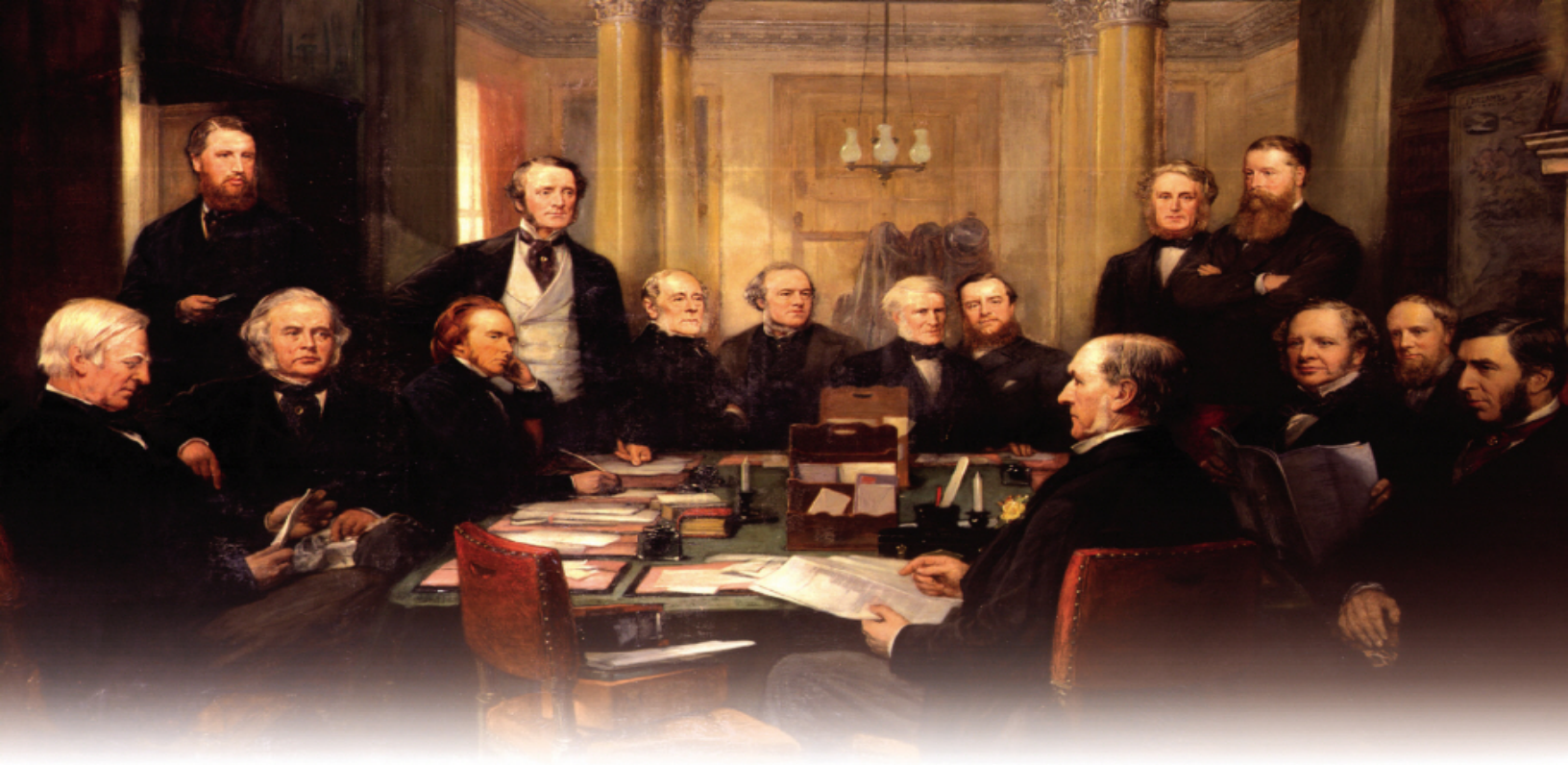
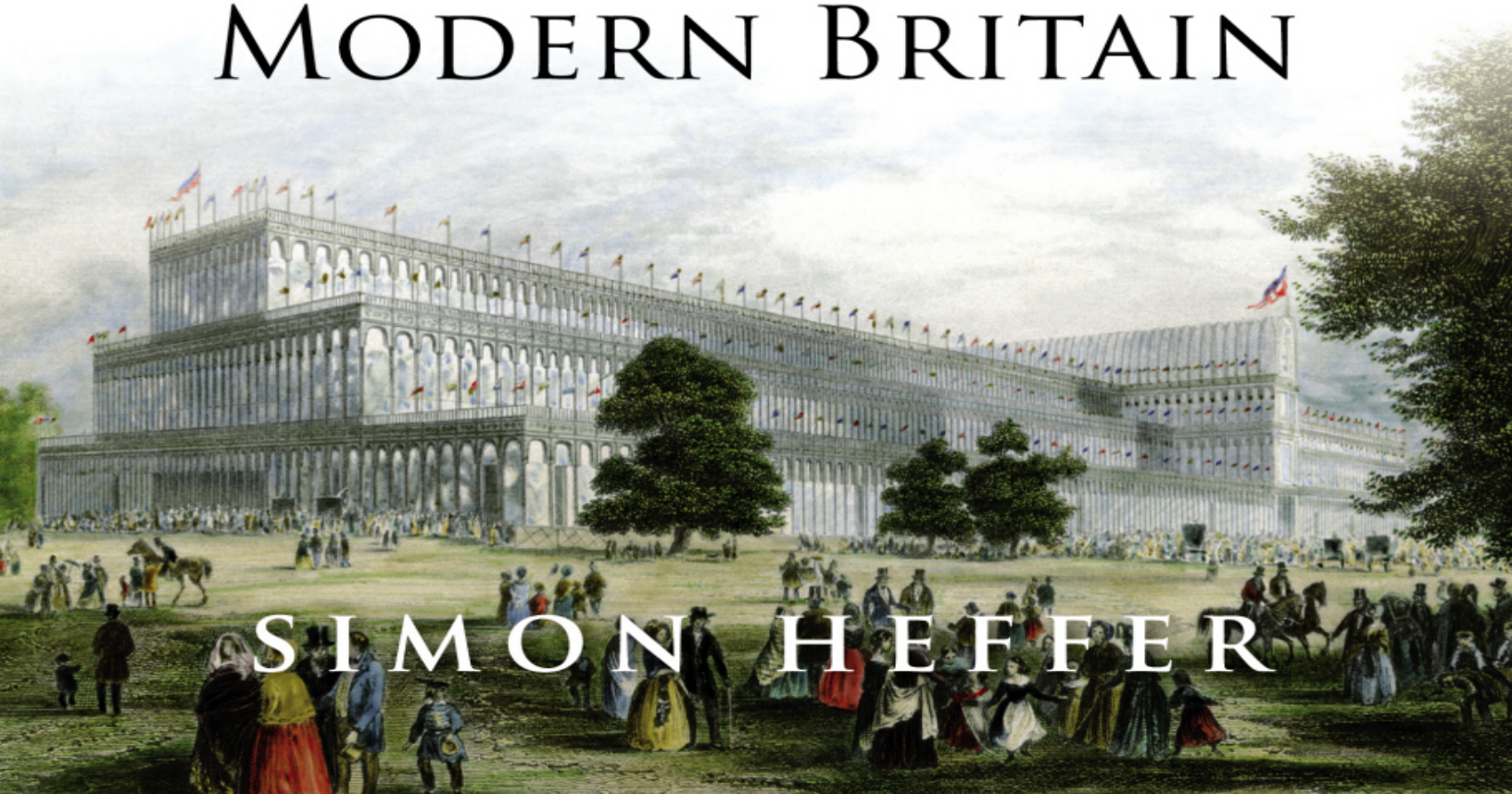


