

5025363

M000 43 778

**LEARNING DISABILITIES IN BRITAIN 1780-1880:  
PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICE**

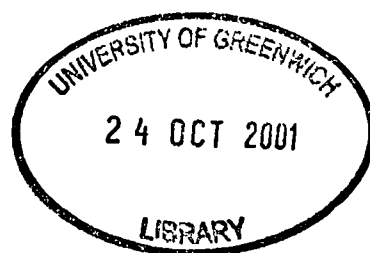
**HILARY DICKINSON**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the University  
of Greenwich for the Degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2000

*Thesis*

*DIC*



## Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	4
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Part I: Perceptions and Representations of Intellectual Impairment by Professionals, by Charity Workers and in Fiction</b>	
Chapter 1. Educational Theory and Practice for the Intellectually Impaired 1780-1880: the Great Blank	31
Chapter 2. Psychiatrists, <i>Bricolage</i> , and the Emergence in the 1840s of Education for Idiots	47
Chapter 3. The Dissemination of Ideas about Idiot Education to the General Public 1843-1880	77
Chapter 4. Intellectual Impairment in Imaginative Literature: (i) the Fool	99
Chapter 5. Intellectual Impairment in Imaginative Literature: (ii) the Idiot	120
<b>Part II: Intellectual Impairment in the Family</b>	
Chapter 6. The Honourable Augustus Lamb	132
Chapter 7. The 10 <sup>th</sup> Earl of Lindsey: 'Poor Lindsey'	159
Chapter 8. Intellectual Impairment in the Families of the Gentry and Upper Middle Classes	188
Chapter 9. The Long Reach of the Institution: Intellectual Impairment in the Middling and Lower Classes	209
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>228</b>
Bibliography	236
Appendix	248

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Professor Angela John for generous supplies of excellent advice and for constant encouragement.

Thanks too to Ben Dunkley who was the inspiration for the research, and who put up cheerfully with the doing of it.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to elucidate perceptions and practices in relation to learning disabilities in different contexts over a period of a hundred years, between 1780 and 1880. Previous studies have concentrated on institutional and professional contexts, on informed medical opinion for example, or on focused studies of local practices. Here a wider range of opinion and practice is sought. The Introduction includes a discussion of nomenclature, and explains why 'intellectual impairment' is used rather than the familiar term 'learning disability'.

Part I of the thesis explores perceptions of, and responses to, intellectual impairment held by different people in various contexts, while Part II employs biographical methods to examine the life histories of a number of intellectually impaired people in their familial setting. Part I starts with the views of professionals - educationists, doctors (who were at the forefront of the well documented emergence of idiot education in the 1840s) and also charity workers. Concentrating on previously neglected issues, the thesis shows that educational theory and practice offered nothing to families with an intellectually impaired child, and medical dominance had negligible competition. In a chapter on the efforts of charity workers as well as doctors to promote and raise money for the new idiot asylums, the focus is on the notion of idiocy that they put forward. Here ideas from the past mingled with new ideas. The question of the nature and origin of the image, or images, of the idiot is continued in two chapters that explore the varied and changing portrayals of intellectual impairment in imaginative literature.

Part II uses family papers in a novel way to investigate the lives of individuals who had an intellectual impairment, and the responses of their families. These families, well known because of at least one eminent member, and well documented, are at the least, comfortably off. But within these parameters there is variation. Augustus, son of William and Caroline Lamb, is from the aristocracy, while Laura, daughter of Leslie Stephen of DNB fame, is from the middle class intelligentsia. This makes the similarity of responses to an intellectually impaired child the more interesting. For the most part, a child's difficulty was conceptualised as an educational, health or social problem, and not in terms of idiocy or a related all inclusive notion. The final chapter of Part II, that explores experiences of the modestly off or the poor, uses, in the absence of family papers, other sources of information. The inclusion of both the familial and private, and the public, contexts enables this thesis to reveal a wider range of perceptions and practices in relation to intellectual impairment during the period than have previous studies.



## INTRODUCTION

Historical accounts of mental handicap tend to be mainly concerned with institutional and - legal landmarks - the building of an asylum, the passing of acts of parliament. Or they deal with the deeds of great men - scientific discoveries and educational reforms. Recently, theoretical studies of the social history of madness, and of dependency and deviancy in general have flourished, but similar studies of mental handicap have hardly begun. Virtually nothing is known about the lives of idiots and their families.<sup>1</sup>

So Joanna Ryan starts her 1987 chapter on the historical background to responses to learning disabilities. It is a fair assessment of the situation at the time,<sup>2</sup> indeed for the next ten years, when institutional provision and attitudes and opinions of specialists continued to be a focus of interest.<sup>3</sup> A brief summary of what they say about learning disabilities runs thus. Before the mid nineteenth century almost nothing is known about the lives of people with learning disabilities, and there were no specific measures or institutions to care for them. By the mid nineteenth century humanitarian reformers had added idiots to the blind, the limping, the deaf and the mad as objects of attention and care. The particular aspect of this that the reformers thought to be the most revolutionary and novel was the view that idiots could be improved, possibly cured, through education, which, it was taken for granted, would take place in a specialised residential institution. However, idiots were not so speedily improved as was hoped (five year periods of training was the arrangement for charitably supported patients at the Earlswood Idiot Asylum, and as will be seen in Chapter 9, many parents considered this period insufficient). Other developments added to a growing beleaguered attitude to the learning disabled; the start of compulsory education revealed many children who, although not

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Ryan, *The Politics of Mental Handicap*, revised edition, (London: Free Association Books, 1987), p. 85. Influential accounts of madness at the time included A. Scull, *Museums of Madness: the social organization of insanity in nineteenth century England*, (London: Allen Lane, 1979); M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: a history of insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. R. Howard, (London: Tavistock, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> L. Kanner, *A History of the Care and Study of the Mentally Retarded* (Illinois: C Thomas, 1964); M. Rosen et al. (eds) *The History of Mental Retardation* (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1976); R. C. Scheerenberger, *A History of Mental Retardation* (Baltimore: Paul H Brookes, 1983); S. Tomlinson, *A Sociology of Special Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982). There is a good section on learning disability in D. Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> B. Rix, *The History of Mental Handicap and the Development of Mencap* (School of Education, University of Nottingham, 1990); J. W. Trent *Inventing the Feeble Mind: a history of mental retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Chapter in P. Safford and E. Safford *A History of Childhood and Disability* (Columbia: Teachers College Press, 1996).

idiots, did not seem mentally capable of profiting from schooling, and a new category, the 'feeble minded', was identified. Eugenic ideas which were gathering force in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century joined with the perception that the mentally inadequate were on the increase to produce a moral panic about the social threat of the feeble minded. The view that people with learning disabilities, particularly those less severely impaired, were a threat developed later in Britain than in the USA, and reached its height in the early years of the twentieth century. In the USA such attitudes can be seen as early as mid century. In broad terms, this picture of institutional developments and changes in attitude from mid nineteenth century to the early twentieth century remains in place.<sup>4</sup> The lacunae were many; for earlier periods than the mid nineteenth century information was fragmentary and anecdotal, and though from the 1840s information became more systematic, it was a broad outline of institutional provision, without detailed study of any particular institution, and still nothing about the lives of idiots and their families.

From the mid 1990s lacunae have started to be filled in. An important contribution was the collection of articles in *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency*, and there are relevant chapters in three more recent works, which however, are more concerned with madness than idiocy.<sup>5</sup> These volumes extend their coverage to the pre 1840 period,<sup>6</sup> they examine care in the community rather than institutional care, and, instead of great swathes of time being covered we get detailed and systematic investigations of practices in specific regions, such as Rushton's study in north east England and Houston's of boarding out insane patients in Scotland, or particular institutions, such

---

<sup>4</sup> A. Digby, 'Contexts and Perspectives, in D. Wright and A. Digby, *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency: Historical perspectives on people with learning disabilities* (London: Routledge, 1996). A crisp summary of these developments can be found in R. Porter, 'Keeping them down on the farm' *Times Literary Supplement*, (1994), p. 29, a review of *Inventing the Feeble Mind*.

<sup>5</sup> D. Wright and A. Digby, eds. *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency: historical perspectives on people with learning disabilities* (London: Routledge, 1996); P. Horden and R. Smith eds, *The Locus of Care: families, communities and institutions and the provision of welfare since antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1998); P. Bartlett and D. Wright, eds. *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: the history of care in the community, 1750-2000* (London: Athlone Press, 1999); J. Melling and B. Forsythe, eds., *Insanity, Institutions and Society 1800-1914: a social history of madness in comparative perspective* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> D. Wright, 'Familial care of "idiot" children in Victorian England' in P. Horden and R. Smith, *op. cit.*; D. Wright, 'Childlike in his innocence: lay attitudes to "idiots" and "imbeciles" in Victorian England' in Wright and Digby, *op. cit.*; A. Suzuki, 'Enclosing and disclosing lunatics within the family walls: domestic psychiatric regime and the public sphere in early nineteenth century England' in Bartlett and Wright, *op. cit.*

as Gladstone's of the Western Counties Idiot Asylum<sup>7</sup>. They also bring a new rigour of investigation as the authors are historians, whereas earlier work was for the most part by doctors (like Scheerenberger and Kanner) and those (like Ryan and Tomlinson) who had an explicit polemical purpose in writing.

There remains however much to be filled in about our knowledge of the lives of the learning disabled. Many of the historical accounts of learning disability discuss attitudes and beliefs, but still primarily concentrated on the period after 1840. They concentrate on doctors and prominent reformers, but do not discuss the prevalence and spread of notions about learning disability among any section of the general public. C. F. Goodey writes about concepts of learning and disability in the seventeenth century<sup>8</sup> but this is about philosophical notions rather than on general ideas. 'Begging the question of idiocy: the definition and sociocultural meaning of idiocy in early modern Britain'<sup>9</sup> has a broader perspective on the sources of ideas. It considers an earlier period than this study, but is interesting for the light it throws on the legacy of ideas that the nineteenth century inherited. There is an institutional and official starting point and focus to the investigations in these recent studies. Rushton's study of North East early modern England uses Poor Law disputes and Court decisions; Andrews uses Parochial records; Sturdy and Parry-Jones examine boarding out in Scotland, a system administered by parish officials.<sup>10</sup> Use of such records gives information about

---

<sup>7</sup> P. Rushton, 'Idiocy, the family and community in early modern north-east England', in Wright and Digby, *op. cit.*; R.A. Houston "'Not simple boarding": care of the mentally incapacitated in Scotland during the long eighteenth century', in Bartlett and Wright, *op. cit.*; D. Gladstone 'The changing dynamic of institutional care: the Western Counties Idiot Asylum, 1864-1914, in Wright and Digby, *op. cit.*; D. Wright, 'The National Asylum for Idiots, Earlswood, 1847-1886' unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> C. F. Goodey. 'The psychopolitics of learning and disability in seventeenth century thought' in Wright and Digby, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> J. Andrews, 'Begging the question of idiocy: the definition and socio-cultural meaning of idiocy in early modern Britain: Part 1' *History of Psychiatry*, 9 (1998), pp. 65-95; Part 2, *Ibid.*, 9 (1998), pp. 179-200.

<sup>10</sup> P. Rushton, 'Idiocy, the family and community in early modern north east England'; J. Andrews, 'Identifying and providing for the mentally disabled in early modern London' both in D. Wright and A. Digby, *op. cit.*; R.A. Houston, "'Not simple boarding": care of the mentally incapacitated in Scotland during the long eighteenth century' and H. Sturdy and W. Parry-Jones, 'Boarding out insane patients: the significance of the Scottish system 1857-1913' both in Bartlett and Wright, *op. cit.*

the poor, rather than about middling and upper classes, though the York Retreat, which catered for fee paying patients, admitted a small proportion (one in seventeen) of idiotic and imbecile patients between 1796 and 1843.<sup>11</sup> Although there is material on family interactions and perceptions and on middle class people in David Wright's and Akihito Suzuki's<sup>12</sup> work on, respectively, familial care of 'idiot' children in the nineteenth century and the interaction of the public and the domestic in managing lunatics, what we see is a transition to institutional care, not what happens in an entirely domestic setting. These volumes do not touch on the views of learning disabled people themselves on their lives, and it is only at more recent periods, within the scope of oral history, that these have begun to be investigated.<sup>13</sup> An area which has as yet hardly been touched on is that of the lives of people with learning disabilities in relation to their families. There is an article by Singer and Singer on a boy's education in early nineteenth century America, and my own on Augustus Lamb,<sup>14</sup> but as yet there is no sustained examination of familial experiences of learning disability in nineteenth century or earlier, a lacuna which this study will begin to fill in.

Such is the context of this thesis 'Learning Disabilities in Britain, 1780-1880: perceptions and practice' which is in two parts. Part I examines lay and medical views about idiocy, how medical views changed over the hundred years of this study, efforts to promote new medical views to the general public and some literary representation of learning disability. Part II explores the lives and familial context of a number of individuals with learning disabilities between 1780 and 1880. The remainder of this introduction will expand on the aims and methods used in the two parts of this thesis, and will show how the two parts are related, but before this questions about terminology for and definitions of learning disabilities need to be addressed.

---

<sup>11</sup> A. Digby, *Madness, Morality and Medicine: a study of the York Retreat, 1796-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, )

<sup>12</sup> D. Wright, "Childlike in his innocence"; lay attitudes to "idiots" and "imbeciles" in Victorian London', in Wright and Digby, *op. cit.*; D. Wright, 'Familial care of idiot children in Victorian England' in Horden and Smith, *op. cit.*; A. Suzuki, 'Enclosing and disclosing lunatics within the family walls: domestic psychiatric regime and the public sphere in early nineteenth century England', in Bartlett and Wright, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> D. Atkinson et al., eds. *Forgotten Lives: exploring the history of learning disability* (Kidderminster, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> H. Dickinson, 'Accounting for Augustus Lamb: theoretical and methodological issues in biography and historical sociology' *Sociology* 27 (1) (1993), pp. 121-132; P. Richards and G. Singer, "'To draw out the effort of his mind": educating a child with mental retardation in early nineteenth century America' *The Journal of Special Education* 31 (4) (1998) pp. 443-466.

No other impairment has seen such a range of terms used to describe it, nor such a rapid succession of terms, as one after another has been rejected as stigmatising. The labels 'idiot', 'moron' and 'feeble minded' give way to 'mentally handicapped' and 'educationally subnormal', which are superseded in their turn by 'learning difficulty' or 'learning disability' - the former being the term mostly used in education, the latter in medical contexts. Anne Digby suggests that the historian should use the terminology of the period under discussion, partly because of the multiplicity of terms and partly because the use of the 'language used historically helps us to understand past values and attitudes'.<sup>15</sup> This is a useful discussion, and a modified version of what Digby recommends will be used here. If the vocabulary of the time were constantly used a writer would have to vary 'idiot' with terms such as 'natural' 'fatuous person' and 'cretin' in the early nineteenth century and 'idiot', 'imbecile' and 'feeble' or 'weak' '-minded' later in the century, and would sound mannered and artificial. What is sought here is not a supposed recreation of the past, but an acknowledgment that not only the terms used but the *mentalité* was different in the nineteenth century. The terms 'idiot' and 'intellectually impaired' will be used throughout, the former term being the one most used throughout the period investigated, and the latter because it avoids the inescapably late twentieth and early twenty first century ring of 'learning disabilities'. The description 'learning disabilities' has been used, however, in the title of the thesis, since it is currently the accepted term.

Now comes the question as to what different people in different periods mean by 'learning disability' or 'idiocy' or 'feeble mindedness'- and does it matter if the various terms refer to different conditions rather than being different names for the same condition? Sticking to a term used in the period being studied avoids the need to address this question, as one could say simply that idiocy was the term the nineteenth century used for what it *perceived* as severe social and intellectual incompetence. C.F. Goodey, in a chapter about definitions of and reflections upon idiocy in an abstract, philosophical realm asks 'Is there a trans-historical idiot? Is there a type from past cultures whom we would recognise as our learning disabled person, congenitally and incurably disabled'<sup>16</sup>, and gives the answer, though it is hedged about with doubts, as 'probably not'. But the answer really depends on what is meant by 'trans-historical'. Are we asking whether the same biological

---

<sup>15</sup> A. Digby, 'Contexts and Perspectives' in Wright and Digby, *op. cit.*, p.3.

<sup>16</sup> Goodey, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

conditions of the nervous system caused a person to be perceived as an idiot in the nineteenth century and as having severe learning disabilities in the late twentieth? Or does the question ask whether there is a trans-historical discourse about learning disabilities. The answer to the second question is obviously 'no', since the terminology is different, expectations are different, educational plans are different, and so on. But I believe that the answer to the former question, and limited to the time span of this study, is 'yes'. Specialists in insanity from the early nineteenth century, for the most part, considered that idiocy was different from madness, in that something had gone wrong with brain development from early on, from birth or in early childhood, and was not curable. The same view is expressed in a textbook for nurses in 1998;<sup>17</sup> the difference is that by 1998 many of the explanations for why brain development went wrong have been identified - but still for the majority of cases of learning disability, the exact cause remains unknown.<sup>18</sup>

This continuity between the early nineteenth century and today in viewing severe intellectual impairment as being a result of neurological damage has been obscured by the addition from about the 1880s in Britain of a category of people, unremarked previously, who were thought to need special educational and social guidance. The nineteenth century and early twentieth century used the term feeble minded for these people, the mid twentieth century educationally subnormal (mild) and now mild or moderate learning disability or difficulty is favoured. It was apparent from the late nineteenth century and continues to be the case, that feeble mindedness or mild and moderate learning disability is more prevalent in disadvantaged social groups, while idiocy or severe learning disability is distributed fairly evenly throughout the population.<sup>19</sup> The similarity between social classes of prevalence of severe intellectual impairment argues in favour of a biological cause. But the greater prevalence of mild impairment among disfavoured classes suggests that much of the milder impairment is caused by inadequate education, chronic poor health, biased assessment

---

<sup>17</sup> D. Watson, 'Causes and Manifestations' in B. Gates, ed., *Learning Disabilities* (London: Churchill Livingstone, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> G. Petrie, Chapter 4, 'Physical Causes and Conditions'; Chapter 5 'Social Causes', in E. Shanley and T. Starrs, *Learning Disabilities: a handbook of care* (London: Churchill Livingstone, 1993). Tomlinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32, cites Dr Shuttleworth's 1888 paper arguing for special schools for children 'not irretrievably deficient'; 1893 the Charity Organization Society published *The Feeble Minded Child and Adult*; 1904, the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded was established, which clearly located the problem as a lower class one.

procedures and stereotyping by educational and medical authorities.<sup>20</sup> In other words, some children who had nothing biologically wrong with their nervous systems are made to seem as if something was wrong. These were the people that the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century regarded as a threat and in need of control, often in an institution.

An alternative, less satisfactory, explanation of the appearance of the feeble minded is that changed social conditions, new educational and work demands meant some people who had previously coped adequately could no longer do so. But this doesn't explain why most of these people were in low social classes. Whichever explanation is favoured, the sudden appearance of the feeble minded has made some writers<sup>21</sup> too inclined to suppose that intellectual impairment is largely created by empire building doctors and by politicians and social workers wanting to keep the lower orders quiet. There has been a tendency to gloss over the possibility that biologically created intellectual impairment exists and produces problems in whatever social class it occurs.<sup>22</sup> Another discourse that tends, for understandable reasons, to play down the importance of, or question the relevance, of biological impairment is the disability movement. The argument is that it is not bodily impairment that causes disability, but the failure of society to provide, for example, wheelchair access everywhere or routine use of British Sign Language that would make the social world accessible to everybody.<sup>23</sup>

This present work is a study primarily of impairment caused by biological defects. In Part 1 it is sometimes the case that people's perceptions may not distinguish biological from social, nor idiocy from madness, but in Part 2 where particular individuals are considered, it is biological impairment that is the issue. One strength of a biographical approach is that the stages by which a problem was perceived, what behaviour was taken to be evidence of a problem, what the problem was thought

---

<sup>20</sup> See B. Coard, How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal by the British School System (London, 1971) for a seminal work on the continuing problem of the allegedly deficient.

<sup>21</sup> Tomlinson, *op. cit.*, Ryan, *op. cit.*; Bogdan *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Tomlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 39; Ryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>23</sup> For an interesting, if extreme, version of this view, see L. Davis, Enforcing Normalcy: disability, deafness and the body, (London: Verso, 1995)

to be and evidence of biological defect that still convinces, can be traced for most of these people. There is nothing in the records of these lives that suggests that weird family relationships or some kind of psychological trauma thrust socially induced impairments on these people. For two of them, Augustus Lamb, only son of William Lamb and Lady Caroline Lamb, and Laura Stephen, daughter of Leslie Stephen and his first wife, Minny, there is evidence about what the biological cause of the impairment was. For most of the individuals studied here we know too that the impairment was perceived by the family and friends *before* there was any definition by doctors or other authority. In any case, most of these families were aristocracy, gentry, or intelligentsia, hardly people who would have been in a position to have their children labelled by doctors or poor law officials. Far from seeing doctors as authority figures, the aristocracy viewed them as superior servants. In Chapter 6 Emily Lamb will be seen sneering at the manners of the 'Scotch doctor' (Robert Lee).

However, having said that, there is substantial continuity in medical views about the difference between madness and idiocy, and about the biological causes of idiocy. The perceptions of intellectual impairment that were available to different social groups, and in different contexts, were often different from medical views. Not only that, but while there is continuity of the belief that intellectual impairment arises from a damaged or undeveloped nervous system, there are many different ways in which such a condition is perceived and judged. There is the issue of education and training, in which the 1840s marked a medically approved shift from the view that idiocy was unimprovable, to the eager promotion of idiot education. This is an important shift in what might be called the official discourse about idiocy, and as Chapter 3 explores, there were strenuous efforts to propagate the new education for idiots. But there were other ways, and more important, other contexts in which to perceive intellectual impairment. Whether someone is thinking about their own son or daughter's difficulty in learning, or about a character in fiction, or about writing an article to bring new developments in idiot education to the public, the perceptions about what idiocy is, what idiots are like, and whether a particular individual is an idiot, will differ. A useful theoretical concept in considering these shifting perspectives and frames of reference is that of discourse, Discourse theory has entered the humanities and social sciences through the work of Michel Foucault,<sup>24</sup> and refers to a 'domain of language use that is unified by common assumptions'<sup>25</sup>. Some discourses,

---

<sup>24</sup> For example, M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: a history of insanity in the age of reason*, trans. R. Howard, (London: Tavistock, 1971); M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

<sup>25</sup> N. Abercrombie et al. *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* 3rd edition (Harmondsworth:



such as a medical discourse of any particular period is easily identifiable, is employed by particular groups of people (doctors) in particular contexts where they are conscious of using a medical discourse (though they would be unlikely to use that word). But other discourses are used by other people and by doctors in other contexts. The social character of discourses is made clearer by Berger and Luckmann's notion of universes of knowledge<sup>26</sup>. This is a very closely related concept, but puts the emphasis on people employing a discourse rather than suggesting that ghostly discourses exist in some non human sphere. A differentiated society has many universes of knowledge. Some are shared by everyone, such as recognition of the value of coins of a national currency (that some people with an intellectual impairment do not recognise the value of coins is a real problem in everyday life). Other knowledge universes are specific to different social classes, or age groups or ethnic groups. There are universes of knowledge, or discourses, that attached to particular professional groups, of which those of doctors, alienists and (from the 1840s) doctors working with idiots, are of importance.

Further, an important point to be explored is that professional groups or networks of shared interests, such as literary subcultures, may or may not be shut off from the rest of society. Before the 1840s medical discourses about idiocy were relatively shut off from lay discourses, but after 1840 doctors, convinced by new ideas about idiot education, together with charity workers (most of whom then were either ministers of religion or had close connections with a church) made a sustained effort to bring the new ideas to a wider public. This as will be seen, was a deliberate endeavour, but deliberate propaganda for a cause is only one way, in which systems of ideas - discourses - circulate in a society or section of that society, are *selectively appropriated, sometimes unconsciously, and used in other contexts than where they were first employed*. The history of ideas has some overlap with what is intended here, but the emphasis in a history of ideas is on experts' ideas, the tracing of philosophical, scientific, literary, and other systematically worked out and explicit idea systems in order to tease out their origins and connections.<sup>27</sup> But while part of this thesis is concerned with medical ideas as an explicit and deliberate discourse, it is also concerned

---

Penguin, 1994) p. 119.

<sup>26</sup> P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)

<sup>27</sup> A. Bullock and O. Stallybrass, eds., *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 286.

with the web of ideas that support everyday understandings of intellectual impairment, and not only ideas, but also the sensibility, the consciousnesses, in which ideas exist and are mediated. Closer to what is intended here is the notion of history of *mentalités*, as used by French historians of the *Annales* school,<sup>28</sup> in the exploration of attitudes to, knowledge of and feelings about intellectual impairment, in relation to particular social contexts that is found in the first part of this thesis.

The words 'discourse' and *mentalité*, can suggest a systematic set of ideas, and that it is these ideas which are employed in viewing a given phenomenon - one thinks about idiots, and calls up a medical and educational discourse; one thinks about poetry and calls up a literary critical discourse. But it doesn't work like that; even deliberately focused discourses, such as scientific, are contaminated as it were by other discourses. And those who are just thinking about things, or reacting to events, bring different fragments of knowledge or knowledge systems to bear on a matter in hand. *Bricolage*<sup>29</sup> might be a better word than 'discourse' for the mix of ideas drawn from different sources and sometimes unconsciously applied to objects of thought or observation. Nineteenth century thinking about people whose mental powers weren't quite right was in many cases a mix of the new and the old, and according to the context - thinking about charity work or about instructing children or about what social position was occupied by a person who wasn't quite right - a different kind of *bricolage* came to mind. It is not suggested that *bricolage* thinking is special to the nineteenth century, or that there is anything wrong with it. Rather it is inevitable in a differentiated society with many different discourses, or universes of knowledge, available. Durkheim, writing in 1915 about common knowledge and about specialised thinking, noted that 'the great majority of the concepts we use are not methodically constituted'.<sup>30</sup>

The views about mental impairment and idiocy looked at in Part I cannot claim to be a thorough description of what nineteenth century people thought about idiocy, since even by the end of the century the systematic social survey was only in its infancy. However, even in the unlikely event of

---

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>29</sup> *Bricolage*, term taken from the psychoanalyst J. Lacan (1901-1981) into sociology and literary criticism, meaning an atheoretical eclectic procedure of drawing on ideas from different sources. See N. Abercrombie, et al. *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J.W. Swain, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1915), p. 437.

