburgh. Four years later, the firm made him a partner ("Notes and News" 1893: p. 504). Soon thereafter Johnson became an elder at St Andrews Parish Church, where the couple worshipped. Although affiliated with the Church of Scotland, St Andrews welcomed parishioners with a range of theological views.

Soon after the establishment of the Lifeboat Saturday Fund in 1891, Johnson became a leading proponent of efforts to greatly expand the resources for saving lives at sea. In 1894, he and James C. Dibdin published *The Book of the Lifeboat*, which sought to raise awareness about the history of lifeboat rescues and to move those "who have hitherto been uninfluenced by any practical sympathy with the Lifeboat Scheme... [to] feel the necessity of helping in the good work" of the institution (Dibdin and Ayling 1894: p. xvi). Although the lifeboat institution had been established in 1824, voluntary donations had been falling. In 1886, however, following the deaths of 27 men on two different lifeboats which had been dispatched from Southport in response to distress signals from a barque that had set sail from Liverpool, a renewed effort was made to provide the service with robust financial support. Additionally, funds were sought to care for the many widows and children left behind by the men who had perished.

During this period, Johnson also became increasingly active in local Liberal party circles. Many in the area felt sure that Johnson would one day enter public life on a national level, but Morley was not so certain. Writing to Grace, he observes that Johnson has "no real ambition, without that public life must be as wretched slavery as the world can show" (1898: n.p.). He does not give his reasons for such an assertion, although, as with Guy, Morley likely believed that marriage and family life were impediments to success.

On 23 May 1900, Kitty passed away unexpectedly. On hearing the news, Rose and John headed for Edinburgh. "The death of poor Kitty was indeed a sorrowful business," he wrote to Grace a week later. Her death came as a shock to Johnson, who "goes through a good many hours of denial" (1900a: n.p.). In the following year, Morley and Rose helped Johnson with the three children (Morley 1900b: n.p.). During this time, Morley developed a particular fondness for their youngest grandchild, Francis. "You would like the little fellow," he exuberantly wrote to Grace about the then four-year-old (1901b: n.p.). In January 1901, Rose

escorted a housekeeper to Edinburgh to help Johnson manage the household (Morley 1901a: n.p.).

The following year, Johnson, a 42-old widower and father of three, married Frances Law. His younger wife assumed primary responsibility for his three children. She also bore him three other children: Winifred in 1903 and twins, Joan and Grace, who were born the following year. The couple's blended family was a familiar reality for many in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, when mortality rates were comparatively high.

## Familial Tensions and Professional Downfall

Throughout this period of personal turmoil, Johnson remained politically active. In 1902, he appeared on the platform with other officials when nearly 4,000 people turned out to hear his stepfather deliver speech to the party faithful ("Mr. John Morley" 1902: p. 8). In 1903, he was made a justice of the peace by the Lord Provost of the City on the recommendation of Bailie Lang Todd, a Liberal town councilor. In a letter to the editor of the *Edinburgh Evening News* in January 1906, Johnson referred to his stepfather as "one of Ireland's best friends" (Ayling 1906: p. 2). But soon thereafter he ran afoul of many senior members of the party when he became actively involved in the Edinburgh chapter of the Liberal League. The league was made up of Liberal Imperialists who felt that under Gladstone the party had fractured into, as Lord Rosebery termed it, "an army of dervishes each carrying a separate flag" (quoted in Matthew 1973: p. 127). Rosebery sought to reconstitute the party as truly national by dispensing with divisive policies, such as home rule for Ireland, and embracing "the new Imperial spirit" (quoted in Liberal Unionist Association 1899: p. 137). The league was a direct challenge to the Scottish Liberal Association, which had represented the party's interest in the United Kingdom's northernmost country since 1881.

Although the Liberal League advocated against many of the policies of Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who was leader of the party in opposition at Westminster, its main targets were William Ewart Gladstone and Morley. As Gladstone's trusted lieutenant, Morley sought to unite the party and galvanize public opinion around one key issue at a time: home rule for Ireland, church disestablishment, franchise reform. As D. A. Hamer writes, Morley "believed that a party which devotes itself to more than one reform question at a time is doomed to disunity and confusion if there is no

underlying principle strong enough to bind the questions together" (1968: p. 93). But Liberal Imperialists thought that this tactic had led to splintering within the party and the loss of votes at the ballot box. Instead, they sought to rally Liberals behind key concepts—"sane Imperialism," "national efficiency"—rather than specific issues (Matthew 1973: p. 139).