HIGH MINDS

The VICTORIANS *and the* BIRTH *of* MODERN BRITAIN



SIMON HEFFER

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About the Book

Britain in the 1840s was a country wracked by poverty, unrest and uncertainty, where there were attempts to assassinate the Queen and her prime minister, and the ruling class lived in fear of riot and revolution. By the 1880s it was a confident nation of progress and prosperity, transformed not just by industrialisation but by new attitudes to politics, education, women and the working class. That it should have changed so radically was very largely the work of an astonishingly dynamic and high-minded group of people – politicians and philanthropists, writers and thinkers – who in a matter of decades fundamentally remade the country, its institutions and its mindset, and laid the foundations for modern society.

Simon Heffer's major new book explores this process of transformation. It traces the evolution of British democracy. It shows how early laissez-faire attitudes to the lot of the less fortunate turned into campaigns to improve their lives and prospects. It analyses the birth of new attitudes to education, religion and science. And it shows how even such aesthetic issues as taste in architecture were swept in to broader debates about the direction that the country should take. In the process, Simon Heffer looks at the lives and deeds of major politicians, from the devout and principled Gladstone to the unscrupulous Disraeli; at the intellectual arguments that raged among writers and thinkers such as Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Butler; and at the 'great projects' of the age, from the Great Exhibition to the Albert Memorial. Drawing heavily on previously

unpublished documents, he offers a superbly nuanced insight into life in an extraordinary era, populated by extraordinary people – and how our forebears' pursuit of perfection gave birth to modern Britain.