Gallup having leapt anachronistically into action, it would have only provided a partial sort of answer, since as will be seen, what people thought was different according to the context of their thinking - Christian charity worker, novelist, parent with a child with an intellectual impairment. What both parts of the thesis seek to do is to show the origin and nature of ideas about mental impairment and to examine contexts in which one set of ideas rather than another were employed. Summarised here are the kinds of ideas about intellectual impairment that are employed by different people and in different contexts in this study:

1. Idiot - hopeless
2. Idiot - educable
3. Idiot with a soul like anyone else, but occluded by an impairment
4. Innocent idiot, with an instinctive closeness to God
5. Closer to nature than other people
6. Propensity for badness, even evil.
7. Physically disgusting object

One and two are predominantly doctors' discourses, two and three predominantly Christian charity workers'. Three, idiot with occluded soul, and four, idiot with instinctive closeness to God are not exactly the same, since in the latter case the idiot needs no kindly educator to uncover the soul within. Instinctive knowledge of God is at its most prominent in the stories for children, examined in Chapter 3, to urge kindness to idiots. Closeness to God is unequivocally good, but the moral character of nature is perceived in different ways. A 'scientific' construction sees nature as morally neutral, but nature when evoked in contexts of idiocy, always has a moral influence, sometimes bad, sometimes good. Before the late eighteenth century nature had mostly negative associations; wildness, confusion and disorder. Hayden White's discussion traces dangerous wildness to rebels against God, Cain, Ishmael, the children of Babel, who inhabit a wilderness land beyond decent human settlement.<sup>31</sup> In 'Is female to male as nature is to culture?' Sherry Ortner considers the question of the all but universal inferiority of women in societies, and asks (assuming that one doesn't accept that women are of essence inferior to men) what is the cultural universal that leads to the disparagement of women.<sup>32</sup> Her answer is that it is nature that is despised and feared, and

---

<sup>31</sup> H. White, 'The Forms of Wildness' in E. Dudley and M. Novak, *The Wild Man Within: an image in Western thought from the renaissance to romanticism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972) pp. 14-15.

<sup>32</sup> S. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' in M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974).

women are despised because they are seen as closer to nature - childbirth, suckling and, paradoxically, charged with the repression of nature in the socializing of children. Pollution she sees as nature sneaking into society, and it may be noted that it is close to nature things that particularly need anti-pollution ritual, such as childbirth, menstruation, sexual relations. It is interesting that White, writing before Ortner's article, uses the word 'pollution' to describe the feared effects of the 'children of Babel and Sodom and Gomorrah'.<sup>33</sup> The imagined, abstract idiot is almost invariably a man. Ortner points to the ubiquitous danger and disorder embodied in women; how much greater then is danger and disorder if it is embodied as a man, who ought to signal control and order.

The idiot as 'wild man' will be returned to in relation to the blurring of the boundaries between idiocy, madness and 'normality', but before this the late eighteenth century transformation of the 'wild man' into 'noble savage' needs to be considered briefly. Radical thinking, the ideas that underpinned the French and American revolutions perceived society as a misdesigned burden, riven with injustice and corruption rather than a source of all that was orderly and rational. In this perspective society distorted and obscured an original and natural human perfection.<sup>34</sup> In Britain Wordsworth is a key figure in a new, romantic, construction of nature as beneficent, and of people as better and purer the closer they were to nature.<sup>35</sup> His poem 'The Idiot Boy' (1798) is the first of a number of literary portrayals of idiocy to be examined in Chapters 4 and 5. Nineteenth century moral children's stories about idiots are strong on this natural goodness theme, though it is very much merged with the instinctive closeness to God theme. The way in which the imagined idiot, almost without exception, comes from a humble station in life, usually rural is very likely a means of keeping him distant and Other.

The seven themes about idiocy identified above can overlap, so an 'educable idiot' can also be instinctively close to God, or have a propensity for badness. The idiot as bad or dangerous is very little in evidence - at least consciously - in the period considered here. Badness is spoken of but rarely occurs in actual situations with a mentally impaired person. For example Thelwall (Chapter 2) will explain how a boy he teaches is not really bad, but has been overindulged, and John Haslam

---

<sup>33</sup> White, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*; A. Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: nature, man and society in experimental poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989)

describes what would now be called very 'challenging' behaviour without moral judgment. It is as if the notion that an idiot might be profoundly bad exists only in the abstract, to be dispelled by contact with a real person with an intellectual impairment. Thus a *possibility* of badness in idiots is very much present, even if kept in abeyance, long before the remarkable fear and loathing of the 'feeble minded' that emerged in Britain after the 1880s. The evidence put forward to the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded in 1908, shows much of the anxiety of this later period, as does the observation of William Potts (psychological expert to the Birmingham Justices) that:

The idiots are no danger at all to society. The imbeciles are a source of a certain amount of danger. It is the feeble minded . . . who are a source of a very great amount of danger, and it is very difficult, without special knowledge, to recognize the feeble minded...<sup>36</sup>

Many writers have noted the specific social conditions which encouraged the emergence of this open and institutionalised hostility towards the end of the century, but the existence of a potential for fear and dislike from much earlier has been little remarked. The likelihood that idiocy will be disgusting is present too in the early years of the century, though it is seen as a reaction that the observer should suppress. In the writings examined in Chapter 3, about the new education for idiots, the reader is constantly urged to conquer his or her natural distaste for the appearance of idiots. In the novels examined in Chapter 4 the reader is often assured that the intellectually impaired character is *not* disagreeable to look at, the assumed need for this assurance suggesting how much of a worry appearance was.

There has been little academic discussion of past perceptions of the appearance of intellectually impaired people, possibly because this continues to bother us. The objections that come up from time to time about people with learning disabilities living next door or using hotel facilities very likely relate to appearances<sup>37</sup>, and the performing of cosmetic surgery for Down's syndrome almost certainly does. The Victorians are seen as hypocritical in sexual matters, but it may be that in their willingness to think that disgust might be a natural reaction to intellectual impairment they are less

---

<sup>36</sup> Report of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded Cd 4215, 1908; W. Potts, 'The importance of health conditions in juvenile delinquents', National Health, 13 (1921), 178-180.

<sup>37</sup> 'An uncaring community' New Society (1988) 12 February, 20-21.

hypocritical than people today<sup>38</sup>. But of course appearance may have been a bigger problem for nineteenth century people than it has become, and there are grounds for supposing that this the case. The late twentieth and early twenty first century are comfortably removed from socially sanctioned gawping at deformed and mad people; not so the nineteenth when people with various impairments were exhibited in fairs.<sup>39</sup> In John Galt's novel *Annals of the Parish*, one of the earliest of the works of fiction analysed in Chapter 5, the antics of the two intellectually impaired characters are a source of amusement - though they have other functions as well. The stories for children (Chapter 3) suggest that there was felt to be a need to persuade people to act with sympathy rather than derision. The forward thinking reformers of the nineteenth century have a different *mentalité* (or think they have) from the less enlightened of the time who might jeer at idiots. It is not just a case of rational, intellectual distancing oneself from the crude past, but a change of sensibility in perception of impairment; not just that one ought to be sympathetic rather than derisive, but that a refined person no longer even sees the possibility of deriving amusement from a deformed appearance and weird behaviour.

Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process*<sup>40</sup> is relevant here; he traces the development in Europe since the Middle Ages in Europe, of politeness, refinement and gentility. Forks replace a knife and the hands for taking food to the mouth, people start to require their own cup to drink from and the carcasses of animals no longer appear on tables. One can see this process of refinement continuing in Britain, despite what seem to be contradictory tendencies such as relaxations on swearing or the resurgence of spitting in public, in such things as the increase in vegetarianism and horror at fox hunting. An aspect of this civilizing process relevant here is the ending of the tradition of the fool. Before this theme is developed, a characteristic of nineteenth century medicine that may be connected with the new possibility of distaste at weird appearance will be briefly considered. This is the importance of appearance in diagnosis of mental maladies. Two relevant works here are

---

<sup>38</sup> P. Devlieger, '(In)competence in America: a comparative perspective' in R. Jenkins, ed. *Questions of Competence: culture, classification and intellectual disability* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 67-8, suggests that avoidance is the late twentieth century response when encountering people with learning disabilities in a public place.

<sup>39</sup>R. Bogdan, 'Exhibiting mentally retarded people for amusement and profit, 1850-1940' *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 91 (2) (1986), 120-126.

<sup>40</sup> N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process: the history of manners*, trans., E. Jephcott, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

Gilman's *Seeing the Insane* and *The Face of Madness*.<sup>41</sup>

The latter considers the emergence of psychiatric photography, but the former includes the many drawings that were used in describing madness and idiocy in the early nineteenth century. Drawings allow a greater focus on strangeness or deformity than photographs, since the artist can emphasise particular characteristics. It is true that the bodily demeanour of a patient is considered relevant today, and photographs continue to be used in psychiatric texts.<sup>42</sup> But there are now many other diagnostic procedures for intellectual impairment, such as standard tests for neurological function, for efficiency of the thyroid gland or pattern of chromosomes. For the nineteenth century doctor appearance and behaviour were the only source of data, and it is suggested here that they gave appearance an overwhelming importance, and when that appearance might be distressing to the very sensitive, it could not be glossed over. This is a tentative suggestion, but it may have some connection with the importance for some writers of avoiding a disgusting appearance or demeanour. In the very old tradition of the fool, which is now to be further explored, weird or deformed appearance could be a positive asset, which may be one among many reasons for the fading away of the tradition in the eighteenth century as deformity was less and less perceived as amusing.

Edith Welsford and Sandra Billington in histories of the fool<sup>43</sup> both identified two kinds of fool, the natural fool who was intellectually impaired (hence the 'natural') and the artificial fool who was an entertainer, sometimes a very professional one, but Welsford's is much more informative about the natural fool, and about the connection between the growth of 'refinement' and the disappearance of the fool (of both types). The fool, or a notion somewhat like him as, Welsford and Billington show, can be traced back, though in a fragmented fashion, a long way, to ancient Egyptian, Celtic, Icelandic and other roots.<sup>44</sup> But the court fool (and court dwarfs, who were

---

<sup>41</sup> S. Gilman, *Seeing the Insane* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); S. Gilman, ed. *The Face of Madness: Hugh W. Diamond and the origin of psychiatric photography* (New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1976)

<sup>42</sup> Gilman, *Face of Madness* *op. cit.* p. vii.

<sup>43</sup> E. Welsford, *The Fool: his social and literary history* (London: Faber, 1935); S. Billington, *The Social History of the Fool* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).

<sup>44</sup> Welsford, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-112.

sometimes also fools) in medieval and early modern Europe has a robust history<sup>45</sup>. It is clear that in fact the court fool or jester was usually in fact an artificial fool. But the *image* of the fool was a complex amalgam of deliberate foolery, idiocy, madness and magical wildness. A sixteenth century engraving by Daniel Hopfer which brings all these elements together and, unusually, shows a female fool, is reproduced in *Seeing the Insane*.<sup>46</sup> A man and a woman are shown in a lumbering dance. Their hair is unkempt, and the woman has an untidy crown of leaves, while the man has a bird nesting in his hair. Both are dwarfish in form, and the man has a goitre hanging from his neck (cretinism), some nasty spots on his face (syphilis? smallpox?) and bells round his neck. Gilman notes that the leaves and bird's nest signify the wild man, the bells, the fool while the grotesque dance signifies possession, idiocy or madness.<sup>47</sup>

That fools and images of fools were a constant element of European culture until the eighteenth century, and then drifted gradually out of sight is something to be noted.<sup>48</sup> It is not hard to pick out some of the things that made the role of the fool useful. He can tell home truths, often lightly disguised in songs, rhymes and jokes, to the exalted without fear of punishment. Bodily and mental deformity remind the 'normal' that dissolution lies round the corner and - paradoxically - reassure observers of their present normality in contrast to the fool. The nineteenth century writers who comment in Chapter 4 on historical people on whom some of Scott's creations were allegedly based say that when the fool kept by a great house was a natural fool his presence was evidence of the generosity and wealth of the householder in supporting an unproductive person. An important issue that Hayden White discusses is that the lack of control the fool exhibits over speech, demeanour, actions and bodily functions are expressions of what ordinary people have been taught to suppress, but have vicarious pleasure in the uninhibited behaviour of the fool. White says that here is the 'wild man' trying to break out from the veneer of 'civilized man'.<sup>49</sup> One may note here the 'noble savage' of the eighteenth century conjures up a more agreeable image of human nature than one is less likely

---

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, chapters 5, 6 and 7.

<sup>46</sup> Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> A Dr Moore in 1774 visited the court of Mannheim where there was, according to Moore, the last surviving example of the court-fool. See Welsford, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>49</sup> White, 1972, p. 20.



to be keen to repudiate than the 'wild man'. White goes on to say that the illicit impulses and desires that were projected onto the figure of the fool or wild man haven't gone away, but have come to be more explicitly acknowledged as part of each individual. Freud is an obvious influence, but White considers also Marx and Nietzsche in this move of the 'wild person' from the exterior to being part of the interior makeup of everyone.<sup>50</sup> Foucault's<sup>51</sup> claim that there was a shift, starting round about the seventeenth century, from social control being exerted by force upon the body, to social control exerted by self discipline is also relevant here. So, the 'wild person', anyway possibly now more 'noble savage' than unattractive wild man, can be explicitly acknowledged as being part of ourselves. Developing refinement views laughter at the antics of the idiot or pretend idiot as coarse and unseemly. The fool fades away, but not all of a sudden, and aspects of him, a multi-valent and shifting clutch of attributes rather than a clearly defined concept, linger on during the nineteenth century to be sometimes discernible in medical and educational discourses, and often in literary contexts.

The question of context is important; as will be seen, doctors and psychiatrists seek a precise scientifically based discourse that for the most part they achieved. Another kind of discourse centres round legal competence, and it has a long history as Richard Neugebauer has shown.<sup>52</sup> The question of competence arises in a very material and practical way if it seems that someone is incapable of managing their property, and laws to deal with this were first enacted in the thirteenth century, and remained substantially unchanged in intent through to the nineteenth century (and were nearly invoked in the case of the 10th Lord Lindsey, one of the individuals examined in Part II). They were based on a document *De Prerogativa Regis* which divided the mentally disabled into two categories, natural fools and idiots on the one hand, and persons *non compos mentis*. This was further clarified in the fifteenth century and 'lunatic' replaced the term *non compos mentis* and referred to those who had become mentally deranged (rather than being born so), had lucid intervals and might recover completely. The form of Crown guardianship differed according to whether the verdict was idiot or lunatic. The latter had more advantages for the individual and

---

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34-5.

<sup>51</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, (London Allen Lane, 1977).

<sup>52</sup> R. Neugebauer, 'Mental handicap in medieval and early modern England criteria measurement and care' in Wright and Digby, *op. cit.*; R. Neugebauer, 'A doctor's dilemma the case of William Harvey's mentally retarded nephew', *Psychological Medicine*, 9 (1989) pp 569-72

family, since the King protected the lunatic's property from waste, revenue from the estate was provided for the lunatic and family, and profits from it restored to the family at the end of guardianship. For an idiot however, the King had only to provide for the idiot, not the family, out of the estate, and could use any revenue spare from this maintenance for himself.<sup>53</sup> Although the indigent would not have any use for these laws regulating property, there were many extremely modestly off petitioners, evidence that they were used by a wide range of people. What is important for this study is the way in which the courts (through a jury of twelve local people) conducted tests of mental competence. Neugebauer quotes the questions put to Emma de Beston in 1385:

The said Emma . . . was asked whence she came and said she did not know. . . Being asked how many days there were in a week, she said seven but could not name them. Being asked how many husbands she had had in her time she said three, giving the name of one only, and not knowing the names of the others. . . . Being asked how many shillings there were in forty pence, she said she did not know. Being asked whether she would rather have twenty silver groats than forty pence she said they were of the same value. They found . . . [she had] neither sense nor memory nor sufficient intelligence to manage herself, her lands or her goods.<sup>54</sup>

By the seventeenth century when literacy became more usual the questions would touch on knowledge of writing. The important point here is that through three hundred years the officials and jurors were asking questions relevant to whether a person had intellectual impairment, and they perceived intellectual impairment as a condition distinct from madness. Neugebauer emphasises that there is no confusion between intellectual impairment and madness in the investigations of these courts, let alone references to supernatural causes. Madness, idiocy or 'normality' were treated as material states of the body. The medical discourse of the time too was based in the material world. Thus discourses which are pragmatic and practical (court decisions) and which are scientific, material and empirically based (medical) coexist with other kinds of discourses on idiocy, in which natural fools, artificial fools and 'wild men'<sup>55</sup> were part of the cultural landscape, and little subject to precise investigation. One doesn't ask of Hopper's engraving; 'How was that bird persuaded to nest on his head?' or 'How come he's so energetic when cretinism produces lethargy?' In imaginative literature too there is found the many faceted fool, where artistic form provides its own context in

---

<sup>53</sup> Neugebauer, 'Mental handicap in medieval and early modern England', *op. cit.*, pp. 25-27.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>55</sup> C.F. Goodey, *op. cit.* discusses the use of the concept of the changeling to explain intellectual impairment. There is no sign of this explanation in any material I have found.

which fictional people can live without needing the practical details of how they manage their lives spelled out. Different contexts, the medical, the educational, the legal, the literary and the general cultural landscape give rise to different, sometimes mutually contradictory discourses about intellectual impairment (or no discourse at all in the case of nineteenth century educational thought).

While doctors, charity workers and some writers of imaginative literature liberally bandied around the term idiot, and sometimes other terms such as imbecile, the families with a child with intellectual impairment, who are considered in Part II, rarely used such a term. It is true that the impairment of some individuals considered, for example Augustus Lamb, was milder than would invite the term idiot, but it was not applied to George Austen, who was severely impaired. There was for these families neither an appropriate, or at any rate acceptable, term for their children's problems, nor an accepted procedure for education. But, as it came apparent that the expected kind of education would not serve, the families made their own adaptations, or *bricolage*, to suit education to the child. What they did, unsurprisingly was to use existing educational routes, but to adapt them, and the solution adopted by all the families where there is information about education, and where the families had means, was a private tutor, or for Laura Stephen, a governess. This statement suggests a smoother solution to the difficulties than was the case, and glosses over changes of teacher and place of education, and the involvement of family members or quasi family members, in the process of education and socialisation of the child. Considerable anxiety and uncertainty about what to do is often seen. In a time scale that spans a century, and which includes the new hopefulness for idiots one would expect to see changes in arrangements for children with learning difficulties. The distribution of the families that have been identified, skewed towards the early part of the period, makes such an endeavour difficult. Additionally the information that can be found for each family is different, making comparisons hard. Laura Stephen provides what might be a key case as, born in 1870, a system for idiot education could in theory have been applied to her. But in fact her father's and step-mother's response was very similar to Augustus's or Lindsey's family in their ad hoc strategy of adapting ordinary educational resources. Despite reformers' efforts it is possible that the Stephens did not know of the new methods, but in fact it is far more likely that they continued to think in terms of an ordinary life plot for Laura, hoped she would get over her difficulties, and didn't want to consider her an idiot. As an adult she went to live at Earlswood, but this appears to have been a recognition of serious impairment, rather than a positive move to take advantage of new methods.

If families rarely used any term, like idiot, to describe a child, the sons or daughters whose lives are examined in Part II never used such a term of themselves. The possibility that they might seem so unlikely that one might ask why raise it? But something of the difficulties of writing these biographies is brought sharply into focus by the issue. People with intellectual impairment do not write their own histories without support. It is only from the mid twentieth century that interest generally in the lives of the subordinated and marginalised has emerged, and only from late in the century that interest has been extended to the intellectually impaired.<sup>56</sup> The individuals considered in Chapters 6 - 9 have not written their own history, but it has been constructed from what other people have written about them, largely in letters to family and friends and in diaries. This means that an important component of what is widely held to be distinctive about biography is missing, the internal reflections and desires of the writing subject.<sup>57</sup> Two important points may be made in response to this limitation; first, internal reflections are subject to self censorship and unconscious self censorship. Carolyn Heilbrun has noted the difficulties women autobiographers had, until well into the twentieth century, of writing about, or even acknowledging the existence of such 'unfeminine' feelings as desire for achievement, ambition and recognition of their own talents.<sup>58</sup> Internal reflection is not a source of unadulterated truth. The second point to be made is that the events of a life and the social framework in which they take place provide a great deal of useful information, even in the absence of internal reflection. Daniel Bertaux in explaining the methods of life story research in sociology puts much emphasis on the importance of locating the stories in material situations and events.<sup>59</sup> Indeed it might reasonably be argued that a detailed account of events set in their context would be more useful as a guide to feelings than a stream of reflection without any context at all. Much of social life is predicated on assumptions, derived from known norms of social interaction, knowledge of particular situations and of individual's character, rather than on what people actually say. It is possible to draw inferences about the quality of a person's life

---

<sup>56</sup> D. Atkinson, M. Jackson and J. Walmsley, eds., *Forgotten Lives: exploring the history of learning disability* (Kidderminster: British Institute of Learning Disability, 1997); D. Atkinson and J. Walmsley. 'Using autobiographical approaches with people with learning disabilities', *Disability and Society*, 14 (2) (1999), pp. 203-216.

<sup>57</sup> M. Erben, 'The problem of other lives: social perspectives' *Sociology* 27 (1) (1993) 15-26, pp. 16-17.

<sup>58</sup> C. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), pp. 24-25.

<sup>59</sup> D. Bertaux, *Les Récits de Vie* (Paris: Nathan, 1997).

even though that person supplies little or no comment.

It is reasonable to ask for any given person whether fundamental human needs were met, and unsatisfactory to dodge the issue by asserting that human needs are infinitely varied. Needs will be fulfilled (or not) in very different cultural settings, but are not infinitely varied. Doyal and Gough develop a valuable perspective in *A Theory of Human Need*; their context is the consideration of need in a contemporary, world perspective, but it is applicable to past societies. They assert that the two fundamental needs of persons are for health (starting with basic survival) and autonomy. The former will not be pursued here since all the people considered in Part II (with the exception perhaps of the people Arthur Mitchell discusses) have basic health needs looked after, in the light of knowledge and resources of the time. But the notion of autonomy is very relevant. Doyal and Gough argue that persons express autonomy through formulating consistent aims in respect of things which they believe to be in their interests, and strategies to achieve these aims.<sup>60</sup> The actual aims and strategies depend on i) knowledge and understanding acquired through education and socialisation, ii) cognitive and emotional capacity, and iii) opportunities. A person with an intellectual impairment has his or her capacity for ii) to some degree restricted by that impairment, but not absent. The conditions for the realisation of i) and iii) rest with the social context and the actions of others. This may seem a rather elaborate way of saying 'Were Augustus Lamb, Lindsey Bertie and other people looked at in Part II able to do what they wanted to do?', but putting the issue in a wider perspective of human needs makes the question of autonomy an important one. The way in which this human need perspective can be used in relation to the biographical material is to ask whether the individuals studied in Part II were able to make the kinds of choices, and undertake the same kinds of activity that another person in that social milieu would have had open to him or her. The kind of information which would allow this question to be answered is available only for some of the individuals considered, but where it is the issue will be pursued.

An important perspective that any biographical account brings is that of the passage of time, and the way in which social life is built upon notions about the passage of time, and lives are lived as narratives through time. This aspect of biography is present whether or not the subject speaks for him or herself. Paul Ricoeur's thinking about narrative, in real life and well as fictional life, is that it is a fundamental way in which humans deal with the passage of time. His point is that the real and

---

<sup>60</sup> L. Doyal and L. Gough, *A Theory of Human Need* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 49-75.

material experience of life lies only in the fleeting moment of the present, and that in fact lives are lived in the imagined future and the remembered past. These memories and projected futures are cast in the form of narratives. For Ricoeur the characteristic of a narrative, as opposed to a simple chronicle of happenings, is that events are set, anticipated and evaluated in terms of plots.<sup>61</sup> The issue of expected life courses, or life 'plots' is important to parents with children; the families studied here had for the most part, a clear notion of the broad outlines of a life course, particularly for a boy, and very particularly in the two cases where the son was the heir to a title. To return to the issue of discourse, one may ask what discourse of intellectual impairment did these families have for their children. The answer is that they didn't have one, or to put it another way, the plot for their child's life was not one of intellectual impairment. There was the term idiot, but as this described as a 'hopeless' condition it is hardly surprising that most families weren't keen on it. Moreover they were not writing and commenting primarily for the historian when they recorded their thoughts, but for themselves and their families.

Having discussed so far biographical methods in general terms, there remain two issues for this introduction. The first is the value of group biography, and whether Part II of this study can be classified as group biography, and the second is a general discussion of the data available for each individual. Group biographies, such as those by Pat Jalland, Jeanne Peterson and Diana Jones<sup>62</sup> are about lives interlinked in some way; by family connections (Peterson), by political connections (Jalland) or religious and social ties (Jones). Lawrence Stone too, in a theoretical discussion of group biography (prosopography)<sup>63</sup> envisages close social links between individuals studied, and that the aims will be particularly to investigate sources of political action and social structure and social mobility. But there is no link between the families studied here; each separately deals with the upbringing, education and adult life (if the child lives long enough) of a son or daughter with intellectual impairment. However this makes all the more interesting the similarity of the responses

---

<sup>61</sup> H. White, 'The metaphysics of narrativity' in D. Wood, ed. *On Paul Ricoeur* (London: Routledge, 1991); M. Erben, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>62</sup> P. Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics, 1860-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); J. Peterson, *Family, Love and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); D. Jones, 'A biographical approach to the history of education: nineteenth century nonconformist lives and educational expansion' in M. Erben, ed. *Biography and Education: a reader* (London: Falmer, 1998).