Johnson was not simply a member of the Liberal League. He served on its executive committee for Edinburgh and East of Scotland ("Mr. John Ayling" 1907: p. 667). He was also a member of the general committee of the Scottish Liberal Club, which strongly aligned itself with Rosebery (*Oliver and Boyd's* 1907: p. 1208). In 1855, Walter Bagehot asserted that "intellectual change" had pitted religiously devout fathers against their liberalizing sons (1915: p. 60). In the early twentieth century, many of those same sons—who aligned themselves with the party of progress and had since become fathers—were at variance with their own progeny over the direction of the Liberal Party.[2]

Before the inevitable tensions between Morley and his stepson could come to a head, however, Johnson was taken into custody on charges of forgery. On 29 October 1907, newspapers in Edinburgh began reporting on the case. Before his incarceration at the infamous Calton Jail, Johnson attempted suicide by slashing his throat and neck ("Arrest" 1907: p. 555). Johnson's legal counsel told that court that when his client was made a partner at T. & A. Constable, he had assumed heavy financial obligations that he could not afford to meet without borrowing money and insuring his life. The interest on these debts as well as the insurance premiums were more than he could afford, and he continuously fell further behind. Lacking the "courage" to ask others for assistance, he forged promissory notes in the names of family members and business aquaintances ("Mr. John Ayling" 1907: p. 666). One of the names forged was John Morley.

The incident was extremely painful for Morley and Rose. For several months after Johnson's sentence, Rose suffered debilitating sadness over the plight of her son. Morley corresponded with some of her closest friends in response to letters they had written to her. To Frederic Harrison's wife, Ethel, Morley wrote:

> You have written my wife a very kind note. She is not up to replying herself, but she asks me to send her warm thanks to you for thinking of her. She would greatly like to take your hand, you have so long been friends with us. But she is horribly depressed in her condition just now. (1908: n.p.).

To Frederic Harrison, Morley revealed his own feelings on the matter. He characterized the experience as a "sore tribulation." "If I could have extricated him, I would," he told his friend, "but the arm of the law was too strong for me" (1907: n.p.). Indeed, Johnson's legal counsel told the court that those whom he had "wronged had granted him their forgiveness as far as they could" ("Mr. John Ayling" 1907: p. 666). Nevertheless, the judge sentenced him to ten years' imprisonment and the Crown Office stripped him of his commission as justice of the peace.

## A New Generation

As soon as Johnson's arrest was made known to them, Morley and Rose arranged for Frances—who at twenty-six found herself bankrupt and responsible for five children—to move in with them. Of the six children, only the eldest, Charles (who went by his middle name), had set out on his own. Francis, then twelve, was studying at the prestigious Fettes College, from which he was pulled (*Fettes* 1909: p. 227). The remaining children were still at home. "We take charge of 5 children, and the unhappy wife—the nicest creature possible," Morley wrote to Harrison. "They will brighten our poor house" (1907: n.p.). Johnson was well aware of the position in which he had placed his wife. Addressing the court, his legal counsel said that his client was profoundly distressed "that he had thrown much misery on his wife—a lady of gentle birth—and that he had to cast his children on the mercy of others when he ought to have been their guiding hand" ("Mr. John Ayling" 1907: p. 666).

John and Rose Morley had been living on their own for only a few years. Florence had moved to Dublin. Johnson was with his family in Scotland. Guy and Jean were living in southeast England. In 1903, John and Rose relocated from No. 57 Elm Park Gardens to Flowermead, a freestanding house just over the Wandsworth boundary in Putney. Although Lord Esher had described the residence as "a rather commonplace villa" (quoted in Wilson 1973: p. 571), the home was far more suited to Morley's tastes than the terraced houses they had occupied after their move from Pitfield. After all, he preferred "the civilized fashion of one's own house best" (Morley 1886: n.p.).

Although Morley remained actively involved in politics until very near the end of his life, his move to Flowermead represented something of a retirement. It was the first residence the Morleys selected without regard for other family members' needs. Morley had published his final major

work, the multivolume *Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, in the same year as their move. His sole editorial responsibility henceforth was to edit Macmillan's *English Men of Letters* (second series) from 1902 to 1919. Although he arguably occupied the most important position of his political career during this period, the intensity of its workload was offset by his removal from the House of Commons in May 1908 on being named Viscount Morley of Blackburn.[3] With frequent district electric trains departing from the Southfields and Wimbledon Park stations for the City and the West End (Jackson 1973: p. 40), Flowermead had exceptional transportation links to Westminster. But with an airy and spacious library, Morley could do much work at home.

The Morleys' semi-retirement was, therefore, interrupted by the sudden responsibilities they were forced to assume. Frances and the children lived with the Morleys for an unknown period of time until she was able—presumably through a combination of the support of her family and in-laws—to establish her own residence. By 1911, according to that year's census, she was living with her girls at an address in Holland Park (Census Office 1911).

Although their time with the Morleys was comparatively brief, the Ayling children formed enduring bonds with their grandmother and stepgrandfather. Morley may have believed himself to be less stiff in raising Guy than he had been with Johnson and Florence, but the more playful, affectionate side of Morley was drawn out the most by his stepgrandchildren, who lovingly called Rose *granny* and Morley *pater*, after the Latin *paterfamilias*.