About the Author

Simon Heffer was born in 1960. He read English at Cambridge and took a PhD at that university in modern history. His previous books include: *Moral Desperado: A Life of Thomas Carlyle*, *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell*, *Nor Shall My Sword: The Reinvention of England*, *Vaughan Williams*, the highly successful *Strictly English* and *A Short History of Power*. In a career of nearly 30 years in Fleet Street he has written columns for and held senior positions on the *Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Spectator*.

High Minds

The Victorians and the Birth of Modern Britain

Simon Heffer

To Mark Jones, in admiration and with gratitude

Estote ergo vos perfecti!

Matthew 5:48, quoted from the Vulgate
by Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy

Fired with the great spirit of the nineteenth century – at least with that one which is vulgarly considered its especial glory – he resolved to make haste to be rich.

Charles Kingsley, Alton Locke (p. 112)

But is it indeed an error to suppose mankind capable of great improvement? And is it really a mark of wisdom to deride all grand schemes of human amelioration as visionary?

J. S. Mill, speech on perfectibility, 2 May 1828

Do you mean to build as Christians or as infidels?

John Ruskin, The Crown of Wild Olive (p. 88)

In a progressive country change is constant: and the great question is not whether you should resist change which is inevitable, but whether that change should be carried out in deference to the manners, the customs, the laws, and the traditions of a people, or whether it should be carried out in deference to abstract principles, and arbitrary and general doctrines. The one is a national system; the other, to give it an epithet, a noble epithet – which it may perhaps deserve – is a philosophic system.

Benjamin Disraeli, speech at Edinburgh, November 1867

This question is no longer a religious question, it has become a political one. It is indeed the question of questions; it has become paramount to every other question that has been brought before us. From the moment that you intrust the masses with power their education becomes an absolute necessity.

Robert Lowe, speech on the Third Reading of the Reform Bill, House of Commons, 15 July 1867

Quand on fait des omelettes il faut croquer des oeufs.

Samuel Butler, unused epigraph for The Way of All Flesh

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,

But westward, look, the land is bright.

Arthur Hugh Clough, ‘Say Not, the Struggle Naught Availeth’

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thank her. Sue Sturrock helped me with an enquiry at the Royal College of Music, and I am also most grateful to Miss Laura Ponsonby for allowing me to see the archive of Sir C. Hubert H. Parry, and for her hospitality when I visited it.

Modern authors owe a considerable debt to those who have ensured that many primary sources are now available online. Millbank Systems, who have made more than 200 years of Hansard available, merit my particular gratitude.

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My wife, Diana, read the proofs at a late stage and applied an invaluable, and sharp, pair of eyes as well as a keen

intelligence to the book. But my real and greatest debt is to her for her constant support, understanding and companionship throughout the three years this book was in the making. My sons, Fred and Johnnie, also played their part, and I thank them all profoundly for their considerable roles in making this book possible.

Simon Heffer
Great Leighs
3 June 2013

PREFACE

In the four decades between the rise of political consciousness that manifested itself in Chartism, and the return of William Ewart Gladstone to Downing Street in 1880 after his Midlothian Campaign, when he sought to prove the depravity of Lord Beaconsfield's administration by illustrating its failings in foreign policy, British life changed almost beyond recognition. Although poverty, disease, ignorance, squalor and injustice were far from eliminated, they were beaten back more in those forty or so years than at any previous time in the history of Britain. This was despite, and because of, a population growing faster than at any previous time in the country's history. A nation that might have been overwhelmed by industrial change, rapid expansion and social upheaval instead saw the challenges of modernisation and embraced them.

This book is partly the social history, partly the intellectual history, and partly the political history of those years. It is not strictly a linear account of events between 1838 and 1880: it takes the great themes of that period and seeks to use them as the illustration of a spirit, or cast of mind, that transformed a wealthy country of widespread inhumanity, primitiveness and barbarism into one containing the germs, and in some measure the evidence, of widespread civilisation and democracy. A sense of earnest, disinterested moral purpose distinguished many politicians, intellectuals and citizens of mid-nineteenth-century Britain, and drove them to seek to improve the condition of the whole of society. A constant theme in the writings of one of the period's greatest intellectuals, Matthew Arnold, and a notion

shared by many educated people of the time, pervades this book. It is that even if a state of human perfection was unattainable, its pursuit was perhaps the noblest enterprise a Christian soul (and, in some cases, non-Christian ones) could undertake. If that pursuit did not finish at the goal, it at least made everything better.