<sup>63</sup> L. Stone, *Past and Present Revisited* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

and adaptations that were made. The families examined in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are all families who, at the very least, were comfortably off, so special educational arrangements and the support of an unproductive person did not pose a financial problem. In Chapter 9, based mainly on the investigation of the Scottish Lunacy Commission, and the letters from Earlswood parents, the resource problem of the support of an impaired person is a worry for families, as too the related problem of behaviour that is perceived to disrupt a small household. But for nearly all families the disruption of an expected life trajectory, whether it brought financial anxiety as well or not, brings into play action - most importantly a specially adapted educational plan - to prevent disruption and to get things onto the expected course.

The final part of this Introduction will outline in more detail than hitherto the structure of the thesis. Part I starts by examining professionals' ideas, those of educationists and doctors. Educationists of the period have nothing to say about learning disabilities. For this reason no doubt ideas about education and its organization have not been considered in histories of learning disability; but an absence of a discourse, in a situation where *prima facie* one might have expected something to be said is interesting, and Chapter 1 considers this. The next chapter 'Psychiatrists, *bricolage* and the emergence in the 1840s of education for children with intellectual impairment' starts with consideration of the views of medical specialists in the first half of the nineteenth century before the novel indeed startling idea of idiot education had come to Britain. It pays attention to the differences (as well as matters of agreement) between the various early practitioners in their views of intellectual impairment, and the observations of one of them, John Haslam, on the teaching of two children with severe educational problems. The chapter then considers the work of John Thelwall, an early, and now largely forgotten educator who took on children with learning difficulties. The material in this chapter shows that though 'idiot education' did not gain a public and approved discourse until the 1840s, before that there were efforts to teach and improve children who had learning disabilities. Such efforts existed out of the public eye, in the absence of a context to ensure publicity and continuity. Chapter 2 examines the work of the two major figures who inspired the bringing of 'idiot education' to Britain, Johann Guggenbuhl and Edouard Séguin. These two appear to have been the pegs on which the 'new enlightenment' about idiot education was hung. But Edouard Séguin was a great deal more, in that his educational theory and practice became the foundation for the teaching of the learning disabled certainly for the time span of this study. William Ireland (superintendent of the Scottish institution at Larpent from the 1870s) and Dr John Langdon Down (superintendent at Earlswood Idiot Asylum 1861-1868) were important

figures in the consolidation and development of idiot education in the second half of the nineteenth century, but will not be considered here since their educational methods were based on Séguin's, they worked exclusively in institutional contexts, and their ideas were not widely promulgated to the general public.

Chapter 3 examines the systematic efforts made by doctors and charity workers, in serial publications and pamphlets, to change the perceptions of the mid nineteenth public towards the learning disabled, towards a greater sympathy and recognition of the benefits education would provide, both to the idiot himself and to society generally. This chapter includes consideration of some moral stories for children to urge sympathy for idiocy. These stories are interesting because, the context being different from the articles specifically about education, the image of the idiot is somewhat different. The final two chapters of Part I are on the representation of intellectual impairment in imaginative literature, throughout the period of this study. These portrayals are important in the history of perceptions of and attitudes towards intellectual impairment. Wordsworth's *The Idiot Boy* (1798) is, to my knowledge, the first portrayal of an idiot and his family as characters to be taken seriously in a work of literature. In addition to Wordsworth's *Idiot Boy*, there are portrayals of people with intellectual impairment in fiction by Walter Scott, John Galt, Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Gaskell and Hardy. Various perceptions of idiocy can be seen in these novels, but a major division is between those which employ what I shall call a 'fool' model of learning disability, and those which employ an 'idiot' model. The 'idiot' model occurs after 1850, suggesting that perceptions of idiocy had changed, in part at least it will be argued, as a result of doctors' and charity workers' propaganda in the 1840s and after.

Part II of this study uses biographical methods to explore individuals' and families' experience of intellectual impairment. There are four chapters in Part II; the first looks at the life of Augustus Lamb (1807-1836), only son and only child of William Lamb and Lady Caroline Lamb, Chapter 7 at Lindsey Bertie (1814-1877), eldest son of the 9th Earl of Lindsey. Chapter 8 considers a number of individuals from the gentry or bourgeoisie, Golding Constable (1874-1838), eldest brother of John Constable, R.A., George Austen (1766-1838), brother of Jane Austen, Hastings de Feuillide (1786-1801), the son of one of Jane Austen's cousins, Byron (1854-1932), son of Victoria Woodhull, the American suffragist and magazine proprietor who moved to England in 1877, and Laura Stephen (1870-1945) daughter of Leslie Stephen and his first wife, Minny. Ideally the families would have been evenly spread through



the century studied. Instead, they are concentrated at the end of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. No reason other than chance suggests itself for this distribution. The fact that the data in Chapters 6-8 comes from families with at least one eminent member is not by chance; it is because of the eminent members that documents have been preserved, sometimes published and are widely known about. There is no reason to suppose that there is more intellectual impairment to be found in eminent than in obscure families of a given social class. Chapter 9 considers lives of people from humbler positions in society for whom documentation is meagre. It draws its material principally from the case reports of the Scottish Lunacy Commission discussed by Arthur Mitchell in his *The Insane in Private Dwellings* and from letters written by parents and friends to the Board of Guardians of Earlswood Asylum for Idiots between 1849 and 1887. Some fragments of information are also taken from Mayhew's work and from Kilvert's diary. The data used in this chapter is more fragmentary than in the earlier sections of Part II, but it is valuable because it reveals that while scarce resources produced some different problems for those considered in Chapter 9, at the same time many of the difficulties experienced by the families in modest but respectable circumstances were similar to those of the gentry and aristocracy.

In Part II the ideas and concepts identified in Part I are explored by using individual biographical case histories and actual familial contexts. There exist histories of education and of institutional provision for the intellectually impaired and historical accounts of ideas about the nature of idiocy. Imaginative literature of the nineteenth century includes accounts of idiots. Historians and biographers have written about individuals' lives in the past. But most have not sought to put together the different contexts in which different discourses about intellectual impairment emerge, and they have certainly not sought to connect the lives of intellectually impaired individuals and their families to a wider context of prescriptive or imaginative literature.

**PART I**

**Perceptions and Representations of Intellectual Impairment  
by Professionals, by Charity Workers and in Fiction**

## Chapter 1

### EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE FOR INTELLECTUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE 1780 - 1880: THE GREAT BLANK

This chapter will look at educational ideas and practice for intellectually impaired children; though if it did so strictly it would be a very short chapter since, for the entire period of this study, educationists showed no interest in these people – or in those with any kind of impairment. Sally Tomlinson and Joanna Ryan criticise the domination of doctors in the education of the intellectually impaired<sup>1</sup>. But it wasn't that educationists were squeezed out; it was that they took no interest and left the field to doctors and to charity workers such as the Reverend Andrew Reed, founder in 1847 of Park House (later the Earlswood Asylum for idiots). This lack of interest from educationists was very long lasting, certainly as far as those with a severe impairment were concerned, and it was not until 1970 that the Education (Handicapped Children) Act brought those with severe learning difficulties - at the time referred to as educational subnormality (severe) - into education<sup>2</sup>. For the period examined here (1780 - 1880) educational thinkers and practitioners gave no consideration to those that would now be defined as having special educational needs. As will be seen, all children were seen as a homogenous group - or, in so far as differences were perceived and noted, it was outstanding talent that received comment. It could not have been the case that children with limited ability never crossed the path of the eighteenth or nineteenth century educator. There is a relevant passage in *The Brontës in Ireland* where Patrick Brontë's admirable qualities as a schoolmaster are discussed: 'It is still remembered that "Master Brontë" studied the characters of his pupils and dealt with each one according to his abilities. In this matter he differed widely from the ordinary school teacher . . . There is no profession in the world in which one sees learning and common sense so absolutely divorced as in that of the school teacher<sup>3</sup>. That Patrick Brontë, and very likely other teachers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attempted as individuals to accommodate different abilities in their pupils, was largely irrelevant; a practice which runs counter to the official

---

<sup>1</sup> S. Tomlinson, *A Sociology of Special Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 10; J. Ryan, *The Politics of Mental Handicap*, revised edn. (London: Free Association, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Tomlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> W. Wright, *The Brontës in Ireland*, 2nd edn (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1854), p. 240.

accepted wisdom of the time will remain officially invisible. The official practice of education at the time was (and this is hardly a caricature) that all boys could have learning beaten into them.

This chapter will examine, in so far as one can ask why something did not exist, why the idea of children having different capabilities, an idea which seems too 'obvious' to need articulating in the present time, hardly existed for educators until after 1880. Other writers<sup>4</sup> on the emergence of education for intellectually impaired children have posed this question the other way round. They have asked why the increasing differentiation, why the emergence of ever more 'refined' categories - moderate and severe learning difficulties, dyslexia, emotional and behavioural difficulties, autism. But they haven't asked why not a recognition of a category of children for whom learning was a thorough going problem. The sorts of answers that have been suggested to account for the question that has been asked cover a number of connected issues. Firstly classification may be connected with the concern for control of unruly elements and is connected to Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* and other writers using this perspective. Secondly the diagnosis of learning difficulties may be connected with the general interest of nineteenth century science in classification and description. These two kinds of explanation are prominent in Tomlinson and Ryan.<sup>5</sup> A third perspective is offered by Davis in *Enforcing Normalcy* in which he connects the interest in defining degrees of disability with the rise of statistics and the notion of the mean and the norm. Before this, Davis argues, there had been notions of an 'ideal' to which few could aspire; but the identification of a norm was a benchmark against which most people could match up, and led to concern with detailing ways in which individuals fell vastly short of the norm<sup>6</sup>. Relevant to Davis's point is that at the beginning of the nineteenth century public schools were not divided chronologically, except approximately, for age of admission, but by achievement, so that boys of seventeen might be found in the lowest division, and fourteen year olds in the highest<sup>7</sup>. The notion that there should be concern for a boy who was not performing round about the norm for his age group did not exist.

---

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Tomlinson, *op. cit.*; J Ryan, *op. cit.*; S. Sigmon, *Radical Analysis of Special Education: on historical development and learning disabilities* (London: Falmer, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> L. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> J. Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe: the development of the public school in the nineteenth century*. (London: Millington, 1977) p. 89.

Such explanations in terms of fear that the masses might get out of control, or of emerging interest in classification and the discovery of the norm, are useful; but they do not seem sufficient to account for the complete blank in educators concern for the intellectually impaired until the late nineteenth century. Nor do they address the question of why it was the discipline of medicine and not education that started to look at differences in 'educability' and ask to what degree children who appeared 'ineducable' might in fact be educated. It is not, as this thesis will show, that there was no need for education to suit an extremely slow learner, but that there was no public recognition of the need. From the mid 1840s, Earlswood and then other charitable institutions, began to provide residential training. It was not until the 1880s, after the span of the study that there was any state interest in intellectually impaired children. Significantly, this was after the beginning of compulsory education, when the obligation to educate everybody revealed that there was a large number of children who were not fit to receive the planned education.<sup>8</sup> Earlswood and other idiot asylums provided for people with a severe impairment, while the problem that the reports and Royal Commissions of the end of the nineteenth century addressed was a less severe condition and came to be called feeble minded (an early use in Britain of 'feeble minded' to distinguish milder impairment idiots or imbeciles was a Charity Organisation report of 1877)<sup>9</sup>. The children revealed by the beginnings of compulsory education as unfit in mind (and often body) were working class children. Perhaps class stereotypes about ability give some clue to the lack of theory and practice for the intellectually impaired; it's all right for the poor to be idiots or feeble minded, but it's hardly what you'd expect of a gentleman. Running through the material drawn on for this thesis, and contradicting the reality of the distribution of impairment, is a trope that reassuringly asserts that idiocy and imbecility are working class and peasant conditions.

This chapter will examine the educational traditions that existed in Britain from the end of the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries in order to consider the absence of anything that could be seen as special education. Five traditions or types of schooling in Britain will be considered:

---

<sup>8</sup> D. M. Daniel, "'Education or Care and Control?' The development of provision for mentally handicapped children in England and Wales, 1870-1914: an examination of legislation, reports, theory and practice' *History of Education Society Bulletin*, 57, (1996), 17-29.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

1. Public school education.
2. Grammar and other schools predominantly for the middle classes.
3. Education for working people - for example charity schools, industrial schools, Sunday schools.
4. Private governesses and tutors
5. Educational reform and radical innovation - Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel.

Public schools in the late eighteenth century and early and mid nineteenth century would have been the most unsuitable institutions ever devised for any boy with an intellectual impairment - indeed for any boy not wholly self confident, physically strong and possessed of marked practical intelligence<sup>10</sup>. At the end of the eighteenth century the regime was characterised by the narrow classical curriculum, the harshness of the living conditions (there was no heating or running water at Eton until 1846<sup>11</sup>), the antiquated pedagogy and the enmity between masters and boys, the boys forming a society of their own; 'a world of brutal compulsions'<sup>12</sup> marked by the fagging system and contempt for the masters. Above all there was the flogging, which may have reached its extreme at Eton in the early nineteenth century under the headship (1809 - 1834) of Keate<sup>13</sup>, a method which resulted not in harmony and order, but a series of rebellions at Eton, the worst in 1818<sup>14</sup>. Dissatisfaction with this state of affairs brought the beginnings of reform; and Thomas Arnold of Rugby (Headmaster 1828 - 42) was the great reformer of public school education. His changes

---

<sup>10</sup> A. Whitredge, *Dr Arnold of Rugby* (London: Constable, 1928); E. Mack, *Public Schools and British Opinion 1780 -1860: an examination of the relationship between contemporary ideas and the evolution of an English institution* (London: Methuen, 1938); D. Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning: four studies on a Victorian ideal* (London: John Murray, 1961); J. Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe: the development of the public school in the nineteenth century* (London: Millington, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> R Archer, *Secondary Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921) p.55.

<sup>12</sup> Mack, *op. cit.*, p.42.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

were substantial, but they were directed to a single and narrow educational goal - a Christian as well as a classical education to produce gentlemen - and to produce gentleman of middle class rather than aristocratic origins (*bourgeois gentilhommes*). Thus the aristocratic base remained but a number of reforms to accommodate (upper) middle class values and aspirations were introduced. The foundation of the curriculum remained the classics, but modern history, modern languages and mathematics were introduced. Arnold introduced examinations, reformed the teaching methods by the introducing separate forms rather than mass teaching and sought to raise the status of assistant masters<sup>15</sup>. Fagging remained, though its character was to be transformed into a moral partnership between masters and older boys rather than the old system of simple oppression. These changes, and the reform that Arnold saw as the most important of all, can be seen as 'bourgeoisification' - a taming and enmoralling of the aristocratic lawlessness. The reform that Arnold saw as the most important was the introduction of the notion of the Christian gentleman - that purity and high moral tone were as important as learning. The neglect of science at Rugby (and following the model, other nineteenth century public schools) was not because Arnold rejected science, but because it had a lower priority than his other aims<sup>16</sup>. These were the changes Arnold desired, and for which he received commendation; but although public school education changed during the nineteenth century in the ways that Arnold sought many of the old brutalities remained.

Recent writing on elite education has focused on the role of public schools in mediating a rupture between a domestic, feminine world, and the masculine world of public life. Concepts of public service were enmeshed with those of power and sexuality in a confusing problematic; the goal of altruistic and courageous manhood had to be attained while rejecting selfish aggression and negotiating the largely unspoken issues of emotion and sexuality<sup>17</sup>. The tricky hidden curriculum aims of dealing with emotion and sexuality in addition to the overt aims of fostering courage, altruism and fortitude were hardly conducive to a consideration of the special needs of weaker and

---

<sup>15</sup> Whitredge, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>17</sup> M. Roper and J. Tosh 'Introduction: historians and the politics of masculinity' in M. Roper and J. Tosh (eds) *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge: 1991); J. Mangan and J. Walvin, 'Introduction' and J. Richards, "'Passing the love of women: manly love and Victorian society' in J. Mangan and J. Walvin, (eds) *Manliness and Morality, 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

less able boys.

Turning to grammar schools and middle class education one encounters a difficulty in making generalizations about education in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century because of the heterogeneity of schools, even among those that had been founded as grammar schools. Founded mostly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries grammar schools at the outset had a clear purpose - to educate poor boys in the classics so they could go to university and enter the church. But by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they had become diversified, each Head and each Board of Governors seeking to cater for various local needs. As well as grammar schools, there were, among others, by the end of the eighteenth century privately run schools (such as Joseph Randall's boarding school in Yorkshire founded in 1740 with 170 boys and a curriculum divided according to the future occupations of the boys<sup>18</sup>), dissenters' schools, Mechanics Institutes' schools, and the Church of England's middle schools linked to training colleges for masters<sup>19</sup>. Such schools put a good deal of emphasis on commercial and technical subjects. But grammar schools too were keeping up to date, and though classics remained important many other subjects were offered, such as English, writing, maths, French, geography and bookkeeping<sup>20</sup>.

But as a common thread in the variety of provision there is clearly an emphasis on vocational education for an increasingly commercial and industrial society. The need for vocationally relevant education was to some degree felt in the public school sector. The curricula of grammar schools and public schools overlapped - the latter after all had been founded as grammar schools for poor boys. Though the classics curriculum remained more central in public schools than grammar schools, public schools - as has been shown earlier - also introduced modern subjects during the nineteenth century. In considering the question of why the lack of any interest in helping those with intellectual impairment grammar schools and other middle class schools can be considered together

---

<sup>18</sup> R. Tompson, *Classics or Charity? The dilemma of the 18th century grammar school* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), p.39.

<sup>19</sup> J. Roach, *A History of Secondary Education in England, 1800-1870* (London: Longman, 1986), p. 194.

<sup>20</sup> Tompson, *op. cit.*, p.60.



in one important respect - the competition between schools to attract fee paying pupils. Roach<sup>21</sup> puts this point strongly. The competition was partly academic (for a good reputation) and partly social (for a nice class of fee paying pupils) but neither element in the competition would have been served by making provision for intellectually impaired pupils. From the parents' point of view, at the start of the century there was in any case only the faintest of stirring of a notion of education for people with an intellectual impairment. When, by the 1850s, there emerged the idea that 'idiots' could be educated, the ideology ran strongly in favour of separate and probably residential provision.

Education for the labouring classes during the period 1780-1870, before the introduction of compulsory free elementary education, was various and fragmented; but there was considerable growth in provision and improvement in levels of literacy. Thomas Laqueur says that there was a growth from 6.5 per cent of the population enrolled in school in 1818 to 13 per cent in 1851<sup>22</sup>. At the start of the century the provision was mostly in private Dames' schools, charity schools and Sunday schools. As the century progressed the monitorial schools - Bell and Lancaster - were added, and ragged schools and industrial schools in the 1840s<sup>23</sup>. In 1833 the first parliamentary grant (£20,000) for education was made<sup>24</sup>. The Factory Act of that year laid down some legal requirements for education of factory and pauper children, and a Committee of Council for Education (later the Board of Education) was established in 1839<sup>25</sup>. It was not until nearly the end of the period covered by this study that it was accepted that a voluntary system could not support the scale of educational provision that was needed, and the way was paved to the introduction of

---

<sup>21</sup> Roach, *History of Secondary Education*, p. 80.

<sup>22</sup> T. Laqueur, 'Growth of English Elementary Education, 1750-1850' in *Schooling and Society: Studies in the History of Education*, ed. L. Stone (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.192.

<sup>23</sup> J. Lawson and H. Silver, *A Social History of Education in England*, (London: Methuen, 1973) pp.226-296.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268

<sup>25</sup> A. Digby and P. Searby, *Children, School and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 6.

compulsory elementary education for all.<sup>26</sup> The practical resource problems of providing education at this time were hardly conducive to consideration of the needs of intellectually impaired pupils. Pedagogical theory was more concerned with how the largest number of children could receive basic instruction rather than with individuals needs. The Bell and Lancaster monitorial systems were the clearest expression of the pressure of lack of resources. In the Bell system there was one large classroom to a school and a single teacher to oversee the work of all. The children were organised into monitorial groups of about ten, under the direction of a monitor, him or herself a more advanced pupil, who drilled the group in basic skills<sup>27</sup>. The different upper and middle class groups - Church of England, dissenter or secular - who sought to provide elementary education had different motives for their endeavours - some desiring independence and advancement for working people, others wanting to train up a submissive and unrevolutionary working class. In neither set of motives would concern for special needs expect any priority.

Thomas Laqueur directs attention to the working class parents who sent their children to school and what they wanted from education. As he says, education was not compulsory at the time, so the parents could not only choose whether to send their children to school at all, but which school to send them to. Parental choice and parental pressure did have some effect; in 1837 Kay (later Kay-Shuttleworth) tried to explain to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Education of the Poorer Classes why parents often spurned the all but free National and other public schools and sent their children for higher fees to what the Inquiry regarded as inferior private schools. Laqueur reports continuing upper class puzzlement at this phenomenon in the 1840s and 50s<sup>28</sup>. Some of the factors which influenced parents were not strictly to do with the curriculum; some disliked church schools and many resented the requirements for cleanliness and short hair that publicly supported schools required; private schools seemed more tolerant of irregular attendance; and possibly most important, the teachers in private schools were perceived as part of the local community, rather than functionaries of the upper classes<sup>29</sup>. But parents were also interested in what was taught. In

---

<sup>26</sup> Lawson and Silver, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.242.

<sup>28</sup> Laqueur, *op. cit.*, p.196-7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198-9.

1837 the secretary of the National schools (Anglican) society complained that the schools were being effectively pressured to provide more practical secular instruction than had been envisaged; there were similar pressures on the curriculum in Sunday schools. The private schools were not uncritically patronised; Laqueur gives examples of failure where the content or methods didn't suit<sup>30</sup>. There is no specific evidence of what the parents wanted, but examples given by Laqueur suggest that reading, writing and arithmetic were valued; and for the practical purpose of social betterment. As for the middle class schools earlier written of is hardly surprising that what are now termed special educational needs were not considered a priority. When education cost scarce time and financial resources it would be no surprise that it would be concentrated on family members most deemed capable of benefiting from it. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the educational system began to consider the needs of children with intellectual impairment in elementary school, and joined interest with the already existing medical expertise in considering how state schools might provide education for some children with special needs. In 1893 the Charity Organisation Society published a demand for state special schools in The Feeble-minded Child and Adult; in 1896 the National Association for Promoting the Welfare of the Feeble-Minded was set up; and in 1898 the Report of the Committee on Defective and Epileptic Children was published<sup>31</sup>

Education at home, with a governess or tutor, was used by many middle and upper class families in the nineteenth century; the 1861 census records 24,770 governesses in England and Wales<sup>32</sup>. It was an education predominantly used for girls and young boys; at around seven boys generally went to prep school and at around thirteen to public school, but in some cases remained with a tutor until much older. The governess or tutor was a normal means of education, but it was one that might seem particularly eligible for a child with learning difficulties, avoiding the roughness of school, the exposure to comparison with others and, in theory, allowing pedagogy to be adapted to

---

<sup>30</sup> Laqueur, *op. cit.*, pp.198-9.

<sup>31</sup> S. Tomlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in K. Hughes, The Victorian Governess (London: Hambledon, 1993) p.22. This figure may understate the reality since Hughes mentions that the census shows 50,000 gentry and aristocratic families, not to mention the many ordinary middle class families of the time.

the special needs of the child. Of the children that are the subjects of detailed study in later chapters, Augustus Lamb and Lindsey Bertie would have been sent to Eton (in fact Lindsey did spend a short time there) but because of their problems had private tutors and Laura Stephen went briefly to a kindergarten but subsequently had several governesses, none of whom worked out successfully. The psychiatrist George Man Burrows recorded a case of a male patient who, entirely normal until the age of twelve, deteriorated rapidly in behaviour and intellect thereafter, until: 'becoming too unmanageable for a public school, he was placed under a private tutor'<sup>33</sup>. John Haslam (doctor and asylum superintendent) records in his case notes: 'In the month of July, 1803, my opinion was requested respecting a young gentleman, ten years of age, who was sent here, accompanied by a kind and decent young man to take care of him'. The word 'man' and a latter reference to him as a 'person' suggests that this attendant was of a lower social class than a tutor, but it may be inferred, that as with the other cases cited here, this is evidence of parents, finding the ordinary educational plan unsuitable, are driven to extemporise<sup>34</sup>.

William Ireland, who in 1869 became superintendent of Larpent, the Scottish National Institution for Idiots, wrote:

It would seem at first sight that the private teacher, such as a governess [would be the best arrangement] . . . as she could devote her whole time to one pupil; but nevertheless, I do not remember ever to have heard of much being done in this way. The influence of the mother under the same roof is often most unfortunate . . . It may be doubtful whether it is a sadder sight to see the neglected idiot children of the poor or the pampered idiot children of the rich . . . indulgent parents who imagine, perhaps, that by catering to every wish they can make up for the want of intelligence which they are keeping enfeebled<sup>35</sup>.

Ireland was in charge of a specialist residential institution and so was likely to have a vested interest in specialised provision. Nonetheless there are several features to be noted about the governess's or tutor's role that may account for lack of success in education children with learning difficulties. Firstly there was the lack of any notion of an appropriate curriculum or teaching methods until the

---

<sup>33</sup> G. M. Burrows, *Commentaries on the Causes, Forms, Symptoms and Treatment, Moral and Medical, of Insanity* (London: Underwood, 1828) p. 490.

<sup>34</sup> J. C. Spurzheim, *Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of the Mind, or Insanity* (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints: 1970 - originally published 1833) p. 96 .

<sup>35</sup> W. Ireland, *On Idiocy and Imbecility* (London: Churchill, 1877).

1840s; and when ideas about special education did emerge they were focused on specialised institutions. As will be seen in Chapter 3 there was considerable dissemination to the public in general about the new education for idiots - but never any suggestion that its methods might be used at home by a governess, tutor or parent. Lindsey Bertie's education is the only instance, of the lives examined here, in which we know that efforts were made to adapt pedagogy to the capabilities of the child; and in this case the adaptations were entirely *sui generis* and derived from no available model.