Among John Morley's personal papers are several touching cards and letters from his stepgrandchildren. Morley appears to have paid for Frank—as Francis, by the age of 16, wished to be called—to attend Thames Nautical Training College. Situated aboard many ships with the same name, HMS *Worcester*, the college trained pupils for careers at sea. It is likely a testament to Johnson's involvement with his children that Frank developed his interests in this direction.[4] On one occasion, Frank rather humorously reports to Pater that he had seen Morley's picture in the newspaper, which was "very bad," but the speech he had given (which had occasioned the article) was pronounced by all of his masters at the nautical college as "very good." He concludes with "Give my love to Granny" (1909a: n.p.). On another occasion, he writes, "I am working very hard this term and mean to please you with my report" (1909b: n.p.). In 1910,

he writes from the HMS *Worcester* to ask, "How long do you think the liberal government [will] stay in?" (1910a: n.p). Charlie, the eldest, was also regularly in touch: "I enclose a ticket for the field gun competition to which I do hope you will come, if even for a minute," he beseeches his stepgrandfather (1910b: n.p.).

## The Light Goes Out

On 23 September 1923, John Morley died at Flowermead. Four days later, a hearse traveled with the coffin adorned by three wreaths from his home to Golders Green crematorium. The simple service was attended by a variety of political figures. Rose was too ill to attend, meaning that Frank, Charlie, and Guy were the chief mourners. The family apparently debated the form that services might take before settling on a religious one ("Lady Morley's Religion" 1923: p. 10). Herbert Henry Asquith "read the Lessons" ("Late Lord" 1923: p. 2). The use of this particular scripture was both surprising and fitting: surprising because Morley was an avowed agnostic, fitting because the "Wisdom of Solomon" is an appeal to pursue wisdom, which Morley sought through the exercise of his rational faculties.

In November, Morley's last will and testament, which was drawn up in March, cleared probate. He bequeathed to Rose a legacy of £500, their shared property, and all of his personal effects and household goods. For Florence, he set aside £1000 and directed his executors to pay the income on it for as long as she wished "as a mark of his attachment" to her. Grace, the sons of his deceased brother Edward, and a wide variety of unnamed family members, presumably including his stepgrandchildren, were also explicitly provided for by the terms of his will. Guy, "at the end of long years of mutual affection and loyally reciprocated duties," received the remainder of the estate (1923: p. 2). Johnson is unmentioned.

Yet perhaps Morley's legacy to Johnson was not financial. In 1912, members of Parliament repeatedly asked the Secretary of State for Scotland why John Ayling had been released only four years into his sentence. Thomas McKinnon Wood, Morley's Cabinet colleague responsible for Johnson's release, responded: "It would be contrary to practice to state the grounds upon which the prerogative of mercy is exercised in any case" (*Parliamentary Debates* 1912: p. 38). It remains unclear whether Johnson, who went on to pursue a career in bookbinding, ever reconciled with his wife or children.

## Notes

1. The exact date of his move to Scotland is not clear. The 1881 census shows him still at home. Morley's letters the following year refer to Johnson living on his own.
2. Rosebery founded the Scottish Liberal Association. Intriguingly, he called himself its "father" and characterized the association's stance against the Liberal League as one of wayward youth (Rosebery 1902: p. 4).
3. He was Secretary of State for India 1905–10 and 1911, and Lord President of the Council 1910–14.
4. He went to sea and retired as a lieutenant-commander in the navy.

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CHAPTER 8

# Conclusion

**Abstract** This chapter provides a brief reflection on the themes and issues of the book with special attention to the relationship between Morley and his stepdaughter, Florence Ayling.

**Keywords** Living liberalism • Religion • Unbelief

When John Morley and his father had a falling out over his refusal to become a clergyman, the son struggled financially and emotionally. The experience led him to formulate a theory of parenting with discreet indifference. Over time, children would be accorded greater freedoms until, in their mid-to-late teens, they reached a stage of independence. From then on, they would be responsible for their own life choices. Parents would assume "the dignified character of guide, philosopher, and friend" (1865: p. 90). In practice, however, Morley struggled with the implementation of his theory. For unlike a friend, parents have unique aspirations for and investments in the outcome of their children's lives. When those expectations are unmet, disappointment is the inevitable result.

Of the three children whom Morley raised, it was perhaps Florence—despite the "horror" of her conversion to Catholicism and her decision to become a nun—who came closest to exemplifying his ideal. Where Guy seemed to have no settled political opinions and Johnson fell well short of

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the ethical standards the Morley had set for the children in his care, Florence adopted a set of opinions. Sincerely believing in them, she maintained the consistent habit of expressing them and supporting them regardless of what others believed. In essence, she was the obverse of her stepfather: he devoted his life to thought, she to prayer; he concentrated on reforms in this life, she—working with so-called fallen women at a Magdalene Laundry in Dublin—on rewards in the next life. Yet, consciously in his case and unconsciously in hers, they each lived their liberalism.

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