The mid-nineteenth century was an era of declining religious observance, but one in which religion still underpinned almost all the great institutions of the nation, dominated education and coloured intellectual discourse. It was one of rigid class distinctions, through which those with talent and good fortune could move if they applied themselves to the task of doing so: and eventually the State extended to many men in the working class the privileges of democracy. It was an era that prized education, but which took a lamentably long time to ensure that most people in England and Wales received one – Scotland was far ahead in that respect – and to see that the teaching offered by the great public and grammar schools was equal to the demands of a modern industrial nation. It encouraged private philanthropy, yet laid the first foundations of a welfare state. It looked fervently to the future, but its vernacular architecture was of the feudal, medieval past. Landed and rich families controlled its ruling class, yet reformed great institutions such as the Army and the Civil Service to create promotion by merit. It was a society that systematically rejected the notion of political, legal and property rights for women, and deplored their attempts to have an education, yet had a Queen as head of state who from time to time behaved in an autocratic manner far from the notion of the constitutional monarchy expounded at the time.

This book omits two aspects of the British experience in the nineteenth century, both of which would be books in themselves: empire and foreign affairs – though the terms were almost synonymous for much of the period – and the

unrest in Ireland, save for the effect of the Potato Famine on the repeal of the Corn Laws. The new ideas it describes and discusses prevailed throughout the United Kingdom, though certain currents on which this book concentrates – such as the wave of religious doubt caused by questioning of the 39 Articles of the Church of England, and the drive to provide education to the masses – were necessarily played out in an English context, since the Scottish Kirk was a different animal and that nation had, since the seventeenth century, set an example of extending education to all. Scotland had also pioneered divorce, something on which it took England and Wales until the 1850s to catch up. In its exploration of British social, intellectual and political life the book relies heavily on the diaries, letters and speeches of the men and women who either inspired, influenced or executed change. It shows people as the main actors of the period, and not government, though government passed laws that enabled people of drive and energy to make the changes a civilised and contented society required. Three times in the decades covered by this book – 1842, 1848 and 1866–7 – political instability in Britain was so serious that it seemed to some to be threatening revolution. That it was avoided – and was, each time, less of a threat than before – was not least because of the measures enlightened government took to break the stranglehold of a narrow governing class on the country, and to find ways of engaging, economically and politically, with those who would otherwise be revolutionaries. Enlightenment came throughout the period from a cadre of intellectuals, thinkers and writers whose freedom of speech and thought slowly changed attitudes, greatly to the country's benefit.

When Queen Victoria ascended the throne in June 1837 Britain was a country of rising prosperity, with a growing empire, and a burgeoning middle class made more affluent by industrialism. However, it was also beset by terrible, and destabilising, social problems. There was little or no attempt

to regulate public health. Cholera outbreaks were frequent because of the failure to treat sewage, and because no one knew cholera was a water-borne disease. Hospitals and housing for the poor were primitive and squalid. Food was unnecessarily expensive because of import tariffs, and often adulterated or diseased; and water unsafe to drink. Cities teemed with prostitutes, the girls driven to vice by the threat of starvation. Boys and men often lapsed into crime, and were punished with a savagery little diminished from medieval times.

The destitute lived in workhouses where families were broken up. Extreme poverty had been, to all intents and purposes, criminalised by the 1834 Poor Law Act. The mentally ill were still treated cruelly. Women were the property of their husbands. Only a small proportion of adult men could vote. For the minority with the suffrage, there was no secret ballot. Entry to the Civil Service and promotion for officers in the Army could, and usually had to, be bought. There was little in the way of formal local government to provide or oversee basic services, and no sense of municipal or civic pride in many of the cities expanded by the Industrial Revolution. Travel was slow and so expensive that most people never strayed more than a few miles from home. Even communication by letter (for those who could write) was erratic and expensive, until the introduction of the penny post in May 1840. With minor exceptions, in England and Wales only rich males could attend school, and only a small proportion of them went on to a university. Many poor people were illiterate and without means to improve themselves. There were scarcely any libraries, museums or art galleries to which they could gain admission. Workers in the factories that comprised Britain’s manufacturing might were only just beginning to have their labour regulated: children as young as eight were working twelve-hour days. Matters were even worse in the mines, where women and girls worked in bestial conditions with

men and boys to provide the coal to stoke Britain's furnaces. Taxation restricted the availability of newspapers and therefore freedom of speech, and with that the growth of opposition to the established order. Writers and commentators attacked the misgovernment of the country – what Thomas Carlyle, the age's foremost polemicist, called 'the condition of England question'. The Chartist movement, with its six-point reform plan for Britain, seemed to promise revolution if its demands were not met.