Secondly the social role of the governess or tutor was not one to encourage initiative in sustained efforts for problem pupils; isolated and subservient (particularly the governess) there was no professional support available. One notes Ireland's general comment about the unhelpful influence of parents and Charlotte Brontë's complaint's, apropos normal children, of parental interference. Robert Lee, Augustus Lamb's tutor received very precise instructions from William Lamb about the classical curriculum Augustus was to be taught which made no allowance for his learning difficulties - though there is no indication that Lee had alternative ideas that he had to suppress. In this context of the tutor or governess's lack of professional independence it is interesting to note that Mr Martin's freedom to devise appropriate methods may have depended on his collaboration with Lindsey's elder sister, Charlotte. In The Victorian Governess Kathryn Hughes notes a further constraint on the governess's role as an educator, that an important part of the ideology of the governess was that she was a gentlewoman helping in another gentlewoman's household as an older sister or unmarried aunt might do unpaid; it was desirable to have a gentlewoman with accomplishments for this role, but one would not desire any professional expertise<sup>36</sup>. The social situation of the tutor was less subservient than that of the governess, but it was seen by and large as a young man's job and stepping stone to better things rather than a career for which it was necessary to develop expertise in any aspect of tutoring. The psychiatrist Spurzheim, having had the standard gentleman's education in Greek and Latin, started his career in Austria early in the nineteenth century, and before he had taken up medical studies, as tutor to the sons of Count Splangen<sup>37</sup>. Augustus's tutor went on to be an eminent doctor and obstetrician,

---

<sup>36</sup> Hughes, *op. cit.*, pp 34-7.

<sup>37</sup> A. Walsh, 'Introduction, in J. C. Spurzheim, Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of Mind (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970 - original publication 1833)

Lindsey's to a career in the Church. It could be seen as a male version of the governess's role; as she was expected to have the ordinary accomplishments of a gentlewoman, the tutor was expected to have the ordinary accomplishments of an educated gentleman, a grounding in the classics. However unlike the governess the tutor was expected to move on to a more elevated role than that of teacher of young boys.

In Charlotte M. Yonge's 1889 novel *Hopes and Fears* there is a portrayal of a distinctly professional governess, suggesting the existence of exceptions to the general rule that a governess's role was subservient and lacking professional status.<sup>38</sup> This is just slightly later than the period of this study and the character is fictional. (The problems of to what degree imaginative literature reflects real life are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.) But the picture it opens up of a different kind of employee from the ill educated and submissive generality of governesses is striking. Miss Fennimore, in charge of the education of three girls, was 'a finishing governess of the highest order, thinking it an insult to be offered a pupil below her teens', and 'a highly able woman'. She had once taught an ideal pupil, Anne Webster, but her present pupils were 'apt to be bewildered in metaphysics and political economy' - but two of the three charges were able to speak French and German alternately during lesson hours, and the eldest of the three managed Greek and algebra.<sup>39</sup> A further point of interest is that the third girl, Maria, had extreme difficulties, probably amounting to intellectual impairment, with her lessons. She's 'let off' French and German conversation. Miss Fennimore distinguishes clearly between her three pupils, Phoebe (evidently a moderately serious scholar), Bertha (who evinces elaborate 'displays of antipathy' to lessons), and Maria who really can't learn much. Miss Fennimore persevered only with manners and music for Maria, who loved music, and 'had just voice and ear enough to render this single accomplishment not hopeless'.<sup>40</sup> Most interestingly the narrative goes on: 'Former governesses had lost patience, but Miss Fennimore . . . never scolded her for her failures. She made her attempt less, and she was improving more, and shedding fewer tears than under any former dynasty'.<sup>41</sup> The preceding paragraphs about

---

<sup>38</sup> C.M. Yonge, *Hopes and Fears: scenes from the life of a spinster* (London: Macmillan, 1889).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

the role of governesses and tutors argue that the absence of professionalism was one of the things that militated against any help for what would now be called special needs, and the vignette about Miss Fennimore and her less successful and less professional predecessors supports this contention.

The final section of this chapter examines the work of educational reformers. It might seem that these would be more likely to think about special needs than those concerned with providing academic education (public and grammar schools) or with mass basic education, but in fact none of the three educational reformers of, or just preceding, the relevant period (Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel) did so. The three are dealt with together as educational innovators, though Rousseau was in many respects different from the other two. His work was largely theoretical, and he was concerned with the education of a boy and girl from the upper classes. Not only were Rousseau's imaginary pupils to be from the élite of society but they were also to be an élite of learners:

I would not undertake the care of a feeble, sickly child, should he live to four score years. I want no pupil who is useless alike to himself and other, one whose sole business is to keep himself alive. . . . Let another tend this weakling for me; I am quite willing, I approve his charity, but I myself have no gift for such a task<sup>42</sup>.

Useless then to look to Rousseau for a specific interest in teaching children with disabilities of any kind. Nonetheless, his child centred approach, based on learning from experience was adaptable for any learners, including those with learning difficulties, and has influenced people concerned about educational difficulties. His ideas had an impact on Pestalozzi and Froebel who put reforming ideas into practice. These two were interested in education for all children, including the poor, but not intellectually impaired children.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi devoted his life to putting into practice education based on his principles and to writing about education. He was born in Zurich to a protestant family; his father died when he was 4 years old, and Heinrich and his brother and sister were brought up by his mother and a devoted female servant in a sheltered and financially straitened atmosphere. Pestalozzi entered a higher education that prepared for the law or the Church. He became friends with a group of young men intent on moral and political reform inspired both by the ideas of Montesquieu and Rousseau, and by patriotic and religious ideals. He didn't take the final exams, but trained in

---

<sup>42</sup> E. Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. B. Foxley, (London: Everyman, 1911) p. 21.

modern agricultural methods at an experimental farm near Berne<sup>43</sup>, a training which made possible the practical basis of his educational plan.

In 1775 Pestalozzi opened his first school, which failed financially. His second school, for orphans, was funded by the government, the state making some recognition of the needs of uprooted abandoned children that religious violence and the Franco-Austrian war had produced.<sup>44</sup> The children (fifty at first, increasing to about seventy) were certainly most unlike Rousseau's ideal children:

Many came with scabies of long standing . . . many with open sores . . . many so thin that one could count all their bones, sallow . . . with fear in their eyes; some were bold and arrogant . . . liars and cheats; others were crushed in their misery . . . Out of ten children, hardly one knew their ABC.<sup>45</sup>

The last, and most successful of Pestalozzi's schools started, also with government funding in Berthoud and moved to Yverdon in 1805. In these schools Pestalozzi put his theories into practice. He believed that learning should and would arise naturally from a child's experience in the world; hence the emphasis on practical skills, and where subject matter was of its nature abstract, he made it accessible to children's experience by the use, for example of the counting of pebbles or beans and the cutting of cakes to learn arithmetic<sup>46</sup>. The theoretical underpinning of his educational theory was that humans had a natural inclination to goodness: ' . . . let the mother rejoice, that whatever may be the weakness of human nature, . . . yet there is in her child a something, the origin of which, as a gift of God, dates prior to temptation'<sup>47</sup>, which was destroyed by fear, and authority based on fear. The way to develop (or restore) this natural inclination to the good is through love, based on a mother's love for her infant.

Every mother will recollect the delight of her feelings on the first tokens of her infant's

---

<sup>43</sup> Silber, K. *Pestalozzi: the man and his work*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960) pp. 3-13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.50-70; Chambers Encyclopaedia, 'Pestalozzi', vol. 10, (London: George Newnes, 1952).

<sup>45</sup> Pestalozzi, 'Letter About my Time in Stans' (1799) quoted in Silber, *op. cit.*, pp 112-3.

<sup>46</sup> Silber, *op. cit.*, Pestalozzi, p. 126.

<sup>47</sup> Pestalozzi, *Letters on Early Education Addressed to J.P. Greaves, Esq.*, trans. unnamed, (London: Sherwood, Gilber and Piper, 1827), p.30.



consciousness and rationality; indeed maternal love knows not a higher joy than that arising from those interesting indications . . . To her they reveal . . . that a spiritual being, dearer to her than life, is opening, as it were, the eye of intelligence, and saying, in its silent, but tender and expressive language, 'I am born for immortality'.<sup>48</sup>

Pestalozzi did not in any way contrast an authoritarian father with the affectionate mother; it was simply that the mother had first care of the infant. All teachers should base their pedagogy on love and trust; Pestalozzi regarded his schools as based on the principles of the family, and himself as a father to the children (the children referred to him as 'father').<sup>49</sup>

The German educational innovator, Friedrich Froebel (1792-1852) visited one of Pestalozzi's schools and was influenced by the Swiss educator. Froebel was however not uncritical - he commented that the Pestalozzi school was far more formal than he had expected and that the methods used failed to make links between the different subjects<sup>50</sup>. However in essentials of theory and method Froebel was close enough to Pestalozzi for them to be considered together. Like Pestalozzi, Froebel wished to draw out from pupils their natural propensity to learn both practically and morally: 'My task was to educate man in his true humanity, in his absolute being, according to the laws of all development'<sup>51</sup>. The methods advocated by both men, being based on the idea of developing the child's inborn tendencies rather than forcing a preconceived programme on it, could have been adapted to the needs of intellectually impaired children. But they were not - or at least, not explicitly so. It is possible that there were children with an intellectual impairment in Pestalozzi's and Froebel's classes but we do not know. It is particularly interesting that there is nothing about intellectual impairment to be found explicitly in Pestalozzi's writings, considering that his only son, Jacques, was epileptic and had some learning difficulties. Silber says that in between convulsions 'he did small jobs and went on errands, but he was incapable of any mental exertion'. He married however, and had five children<sup>52</sup>. His epileptic attacks worsened towards the end of his life and he

---

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> Silber, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>50</sup> F Froebel. *Autobiography of Friedrich Froebel*, trans. E. Michaelis, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey and Co., 1888) p. 54; p.70.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>52</sup> Silber, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

also suffered from amnesia; he died at the age of thirty-one<sup>53</sup>. His infirmity was treated with hypnosis and magnetism<sup>54</sup>. This suggests that it was perceived as a physical illness rather than an educational problem.

This chapter has examined the absence in educational theory and practice of any explicit interest in the needs of intellectually impaired children. Chapter 2 will examine the emergence in the 1840s of a novel discourse about the educability of idiots. It will also examine the evidence about the need, existing before the 1840s, for education for intellectually impaired children, some sporadic and unsystemised attempts to meet this need, and the notable fact that both early sporadic efforts, and the fully fledged notion of idiot education, arose in medical psychiatric contexts.

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

## Chapter 2

### PSYCHIATRISTS, *BRICOLAGE* AND THE EMERGENCE IN THE 1840s OF EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENT

This chapter will examine the revolution in thinking, dating from the 1840s in Britain, that idiots and imbeciles could be educated. But for the first sixty years of the period this study covers, and for the childhood of Augustus Lamb and Lindsey Bertie, the two individuals for whom most information is available, the new educational thinking had not yet arrived, and so makes some consideration of what preceded this important. As has been seen in the previous chapter, educational theory and practice offered nothing - with the exception of the unsatisfactory *faute de mieux* expedient of the governess or private tutor. Doctors and psychiatrists of the period did not offer much help, but it seems to have been to them that families took children with intellectual impairment. The medical view at the time was that 'idiocy' was incurable - but an empirically minded doctor might not leap immediately to such a depressing diagnosis. There were no diagnostic criteria for idiocy in the first half of the century - or indeed in the later nineteenth century. John Haslam,<sup>1</sup> early in the century, was empirically minded, and published case notes including some on 'insane children'. Idiocy was in the early nineteenth century a subdivision of insanity, the other being madness. Haslam's description of the children's behaviour conveys to a present day observer 'impaired intellect' and 'behavioural problems'. But apart from putting them in a section called 'insane children', Haslam makes no further pronouncements about the nature of their impairment (whether madness or idiocy), but simply records their behaviour, how they were cared for and attempts at teaching them. Unlike the stereotype all-knowing doctor, Haslam seems far from certain about diagnosis and prognosis, and inclined to observe the effect of different regimes, rather than rushing in with a judgement. *Bricolage*<sup>2</sup> describes the treatment/teaching of

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Haslam, Observations on Madness and Melancholy, including practical remarks on those diseases, together with cases and an account of the morbid appearances on dissection (London: John Callow, 1809). (First published in 1798 as Observations on Madness.)

<sup>2</sup> *Bricolage*, term taken from the Psychoanalyst J. Lacan (1901-1981) into other academic disciplines, meaning an atheoretical eclectic procedure of drawing on ideas from different sources. See N. Abercrombie et al. Penguin Dictionary of Sociology 3rd edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994).

John Thelwall<sup>3</sup> (1764-1834) who taught (among other things) how to overcome speech impediments, but it is also a felicitous term for the efforts of the private tutors and family members, examined in part II, to adapt ordinary educational methods to the needs of impaired pupils. Thelwall took pupils whose problems were general slowness of development as well as speech disorders caused by defects of the mouth such as cleft palate. His method of selection of these backward pupils is interesting because he was keen to take only those who could be expected to make progress.<sup>4</sup>

The second part of this chapter will examine the work of Edouard Séguin (1812-1880) and Johann Guggenbuhl. Through the efforts of doctors and charity to disseminate their views, these were the two men whose work inspired the revolution that introduced idiot education in Britain. The section on Guggenbuhl will be brief. Much material relating to him is in German, and such of it as was accessible to the general public of the time was essentially propaganda about idiot education, and will be considered in the next chapter. Guggenbuhl and his school in Switzerland represented a romantic notion of what might be done; but it was Séguin who provided a practical model for an educational plan. Guggenbuhl as will be seen was discredited in the late 1840s. Séguin moved to America, published in English, continued his work into the 1870s and became the principal, indeed the only model for idiot education during the nineteenth century. Important issues to be explored in the chapter are what kind of condition idiocy was thought to be, and the related question of the difference between 'curable' and 'educable'. To illustrate the confusion that arose about these terms, here is part of the Rev. Samuel May's 1854 speech while laying the corner stone of the first U.S. specialised school quoted at length in the introduction to Seguin's 1866 *Idiocy*:

Twenty-five years ago, or more . . . I encountered, as every man who thinks at all must . . . the great problem of the existence of evil. . . and how the Good God . . . could permit his children . . . to be so . . . tried and afflicted as they are. [He speaks of evil as a stimulus to doing good, and the work of the Asylum for the deaf and dumb] . . . But there

---

<sup>3</sup> J. Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline Esq. on Imperfect Development of the Faculties, Mental and Moral as Well as Constitutional and Organic; and on the Treatment of Impediments of Speech* (London: J. McCreery, 1819); J. Thelwall, *Results of Experience in the Treatment of Defective Utterance from Deficiencies in the Roof of the Mouth and Other Imperfections and Malconformations of the Organs of Speech, with Observations on Cases of Amentia and Tardy and Imperfect Development of the Faculties* (London: J. McCreery, 1814).

<sup>4</sup> Thelwall's work is placed in this chapter rather than the previous one, since he was an isolated practitioner who was no part of any recognized theory or practice of education.

was idiocy - idiocy so appalling in its appearance, so hopeless in its nature; what could be the use of such an evil. . . Two or three years afterwards I read a brief announcement that in Paris they had succeeded in educating idiots. I flew to [my wife] shouting, ' . . . my prophesy is fulfilled. Idiots have been educated'<sup>5</sup>

It is true that May does not actually speak of curing idiocy, but the reader could be forgiven if led by the extravagance of the language to read much more into it than actually claimed and to suppose that idiots had been educated to be indistinguishable from someone born without any intellectual impairment. In much of the post 1840 propaganda to the general public there is, as will be seen, confusion about what exactly is being claimed for the new methods - and some of the claims were very high; Guggenbuhl certainly claimed cures. But an effect of the post 1840s enthusiasm seems to have led historians to overlook the nuances in the views of early nineteenth century psychiatrists over what might be done for people with intellectual impairment; they did see idiocy as incurable, but not all of them felt that this meant it was not worth bothering with. A third issue to be closely examined in the pre 1840s literature is the amount of empirical information and discussion that is given to particular cases. Some accounts of idiocy are very abstract while others give a great deal of illuminating information about individuals and their social circumstances. Information about specific cases is important since such evidence suggests that in the absence of help from any other source it was to psychiatrists that families turned for help. Further, from some doctors at least they did receive consideration and attention; at the very least they had found someone who took an interest in their problems and would discuss what was best to be done. This then suggests part of an answer to the question of why it was in the medical rather than the educational context that education for children with intellectual impairment developed. It was from doctors that help was sought.

Before examining how early nineteenth century doctors defined idiocy, some exploration is needed of the nature and organisation of psychiatry in the eighteenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century the specialism of psychiatry - of mad doctors or alienists to use the contemporary terminology - along with other medical specialisms had emerged as distinct from general medical practice. It was however hardly possible to speak of psychiatry as an organised profession; mad doctors operated as individuals, often owning and running their own private

---

<sup>5</sup> E. Séguin, *Idiocy and its Treatment by the Physiological Method* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971 [facsimile of 1866 edition]) pp. 10-12.

asylums, rather than as an organised group<sup>6</sup>. The profession developed earlier in France than in Britain, round the influential figure of Philippe Pinel (1745-1836) and French practice was an important reference point for British doctors. From early in the nineteenth century there is evidence of links developing - John Haslam in 1809 for example discussing Pinel's methods and contrasting them with his own (better ones)<sup>7</sup>. But what all the psychiatric specialists who worked before about 1845 had in common was that they were primarily interested in madness. Idiocy and related conditions, though classified with madness as a form of insanity were for most of them a relatively minor concern. Madness typically commenced in adulthood, was subject to remissions, and few, if any organic lesions could be detected in a living subject. All this suggested that madness was curable - and therefore, in contrast to idiocy, would repay efforts directed to this end:

The numerous cures that have been performed in England and France; . . . results of dissection which have shown no organic lesion of the head; and . . . the observations of Mr Harper, who considers insanity an affection purely nervous, appear to establish [that mania is curable]<sup>8</sup>.

Before Pinel some doctors had found, they said, organic lesions in madness, and believed that the condition was incurable<sup>9</sup> but increasingly in the early years of the nineteenth century Pinel's view of madness as a functional rather than organic problem prevailed.

The psychiatrists or 'mad doctors' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, accorded idiocy a minor place in their work and saw it as an organic defect of the nervous system, present from birth or early childhood, and incurable.<sup>10</sup> There were differences in emphasis between different experts. Thomas Arnold in his 1806 Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes and Prevention of Insanity devotes most of this work to insanity and its causes and has little to say about intellectual impairment. He identifies three types of idiocy, 'stupid' when the mental powers

---

<sup>6</sup> R. Porter, Mind Forg'd Manacles: a history of madness from the restoration to the Regency (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> Haslam, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> P. Pinel, A Treatise on Insanity translated by D. Davis (New York: Hafner, 1962 [facsimile of 1806 edition]) pp. 110-11.

<sup>9</sup> P. Cranefield, 'Preface' to P. Pinel, A Treatise on Insanity, *op. cit.* p.ii.

<sup>10</sup> G. Berrios, 'Mental Retardation: Part 1', in G. Berrios and R. Porter, eds. History

have never developed, 'absent' when they are 'benumbed' and 'incoherent' when the train of ideas is deranged. He observes that idiocy is different from insanity, yet 'it may be cured by the same means'<sup>11</sup>. John Haslam's 1807 Observations on Madness and Melancholy<sup>12</sup> provides no definition of idiocy. However the work is more explicitly based in empirical observation than Arnold's and Haslam's case notes will be relevant to the section to come on doctors' patients. James Cowles Prichard though writing in 1822, and described by the Dictionary of National Biography as providing what was for 'long the standard work in this branch of medicine' seems closer to Arnold than Haslam, in that it is a very abstract discussion containing little in the way of empirical observations, mostly on mania and epilepsy. It is in the latter context that he discusses cognitive deficit as a frequent consequence of epilepsy: 'whether the fits are severe or not the disease seldom continues long without giving rise to a diminution of the acuteness of the faculties: 'In severe cases there is a complete fatuity or a state much resembling idiotism'<sup>13</sup>. In other works of the time there is as much consideration of the loss of mental powers through illness or injury in childhood, than of cases where the loss was present from birth. It will also be noted that in two of the fictional portrayals of intellectual impairment to be considered (Maggy in Little Dorrit and Willie in Gaskell's Half a Lifetime Ago) the difficulties are a result of illness. It is possible that parents were more inclined to seek treatment for a child who had been normal at birth, but subsequently regressed. It is easy to see that their anxiety and disappointment would have been greater; and sharing probably the view that idiocy from birth was a hopeless matter would have felt in that case their was no point in seeking help. Doctors considered that it was easier to restore what had once existed, as with Arnold's 'benumbed' as opposed to 'stupid' idiocy. It is also possible that many children who were said to have acquired difficulties had in fact had them, unnoticed, from birth.

The distinction between acquired and congenital intellectual impairment is found in George Man Burrows's 1820 work. Burrows distinguishes demency or fatuity on the one hand from idiocy on

---

of Clinical Psychiatry (London: Athlone Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> T. Arnold, Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes and Prevention of Insanity, 2nd edition, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Richard Phillips, 1806). pp. 96-100.

<sup>12</sup> Haslam, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> J. C. Prichard, A Treatise on Diseases of the Nervous System (London: Underwood, 1822) p. 68.

the other, a classification which draws explicitly on Esquirol's work. The former conditions are acquired: 'True demency implies a previous possession and exercise of the mental faculties; but one or more of these faculties may, by accident, disease or age, have become deteriorated. . . The connate idiot never possessed any intellectual endowment'<sup>14</sup>. Apart from accident or injury demency may also be the outcome of insanity - or excessive bleeding to treat insanity - in which case the mental powers are only in abeyance and may be reawakened. Burrows urges great caution so as to avoid the '[consignment] to oblivion of one who being only in a state of acute demency might have become a useful member of society' since 'provided there has been no organic damage in the organ of intelligence . . . means which invigorate the constitution and restore the suspended energies of the brain may still effect a cure'<sup>15</sup>. In the case of congenital or acquired idiocy one finds in the former 'mal conformation of the cranium or of the brain itself' and that the latter results from 'injury or disease, excess in sensual pleasures, habitual drunkenness . . . study too intense . . . and from terror, fright, extreme joy, etc'<sup>16</sup> - a conveniently wide list of causes such that any victim would have experienced at least one. 'Absolute idiocy admits of no cure' asserts Burrows<sup>17</sup>. One sees why families would be unwilling to confess to a child's having a congenital condition with no cure possible and so have it consigned to 'oblivion'.

The phrenologists, Johann Spurzheim and Andrew Combe will be considered next. Spurzheim was born in Germany, moved to Vienna and started medical studies as a pupil of Gall's in 1800. In 1807 Gall and Spurzheim moved to Paris and between 1814 and 1832 Spurzheim lived alternately between Paris and London. In London he published, lectured and generally propagated phrenological ideas<sup>18</sup>. Combe was born in Edinburgh, qualified as a surgeon there, then studied for

---

<sup>14</sup> G. M. Burrows, *An Inquiry into Certain Errors Relative to Insanity and their Consequences* (London: Underwood, 1820) p. 485.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 506.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 506-7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 505.

<sup>18</sup> A. Walsh, 'Introduction' to J. C. Spurzheim, *Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of Mind, or Insanity* (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970 [facsimile of U.S. edition, 1833]).



two years in Paris under Esquirol before returning to Edinburgh<sup>19</sup>. The most striking feature of the writings on idiocy of Spurzheim and Combe is their close observation of their patients, and attention to particular ways in which one person's condition differed from another. Walsh in his introduction to Combe's Observations on Mental Derangement comments on the phrenologists' optimism about the possibility of cure for insanity<sup>20</sup>. Although as far as idiocy was concerned Spurzheim and Combe shared the general view that it was incurable, they also commented on the very different degrees of cognitive impairment that existed - in contrast to Burrows's monolithic view of idiocy. Spurzheim comments that: '... idiotism is not always complete, but . . . partial; so that parents, and sometimes even physicians cannot conceive why a child should be deemed an idiot.'<sup>21</sup> He gives several examples of people with abilities in some areas but deficits in others:

We saw a young man . . . sixteen years of age, the inferior parts of whose brain were favourably developed, but whose forehead was scarcely one inch in height, and in whom consequently the . . . superior parts of the brain [were] impeded. . . I saw in Cork a boy who excels in verbal memory, but as to judgement he is an idiot. . .<sup>22</sup>

He does not think that all people with intellectual impairment are the same, but notes their individuality:

[speaking of physical love] I have seen several idiots in whom his propensity was very powerful, but others . . . who were quite indifferent in this respect. Some idiots like to imitate other persons; some are very benevolent and cheerful; . . . others are irascible<sup>23</sup>.

Combe too recognises great variations in cognitive deficit:

'[In other cases idiocy] is limited to one region of the brain, and to one department of the mind . . . Sometimes, for example, the frontal region of the head is small, low and compressed and the intellectual faculties extremely limited, while . . . the sentiments being pretty well developed considerable tact and correctness of feeling and conduct in simple matters are observed; but a glaring deficiency becomes obvious that the individual is thrown

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>21</sup> J.C. Spurzheim, Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of the Mind or Insanity (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970 [original edition 1833]) 92.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91-5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

into a situation requiring the aid of intellect. Occasionally a single organ or faculty are possessed in considerable endowment all the rest being deficient<sup>24</sup>.

Combe and Spurzheim then take a keen interest in the variations of cognitive deficit shown but like the earlier physicians they do not see the deficits, whether in one area or several as curable. Neither, for the most part, did eighteenth century physicians and neither in fact has anyone since, except for some people in the brief period of about 1840 to 1860.

Of the two famous idiot educators, Guggenbuhl and Séguin, it was only the former who claimed cures in the medical sense of the term - a 'cure' meaning that a physical condition which had at one time existed no longer exists, as for example when the TB bacillus has been permanently eradicated from the body. If an idiot were to be cured, he or she would be in every respect like a 'normal' person. Guggenbuhl as will be seen, did claim cures, and unlike Séguin, his methods sought, in addition to education, treatments that were supposed to act on the underlying causes of cretinism and remove them. Séguin did not believe in cures in this medical sense, though his propagandizing style sometimes glosses over exactly what is being claimed. The assertion of the early nineteenth doctors was that idiocy (severe intellectual impairment) was a result of failure of the nervous system to develop properly, or that disease or injury had permanently damaged the brain and nervous system; and that once damage was done it could not be reversed by medical treatments. Medical opinion on this remains unchanged<sup>25</sup>. What has changed, and Guggenbuhl, Séguin and others were important movers of this change, was that attention came to be paid to how a damaged nervous system could be developed to its fullest extent through education. For the most part the early nineteenth century psychiatrists took absolutely no interest in the question of how a person with a damaged nervous system could be helped to make the best of things but rather harped on the hopelessness of the matter.

---

<sup>24</sup> A. Combe, Observations on Mental Derangement: being an application of the principles of phrenology to the elucidation of the causes, symptoms, nature and treatment of insanity (Edinburgh: Anderson, 1831), pp. 242-3.

<sup>25</sup> Treatments for certain conditions - thyroxin for cretinism, diet for phenylketonuria, anticonvulsants for epilepsy - work by identifying the condition and putting it right before substantial damage has been done. Treatment then may sometimes halt a pathological process, but it cannot cure any nervous system damage the pathology caused before intervention halted it.

In spite of the generally negative view taken by early nineteenth century psychiatrists to intellectual impairment, the case histories given by two of them (Haslam and Burrows) do indicate interest in the progress of patients and their family, educational and social circumstances. Spurzheim evidently values Haslam's observations since he quotes several pages of Haslam's case notes<sup>26</sup> but his own observations of patients are derived from asylum settings, as: 'I saw in the poorhouse at Cork a boy who excels in verbal memory, but as to judgment he is an idiot. At Inverness, in Scotland, [doctors] showed me a blind idiot who repeats passages of the Bible merely from hearing them repeated'.<sup>27</sup> Haslam and Burrows saw their patients in medical settings, but they recorded information about the social context of their lives. Haslam has lengthy case notes under the heading of 'Insane Children'. One is a boy admitted to the asylum when nearly seven. His development had been slow - fifteen months before he had a tooth, 'had arrived at his fourth year before he began to speak, and when in his fifth had not made a greater proficiency . . . than . . . in children between two and three years'. At two years old he could not be controlled and his mother 'frequently corrected him'. Presumably this means physical punishment. He was placed on a female ward where he was hyperactive and behaved badly to the other patients, kicking and spitting. He showed a 'talent for mimicry', but there was no success in teaching him the alphabet since 'he was not to be stimulated by coaxing or coercion; he did not possess a sufficient power of attention to become acquainted with ordinary characters'.

He was discharged after four months, but Haslam saw him again when he was thirteen. The boy was 'much pleased at the renewal of acquaintance' and:

by this time had ,made, comparatively, a great progress in language . . . and was able to tell correctly the street in which he resided, and the number of his house. . . To watch other boys when they were playing, or to observe the progress of mischief, gave him great satisfaction; but he never joined them, not did he become attached to any one of them. Of his mother he appeared excessively fond, and he was constantly caressing her; [but he had] paroxysms of fury, . . . and on two occasions he threw a knife at her'

He continues that:

the defect of this lad's mind appeared to be want of continued attention to things . . . and he

---

<sup>26</sup> Spurzheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-99.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

possessed less curiosity than other children. . . His sentences were short and he employed no particles to join them together; he always spoke of himself in the third person.<sup>28</sup>

We learn from this account that with the exception of the four months in the asylum he had been cared for at home until Haslam saw him again at the age of thirteen (what happened subsequently we do not know) and it appears that his mother had been much involved in his care. Efforts had been made to teach him both at home and in the asylum, and he had also been taken out since:

'his mother informed me that he was particularly fond of going to church, although he was unable to comprehend the purpose for which he went' observing in a disjointed manner, of the Eucharist, that 'he thought it extremely hard that the ladies and gentlemen should eat rolls and drink gin, and never ask him to partake.'<sup>29</sup>

Although he behaved with decorum at times, it is plain that at others he was difficult - as in the description of knife throwing - and Haslam notes that sometimes he smeared his faeces on the walls<sup>30</sup>. Although this case does not set out to reveal much about the life outside the asylum of this boy, a number of things can be gleaned - that the mother was much involved in the boy's care; that (unsuccessful) efforts had been made to teach him writing, including during his time in Haslam's asylum, and that he went out on ordinary occasions, such as to church.

Haslam gives information about two other 'insane' children. These two, like the boy discussed above, show both what would now be termed learning disability and challenging behaviour. One was a girl, three years old when first seen by Haslam, girl and reported to have been normal until a small pox inoculation.<sup>31</sup> The other was the ten year old boy, mentioned in Chapter 1 as being in the care of a 'young man', said to have become 'mischievous and uncontrollable' at the age of two. Various methods of care (most of them featuring a good deal of physical punishment) had been tried, including several schools, but he had failed even to learn his letters. Very difficult behaviour is reported of him, and on his visit to Haslam deliberately tore off the doctor's shirt frill. He was cruel

---

<sup>28</sup> Haslam, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-194.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 185-8.

to animals, did not make friends with other children and seemed 'insensible to kindness'.<sup>32</sup> The efforts that were made to teach these two boys discussed by Haslam, show that education for the intellectually impaired existed before what might be termed the official change of view in Britain in the 1840s. It is true that these boys are discussed under the heading of 'Insane Children' and are nowhere referred to as idiots. The category 'insanity' comprised madness and idiocy so it may be that Haslam thought of them in the first category – or was at least uneasy about diagnosing idiocy. It seems likely that in the period when a diagnosis of idiocy meant 'consignment to oblivion' in Burrow's chilling phrase, such a diagnosis would be made or accepted as a very last resort. Thus cases where there were very real educational and social problems were not classified as idiocy, whereas later in the century they might have been. That the term idiocy was reserved only for cases where parents and doctors had accepted a hopeless future for their child is supported by the evidence from John Thelwall's work, which is now to be examined.

Here we find a similar evasiveness about the term idiocy as Thelwall (1764-1834) primarily offered help for people with speech defects.<sup>33</sup> He was a political reformer whose views had led to a trial at the Old Bailey, before he turned to teaching. He had had some medical training but described himself as a professor of the science and practice of elocution, and his particular interest in speech impediments was connected with his successful efforts to overcome his own childhood stammer.<sup>34</sup> With his wife and son Thelwall ran schools, first in Liverpool and then in London for a wide range of learning needs, but particularly for speech impediments. Speech difficulties comprise many conditions, some, like cleft palate, having no (or only contingent) connection with neurological damage, but others are part of a syndrome of nervous system and brain defects. Thelwall said he was careful to choose only those he thought would improve, not hopeless cases. But as will be seen, he took on children with very limited achievements. It will be seen that terms like 'idiot' or 'imbecile' were never (except in the case of Byron Woodhull) used by the parents, tutors, or sympathetic relatives of the children whose education will be considered in Part II.

---

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-220.

<sup>33</sup> R. Hunter and I. Macalpine, *Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry, 1536-1810* (New York: Carlisle Publishing, 1982), pp. 656-7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

Augustus Lamb's aunt did mention a possibility of 'idiocy' and Lindsey Bertie's niece used the term 'imbecile' - but they were distant from day to day care and association with Augustus and Lindsey. In fact the concept of idiocy as ineducable is altogether a strange one, since 'idiots' could for the most part talk, and look after elementary needs, which argues that they had been taught some things. This suggests that it was more to do with the organization of education at the time, in particular gender and class assumptions, that hindered education for seriously impaired children. 'Education' for doctors and clergymen of the time meant the classics – learning that was beyond even a moderate degree of intellectual impairment. Thelwall, outlines cases of speech impediments where he helped women; but all the cases which appear to be of intellectual impairment concern boys, which lends weight to the view that it was the educational problems of boys which parents were most concerned about.

Thelwall's work clearly included people (or male people) whose faulty speech was a result of intellectual impairment, as well as problems like cleft palate and stammering. The London school offered a wide range of classes for very different needs. Thelwall wrote two short books (1810 and 1814) about his work.<sup>35</sup> The 1814 work describes his school, near Lincolns Inn Fields, in a long appendix; indeed the publication seems to be a brochure for the school. It took junior pupils (boys) who were taught by Mrs Thelwall, 'three or four ladies, adult or junior' who were lodged in the same part of the house as his daughters. There was a classical, mathematical and scientific section, classes for foreign learners of English, in oratory for clergymen and barristers - and some provision for cases of amentia.<sup>36</sup> It is not clear how he managed the accommodation of such different learners; at one point he says that even when he is successful in 'cases of amentia and tardy development of understanding' the family will want to keep the matter quiet, so one assumes that the barristers and clergymen didn't see intellectually impaired fellow pupils.

Most of both publications is concerned with the teaching of people with speech impediments and impairments. He says that he doesn't take 'extreme cases' and that he doesn't run a hospital for 'idiots and lunatics' nor does he admit 'disgusting objects'.<sup>37</sup> His intention is to distinguish between

---

<sup>35</sup> J. Thelwall, 1819, *op. cit.*; J. Thelwall, 1814, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Thelwall, 1814, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-15.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

cases where the faculties were 'undeveloped' rather than 'extinct' in what he would consider an unsuitable case. The issue of distinguishing between different causes of slow development - intellectual impairment from neurological damage to motor functions or from social and psychological damage - continues to be important. As Hunter and Macalpine observe, without the help of intelligence tests Thelwall sought to distinguish intellectual potential from current performance.<sup>38</sup> Thelwall claimed to do this by close observation of behaviour and physical signs<sup>39</sup> but in fact his descriptions of his pupils suggest that it was hope rather than science that guided his selection (and he gives no information about pupils he turned down). The case histories make puzzling reading since the outline of the several of 'before' accounts suggest such serious impairment that even the most careful education could never make 'normal'. For example he describes a boy, between six and seven, who came to his first establishment in Liverpool. This boy had a 'querulous inanity' and 'all the helplessness, without the vivacity, of an infant of less than two', an inexpressive face, a 'vacant eye' and hardly any speech. Soon after he had been with the Thelwalls it became evident that it was a case where 'the faculties, both of mind and body, had been rather undeveloped than extinct'. He soon began to speak, in less than two years had become 'lively and bold' and was able to go to public school.<sup>40</sup> This is the sort of account that provokes the thought that the past really is a foreign country, since it tells of a starting point so damaged that it is hard to credit the degree of progress. As will be seen, Guggenbuhl claimed equal if not more dramatic cures - but later his claims were discredited. Perhaps Thelwall is giving a greatly exaggerated account. But the boy is described as having 'a feeble constitution', and it is possible that almost nothing had been expected of him until he went to the Thelwalls.

What this kind of evidence certainly does show is the uncertainty that existed. There were no diagnostic criteria to separate biological abnormalities of the nervous system from socially induced impairment, or from bodily conditions such as cerebral palsy, co-existing with and masking an undamaged cognitive system. Related to the lack of agreed diagnostic criteria was the absence of informed opinion that might challenge Thelwall's claims for progress made. Guggenbuhl, as will be

---

<sup>38</sup> Hunter and Macalpine, *op. cit.* p. 657.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Thelwall, 1814, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-43.

seen, made far more grandiose claims for cures than did Thelwall, claims that were largely demolished when there was public scrutiny of his work. In the first half of the nineteenth century such public scrutiny had not started, and what may strike the present day reader as desperate grasping for straws, as Caroline Lamb sought a cure for Augustus, is far more rational in a context where spectacular improvement was thought possible.

However, public scrutiny or not, Thelwall's cases present an illuminating picture of the problems and solutions sought by families whose child had developmental difficulties. Another case history with a number of interesting features is of a boy of nine who had 'water on the brain' (a condition which can now be treated surgically, thus avoiding deformity of the skull, even if it does not always prevent neurological damage). This child had 'a massive projection [of the forehead] which pressed onto his eyes.'<sup>41</sup> To a casual observer he might look like an idiot, but I thought, and it turned out, that the defects were a result of solitary education and too much indulgence'. The boy had had a private tutor but in Thelwall's view had been 'rather the sport of his caprice than the master of his conduct'. Here, as has been seen before, we have the expedient of a private tutor. Other features of this case chime with things seen before or to be seen in later chapters. There is the opinion that the boy had been indulged rather than managed with necessary firmness; there is the determination not to vary educational content - this boy was learning Latin. In the event Thelwall didn't take this boy (an only child). First of all the parents wanted him to have a classical tutor (as at home) though Thelwall didn't see this as appropriate. Then at the point when it seemed that it was agreed he should come as a day pupil, the parents jibbed at their son being with Mrs Thelwall, as were all the younger children, including the Thelwalls' own.<sup>42</sup> It is not ideal to get at the parent's views through Thelwall, but it gives a picture of a couple deeply worried and confused about how to educate their only son, anxious to not to relinquish any of the privileges (teaching by men, with boys only) that are due to a male child. It is not clear whether the younger children taught by Mrs Thelwall included his daughters or whether when he referred to his own children being taught by her he was in fact only including male children. As will be seen when the education of the Austen family is examined, Jane and Cassandra went away to school while the boys of the family (except for the intellectually impaired George) were taught at the parsonage by the Reverend Austen along with

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 49-50.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-55.



fee paying male pupils.

Two further issues found in Thelwall's writing occur also elsewhere; the first is the notion of idiocy as 'disgusting' and the other that 'vicious' qualities are likely in people with intellectual impairment. Thelwall, as already noted, did not admit 'disgusting objects',<sup>43</sup> and the next chapter will also see fear of 'disgustingness'. Apart from this observation about his admission policy there is no more on this topic, but the anxiety about evil is mentioned several times - interestingly usually in terms of how it was avoided. A ten year old boy, 'inert', who had had epilepsy luckily had 'no vicious insensibility; no malignant cunning; no want of moral perception'.<sup>44</sup> In fact the period when the 'threat' of the feeble minded really flourished is later than that of Thelwall's school, in Britain dating from the end of the nineteenth century, and reaching its clearest expression in the setting up in 1896 of the National Association for the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded.<sup>45</sup> Joanna Ryan notes, of this time, that the animality of idiots, which earlier had been seen as pitiable, now came to be linked with animality, physical degeneration, immorality (particularly sexual) and crime.<sup>46</sup> However, as can be seen in Thelwall's writing such notions had been hanging around as it were much earlier, though perceived by him as needing determined eradication rather than segregation from society and institutional control. Two of Thelwall's case histories show examples of his thinking here. There was a thirteen year old, who had previously been epileptic (Thelwall would not have admitted him if he still had fits). His parents were 'obviously illiterate people' with 'strong passions and weak intellects' and their son had 'the abject timidity which shrinks alike from mental and bodily exertion'. He had had no restraint on 'that tyrannous impetuosity' and 'abject cunning which flourishes like an evil weed . . . [and] that rapacious sensuality of appetite and insensibility to all moral feeling'. He was admitted, and Thelwall set himself to 'restrain the selfishness of animal passion and eradicate habits of falsehood'. But his parents took him away after three months.<sup>47</sup> The

---

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 35.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-60.

<sup>45</sup> J. Ryan, *The Politics of Mental Handicap*, revised edition (London: Free Association, 1987), p. 107.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p. 106.

<sup>47</sup> Thelwall, 1814, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-8.

other case relevant here had a happier outcome; a nine year old 'small for his age . . . [in] perpetual motion, twitching, fidgeting, talking without coherence. He had however a taste for music and the 'rudiments of reading' and seemed to have no 'evil passions and malignant propensity'.<sup>48</sup> Even allowing for florid nineteenth century language, it seems odd that Thelwall feared anything so bad in a nine year old. He was a long time with the Thelwall's, rarely went home, and improved while he was with them (the exact length of his stay isn't specified).

Whatever the merits of Thelwall's work, he gained no fame and no lasting reputation, unlike Guggenbuhl (who won shortlived fame) and Séguin (who won lasting reputation). These were the two men who were pre-eminent in inspiring the development of idiot education in Britain; Johann Jakob Guggenbuhl (1816-1863), in Switzerland, and Edouard Séguin (1812-1880), in France. Both developed practical methods that inspired fervent admiration and emulation in England and in the States. A third educator, the German Carl Wilhelm Saegert, Director of the Institute for Deaf-Mutes in Berlin, was also working with idiots at the time, but unlike the other two inspired no following in the UK or the US<sup>49</sup>. Of Guggenbuhl and Séguin, the latter is the more important figure; the theory and practice of education he developed continued to be a model for the education of intellectually impaired people throughout the century, and was adopted in a very similar form by Maria Montessori in the 1880s for the education of normal children as well as the impaired.

Despite Séguin's more durable reputation, Johann Guggenbuhl was the influential figure in the start of idiot education in Britain. His fame is odd, for two reasons. First, Guggenbuhl's establishment in Switzerland was for the cure of cretins (sufferers from infant hypothyroidism, common in Switzerland because of lack of iodine in the soil, and rare in Britain). Secondly he claimed to cure cretinism, while his followers in England for the most part sought to educate rather than cure idiots. In contrast to Séguin, Guggenbuhl wrote little and what he wrote has not become available in translation. And there was little continuing reason to translate it, because though extravagantly admired in England in the 1840s, by the 1850s visitors to the school expressed

---

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-70.

<sup>49</sup> R. Scheerenberger, *A History of Mental Retardation*, (Baltimore: Brookes, 1983), p.73.

concern about it, and it was closed down in 1858 following a damning report.<sup>50</sup> There will be more to say about Guggenbuhl in the next chapter which deals with the dissemination of ideas about idiot education to the general public, and he will be dealt with briefly here.

Infant hypothyroidism was prevalent in some mountainous regions of Switzerland and also in France; and physicians, reformers and geologists in these countries were concerned about the problem, and there were scattered and rudimentary attempts to make some provision for them. In a census of cretins in the canton of Wallis that Napoleon had ordered in 1811 there were found to be three thousand.<sup>51</sup> In 1836 Guggenbuhl, passing through a Swiss village, was moved by the sight of a cretin praying at a roadside cross, and decided to devote himself to the problem. He had trained as a doctor, but deciding he also needed pedagogical skills he became for a while physician at Hofwyl, Philipp Emanuel Fellenberg's model school.<sup>52</sup> Guggenbuhl addressed a paper on cretinism to the Swiss Association of Natural Sciences, and a Swiss forester and social reformer put forty acres on the Abendberg, near Interlaken at Guggenbuhl's disposal. The site was four thousand feet above sea level; cretinism was not known to occur at such a height. In 1841 Guggenbuhl's curative school was founded.<sup>53</sup> He promoted his school through travel and in pamphlets, and it became famous. The British contacts with the Abendberg will be examined in detail in the next chapter, but Guggenbuhl had admiring visitors from Europe and the U.S.A.<sup>54</sup> Guggenbuhl was made honorary or corresponding member of the Swiss Academy of Natural Sciences, the Imperial-Royal Society of Physicians in Vienna, and other august bodies.<sup>55</sup> As told by Kanner, from the start there had been sceptical voices about the method, and in particular the claim of 'cures'; there were rumours of neglect, and in 1858 the British minister to Berne visited to see the few English patients there, and found the children neglected and the place in disorder. Guggenbuhl was away on a lecture tour.

---

<sup>50</sup> This section draws on: L. Kanner, 'Johann Jakob Guggenbuhl and the Abendberg' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 33 (1959) 489-502.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 490.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 491.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492-3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 493-4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

The Swiss Government ordered the official inspection that led to the closing of the establishment. There were nine points of criticism, which included that 'Not a single cretin had ever been cured; the director was away from four to six months every year and made no provision for a substitute', and that 'heating facilities, nutrition, water supply, ventilation in the dormitories and clothing were inadequate'.<sup>56</sup> Kanner observes that Guggenbuhl's writing 'leaves no doubt as to his sincere belief in the curability of cretins'<sup>57</sup>; but however that may be it appears that in the latter years of the Abendberg the recurrent problem of maintaining high standards in the care of the powerless and vulnerable was not overcome.

Séguin, whose theory and practice will now be considered, made, in contrast to Guggenbuhl, a lasting contribution to idiot education, and, through Maria Montessori, to education generally. Education for idiots arrived in Britain in the 1840s as an exciting rupture with the past, but Séguin worked in a context where the issue of whether education was possible for idiots had been debated since the beginning of the century. A focus for this debate was the 'wild boy of Aveyron', Victor, who had been captured in 1799. He was entrusted to Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, physician at the institute for the deaf and dumb in the Rue St Jacques for his education.<sup>58</sup> Itard published a report on his methods for education Victor (1801; 1806) and his pupil's halting progress.<sup>59</sup> *L'enfant sauvage* became known throughout Europe, having arrived at just the right time to give colour to discussions about man's essential nature, and what a 'noble savage' might be like. But to the Paris circle of doctors the issue was whether, as Pinel thought, Victor was an idiot and would never develop, or whether he was more of a noble savage, and could have his senses awakened by teaching, as Itard, and later Esquirol too, believed.<sup>60</sup> Neither opinion was exactly right - or an optimist might say both were right - since Victor changed very little; but the idea of education for the intellectually impaired was firmly planted. In all probability it would have come anyway, since

---

<sup>56</sup> Report to the Swiss Government, quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 497-8.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 499.

<sup>58</sup> L. Malson 'A Note on Jean Itard' in J. Itard, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron* (London: New Left Books, 1972), p. 83.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 83-4.

<sup>60</sup> Sheerenberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-7.

an obvious step after showing that deaf mutes could be raised from isolation would be to see if something similar could be done for the mentally disabled. The mantle of the pioneering teacher of the intellectually impaired fell very conspicuously onto Séguin, who was at a key moment working at the deaf mute institution in Paris. But Séguin would not have been appointed to work at a national hospital had others not been interested in idiot education. Dr Félix Voisin (1795-1872) was a disciple of the psychiatrist Esquirol, who had a more open mind than Pinel about the educability of idiots. Since 1830 Voisin had been interested in the problems of the intellectually impaired and from 1833 he organised a facility for idiots and epileptics at a hospice for incurables, which was transferred to the Bicetre Hospital in 1836. Dr G.-M.-A. Ferrus (1784-1859) was an assistant to Pinel, and with Voisin, promoted Séguin as a teacher.

In contrast to Guggenbuhl's isolation, Séguin was very much a part of an intellectual left wing community as far as general interests were concerned; and professionally he became part of the reforming medical and psychiatric circle of Pinel, Esquirol, Itard and their like. Séguin's career was not free of controversy, but the fundamentals of his method continued to be admired throughout the century, and he came to be regarded by his colleagues, as will be seen, as the founder and luminary of idiot education. Séguin was born in Clamécny near Auxerre of a family of doctors, and most accounts of his life say that he too became a doctor<sup>61</sup>. But according to the biographical outline by Yves Pelicier and Guy Thuillier, the most detailed source on Séguin available, he trained as a lawyer<sup>62</sup>. His career as an educator of people with intellectual impairment started in 1837 when Guersant, the doctor in charge of *l'hôpital des incurables* asked Itard, the physician in charge of the Paris deaf-mute institution, to teach a young idiot. Feeling too old and unwell for the task Itard said that he could manage to supervise the work of someone else; Guersant suggested Séguin, who was then a *maître auxiliaire* at the Paris institution<sup>63</sup>, and the collaboration went ahead until Itard's death in 1838.<sup>64</sup> There is nothing in Pelicier and Thuillier to indicate how Séguin moved from his

---

<sup>61</sup> M. Talbot, *Edouard Séguin: a study of an educational approach to Mentally defective children* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1964), p. 1; Scheerenberger, *op. cit.*, p.68.

<sup>62</sup> Y. Pelicier and G. Thuillier, *Edouard Séguin (1812-1880) "l'Instituteur des Idiots"* (Paris: Economica, 1980), p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

legal training to be a teacher of the deaf and then of those with intellectual impairment, but intellectually he was a committed Saint Simonien<sup>65</sup> to whom the condition of the poor and deprived was a concern. In his early work, *Hygiène et Education des Idiots*, 1843<sup>66</sup> the influences he cites, apart from the medical sources (Pinel, Esquirol, Itard, Voisin, Ferrus and Belhomme) are the educators of the deaf, Pereyre (the usual spelling is Pereire) and Sicard, and of philosophers, Rousseau and Condillac. The former is mentioned only in passing, but the latter was an important influence on Séguin's ideas. Etienne Bonnot, abbé de Condillac (1714-80), was a 'sensationalist', who, following Locke, believed that ideas and knowledge were derived in the first instance from the senses; sensations came first and gave rise to thought processes, in contradistinction to the Cartesian notion of the priority of thought<sup>67</sup>. Séguin's system of education was designed to awaken the dormant (as he saw them) senses of idiot children, and through the awakened senses to develop cognition.

A fundamental of the theories of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel is that education should encourage, rather than distort or repress, the natural tendency of a child to explore, to communicate and to learn. But Séguin's theory is based on the premise that intellectually impaired children do not naturally respond to the people and things round them: 'he [the idiot] wants to do nothing; he has a negative will and not a positive will' and 'The idiot is not naturally affectionate, but he may become so through education'<sup>68</sup>. For Séguin it was insufficient for education to offer opportunities, it had rather to compel children from their inertia and isolation. The methods he advocated remained substantially the same from *Hygiène et Education des Idiots*, 1843, to *Idiocy and its Treatment by the Physiological Method*, 1866<sup>69</sup>. Neither in *Hygiène et Education* nor *Idiocy and its Treatment by the Physiological Method* did Séguin define idiocy - because he considered that in the present state of knowledge, no-one could: 'not only are practitioners powerless in the face of this illness [*mal*]

---

<sup>65</sup> Scheerenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 69; Pelicier and Thuillier, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>66</sup> E. Séguin, *Hygiène et Education des Idiots* (Paris: Baillière, 1843 [Facsimile reprint in Y. Pelicier and G. Thuillier, *Edouard Séguin, "l'instituteur des idiots"*, Paris: Economica, 1980])

<sup>67</sup> P. France, (ed) *New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)

<sup>68</sup> Séguin, 1843, *op. cit.*, pp. 154 and 145-6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*; Séguin, *op. cit.* 1971.

but also the malady is not defined'.<sup>70</sup> It is clear, however, that he saw it as a result of biological/physiological malfunction or mal-development, not a psychological or social condition. His view was that in time idiocy would be fully understood scientifically and would be cured, but for the present he could offer two things of a 'practical value now', which were firstly his method of teaching, and secondly his '*cadre monographique de l'idiotie*' - a classification of different kinds of idiocy - which he hoped would be a basis for reaching a satisfactory definition. This second aim gets two and a half pages, a small beginning that he was not to take up again; it was the theory and practice of education which is the main issue in this early work, and continues to be in later ones.