Yet industrialisation created wealth, stimulated innovation, encouraged education and, above all, pricked the consciences of those enriched by it. An intellectual elite sought to liberate minds from the doctrines of religion, and to drive movements for reform in education, housing, public health, the law and the constitution. The educated classes sought to bring a growing number of the uneducated inside the pale of a common civilisation, one rooted in an understanding of the classical world and, in a more contemporary sense, the benefits of an evolving democracy. Between the censuses of 1841 and 1881 the population of Great Britain and Ireland rose from 27 million to 35 million, despite falling by 3 million in Ireland following the great emigration after the Potato Famine. By 1880 most men had the vote, women were no longer their husbands' chattels, and school places were provided for all children. Britain was the world's leading power, and had developed a formidable and distinct contemporary culture along with its prosperity.

But the greatest transformation in those forty or so years was visible all over Britain: whole suburbs of housing, town halls, museums, concert halls, art galleries, schools, colleges, hospitals, libraries, railway stations, market halls and Gothic Revival churches spoke of a country that had with determination, and a sense of common direction, put its new-found wealth to use in improving the lives, the minds and the souls of its people. The pursuit of perfection might have been idealistic, but it did not fail to bring its

own, plentiful, harvest. This book will describe this awesome transformation, and will celebrate the men and women who undertook it.

PROLOGUE

DR ARNOLD OF RUGBY

I

A CLIMATE OF prejudice about the Victorians still lingers. It began with a mild moral rebellion in the 1890s, before the old Queen was in her tomb at Frogmore. It was active until the 1960s, when the era was passing out of living memory; and those unborn at the time decided to stop wrecking the legacy of the nineteenth century. The saving of the Midland Hotel at St Pancras Station in London from demolition in 1967 signalled the change of mood. Buildings had been one of the most significant representations of Victorian attitudes and purpose, which was not least why some wished to destroy them. However, as the importance of preserving the visible symbols of an era was recognised, so a new perspective on the intellectual and psychological achievement of the Victorians became necessary. After all, without a sense of moral purpose, and moral leadership, the affluence of the few might well have been destroyed by the revolution of the masses, brought about by a sense of injustice not unlike that felt in France in the 1780s. As it was, a social movement from the 1830s to the 1870s helped manage the final transformation of a feudal nation into an industrial, democratic one: and it did so not least because of the sense of mission many in the upper and upper-middle

classes had towards bringing light into the lives of those whom seismic social upheaval had driven towards darkness.

A prevailing theme behind change in the nineteenth century is a religious, or more specifically Christian, motivation of those who inspired, enabled and undertook it. This ethos was promoted most assiduously by the public schools, almost all of whose headmasters were divines. Many took their cue from one man: Dr Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School from 1828 to 1842. Arnold was savaged by Lytton Strachey in *Eminent Victorians* for his piety, his perceived priggishness and his earnestness: that Strachey felt he had to attack a man who died only five years into Victoria's reign as part of his assault on the values of the age betrays what a towering and enduring influence Arnold was. Since Strachey, others have sought to belittle and diminish Arnold. However, in his liberal belief in the expansion of education and his quest for the moral improvement of society, his influence set the tone of the reforming classes of Victorian Britain. He helped renew the idea of a principle of duty by which more fortunate Christians strove to improve the lives of less fortunate ones. His view of life as a constant struggle between good and evil came to be shared by many Victorians, with a conviction that good must triumph.

Although his direct influence was only on his family, the boys he taught and his colleagues, his ethos came to suffuse the public-school system, and went beyond it, for the rest of the nineteenth century. One of his twentieth-century biographers, T. W. Bamford, argued that 'he is said to have reformed the public schools whereas in fact there is precious little evidence of it'.[1] Although he hardly diversified the curriculum at Rugby, he sought to teach the narrow range of subjects more imaginatively. He also established a relationship with his assistant masters like that between university dons, and tried to alter the products of his school:

which, in time, changed the products of most leading public schools.

Arnold also played a significant part in changing the climate of the age that followed him, through his high-minded moralism in the collected editions of his sermons and his writings. He was a born journalist, unafraid to disseminate his views – much, on occasion, to the annoyance of Rugby's governors. His son Matthew inherited this trait. Some he influenced may have been hypocrites, but they were inspired by Arnold's tone (if not always by his example) to make life better, nobler and less mean. He advanced godliness in a society that would gradually become more secular: but this secularisation came amid vigorous religious debate and dispute, against a backdrop of aggressive church-building – and of taking the Established Church and dissenting congregations into new communities in expanding towns all over Britain.