Séguin's system started with the awakening of the senses but did not end there. The ultimate failure of the programme of education for Victor, the 'wild boy' Seguin attributed to Itard's reliance wholly on sensory education:

[H]e [Itard] never understood how and why ideas are something other than the senses, and that moral sense is superior to intelligence<sup>71</sup>.

As Séguin expressed his aims:

Three orders of phenomena dominate all others in the individual: activity, intelligence and will. The order in which I give them here is in exact inverse of their importance; but it indicates the sequence in which they should be developed through education<sup>72</sup>.

The importance of developing these three aspects of a person remain unchanged in the 1866 *Idiocy and its Treatment*. Starting with 'activity' the muscular system and the senses are to be awakened, to be followed by 'intelligence' which comprises essentially the 'three Rs' and finally the 'will'. For Séguin will and morality are virtually synonymous, a curious conflation at first sight. It can be understood in terms of his search for a secular, Enlightenment morality founded in the will, the quality which Séguin sees as the core of what it is to be human:

The metaphysicians of the previous century . . . denied the shameful . . . will that directed their pens, as the duellist denies the cowardice which gives him courage.

---

<sup>70</sup> Séguin, 1843, p. 58.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[Distinguished men of our time] shine only because of their will, this virtue which constitutes the human personality.<sup>73</sup>

Such a definition of humanness leads Séguin into the problem of the clash of wills and the question of will to what end. The former problem he partly addresses in his discussion of the importance of the pupil learning obedience to the consistent discipline of the teacher; a child taught 'turn and turn about with feebleness and harshness . . . sees only whim in the command and not the expression of a moral law'<sup>74</sup>. This of itself leaves unanswered the question of where the moral law is to come from (or to what end a person's will guides him or her). Séguin's not wholly satisfactory answer to this one seems to be that it is through the will that social, as opposed to individual life, can come about: 'The will (emphasis in original) differs . . . from other faculties in that the latter are exclusively individual . . . and produce only individual results, whereas the will is a faculty which is both individual and social'. In a section where Séguin reflects on his own approach to moral instruction, he favours a humanist and not a religious framework in which '[the instructor] must teach morality in the human and civil meaning of the word. In this sense morality includes the relations of man with himself and others'<sup>75</sup>.

What is more important than whether Séguin's solution to the origin of moral law is satisfactory or not is the fact that he included discussion about the fundamentals of human life in his work on the education of idiots. Although, as has been seen, Séguin believed that the initial orientation to life of people with severe learning difficulties was different from normal children in that the will to activity and communication was defective and was rather a negative will<sup>76</sup> to inertia than a positive will to action, he also believed that through a suitable education programme the will could be awakened. Séguin did not see the idiot as Other, as having an inherently different nature from the rest of humanity but rather that there was an isolation to be breached. He did not regard the principles of special education as wholly different from ordinary education. There are several

---

<sup>73</sup> Séguin, 1971, *op. cit.*, p.143.

<sup>74</sup> Séguin, 1843, *op. cit.*, p.139.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144,137.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.145.



places in Hygiène where he indicates a continuum between 'normal' children and the intellectually impaired, as when discussing different aspects of 'will' - instinctive, negative, intellectual and moral - he says that the first two predominate in the idiot and in many normal children<sup>77</sup>.

Séguin's thought is important because, in addition to the practical programme of education, of the philosophical and sociological reflections on human nature, whether 'normal' or experiencing intellectual impairment, and society. The title of his 1866 work *Physiological Education* indicates something of Séguin's concerns. Although his programme divides education into a series of stages from that of the body and the senses through that of the intelligence to the final stage of moral education it is apparent that Séguin saw the education of the body as being in itself a kind of moral education; that the order of the body was a precondition for order of the mind.

The numbed senses only carry out their functions under the force of necessity; the sense of touch is dull, . . . of hearing is idle, the gaze is involuntary, vague and random. . . [M]astication and digestion [are] incomplete, salivation continual . . .

In intellectual matters, attention is only focused to satisfy appetites . . .

As for moral sense . . . he is cruel or caressing, taciturn or cheerful . . . timid or enterprising, like . . . other children . . . although what distinguishes him from the latter is that he wants to do nothing, that he has negative and not positive will<sup>78</sup>.

The postulation of 'will', which can be seen as a biological drive, as the origin of action enables Séguin to avoid a body/mind dichotomy. Moral and intellectual action are not divorced from the body. This way of conceptualising a mind/body unity has interesting parallels with the thought of recent writers such as Foucault and Bourdieu. In *La Distinction*<sup>79</sup> the latter develops the concept of 'habitus' as a term for the way in which socially learned dispositions become habits and properties of the body. It may be objected that, Séguin's experience having been largely with institutionalized children, the passivity and negative will that he regards as the fundamental obstacle to the awakening of physical and mental vitality had been created by the conditions of the Bicetre and similar places. Such conditions may well have intensified the difficulties he notes. But a lasting principle of education for people with intellectual impairment since Séguin's day has been that

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-4.

<sup>79</sup> P. Bourdieu, *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979) especially pp.189-248.

actions that arise naturally in 'normal' children need, in varying degrees, to be carefully fostered and stimulated.

Before moving to the practical part of Séguin's education, the question of the meaning of 'moral' for him needs exposition. Following *Hygiène et Education* in 1843, Séguin wrote *Traitement moral, hygiène et éducation des idiots et d'autres enfants arriérés* in 1846. Murray K. Simpson in an article, 'The Moral Government of Idiots' considers the role which moral government played in the treatment of idiots in the nineteenth century and particularly in the work of Edouard Séguin'.<sup>80</sup> He links the notion of 'moral' in Séguin's work with 'moral' treatment of madness by such as Pinel and Tuke, and argues that moral treatment for idiots was 'based more on utility in securing the ends of social and productive subjects than on humanitarian notions of care and treatment', and that it secured the dominance of physicians in idiot education. There is a link between idiot education and the treatment of madness through humanitarian methods, but in two respects Simpson's approach misinterprets the meaning of 'moral' in Séguin's work. Simpson sees three aspects to 'moral treatment'; first there is the 'teleological view of the physical and social world' (i.e. that there is a natural order among phenomena), second there is the disciplining of mind and body so that individuals learn their position in this order and the will of the institution staff is substituted for the defective will of the idiot, and third, there is the need for humane treatment of the impaired.<sup>81</sup> One of the specific issues that Simpson finds fault with is Séguin's method of teaching idiots table manners (by suggesting that table manners are 'naturally' a 'good thing'): 'Control over the appetite must be learned through the intimacy of family sized eating areas and the judicious timing of serving. The example of care in eating must also be given . . . through the promotion of mutual serving among the children'. Séguin is in fact contrasting this method with coercion and punishment as a means of teaching table manners, and it is rather hard to see what method Simpson would favour for the teaching of table manners. Simpson makes I think three errors in his assessment of Séguin. First, over the 'natural order' issue he assumes a far higher level of generality than Séguin has in mind - he is only talking about connecting hunger, food and social relations. Second, while Simpson acknowledges that 'moral' had a different semantic spread in the early nineteenth century

---

<sup>80</sup> M. K. Simpson, 'The Moral Government of Idiots: moral treatment in the work of Séguin', *History of Psychiatry*, 10 (1999), 227-243 (p. 227).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 231-7.

than it has now, he doesn't acknowledge the most obvious difference - that in many respects the moral training of the nineteenth century is the social training of today. Third, and most significant, he simply attaches far too much importance to the 'moral' issue in Séguin's work. Far more important are his ideas about sensory and physiological education, and that the idiot could be raised out of mental inertia by stimulating the body.

What practitioners took from Séguin, or recommended to others, were essentially his practical ideas. This taking on of the practical applications only of a theory is found in other contexts; for example the practice of progressive education is not greatly different whether it derives from Piaget's ideas about the natural development of human abilities, A. S. Neil's psychoanalytic theory or Dewey's ideas about education for democracy. Simpson's 'history of ideas' approach ignores the complex relationship between theory and practice and that in the application of ideas practice may become separated from theory. It was Séguin's practical programme that was adopted by nineteenth century educators. For the awakening of the muscles Séguin designed gymnastic exercises, the most basic of which was the ascent and descent of a ladder, the pupils hands and feet placed and moved physically by the teacher if necessary, until the learner could do it him or herself<sup>82</sup>. Then the education of the senses should commence, starting with touch, the most basic, followed by taste and smell and then by hearing and speech exercises, and finally sight. For the education of touch Séguin suggests the giving of different substances, hidden from the child's sight, to distinguish by touch, and the provision of various moulded objects to be fitted into matching hollows - both exercises recognisable now as educational games for small children. The child progresses into intellectual education through tasks that have been broken down into simple steps.

To what extent Séguin's programme was derived wholly from his logical inferences about the fundamental importance of the will and the hierarchy of human qualities, as opposed to empirical test, is not possible to say. But it is clear that there was some trial and error; earlier noted was Séguin's reflection on the failure of Itard's programme with Victor. Séguin also records that in the teaching of shapes Itard regarded the square as the simplest and most basic. But the pupils didn't seem to find it so and 'four hours a day were consumed in vain at this exercise' and in the end he

---

<sup>82</sup> Séguin, 1843, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

found that a triangle was easier for them<sup>83</sup>. It will be noted from this example that as well as its progressive features Séguin's educational programme also had that quintessentially nineteenth century quality of categorising and subdividing; one may wonder why he thought it useful for the pupils to learn to draw geometrical shapes abstracted from the real world. In the training for hearing and speech he recommends the repetition of syllables before that of whole words. Whatever might be the educational merit of these exercises one must note that the detail of how they were devised was based on observation of babies' spontaneous vocalization - that it consists of repetition of syllables composed of a simple consonant followed by a vowel, such as 'ba ba' (and not 'ath ath')<sup>84</sup>.

Séguin's educational practice and its theoretical underpinning have been outlined, but the small but important ways in which he modified his theory over the course of his life, almost certainly in response to life experiences, need to be considered. The start of Séguin's career as a teacher has already been noted, the education of a single pupil in 1837 in collaboration with Itard. In 1839 Esquirol signed a document commending Séguin for his success. As a result Séguin was asked to take on a class of male idiots at the Bicetre hospital in Paris; this is the first recorded systematic education for people with intellectual impairment in Europe or the US, and is therefore a landmark date<sup>85</sup>. However the work of Ferrus, Voisin and Belhomme on the question of whether idiots could be taught has earlier been discussed and it is important to record that Séguin was not a solitary innovator (as Guggenbuhl was) but part of a group of reformers in the treatment of the mentally ill and mentally disabled. Séguin does however merit a pre-eminent place, because of his practical work, his books and his influence on other educators. He is also the first teacher of the intellectually impaired who was a teacher and not a physician. Being part of a group brought professional disagreements for Séguin as well as opening a career to him. One disagreement was over the extent to which idiots could be improved. Belhomme regarded Séguin as unduly optimistic on this score; that improvement was possible but not cure. He also commented that there were a number of epileptics in Séguin's class - the implication being, presumably, that they did not necessarily have a

---

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-90.

<sup>85</sup> Pelicier and Thuillier, *op. cit.*, p.13.

learning disability<sup>86</sup>. However Belhomme's complaint is not reasonable. There is considerable discussion in *Hygiène* about the limits of improvement: 'it is important to recognise . . . cases of idiotism that are refractory to all possible means of education', and on the danger of setting educational goals too high and towards inappropriate ends<sup>87</sup>. Belhomme resented the plaudits Séguin was receiving as an innovator since the former felt he had claim to priority. The second edition of *Essai sur l'Idiotie*, 1843, (the first was 1824) has a new Introduction which complains of writers who 'seem to ignore my researches' and refers to a letter that Belhomme wrote to the Academy of Sciences in 1835 claiming priority for his ideas on idiocy. However, the fact is that whatever Belhomme may have achieved in practical terms, there is nothing in the *Essai* about methods of education, except what has been added as footnotes to the 1843 edition, and is clearly derived from Séguin<sup>88</sup>.

Another issue of professional disagreement was over whether productive, or at any rate useful, work should be the aim of idiot improvement as opposed to purely educational and social development. Séguin, in conflict with many of his colleagues, notably Ferrus, was on the pure educational side, regarding productive work as a means of exploiting those with intellectual impairment<sup>89</sup>. There was also friction between Séguin and the hospital officials over administrative matters. In 1843 there is a series of complaints that Séguin had refused to teach his classes because of alleged failures by management: 'M. Séguin hasn't taken his class for eleven days because, he says, he hasn't the means of repression suitable to make the children afraid; he gives lessons to some idiots only', and 'All the other teachers presented themselves at the times required, M. Séguin was the only one not to do so'.<sup>90</sup> The episode throws up unanswered questions about Séguin's relationship with his pupils on the one hand, and about the scale of pedagogical arrangements at the Bicetre on the other. The hospital's memo about Séguin's complaint about lack of repression makes his practice sound unpleasantly coercive; Dr Bourneville spoke of 'abominable accusations' made

---

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>87</sup> Séguin, 1843, *op. cit.*, pp.155-6.

<sup>88</sup> E. Belhomme, *Essai sur l'Idiotie* (Paris: Germer-Baillière, 1843).

<sup>89</sup> Pelicier and Thuillier, *op. cit.*, p.19.

<sup>90</sup> Report of the Superintendent of the Bicetre, cited in *ibid.* 1980, p.20.

against Séguin, though he did not specify what they were, nor who made them.<sup>91</sup> It is at least plain that the atmosphere at the Bicetre was far from sunny; and whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter, Séguin lost his job there at the end of 1843. With his successor, Vallée, things went downhill at the Bicetre according to Pelicier and Thuillier - different ages muddled together, amenities dirty and inadequate, staff shortages<sup>92</sup>. From this it sounds as if Séguin's aspersions about the running of the place were justified. The other puzzling issue here is the hospital's reference to the 'other teachers' (the word used is *professeur*) who did not go on strike. Yet Séguin is presented in most sources as being the Bicetre's sole teacher.

While still in France Séguin made contact with Britain. The alienist and promoter of non restraint, John Conolly, visited the Bicetre and wrote an appreciative article about his methods,<sup>93</sup> which were substantially the methods adopted at Park House, Highgate (which soon moved to Surrey as Earlswood Asylum) the first English specialist establishment for idiots, in 1848. Between 1844 and 1850, when Séguin emigrated, with his wife and son, to the US little is known about his life. He continued to give private lessons, and he took part in some political activity. Sources before Pelicier and Thuillier say that the reason for his emigration was that he was in political difficulties though details of what these were are not given.<sup>94</sup> Pelicier and Thuillier suggest that more likely reasons were the loss of the Bicetre post, an economic down turn that could have affected his private tuition - and the fact that he had friends and admirers in the States which was at that time beginning to develop education for people with intellectual impairment<sup>95</sup>. He worked with Samuel Gridley Howe (1801-1876) in a small school for idiot children which moved to Boston, and became in 1854, a state institution, and with other luminaries of the development of education for the intellectually impaired, Hervey Wilbur and Fernald. In 1876 Séguin moved to the Pennsylvania training school. In 1870 he started, with his wife, a small day school for feeble minded children,

---

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 19-20.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>93</sup> J. Conolly in *The British and Foreign Medical Review*, 1845, pp. 291-298, cited in *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>94</sup> Talbot, *op. cit.*, p. 11; Scheerenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>95</sup> Pelicier and Thuillier, *op. cit.*, p.25.

which she continued to run after his death.<sup>96</sup>

Séguin's educational theory and methods remained substantially unchanged until the end of his life; his principal publication of the period was *Idiocy and its Treatment by the Physiological Method*.<sup>97</sup> However there were changes of emphasis and interest in this and in later publications. Mostly these were in the direction of seeking less institutionalised lives for intellectually impaired children, and towards emphasising the continuum between education for impaired children and 'normal' children. However in one place in *Idiocy and its Treatment* he appears influenced by the view that gained increasing currency in both Britain and the States, that there were moral differences between types of intellectual impairment. It is a curious passage, of several pages:

That the idiot is endowed with a moral nature, no one who has had the happiness of ministering to him will deny. Epileptic, paralytic, choreic or imbecile children will often strike or bite their mother or affectionate attendant. . . He is sensible to eulogy, reproach, command, menace, even to imaginary punishment; . . . he loves those who love him; he tries to please those who please him . . . he is one of us in mankind, but shut up in an imperfect envelope.

Therefore we must not confound with imbeciles, insanes, epileptics, etc., the harmless idiot.<sup>98</sup>

It then goes on to add that the *enfant arriéré* (French in original) is more like the idiot and the two categories can be happily educated together. It is a curiously muddled passage, since next we are warned about 'dements' (their difference from idiots being a later onset) and then insanity. Then Séguin sums up saying that 'here are five classes [presumably backward, epileptic, imbecile, demented and insane] of persons confounded with idiots without reason' but that four of the five classes can benefit from a physiological education with idiots (in spite of having said that the imbecile is 'self-confident, half-witted and ready to receive immoral impressions'. He doesn't give any advice about how to tell the categories apart - perhaps with luck all intellectually impaired children would get classified as idiots.

This passage appears to anticipate the theme of moral danger from certain categories of

---

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>97</sup> Séguin, 1971, *op. cit.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-66.

mentally impaired people that became important in Britain from the end of the century. But in the same work Séguin shows a concern for family involvement - unique in writings about the education of idiots at the time:

Who could watch over the tardy coming of [the development of the faculties better than a mother, if she were timely advised by a competent physician. The skill of the latter is of no avail without her vigilance. . .

If the features of idiocy are decidedly marked, the mother must often visit with her child to the nearest institution . . . and receive the instructions necessary to carry out the same treatment at home.<sup>99</sup>

It is the mother, rather than the father, who bears this educational responsibility - but it would hardly be otherwise at the time. Further, Séguin sees it as inevitable that the child will need to be handed over to an institution when it is a little older, but even so it is noteworthy that he suggests that a mother could carry out some of the training that all other authorities saw as being solely the prerogative of specialists.

Séguin's ideas were complex and, as shown in the previous two paragraphs, sometimes contradictory - and these later thoughts were little or not at all known to the general public, since it was his earlier writing that those who propagated his ideas in the 1840s and 50s had to draw on. But, as the next chapter shows, the writers who brought both Guggenbuhl's and Séguin's ideas to the British public, were selective in which of these ideas they chose to promote. Séguin's practical methods were admired and adopted but his theories about human nature received little attention. What Séguin's methods provided, together with the reassurance of the impressive institutional contexts he worked in was the end of *bricolage*. At last there was an approved method for teaching idiot children. There were also reassuring residential institutions in which to deploy these methods, and it is to the doctors and charity workers who wrote articles and pamphlets promoting these institutions that the next chapter turns. It is however the ideas about what idiocy is that emerge from these publications, not the idiot asylums themselves, that are to be the focus of interest.

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. pp. 87-8.



## Chapter 3

### THE DISSEMINATION OF IDEAS ABOUT IDIOT EDUCATION TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC 1843-1880

Between 1843 and 1880 there appeared a steady stream of publications, aimed at the British public in general, which propagated new ideas about education for intellectually impaired children. In the 1840s and early fifties these spoke of developments on the continent, particularly Switzerland and France, and urged Britain to make comparable provision, but from the middle fifties, when provision had started in Britain, they urged support and expansion for these initiatives, and were sometimes published by and for a particular institution. In nearly all the main point was to expound the worth of education and what could be achieved by the latest methods, but in two (Harriet Martineau in 1851 and Dora Greenwell in 1869) there is philosophical reflection on what 'idiocy' meant, and how it related to 'normality'; and one article in 1848 takes care to point out that methods used in Switzerland were unlikely to be applicable to the British situation. The articles of the 1840s and the early 1850s are often breathless in their enthusiasm for idiot education and what it can achieve, while later writings give more measured accounts. A different kind of writing is found in 1868 and 69 when a number of stories for children appeared, most of them edited by Dora Greenwell, urging sympathetic treatment for intellectually impaired people. Some of the works used here are referred to in histories of responses to learning disabilities<sup>1</sup> but these concentrate on the development of institutional provision and on professional theory and practice and are not seeking, as here, to develop a perspective on the content and character of the propaganda to the general public.

In the writings of the 1840s and 50s the two main sources of the message about the new optimistic possibilities of education are the work of Johann Guggenbuhl in Switzerland and that of French psychiatrists and the educator, Edouard Séguin, centred on the Bicêtre and Salpêtrière hospitals in Paris. Sometimes the British popularisers draw on both sources (and occasionally on other continental pioneers) but more often they concentrate on one or the other - and far more often on Guggenbuhl's work. Guggenbuhl, as Chapter 2 has shown, was an eager populariser of

---

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Scheerenberger, *A History of Mental Retardation* (Baltimore: Brookes, 1983); J. Ryan, *The Politics of Mental Handicap* New edition (London: Free Association, 1989); J. Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: a history of mental retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

his method and became something of a celebrity in Europe, being made honorary member of medical or scientific societies in a number of European countries<sup>2</sup>. Visitors from England went to Guggenbuhl's establishment at the Abendberg and Guggenbuhl himself visited England to advise on the setting up of Park House in 1846 (later to become Earlswood Asylum) and in 1848 one of the Sisters of Charity from the Abendberg came to assist and advise at Park House, organised by Dr Forbes who visited Guggenbuhl's school<sup>3</sup>. Séguin, as has been seen in the previous chapter, on the whole emphasised the demanding nature of the teaching required for the cognitively impaired and slow progress (with occasional dramatic improvements) while Guggenbuhl claimed near miraculous cures, as reported by several English writers, notably William Twining<sup>4</sup> who translated Guggenbuhl's first Report on his work. But John Forbes was not carried away with enthusiasm. Forbes, an FRCP, author of several books, editor of two medical journals, Physician in Ordinary to the royal household, was an important and influential figure, not only in his work for idiots.<sup>5</sup> He visited the Abendberg in 1848 and reported:

Dr Guggenbuhl was so kind as to examine, in my presence, three or four of his more advanced pupils . . . and it was delightful . . . to see the amount of real knowledge that had been thus acquired, and the gratification which . . . the conscious possession of it evidently conferred on the . . . pupils. Not that the poor children know much or could do much; far from it; . . . At the very least, the actual result showed the existence in the poor children of the quality of teachableness; and this quality can be made subservient, in many ways, to the acquisition of habits (emphases in original) which cannot but fail to add to the comfort, health and happiness of themselves as well as their relations<sup>6</sup>

Both the promised cures and Guggenbuhl's publicity seeking may explain the predominance in the

---

<sup>2</sup> L. Kanner, 'Johann Jakob Guggenbühl and the Abendberg', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 33 (1959), 498-504 (p. 495).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495; J. Forbes, *A Physician's Holiday, or a Month in the Country in Switzerland in the Summer of 1848* 3rd edition (London: John Churchill, 1852) p. 190.

<sup>4</sup> W. Twining, MRCP, was physician to the Public Dispensary and the North London Ophthalmic Institute, but his principal claim to be remembered is his writing about Guggenbuhl's work. See *Medical Directory*, 1845.

<sup>5</sup> O.C. Ward, *John Langdon Down: a caring pioneer* (London: Royal Society of Medicine Press, 1998), p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

1840s and early 50s of his methods; but it seems more likely that the self promotion was the more important since as will be seen not all his admirers were as credulous as Twining, though they were in no doubt that considerable progress could be expected.

The Abendberg was intended specifically for the cure of hypothyroidism, or cretinism as contemporary terminology had it. There was a high incidence of cretinism at the time in certain parts of Switzerland because of lack of iodine in the soil; the condition also occurred in Britain but was not regarded as an important cause of cognitive impairment. It is odd that there was so little debate about the applicability of Guggenbuhl's methods to cognitive impairment in general. Kanner's explanation is that since 'most authorities regarded cretinism and all forms of idiocy and imbecility as the same phenomenon'<sup>7</sup> methods applicable to one condition would be applicable to the others. However, this is an overgeneralisation; certainly an early general article of 1848 in Chamber's Edinburgh Journal takes pains to point out that Dr Guggenbuhl regards cretinism as having completely different causes and physical manifestations from idiocy, as in the latter a 'fault in the formation of the brain allows only a very slight degree of cultivation' whereas cretinism is not a fixed condition, and can be cured by a change of air or diet<sup>8</sup>. The writer ends by calling on British readers altruistically to support Guggenbuhl's work: 'we can fearlessly call on those in our own happy land, where cretinism and goitres are unknown . . . to come forward with the abundant riches with which prosperity and commerce has blessed us, so different from the scanty resources of poor revolutionised Switzerland'<sup>9</sup>. However the attentive reader would also have noted that earlier in the article we are told of children of persons of 'high rank' 'who though not precisely cretins were yet [those in whom the brain] was not properly developed'<sup>10</sup>, were nonetheless benefiting from the Abendberg regime. At about the same time John Forbes visited the Abendberg and, observing the patients there, felt that many of them were not cretins, but were 'ordinary idiots'<sup>11</sup>. It seems then that though there was awareness of cretinism having a different cause from

---

<sup>7</sup> Kanner, *op.cit.* p. 493.

<sup>8</sup> 'Hospital for Infant Cretins' Chambers Edinburgh Journal 9 (1848) pp. 296-299 (p. 298).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>11</sup> J. Forbes, The Physician's Holiday or a Month in the Country in the Summer of 1848 3rd

other kinds of idiocy, in practice distinguishing the two conditions was not easy, a factor which increased a tendency to believe that a regime which benefited hypothyroidism would also benefit other kinds of intellectual impairment.

However, it is likely that more important than the difficulties of diagnosis was an inclination by readers and other commentators to seize on what chimed with their own expectations and wishes, and that a method had been found to improve conditions that had previously been thought hopeless overrode any doubts over exactly which conditions could be expected to improve. That there was selectivity not based on explicit criteria about what messages were taken from Guggenbuhl's work is borne out by another oddity; that the Guggenbuhl regime was about a lot more than education alone, yet it was education that fired the interest of most commentators. The *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* article lists electric shocks to hands and feet; aromatic frictions; preparations of steel(*sic*) and bark; mineral waters from a local spring; cod liver oil; iodine; great attention to the diet which should include goat's milk; air and 'above all, continual exposure to the sun'<sup>12</sup>; in fact the most important physical part of the treatment, mentioned in all discussions of Guggenbuhl's work, is the removal of children from narrow valleys where the causative agent of hypothyroidism was thought to lurk to mountains above 4,000 feet. The *Chambers* article goes on to say that Guggenbuhl thought it essential to improve the body before 'developing the mind' and that to do the latter before the former 'can have disastrous consequences'<sup>13</sup>. It should be mentioned though, that there are no accounts, at least in English, that explain in detail the temporal organisation of the treatment, nor explain exactly what improvements can be expected from the initial bodily regime; the case histories simply outline the dramatic improvements made by the regime as a whole. The message that writers took from Guggenbuhl and that formed the basis for the regimes at the British institutions which developed in the late 1840s and 1850s, was education allied to attention to general health. Yet the latter was only the application of what at the time was thought generally to promote bodily health and there was little attempt to implement Guggenbuhl's special measures.

The French methods which were developed by Edouard Séguin, unlike the Swiss, relied solely

---

edition (London: John Churchill, 1852) p. 183.

<sup>12</sup> 'Hospital for infant cretins', *op. cit.*, p.298.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

on education; the earliest detailed expositions of his practice were available to general readers in 1847<sup>14</sup>. Thus, despite the greater prominence of the Swiss approach, both sets of ideas were available to the British public in shaping ideas about idiot education and both agreed on the importance of education even though Guggenbuhl recommended other treatments. It is very clear how first Guggenbuhl and later, and more lastingly, Séguin influenced theory and practice at the British institutions for intellectually impaired people, but it is a much harder task to assess the degree to which the literature analysed here actually influenced public perceptions. Indeed it is only possible to make a reasoned guess. The strongest evidence for influence is that several of the articles appeared in general journals or other publications. In other words they appeared where the writer was likely to engage the attentions of a reader interested in current issues, but without, at least at the outset, a specific interest in idiot education. The articles in the 1847 and 1848 Chambers Edinburgh Journal, John Forbes's 1848 The Physicians Holiday or a Month in Switzerland, Harriet Martineau's 1851 Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development, the two articles in Charles Dickens's periodical Household Words (1853 and 1854) and an article of 1863 in the North British Review are then of particular interest. These were publications designed for a reasonably well educated general reader, with the exception perhaps of Martineau's work which was rather more heavyweight - it was a general philosophic work, not one only concerned with intellectual impairment. The articles in Chambers Edinburgh Journal indicate that it was not aimed solely at Scottish readers (for example an article in 1848, 'National Education: Its Obstructors' was about Britain as a whole). Edinburgh was the centre of periodical literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Physician's Holiday is a travel book with medical interest, not a specialist medical work, and that it ran to three editions is some evidence of its popularity. The other books and pamphlets used are specifically about idiot education, often published by or for single institutions and while it may be that these would have been more likely to appeal to those already interested in idiot education their intended appeal was to charitable donor - and hence to the general reader, and require no specialist knowledge to understand them.

The publications considered fall into two parts; those that expound the virtues of the Swiss and

---

<sup>14</sup> W. R. Scott, Remarks, Theoretical and Practical, on the Education of Idiots and Children of Weak Intellect (London: Hamilton Adams and Co., 1847); 'Visit to the Bicêtre'; 'Education of Idiots at the Bicêtre, 2nd article' and 'Education of Idiots at the Bicêtre, 3rd article', Chambers Edinburgh Journal, 7 (1847) pp. 22-23, 71-73 and 105-107.

French initiatives, that is those up to 1853 with the addition of the rather late 1857 Wonders of the Abendberg (which however was a 'new edition' and so had first appeared somewhat earlier) and those from 1853 which deal with British institutions, though continuing to mention the models on the continent. There is much on which all the writers agree; but there are also important divergences of view. The shared perspectives are examined first. About the question of the need for a specialist institution there was no doubt. Other themes that found general agreement are:

- 1) that is a moral and Christian duty to help the cognitively impaired, who have until then been neglected in charitable moves to help the unfortunate
- 2) the major rationale for this, apart simply from a general duty to help the less fortunate, is that beneath the unpromising, often apathetic, exterior there is an understanding to be released - in particular a Christian soul hitherto trammelled by its impairment
- 3) a secondary rationale, not found in all the writings, is a practical one - that education will make the cognitively impaired more able to undertake productive work and so be less of a burden on the community
- 4) related to this practical aim is one which seems to bear on the sensibilities of the 'normal' as much as on the needs of the impaired - that of producing order and organisation out of disorder
- 5) that there is something inherently alarming, even disgusting, about the cognitively impaired which makes charitable efforts the more commendable

There was some difference of opinion about the degree of improvement to be expected from education but in fact Twining's early reports on the Abendberg are the only British writings to expect 'miracle cures'.<sup>15</sup> Later writings, and even early ones based on the French methods, are more inclined to expect moderate improvements. Otherwise differences are mainly in emphasis rather than in major issues of theory and practice, the French inspired work stressing the scientific and rational nature of the endeavour to rouse the idiot out of inertia, while the Swiss inspired writers stressed the religious aspect of the work, towards the release of a Christian soul. There are individual differences between the writers, some emphasising the positive (in relation to modest improvements as well as the spectacular) such as the first Household Words article, while others stress more the alleged pitiable and distressing condition of idiocy - as, oddly enough, the second

---

<sup>15</sup> W. Twining, Some Account of Cretinism and the Institution for its Cure on he Abendberg (London: John Parkes, 1843); J. Guggenbuhl, Extracts from the First Report of the Institution on the Abendberg, trans. By W. Twining, (London: John Parkes, 1845)

Household Words article. There is an unquestioned assumption that a specialised and probably residential institution was the right place to educate the intellectually impaired. However, all the writers regarded a well run specialised institution as a positive place, in contrast to a lunatic asylum or a workhouse; in this their classification system is completely different from most late twentieth century writers who lump all residential institutional care together and regard it wholly negatively. The contrast is shown in the 1856 observation in a Scottish pamphlet, that at one time idiot children and adults could be seen on the streets, but that about 35 years previously they began to be shut up in workhouses which might have benefited society at large, but it was 'painful to think of the poor children and others . . . imprisoned and treated as if they were animals'<sup>16</sup>. The writer clearly sees the workhouse 'prison' as an entirely different thing from the Edinburgh Home and School. Though the point is not made explicitly the writer is probably expressing suspicion over state regulation and centralisation of the asylum contrasted with the private initiative of the Edinburgh Home and School'.

It is interesting to note that two issues that later came to great prominence are absent in these articles addressed to the general public from the 1840s to the end of the 1870s. There is little discussion, except for hypothyroidism, of the assumed causes of intellectual impairment. Two articles only touch on this, both in Household Words, 1853 and 1854. Hypothyroidism was discussed in relation to Guggenbuhl's work, but all writers felt it was clearly caused by special features of the environment, and not by things for which individuals or 'modern society' could be blamed, such as 'degeneracy', drunkenness and intermarriage, issues which became important in medical discussions of idiocy from the 1880s onwards (and earlier in the US) until well into the twentieth century, and were related to the emerging view of learning difficulties as a threat. John Langdon Down described Down's syndrome, named by him 'Mongolian idiocy' a term which might be taken to suggest that idiocy was a kind of degeneracy, in 1866.<sup>17</sup> But the article is largely descriptive of the typical appearance of Down's syndrome and makes little of degeneracy or racial issues. In any case, the term Mongolian idiot is only found once in the writings for the general

---

<sup>16</sup>The Education of the Imbecile and the Improvement of Invalid Youth (Edinburgh: Home and School for Invalid and Imbecile Children, 1856) p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> J. Langdon Down, 'Observations on an Ethnic Classification of Idiots' London Hospital Reports (1862), 3, pp. 259-62.

public - this in a pamphlet of 1876 by Down himself.<sup>18</sup> The other issue that became important after 1880 and into the twentieth century was the notion of a new category of the 'feeble-minded', who had a lesser intellectual incapacity but a greater moral inadequacy than idiots. The term feeble minded as used by Down in his 1876 pamphlet, is simply a euphemism for idiocy or imbecility, which is how the term was initially used. The use of 'feeble minded' as a different category of defect is found for the most part after 1880; but, confusingly, there is one 1869 article to be discussed in due course, where feeble minded is used for a separate category.

This chapter will continue by analysing the five messages identified above, and show how they connect with the assumption that a specialist institution is best. The first two points, the moral and Christian duty to help the intellectually impaired, and that there is an understanding or a soul beneath the unpromising exterior, will be dealt with together since they are closely linked. The two points are closely linked in writers' minds, even if there is no logical connection, as is shown in the conclusion to W.R. Scott's 1847 book shows:

'My task is now finished of pleading for these fallen brothers of humanity . . . The attempt to elevate the imbecile from the melancholy position in which he stands is holy work - it is to raise one who has lost all that characterises humanity to the privileges of intellectual man . . . We pity the heathen savage and traverse oceans to redeem him, while we leave at home the wretched being [near at hand]<sup>19</sup>.

Scott was principal of the West of England Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, another connection that shows the influence on idiot education of facilities for the deaf. The main influence on Scott was Séguin, but he also mentions work with idiots by Saegert and Sachs at the Berlin Deaf and Dumb institution. The evangelical sounding purple passage is not typical of Scott's style which for the most part is a sober account of how idiocy is now seen as capable of 'improvement' and a detailed description of Séguin's methods. It will be noted that intellectual lack is his focus, not soul. The 1847 articles in *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal* seek a careful and scientific perspective based on his own observation of the all male pupils (females were at the Salpêtrière). He saw them learning singing through the solfa system 'in a manner which would have done credit

---

<sup>18</sup> J.L. Down, *The Education and Training of the Feeble in Mind* (London: H.K.Lewis, 1876).

<sup>19</sup> Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-5.



to any juvenile class of singers'<sup>20</sup>; performing gymnastic exercises; naming by sight and feel geometrical wooden shapes and writing, of which he observed 'feebleness and uncertainty of grasp' and that the writing was 'slowly done it is true, but still [it was] well done.'<sup>21</sup> He saw a star pupil playing dominoes and in the workshops pupils engaged in carpentry, shoe making and setting off for agricultural work<sup>22</sup>. The author, who identifies himself as superintendent at an asylum for the insane, makes many observations about the general ambience of the Bicêtre and the pupils (for example satisfying himself that they really were 'idiots').<sup>23</sup> He was pleased to see evidence of sociability between the pupils, interest in their visitor, and that 'the principle of fear seemed in no respect a part of this system'<sup>24</sup>. In the course of his general observations the author makes several statements relating to the notion of the system revealing abilities previously occluded. He notes how the pupils:

[were made] capable of exercising the faculties of observation, comprehension and power of application, which, a few years ago, would have been thought impossible. [He sees] exercises likely to rouse the dormant capacities of the pupils . . . several of the idiots came romping and scampering together . . . showing much more spirit and a greater capacity for playful enjoyment than I could have supposed. . . Having lived several years in a senseless and inactive condition, it is easy to conceive that . . . change . . . to an existence conscious and intelligent must be accompanied with feeling of peculiar pleasure.<sup>25</sup>

The story about the beginnings of Guggenbuhl's work with cretins encapsulates the idea of the freeing of a trammelled soul, and has it that Guggenbuhl was walking in the mountains when he saw 'an aged cretin pause, and mutter something which seemed to be a prayer to a wayside crucifix and reflected on the germ of intelligence that must have lain dormant [in him] . . . "there is an immortal soul buried here" said he, "and I will dedicate my life to the deliverance of such". A similar idea is found in 'The hospital for infant cretins', 1848<sup>26</sup> which says 'Few persons we think could

---

<sup>20</sup> 'Visit to the Bicêtre', *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> 'Education of Idiots at the Bicêtre', *op. cit.*, p71.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, pp 71, 72, 105.

<sup>23</sup> 'Visit to the Bicêtre', *op. cit.*, p.22.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*. p. 105.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*. pp. 22, 71, 105.

<sup>26</sup> 'Hospital for infant cretins', *op. cit.*

have restrained their tears [listening to a choir at the Abendberg] and reflecting that but for that Christian love . . . their voices might have uttered nothing but groans and their souls remained ignorant of God their maker<sup>27</sup>. 'Cretins and Idiots', 1853, quotes a speech of the Rev Edwin Sydney on the importance of work to 'restore to its higher condition the ruined tenement of an idiot's frame which has obscured, but cannot extinguish the inmost soul and thus to transform . . . ignorant, frivolous, debased and ungovernable into a tractable human being, with the prospect of present happiness, and the hope of a better world'.<sup>28</sup> Narrative Poems and a Beam for Mental Darkness published in 1862 'For the benefit of the idiot and his institution' said it was a 'blessed charity to unlock the dark imprisoned soul'<sup>29</sup>. In 1853 Dickens wrote a more moderate version of this theme, observing that 'a closer study of the subject has now demonstrated that the cultivation of such senses and instincts as the idiot is seen to possess, will, besides strengthening others that are latent within him but obscured, so brighten [others and]. . . improve his condition, both with reference to himself and society.'<sup>30</sup>

A more sophisticated and universalistic version of the 'imprisoned soul' motif is found in Dora Greenwell's 1869 pamphlet On the Education of the Imbecile. Dora Greenwell (1881-1882) was a poet,<sup>31</sup> essayist and an evangelical Anglican. Her essays touched on several social issues, for example, women's education and child labour. She was also a supporter of the Essex idiot asylum, and it was for this cause the 1869 pamphlet was written, which in the Introductions says:

In every human being, be he the mightiest or the meanest among the family of Adam, there exists a dimly lighted region of unknown extent . . . a world of which we know too little even to define its boundaries . . . It lies between the mind and body, between soul and sense. It is a realm thick sewn with subtle affinities, some of obscure and some of fearful

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 298.

<sup>28</sup> 'R. T.' Cretins and Idiots: a short account of the progress of the institution for their relief and cure (London: W.A. Wighton, 1853) pp. 30-31.

<sup>29</sup> E.G. Narrative Poems and a Beam for Mental Darkness for the Benefit of the Idiot and his Institution (London: Dean and Son, 1862) p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> C. Dickens, 'Idiots', 1853, in Charles Dickens Uncollected Writings from Household Words, Vol 2, 1850-1859, ed. by H. Stone (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press) p. 490.

<sup>31</sup> M. Drabble ed. Oxford Companion to English Literature New edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) Entry on Greenwell.

import . . . dark untracked woods are around us . . . [we know little about our own nature, but if we really want to know humanity we must get to know] its most strange and conflicting aspects [Human nature can be compared to a large house in which we find] not only fair parlours, but many dark closets.

She goes on to say that we should seek to understand this obscure part of our nature and that:

[T]he more we learn of the soul's dependence on the body, the more we recognise its subjugation to the organism it has to work through<sup>32</sup>.

In a way Greenwell's point is the same as the other writers quoted - that educating the imbecile allows hidden qualities of mind to be revealed: 'awakening what is dormant and setting free what is bound'<sup>33</sup> - but she puts this in the universalistic context of the difficulties of understanding any person's mind; and hence imbeciles' connection with other people is emphasised, rather than their separation. It is very rare to find an acceptance of kinship between an intellectually impaired person and a 'normal' one; in fact the only other example that has been found is in a novel, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (discussed in Chapter 5) wherein there is an implied parallel between Lucy Snow's state of mind and that of a cretin. However that implied parallel has been noted by a critic, and there is no knowing whether Brontë was aware of the suggested kinship. Greenwell stands alone in explicitly pointing out that 'normal' people and 'idiots' are not so very different. It might be objected that recognising that idiots have souls is also a recognition that idiots are like any other human being. However, without going into a theological-historical investigation of exactly what Victorians thought the soul was, the notion of soul that is implied in most of the writing about idiots is that the soul is rather a distant and mysterious entity, that has little or no connection with what might be called mind, the area of conscious thought and reflection.

There are several references to the advantages to themselves and to society at large of idiots learning to be self-sufficient or even to undertake productive work. This view is expressed in the 1847 article on the visit to the Bicêtre, and in Dickens's remark about the youth who 'had latent powers of construction'. The advantages to all envisaged by improvement is closely connected with point 4) the creation of order out of disorder. This can be seen in Dickens's account of a visit to Park House, Highgate:

---

<sup>32</sup> D. Greenwell, *On the Education of the Imbecile* (London: Strahan and Co., 1896), pp. 3-5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

In a second room, likewise perfectly quiet and placid, were some little fellows busily plaiting straw of various colours. In a third, the whole male body turned out on parade, and were drilled by an old soldier. . . We found a work room full of little girls sewing, and making little fancy ornaments . . . Every room was airy, orderly and cheerful.<sup>34</sup>

In 1868 Greenwell observed: 'bad habits corrected, health and morals improved . . . [children who were a burden] now able to maintain themselves or partially maintain themselves by their own labour' She cites Dr Vitré of Northern Counties Asylum who says that about 45 % of idiots can 'learn to attend to their own want with some degree of propriety', at least 10% can be 'restored to society as useful members' and only 6% won't improve at all, and quotes Dr Voisin, writing in 1848, who asked whether "such poor beings to be turned loose on society to become centres of evil and degradation or are they to be trained in peace and order"<sup>35</sup>.

A number of the articles convey the idea that there is something alarming and disgusting about idiocy. This comes in three contexts, the first largely in relation to Guggenbuhl's work, which emphasises the distressing state of children before the treatment, but is also connected with galvanising readers to the needs of these children, the second which emphasises the heroic work being done by a few, and a third, only found in Dickens's 1853 article, which has the intended purpose of persuading people that their revulsion is wrong and mistaken. In 1845, presenting Dr Guggenbuhl's work William Twining gives several examples of cures, for example of Claudine S who thrived for her first year of life, then her liveliness declined and the 'extremities of her limbs [and her head] showed signs of deformity' and was brought to the Abendberg at 3 years 'a miserable cripple'. After 'long and unwearied care an entire change took place . . . she learned to speak [German as well as French, her native tongue]. This child . . . is now so advanced in her recovery as to be able to attend school'<sup>36</sup>. The 1853 article 'Cretins and Idiots' prints an extract from speech by Rev Edwin Sidney in 1852 at Ipswich (on behalf of the Eastern Counties Asylum) in which he touches on the problem of why God permits idiocy, but urges people not to dwell on this questions, since 'These conditions of humanity are, doubtless parts of a great design, infinitely wise, however unfathomable' but that

---

<sup>34</sup> Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 496-7.

<sup>35</sup> D. Greenwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-5; 14.

<sup>36</sup> Guggenbuhl, ed. Twining, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

'our concern is not so much with God's ultimate design as with the question of present duties [and the importance of work] to restore to its higher condition the ruined tenement of an idiot's frame, which has obscured, but cannot distinguish the inmost soul, and thus to transform . . . ignorant, frivolous, debased and ungovernable into a tractable human being, with the prospect of present happiness, and the hopes of a better world<sup>37</sup>.

Dickens's 1853 article is long, and in selecting from it there is a danger of distorting the overall plan. As will have been seen from extracts already used, there is for the most part an optimistic note, as here where Dickens, talking about recent improvements, explains that 'the cultivation of such senses and instincts as the idiot is seen to possess, will . . . so brighten those glimmering lights, as immensely to improve his condition, both with reference to himself and to society<sup>38</sup>. However he starts with a picture likely to alarm the reader:

The popular notion of an idiot [varies little from place to place]. [I]n France or Italy, the name recalls a vacant creature all in rags, gibbering and blinking in the sun . . . In . . . Switzerland, it suggests a horrible being . . . of stunted and misshapen form with a pendulous excrescence dangling from his throat . . . [In] our own childhood . . . he is a shambling knock-kneed man . . . with an eager utterance of discordant sounds . . . a tongue too large for his mouth<sup>39</sup>.

Most of the remainder of the article outlines the useful order and personal development that arises from the latest methods. However, in a polemical passage at the end Dickens intends to rouse apathetic or nervous readers by the following:

'Madam, you are a lady of very fine feelings, you are very easily shocked . . . This idiot old man of eight, with the extraordinarily small head, the paralytic gestures, and the half-palsied forefinger . . . disturbs you very much. But madam, it were worthwhile to enquire . . . how much of the putting away of many kinds of unfortunates at any time, may be attributable to that same refinement that cannot bear to be told about them<sup>40</sup>.

Similar passages, clearly designed to stimulate the reader's charitable impulses are found elsewhere:

[It is] almost worth the suffering of the calamity to have so truly benevolent an institution

---

<sup>37</sup> 'R. T.', *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31

<sup>38</sup> Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 490.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 489-90.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 497.

spring from it . . . I will show you still more affecting proof of the power and tenderness of God . . . What see you [at the Abendberg] . . . children apparently deprived by nature of the ordinary powers of body and mind, with vacant looks and awkward gait . . . [and] will show you what has been done for these outcasts of society, whose very presence is oppressive to you even for a few minutes<sup>41</sup> .

Pity the mother who has wept  
Over her dear first born  
Watching and waiting long to see  
The light of reason dawn<sup>42</sup> .

The intention of these vignettes of a dreadful before and happy after is to encourage charitable support, but an unintended effect may be to make readers unnecessarily alarmed at the distressing picture of idiocy painted. The writers, in spite of sometimes pointing to the range of impairment that may be encountered, underline for readers the worst scenarios. Thus the very organisation of Victorian charity leads to this emphasis on the most distressing cases, underlining the difference from the 'normal' - and reminds one of the protests from present day disability groups against the use of pathetic cases in charitable ventures such as telethons. A further unintended effect of particular relevance here is that it conjures a picture of an educational problem that needs specialised facilities and specialised help. In urging support for special institutions the writers emphasise how very much they are needed and never refer to the possibility that, once one has recognised the value of education, it is something that might be undertaken at home.

Thus far, views that were common to most of the writers considered here have been examined. But it would be a mistake to assume that there was a single standardised view of idiocy; and there is additionally the curious fact that some writers express seemingly contradictory views within one article or pamphlet. There is little evidence of the movement that started in Britain after 1880 to regard people with moderate learning difficulties as a threat to national health and a source, unless controlled, of degeneracy of the national stock. Dickens, 1853, explicitly mocks theories about the effects of drunkenness:

A woman with two idiot children happened to mention that her husband was a drunkard,

---

<sup>41</sup> L. Gaussen, *The Abendberg: an Alpine retreat founded by Dr Guggenbuhl for the treatment of infant cretins*, (Edinburgh: W. P. Kennedy, 1854), pp. 5-6.

<sup>42</sup> E.G., *op. cit.*

and ill-used her. It was then supposed that their condition was referable to his degraded habits . . . ; but on pursuing the enquiry, it appeared that these two children had been born in sober and kind days, and that the subsequent children of his later life were healthy and sensible<sup>43</sup>.

Concerns about degeneracy and threat are present in only two of the sources used here. The first is an anonymous article of 1863 in the North British Review, which starts off moderately enough, outlining the progress that had been made in the past twenty years, notes parishes that make efforts to place 'fatuous paupers' with employers and the value of the Earlswood training. Then, with a change of tone and attitude that is surprising, it introduces a theme absent in the other publications, warnings about a new kind of problem, those who 'are chiefly deficient in moral sense' who may be in prison or who are 'pests to their families, a disgrace to their friends'. It then mentions examples of this - one of Leigh Hunt's sons who was 'intemperate' and made several knife attacks on his brothers, and a grandson of Lord Byron. It is very much the issue that was evident in the Government reports of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, though the North British Review article is unusual in selecting upper class examples, since the problem came to be identified with supposed working class disorderliness and degeneracy. The other discussion of degeneracy reputedly caused by marriage of kin, is found in an 1854 article, almost certainly by Harriet Martineau.<sup>44</sup> In it she expresses views that seem mutually contradictory, both within that article, and between her views in that article, and her earlier (1851) Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development.<sup>45</sup>

On the one hand Martineau is the only writer considered in this chapter who admits to an intellectually impaired person living in her own social circle (as opposed to encounters in institutions), and one of the few who acknowledges explicitly that intellectual impairment can happen in any family. She is also interested in the condition of intellectual impairment, in the different ways that mental capacities may be affected, an interest clearly sparked by knowledge of a particular acquaintance and by her interest in phrenology. This interest in the nature of idiocy is a

---

<sup>43</sup> Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 498-9.

<sup>44</sup> H. Martineau, 'Idiots again', Household Words, 9 (1854) pp. 197-200 (p. 197).