Arnold's example did not merely transform public schools, and the grammar schools that imitated them, but inspired others – notably Matthew, and his pupils Arthur Hugh Clough and Arthur Penrhyn Stanley – to seek to raise the moral tone of Britain and make people more Christian: and to cause them to devote themselves to improving the lives of others and the society in which they lived. This was not only about making people more godly and pious, as Dr Arnold had intended: it was about extending the intellectual and material aspects of civilisation. Only if the determination to make life better was rooted in faith, they felt, could improvement be possible. Matthew Arnold argued for the extension of civilisation most powerfully in his 1867 polemic *Culture and Anarchy*. Its superscription summed up his mood: '*Estote ergo vos perfecti!*', 'Be ye perfect!' The intense commitment by the mid-Victorians to give life a greater nobility of purpose, founded upon a sense of duty, and to pursue perfection can be traced back to Dr Arnold. Inevitably, this mood also gave rise to incidents of extreme

hypocrisy – such as when Arnold's pupil Charles Vaughan resigned as headmaster of Harrow in 1859 because of his homosexual affair with a pupil: but even Vaughan went on to help found University College, Cardiff. The Arnoldian message was never entirely lost on him.

II

Stanley, in writing the life of Arnold, his recently deceased and much-loved mentor, claimed that 'it will be felt that, not so much amongst his own pupils, nor in the scene of his actual labours, as in every Public School throughout England, is to be sought the chief and enduring monument of Dr Arnold's head-mastership of Rugby.'[2] Almost a century and a half later Stefan Collini wrote that 'He [Arnold] transformed what had been a fair specimen of the debauched and riotous establishments known as public schools into the character-building, God-fearing, scholarship-winning model for the reform in the 1840s and 1850s of other schools of its type. He thereby had an incalculable influence on world history, indirectly staffing an empire, and helping to shape, perhaps to stifle, the emotional development of a governing class for several generations.'[3] These are powerful claims, and given what they imply for Victorian society, require investigation.

Arnold was an early meritocrat. His father was postmaster and customs officer for the Isle of Wight, but died in 1801, when Tom was only six. So tight was money that Tom's mother took over as postmaster to keep the family solvent. Tom was sent to Warminster School in Wiltshire: which, although not well known, was a high-achieving school academically. However, when Tom was twelve he moved to Winchester. He had shown ability, and his mother wished him to go to university: but so difficult were things financially that that required Tom to attend a school with well-funded university scholarships.

At Winchester he became an accomplished classicist. He also developed a precocious interest in history. He had a strong character and left his mark on any group of which he was a part. He had just the right combination of force of personality and intellect to be a successful headmaster. With this manner came streaks of anger, impatience and determination.

He won a scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Here, as at school, he was bookish. He became something of a poet, a trait that would be more successfully developed by his eldest son, Matthew. He had hoped to enter the Church, but the period from his graduation as a Master of Arts at Oxford in 1817 until the mid-1820s was one of serious religious doubt for him: although he became a deacon in 1818, he struggled with the Athanasian Creed, the nature of the Trinity and aspects of the Thirty-nine Articles. This doubt was not about the existence of God, or with the nature of Christianity, but was a theological problem with the established interpretation of the tenets of Anglicanism. The Articles had defined Anglicanism after the Reformation as distinct from Roman Catholicism. They had in some respects a doctrinaire medievalism that many modern scholars, including Arnold, struggled with. The rise of Nonconformism, notably Methodism, in the eighteenth century had been largely as a reaction to the prescriptive and inflexible nature of the doctrine contained in the Articles, and this had its effect on a generation of Anglicans determined to analyse and reflect upon what they had been taught. Doubt delayed Arnold’s entry to the priesthood. Instead, he became the partner of John Buckland, his sister’s husband, in a private school at Laleham in Middlesex. He married in 1820, and the first of the Arnolds’ eleven children (nine of whom lived to adulthood) was born the following year.

An expanding family and the low earnings of a schoolmaster caused Arnold to work on literary projects in

his spare time, notably ancient history. For all the privations, he enjoyed teaching older boys and brought favoured pupils into his family circle. This would set the tone for Rugby. He sought a more lucrative appointment, and applied to become professor of modern history at the University of London; however, he was offered the headmastership of Rugby School in Warwickshire. Arnold was high-minded; but before that notion about him becomes too distracting, it should be noted that he chose Rugby not because he felt a stronger vocation to teach boys rather than men: it was because it was better paid.

His chances when he submitted his name for consideration were felt not to be high, since others had been in the field longer. He was unknown to most of the twelve trustees – noblemen and gentlemen of Warwickshire – even by name, and he had applied late. However, all his references spoke highly of his suitability and qualifications as a schoolmaster; and one, from the Reverend Edward Hawkins (who within weeks would be elected as a famously obstinate Provost of Oriel) 'predicted that, if Mr Arnold were elected to the head-mastership of Rugby, he would change the face of education all through the public schools of England.'[4] Arnold was elected in December 1827 without even having to submit to an interview, so powerful were the recommendations in his testimonials. He had, nevertheless, felt reluctant to choose Rugby. His religious difficulties had not been entirely resolved, and he felt he would want to take holy orders to be able to administer communion in chapel. However, a way was found for him to interpret the Thirty-nine Articles that removed his problem with them: his ordination followed rapidly. By the time he arrived at the school in August 1828 he was the Reverend Mr Arnold, and his doctorate of divinity came in November.

A second cause for hesitation was that he understood the school to be a moral sink. Lytton Strachey, in his essay on Arnold, famously described the public-school system at the

time as ‘anarchy tempered by despotism’.[5] Some boys Arnold could bring into line with a birch rod, and neither he nor the school governors had any qualms about his doing so. But he also wished to expel particularly recalcitrant elements, which might affect the school’s reputation and finances; and, also, to remove boys who showed no aptitude for his rigorous teaching methods because of a lack of intellectual curiosity. He was encouraged in this too.

Arnold was conscious that he was assuming a prominent position in a business that had generally sunk in regard and achievement. Many schools were dens of buggery and bullying, with youths out of control. John Bowdler, nephew of the sanitiser of Gibbon and Shakespeare and a comrade of Arnold’s in various theological battles, proclaimed: ‘the public schools are the very seats and nurseries of vice.’[6] Arnold himself observed that ‘that is properly a nursery of vice, where a boy unlearns the pure and honest principles which he may have received at home, and gets, in their stead, others which are utterly low, and base, and mischievous; where he loses his modesty, his respect for truth, and his affectionateness, and becomes coarse, and false, and unfeeling.’[7]

He distinguished between two forms of removal. The first was meant as a public disgrace and was conducted as such; the second was more discreet, with no shame, but merely (as it was argued to the boys concerned and their parents) in their best interests. It was said of Arnold himself that ‘he wakes every morning with an impression that everything is an open question’, and he expected his pupils and his staff to take a similar view.[8] Once, after expelling some boys for moral turpitude, Arnold stood before the assembled school and said: ‘It is *not* necessary that this should be a school of three hundred, or one hundred, or of fifty boys; but it *is* necessary that it should be a school of Christian gentlemen.’[9] He also said: ‘Sending away boys is a necessary and regular part of a good system, not as a

punishment to one, but as a protection to others. Undoubtedly it would be a better system if there was no evil; but evil being unavoidable we are not a gaol to keep it in, but a place of education where we must cast it out, to prevent its taint from spreading.'[10]

This was the sort of 'evil' he was determined to vanquish. Sunday after Sunday he would rail against it, each new generation of boys prone to the same pollution, his battle never won. As pupils, Stanley and Charles Vaughan would 'nudge each other with delight' when Arnold entered the pulpit to preach: a reaction probably untypical of boys, and indicative of the priggishness Arnold risked inspiring.[11] 'Evil' was not a term he bandied about casually. He had identified it, and indeed categorised it. He told his boys, in a notable sermon, that there were six sorts of evil, and he listed them: profligacy (or 'direct sensual wickedness', of which he gave the example of drunkenness – sexual impropriety was the great unmentionable and, in all his sermons, unmentioned), systematic falsehood, cruelty and bullying, active disobedience, idleness, and the bond of evil, or the way in which boys feel tied to one another by ties of wickedness rather than by ties of good.[12] 'Let these six things exist together,' Arnold proclaimed, 'and the profanation of the temple is complete.' He set a high standard, and very few boys would be equal to it. He also made it clear that it was not just he who was judging and, if necessary, punishing them. God, too, was taking notes.

Yet Arnold was optimistic: 'Every boy brings some good with him, at least, from home, as well as some evil; and yet you see how very much more catching the evil is than the good, or else you would make one another better by mixing together; and if any single boy did anything wrong, it would be condemned by the general opinion of all the school, just as some wrong things, such as stealing money, for example, are condemned at present.'[13] He was ever confronted by boys of whom 'some are losing their child's innocence, but

none, or very few, are gaining a man's virtue'.[14] His aim was to create a sense of 'Christian manliness' in his charges, urgently.[15]

The standard of educational provision and of conduct elsewhere was not high. In other schools discipline was savage but arbitrary. Sanitary conditions were often disgusting. Not the least of the schools' problems was that the teaching was so bad. Arnold tolerated none of these things: and it was his ferocity in fighting against them and setting a standard of reforms that helped begin a revolution in education. This revolution spread not least because he sent out men from Rugby to other schools, and other institutions, who took the Arnoldian message of Christianity (developed by the next generation, with its growing interest in sport and team games, into muscular Christianity) with them and who transformed the attitude of the upper and upper-middle classes. He was motivated by disinterest, a quality his eldest son would make a touchstone of successful criticism, and which would motivate many reformers. 'His consciousness of his own integrity, and his contempt for worldly advantage, sometimes led him to require from others more than might be reasonably expected from them,' Stanley claimed.[16]

It was this fanatical (though Dr Arnold would have repudiated such an adjective) determination to make his charges see life as a battleground between good and evil that made him a figure of fun, or obloquy, to critics. A sympathiser, H. F. Lowry, referring to the famous novel by Thomas Hughes, one of Arnold's pupils, described the caricature: 'To them [his detractors] he will never be more than the pious Englishman who turned Tom Brown's fellows into first-rate prigs and made little boys grow old before their years . . . he was, even in his own time, the embodiment of Duty waiting with a birch in hand, haunting their doubtful dreams like a Hebrew prophet, and summoning on their guilty heads the fiery wrath of God.'[17]

His assistant masters were chosen for their moral and intellectual calibre, and were paid better than previously. Arnold expected complete commitment – too many masters had been clergymen with parishes, sometimes far-flung – and evidence of continued interest in learning. Some of these men became housemasters as Arnold ended the practice of boys lodging at dames' houses in the town. Those masters who were laymen he urged to become ordained, and came to an arrangement with the diocesan Bishop to facilitate this. In appointing staff, he said that 'what I want is a man who is a Christian and a gentleman, an active man, and one who has common sense, and understands boys . . . I prefer activity of mind and an interest in his work to high scholarship.'[18] On a man's appointment to the staff, Arnold would write to him that 'he should be public spirited, liberal, and entering heartily into the interest, honour, and general respectability and distinction of the society which he has joined.'

III

While the Classics were the heart of the curriculum – and, as the Clarendon commission would find in the early 1860s, they were still almost all that was taught in many public schools – Arnold raised the standards of subjects such as modern languages and mathematics, and modern history assumed an increased importance. He introduced the study of geology, something many clergymen regarded as heretical because of what it seemed to say about the Creation. Other physical sciences were not attempted, something for which Strachey mocked him: but his detractor admits Arnold avoided these subjects because he did not believe they could be taught properly, and because the time needed would have had to be taken from other subjects Arnold regarded as more important. He favoured the teaching of physical science, though only if morals were

taught alongside it. Strachey, mocking Arnold from the security of the secular world, quotes him as saying: ‘Rather than have physical science the principal thing in my son’s mind I would gladly have him think that the sun went round the earth, and that the stars were so many spangles set in the bright blue firmament. Surely the one thing needful for a Christian and an Englishman to study is Christian and moral political philosophy.’[19]

Arnold was opposed to the utilitarian notion that saw education as a cramming of the mind with facts, but sought to make it a process that encouraged boys to find out answers to any problem that might confront them. Ironically, it was those of a utilitarian cast of mind who most readily praised his improvements to the curriculum. He brought in mathematics, some Shakespeare (whom he felt grossly inferior to Homer), and also Dante and Goethe. The Greek mathematicians were of natural interest to him, especially Euclid. Despite his belief in teaching modern history he struggled to get past the ancients: ‘The history of Greece and of Rome is not an idle inquiry about remote ages and forgotten institutions, but a living picture of things present, fitted not so much for the curiosity of the scholar, as for the instruction of the statesman and the citizen.’[20] Sciences in any depth he believed necessary only for the class of person who would go into industry: in that he helped foster and influence a prejudice among the upper classes against the new source of Britain’s wealth, which would handicap the country. As another biographer, Michael McCrum, has written: ‘His view was that vocational training did not cultivate the mind and inspire the moral sense.’[21]

Stanley wrote of education at the time of Arnold’s translation to Rugby: ‘The range of classical reading, in itself confined, and with no admixture of other information, had been subject to vehement attacks from the Liberal party generally, on the grounds of its alleged narrowness and inutility.’[22] He added that ‘it was not knowledge, but the