<sup>45</sup> H.G. Atkinson and H. Martineau, Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development (London: Parkes, 1851)

focus of the section on idiocy in *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*<sup>46</sup>. On the other hand, negative attitudes are found in Martineau's work, in her use of American work on the inheritance of defect. She quotes Dr Howes's claim in his *Report on Idiocy in Massachusetts* that 'the law against the marriage of relative is made out as clearly as if it were written on tablets of stone' and some alarming statistics showing that forty four out of ninety five children of related parents were idiots.<sup>47</sup> A puzzling contradiction between Martineau in 1851 and in 1854 is that she uses the same material about the impaired man of her acquaintance, sympathetically in *Laws*, and then as evidence that it is unbearable to live in the same house as an idiot. *Letters* tells about a boy who could not speak but enjoyed music and showed 'delicacy of touch, in the intricate paper cuttings he like to do. He also like great order and symmetry in his life: 'he could endure nothing out of its position in space or its order in time . . . he was punctual to the minute in all his observances . . . If seven comfits had once been [given] he would not rest with six; and if nine were given [he would return two]'. She ends this account saying that he 'was exquisitely trained in a mechanical patience, order and gentleness, which made his lot an easy one to himself and others . . . we mourned him when he was gone with a sorrow which surprised us'<sup>48</sup>. Much the same account of the child's abilities is found in 'Idiots Again' but the social scene is presented differently, talking of the demands on the household, messing up siblings' games, pouring away his father's coffee, of being 'an unremitting trial' and the difficulties of providing him with 'occupation'. This leads into an outline of the benefits of the new institutions<sup>49</sup>. 'Idiots Again' is mostly directed to being a puff for institutions while *Letters* is a philosophical reflection on human abilities, what it means to be human, and how we can learn from 'disease and deficiency' about normal 'structure and function'.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps here we have further evidence of the issue earlier raised, that the need to promote charitable gifts led writers to overstate the difficulties of having an idiot child at home. In 'Idiots

---

<sup>46</sup> Compare Atkinson and Martineau, *op. cit.*, pp. 71, 90 with Martineau, *op. cit.*, pp 199, 198.

<sup>47</sup> Martineau, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>48</sup> Atkinson and Martineau, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>49</sup> Martineau, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>50</sup> Atkinson and Martineau, *op. cit.*, p. 96.



Again' there is passage about the awfulness for a mother who suspects and then knows her child is an idiot: 'Of all the long and weary pains of mind to which the unselfish can be subject, we know of none so terrible as that of the mother attaining the certainty that her child is an idiot'. After this depressing beginning the author suggests it is not quite so bad : 'Reviewing the whole case, as we ourselves have observed it, it seems to us an affliction made tolerable only by its gradual growth, and the length of years over which it is spread'. However there is rapidly a return to gloom: 'As the weeks pass, however, and still the child takes no notice, a sick misgiving enters the mother's mind - dread of she does not know what.'<sup>51</sup> What comes across from the changes of tone and judgement in the two articles by Martineau, in the *North British Review* article, and in Dickens's long piece in *Household Words* is uncertainty and doubt about idiocy; there is not at this time, the 1850s and 60s, a fixed view about what idiocy is.

The picture of competing views, or perhaps of views varying according to the context of thinking, is reinforced by evidence from a different kind of publication, stories for children urging sympathetic treatment for intellectually impaired people. Four stories were found by Dora Greenwell, edited and reissued by her on behalf of the Royal Albert Idiot Asylum.<sup>52</sup> In these stories all four of the intellectually impaired characters live in the community. It is also worth noting that the setting is always a rural community, and, usually, about sixty years in the past. It is as if the writers are unable to picture a person with learning difficulties living in a town - it is a picture of a traditional village idiot that these stories conjure up. The character is always from a labouring or artisan family (and the fictional characters who will be examined in Chapters 4 and 5 are, with two exceptions, people from working, country or artisan families). A summary of one of these tales, *Benjie of Millden* gives an impression of the moral message of all these stories. It is set in a Scottish village sixty years ago (ie approximately 1809). James Gray is a weaver, rather severe in manners, but honest and trustworthy' and an elder of the church. All his family has died except the youngest 'a poor imbecile' who had never been able to learn the catechism - though he learned songs with

---

<sup>51</sup> Martineau, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>52</sup> D. Greenwell, (ed), *Harmless Johnny or the Poor Outcast of Reason* by C. Bowles (London: Strahan and Co., 1868); D. Greenwell, (ed), *A Poor Boy* abridged from the French of Countess de Gasparin (London: Strahan and Co., 1868; D. Greenwell, *The Wow of Rivven or the idiot's home* by G. MacDonald (London: Strahan and Co., 1968; D. Greenwell, (ed) *Benjie of Millden*, by the author of *Bygone days in our Village* (London: Strahan and Co., 1869).

ease - and of whom the dominie said 'It's [ie teaching him] all in vain . . . so acknowledging the finger of God, we must just let him alone'.<sup>53</sup> This contradicts the message of most of the writing in support of idiot asylum, that it is education, not neglect, benign or otherwise that is needed. Benjie followed his father on his travels delivering cloth, carrying two pieces of wood which he 'played' as if a fiddle and bow and sang, a performance 'highly prized by the simple peasantry'<sup>54</sup>. But James became weak and ceased his travels, though was sorry to see how much Benjie missed them as he'd been welcome at the isolated homes they'd visited, and was afraid to go from home on his own because of being taunted by village children. Then James dies and the village people worried about Benjie and noticed that 'his eyes had a restless expression of one who is seeking something he has lost'<sup>55</sup>. The spring following the autumn in which James died, Benjie goes to the minister and says 'I maun gang to the sacrament on Sunday'<sup>56</sup>. The minister is reluctant, feeling Benjie doesn't understand the request he is making, but is convinced when Benjie says 'It's the Lord . . . said I was to gang to his table on Sunday, for he would tak' me to heaven on Monday'<sup>57</sup>. The minister changes the text he had originally chosen for the service to "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise"<sup>58</sup>. The next day Benjie indeed dies, and when the villagers gather round his grave the dominie says to the minister 'Benjie was blind, mentally blind, but in that land there will be none blind and none in darkness.'<sup>59</sup> Since Benjie, before he left this earthly life had received a premonition of his death and wished this death to be in a Christian context (the sacrament mentioned) he was in fact not wholly 'in darkness' before he went to heaven. The story is followed by an editorial section urging support for asylums, since outside them idiots live the 'object of scoffers . . . a cheerless and neglected existence' in the homes of the poor where they are a drain on scanty resources, whereas inside health and habits can be improved, they can be trained 'in industrial

---

<sup>53</sup> *Benjie of Millden*, op. cit. p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

pursuits and religious feeling aroused<sup>60</sup>. This is a puzzle, since Benjie's father did not perceive him as a burden, he is described as 'docile and obedient'<sup>61</sup> and he seems to have plenty of religious feeling.

In two other stories too the 'idiot' is presented as little trouble to those about them - though sometimes taunted by village boys. The central character in The Wow of Rivven had been found abandoned and taken care of by the parish; when grown up he was employed in fetching water being paid in food or whisky, and expressed gratitude to those who were kind to him. Johnny of Harmless Johnny had been loved by his parents, but when they died he had to go to a workhouse; it was however a humane regime and Johnny had a number of skills - making rush baskets and mats, wicker bird-cages - and did household tasks for a variety of employers - fetching water, watching coppers, sweeping and rocking cradles<sup>62</sup>. Ulysses in A Poor Boy is the only one in the four stories who does lead a 'cheerless and neglected existence'; his father, a shoemaker, was a great reader and it was reading, ironically, that gave him the idea for the fancy name for his son. The household was unhappy before Ulysses's arrival, because the wife was 'a slattern' and 'gawky'<sup>63</sup> but she had been made clumsier by constant censure from her husband. Ulysses went to school but failed to learn in spite of being beaten, and as his deficiencies became more obvious his father began to bully him at home, his mother who wanted to protect him, being too downtrodden by her husband to do so. Ulysses declines and dies a lonely death for 'the want of love, of hope and of pity'<sup>64</sup>. The reader's sympathy is on the side of Ulysses whose only faults - apart from stupidity - seem to be that he is too easily led into trouble by other boys.

The odd thing is that in these stories the idiot is docile, helpful and likeable - and has none of the alarming behaviour and appearance of the idiot in many of the non fictional accounts examined here. It is true that the stories, except for the Wow of Rivven, were selected by one person,

---

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Harmless Johnny, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>63</sup> Poor Boy, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Greenwell, but they had different authors, evidence that this image of the idiot is not Greenwell's alone. There is a much later story, *Witless Willie*, in the Sunday Library for Young People<sup>65</sup> in which Willie is friendly and tractable from the start but his grandmother, who looks after him, cannot do much for him (his father was lost at sea and his mother died in childbirth). Kind friends arrange for him to have a period of training in an idiot asylum where his speech, simple skills, mobility and religious understanding improve greatly and he is then able to return to his grandmother's home where he can even earn a little money. True, the specialised institution plays an important role in this story (rather than being a separate puff at the end as in the Greenwell edited stories, but it provides education for a person who from the start was friendly and willing even if he had a 'vacant stare and unmeaning smile'<sup>66</sup>. One interpretation of these differences is that the stories and the non-fictional accounts have different purposes; the former are urging readers, particularly children, to be sympathetic and understanding to idiots when they meet them in the ordinary course of life - not to tease them, to see that they can lead useful lives and that they too have religious understanding even if it is different from the 'normal' person's. The non-fictional accounts on the other hand are directed for the most part to urging people to support financially the new specialised institutions, which as has been seen, are conceived of as progressive and pleasant places, in contrast to lunatic asylums or workhouses. Moreover, at the period in question - 1840-1870, specialised institutions were not seen as permanent placements but as a matter of some years of training. As has previously been suggested, a consequence of the need to appeal for charitable gifts is to exaggerate the pathetic state of the idiot, with the unintended result of suggesting that idiocy is a truly alarming and possibly disgusting state. On the other hand, those who wanted primarily to encourage sympathy for idiots stressed the harmless and likeable qualities, and quaint characteristics. Thus different images of idiocy are put into play according to the purpose at hand.

But the contradiction between the benefits to be gained from the orderly and rational education provided by an asylum, and the idiots in the stories who appear to be orderly, if in a somewhat eccentric way, without the education provided by an asylum, suggests that we are seeing two quite different images of the idiot, both of which had a long history. One of them, stretching back at least to the beginning of the eighteenth century, is of the inert and possibly disgusting idiot. Jonathan

---

<sup>65</sup> *Witless Willie: the Idiot Boy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1885).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Andrews<sup>67</sup> provides much evidence of the idiot regarded as monstrous and burdensome. It is this kind of idiot that writers for the charitable institutions are seeking to save and improve. The other image is the romantic folkloric image of the fool or the wild man. This distinction has been touched on the Introduction and will be further developed in Chapters 4 and 5 that consider intellectual impairment in imaginative literature. Important in the construction of the fool in the literary representations are: kinship with animals and the natural world; musical ability; strange wild dress; spiritual perception which can be deeper than that of 'normal' people; that eccentricity or madness is not clearly separated from cognitive impairment; and existence on the margins of society rather than fully integrated into it. There are suggestions of some of these attributes in three of the Greenwell edited stories. Johnny in Harmless Johnny likes to sit on a roadside bank watching animals and collecting a group of children round him, challenging them to contests of 'threading daisy necklaces, or sticking a thorn branch with flowers'. Or he would march them up and down, as he paraded in 'cocked hat and ragged scarlet coat'. He is also very fond of music (though not gifted)<sup>68</sup>. In the Wow of Rivven the fool of the story (and this is how he is most commonly described) wears clothes 'peculiar in cut' the coat a military one with the stripe removed, and he carries a bell<sup>69</sup>. Although he does jobs for the villagers he lives an isolated life, except for a friendship with Elsie a young woman who is herself 'shunned' by most people<sup>70</sup>. Elsie overhears the Fool saying that the 'wow' says "come hame, come hame" but what this means is a mystery until many years later when she wanders into a deserted church and hears the bell made to ring by the wind. At the same time she hears a voice, which turns out to be that of the Fool, imitating the rhythm of the bell, saying 'Come hame, come hame'. He has been living in the deserted church of Ruthven (Rivven) and the wow is his term for the bell.

The percipient reader will not find it hard to guess that both the Fool and Elsie are soon to be

---

<sup>67</sup> J, Andrews, 'Begging the question of idiocy: the definition and socio-cultural meaning of idiocy in early modern Britain' History of Psychiatry, 9 (1998) Part 1, pp. 65-95, Part 2, pp. 112-173.

<sup>68</sup> Harmless Johnny, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> Wow of Rivven, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp.7, 10.

called to their final home where 'both intellect and love were waiting for them'<sup>71</sup>. Benjie's mystical premonition of his death in Benjie of Millden has already been referred to. The Fool of Witless Willie and Ulysses live on the margins of society - the Fool in the deserted church and Ulysses after his father gives up on him. However in another sense all four live marginal lives - marginal to developing industrial and urban society, marginal to the lives of the kind of reader addressed in all the publications examined here who is implicitly seen as educated and middle class. In the chapter that follows, the presentation of the intellectually impaired characters as fool rather than idiot can be seen to have some kinship with the presentation of such characters as Benjie of Millden and Harmless Johnny. The portrayals in imaginative literature however are more complex and nuanced; and in Chapter 5 wherein the intellectually impaired characters are shown as 'idiot' rather than 'fool' there is little connection with the children's stories considered here.

---

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12; 18-20; 28.

## Chapter 4

### INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENT IN IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE: (i) THE FOOL

The final two chapters in Section I consider portrayals of intellectual impairment in imaginative literature (mainly novels). Fictional characters are of course only imaginary; but fiction arises out of a real, lived, world, and authors often intend a faithful reflection of this world. All the works examined in Chapters 4 and 5 were intended to contain, and perceived to contain, pictures of ordinary life; or, to express it another way, they all (with the possible exception of Scott) contain dominant elements to which 'realism' or 'naturalism' as literary terms can be applied<sup>1</sup>. However intention to represent the real world doesn't unproblematically produce truth-to-life, quite apart from the fact that authors have other purposes than naturalism or realism.. The issue of the relation of the literary portrayals to real life, or perceptions of real life will be explored. The authors, works, and characters, to be examined here are:

William Wordsworth	Johnny	'The Idiot Boy'	1798
Walter Scott	Davie Gellatly	<u>Waverley</u>	1814
John Galt	Jenny and Meg Watty	<u>Annals of the Parish</u> <u>The Entail</u>	1821 1832
Charles Dickens	Smike Barnaby Maggy	<u>Nicholas Nickleby</u> <u>Barnaby Rudge</u> <u>Little Dorrit</u>	1838-9 1841 1855-7
Elizabeth Gaskell	'the twins' Willie	<u>Mary Barton</u> 'Half a Lifetime Ago'	1848 1855
Charlotte Bronte	Marie	<u>Villette</u>	1853
Thomas Hardy	Christian	<u>The Return of the Native</u>	1878

---

<sup>1</sup> Entries for Realism and Naturalism in Drabble, M. (ed) Oxford Companion to English Literature New Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

This list covers all portrayals of intellectually impaired characters identified for the relevant period in Britain. An important difference between the portrayals of idiocy in the works examined here is whether they are based on a 'fool' model or an 'idiot' model. In the fool model, the intellectually impaired character inhabits a borderline between idiocy, madness or extreme eccentricity, and the impairment is either unexplained or has a supernatural origin (Davie and Barnaby). In the idiot model the impairment has a medical/biological aetiology, usually severe childhood illness. There are other differences between the fool and the idiot images, which will be explored as each work is analysed. The works in which the model for the intellectually impaired person is the fool are those published before 1845, while in those published after that date the model is the idiot. There are some exceptions; the earliest work 'The Idiot Boy' is in most respects in the idiot mode - though there is no suggestion about aetiology. Smike in Nicholas Nickleby (1838-9) accords with neither model, and Christian Cantle in The Return of the Native (1879) has some affinities with the fool. However, the idiot model portrayals which accord in most respects with the medical notion of idiocy as examined in Chapter 3 do not appear until after the 'idiot education' propaganda of the 1840s.

In most cases the intellectually impaired characters play a subordinate role and as background to the action rather than as significant agents. However, in The Entail Watty Walkinshaw is a central character as of course is Johnny in 'The Idiot Boy'. It may be objected that the research includes only 'great' literature and very many novels were published and eagerly read in the period in question only to be forgotten now<sup>2</sup>. But this caveat made, the authors and works selected for scrutiny here were celebrated and popular in their time, and several of them had considerable influence on literary sensibility and on public opinion about moral and social issues. What is more important than the possibility that some nineteenth century portrayals may have been missed, is that before Wordsworth's 'Idiot Boy', there were no sustained literary portrayals of an intellectually impaired person, whether as fool or as idiot. Jonathan Andrews shows that there were mentions of 'idiots' and 'idiocy' in earlier literature - but as an abstract condition or a term of

---

<sup>2</sup> Webb, R.K. 'The Victorian Reading Public' in B. Ford, ed. The Pelican Guide to English Literature Vol 6. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), gives some information from the 1830s about books in a number of small circulating libraries. Books by well known writers such as Scott, Galt, Bulwer-Lytton, Marryat and Edgeworth numbered in hundreds, while the bulk of the stock was 'novels of the lowest character', (pp.216-7).



abuse. There was no interest in exploring the life of an idiot<sup>3</sup>, as there was little interest in a serious exploration of the life of any low status or poor person. By contrast, nineteenth century literature, and the novel in particular, saw the rise of interest in working class, ordinary and poor people, not just to provide amusing interludes of 'country bumpkinishness', but as serious characters whose doings merit interest and sympathy as do those of the bourgeoisie and the gentry. Closely associated with the emergence of new types of people is a new articulation of concern for social issues - poverty, exploitation, oppression of women and the effects of technological change. These new social types and novel expressions of social concerns together mark the emergence of new narrative modes, naturalistic accounts of ordinariness and the mundane. Such points are made by Harding in his classic 1957 essay where he compares the new concerns of the nineteenth century with the eighteenth century literary perspective of the self controlled, prosperous, rational adult which implicitly belittled or ignored many kinds of social actor.<sup>45</sup>

While naturalism in literature seeks to represent real life, so called real life, as Ricoeur has argued, has features that make it like a story. The meanings of the real life objects of the world are perceived and construed differently by different people. As has been seen in other parts of this thesis, particularly the Introduction and Chapters 2 and 3, there are many ways to perceive and react to a person with an intellectual impairment - is he or she closer to God than the ordinary person, a threat to the ordinary person or just disgusting? It might be useful here to distinguish between a real individual (such as those to be studied in Part II) and general ideas about allegedly real people. Nominalism in philosophy would say that there only are individual named instances (such as Augustus Lamb) and there is no universal category (such as intellectually impaired people). This may be a rather shaky application of the concepts of nominalism and universalism, but it underlines rather well the fact that there isn't a clearly defined distinction between real and imagined objects. Similarly there is no absolute distinction between fiction on the one hand and real life on the other, because fiction may be very lifelike, while supposedly real life may be constructed

---

<sup>3</sup> J. Andrews, 'Begging the question of idiocy: the definition and socio-cultural meaning of idiocy in early modern Britain: Part 1.' *History of Psychiatry*, 9 (1998), 66-95.

<sup>45</sup> D W Harding, 'The Character of Literature from Blake to Byron' in B. Ford, (ed) *The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Volume 5: From Blake to Byron*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), p. 34.

to suit what an observer expects and wants. A real person is to a great extent a socially constructed being, not only from an observer's point of view, but even from his or her own point of view; the constant work of presenting a suitable self to the world is explored in Erving Goffman's work.<sup>6</sup>

However, novels and poems, offer greater opportunities than 'real life' for constructing characters as one wishes them to be, or fears they may be, and making them bearers of moral and metaphoric messages. An author, as the lone constructor of a work, is able to put forward his or her own view without the hindrance of competitors in the construction of the narrative, as is the way of everyday life. This is so notwithstanding the fact that an author may be influenced by other writers or by current ideas. The issue of moral and metaphoric messages is particularly pertinent where impairment is depicted in any art form. In Illness as Metaphor<sup>7</sup> Susan Sontag complains that the metaphors attached to sickness, particularly tuberculosis and cancer, often ignore the realities of the illness and, worse, can attach negative meanings to a condition, as in an image of cancer as an evil growth, a parasite on the good or the normal. Sander L. Gilman argues that sickness and impairment in art are overwhelmingly constructed as Other. This protects the reader,<sup>8</sup> who is implicitly seen as able bodied, from the possibility that the bodily dissolution described could possibly contaminate him or her. The reader projects fears onto the Other, so localising fear elsewhere as well as getting rid of it.<sup>9</sup> The temporal difference between 'fool' and 'idiot' portrayals is itself evidence against any simple mirror-of-life argument, since it is hardly credible that every live model for an intellectually impaired person encountered by an author before 1845 had an entirely different aetiology and syndrome from those encountered after that date.

Whether in the fool or the idiot mould, the intellectually impaired characters convey to the reader various and multi-layered literary, social and moral meanings, which include the following:

---

<sup>6</sup> E. Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959).

<sup>7</sup> S. Sontag, Illness as Metaphor (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Gilman's book is about pictorial art, but the point is applicable to literature, so the term 'reader' will be used.

<sup>9</sup> Sander L. Gilman, Disease and Representation: images of sickness from madness to aids (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p.1.

1. Exposition of morality
2. Symbol of innocence to contrast with the over civilised
3. Otherness, mystery, source of transcendence and 'truer' meaning
4. Emblem of one's own fears of dissolution and disorder
5. Source of amusement
6. Social problem

Meanings 1, 2 and 3 are the most common and the connection of an exposition of morality with an intellectually impaired person is found in all the novels - usually he or she is a foil to show another person's goodness or badness, but sometimes it is the impaired person him or herself who is the source of virtue. There is some overlap here with (2) when the impaired person symbolises innocence. Meaning 3 (Otherness, mystery, source of 'truer' meaning) is confined to the fool model portrayals. While points 2 and 3 look similar at first sight, there is a distinction worth making. In point 2 the intellectually impaired person hasn't been distorted by a so-called civilizing process, while in point 3 the impaired person is credited with some abilities beyond and greater than the 'normal' person. There is only one work (Annals of the Parish) where the impaired characters' antics undoubtedly amuse others, and only one ('Half a Lifetime Ago') where the impairment is presented as a social problem. There is no work that presents intellectual impairment as a positive threat to 'normal' people and civilised development. In France, Balzac's Médecin de Campagne (1833) uses cretins living in rural France as metaphors for inertia and absence of progress; getting rid of them is part of the civilising process. This surprisingly early showing of intellectually impaired people as a threat is further evidence of the uneven development of ideas, and the difference between the isolated expression of an idea (as Balzac's view of cretins seems to be) and its institutionalisation. It was mid century in the United States and the end of the century in Britain before the 'threat' of the feeble minded really got under way.

Setting out the points thus in a list gives the misleading impression that literary creation is a conscious and deliberate process as opposed to a creative and mysterious one. In fact both processes are usually present in the production of a literary work. For example the source of his novels was in part a mystery to Dickens who feared often that the unconscious inspiration might

cease. Yet some of his themes were deliberately constructed and sometimes researched - as in his research into low-grade boarding 'schools' for Nicholas Nickleby.<sup>10</sup> Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads shows that he was deliberately setting out to bring the concerns of ordinary people and everyday life into poetry.

The remainder of this chapter will analyse the early works that are, for the most part, in the fool model. The earliest of these, Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy', is the only pre-1850 work that is not in this model. Johnny is an idiot *tout court*, there can be no doubt about this. The story of the poem is that Johnny is sent by pony by his mother, Betty, to fetch the doctor for neighbour Susan who is ill. They live in a remote country region and there is no one else near. Hours pass during the night, no John, no doctor and Betty is increasingly anxious both about Susan and her son. Finally she sets off on foot to look for John, gets to the doctor's to find John has never called, quite forgets to ask the doctor to call on Susan and rushes back looking agitatedly for her son. At last (dawn is breaking) she sees him beside a waterfall, sitting peacefully on the pony, and hugs her son in joy and relief and they turn for home. On the way they are met by Susan who, having recovered, has gone to look for them. All three set off happily home and on the way Betty asked Johnny what he'd been doing to which he replied:

'The cocks did crow to-who, to-who,  
And the sun did shine so cold!'  
- Thus answered Johnny in his glory,  
And that was all his travel's story.<sup>11</sup>

Of the possible meanings of intellectual impairment the dominant one is (1) symbol of innocence, contrasting with the overcivilised. Johnny in his innocence forgets all about fetching the doctor; but this doesn't matter since Susan recovers - one can even supply an additional possibility, that the doctor's cure might have been less effective than nature's. Betty's anxiety and her shaky faith in Johnny's capabilities are sympathetically portrayed; as is Johnny's pleasure in the moonlit night and the little group's happy sociability as they return. Though it is a poem, Johnny doesn't say anything

---

<sup>10</sup> C. Dickens, 'Preface' Nicholas Nickleby (London: Educational Book Company, 1910) p. xviii.

<sup>11</sup> W. Wordsworth, 'The Idiot Boy' in W. Wordsworth and S. Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads (Oxford: Woodstock, 1993), p. 179.

'poetic'; he doesn't utter words of wisdom or mystery in well formed metre - his only articulate sentence is simple and previously he has only uttered wordless sounds. What makes this portrayal of intellectual impairment different from all the other works examined here is that Johnny is part of an innocent and not over refined community rather than being in a quite different category from all his associates. It is not that Susan and Betty teach Johnny anything, but rather that he shows them that not fetching the doctor didn't matter.

Wordsworth's letter of 1802 to John Wilson<sup>12</sup> contains a detailed rebuttal of Wilson's opinion (as recounted by Wordsworth since Wilson's original comments have not survived) that the subject of the poem didn't 'please' and that people experienced a natural 'disgust' at the sight of an idiot. Wordsworth also says that he had encountered positive reactions too. 'This poem has, I know, frequently produced [the s]ame effect as it did on you and your Friends but there are many [peo]ple also to whom it affords exquisite delight, and who indeed, prefer [it] to any other of my Poems'<sup>13</sup>. There are two elements in Wordsworth's answer of which the first is simply that people have very different tastes and what pleases one person may disgust another. However this is really a preliminary to the second and more important point that fundamentally a poem should be pleasing to 'human nature, as it has been [and eve]r will be', a human nature which in over civilized people may have been overlaid by accretions of 'false refinements, wayward desires' a nature which we need to rediscover '[from with]in; by stripping our own hearts naked, and by looking out of ourselves to[wards me]n who lead the simplest lives most according to nature'. By learning from such people we will see that there is little 'natural' disgust at the sight of an idiot, since 'Persons in the lower classes of society have little or nothing' of allegedly natural disgust. '[I]f an Idiot is born in a poor man's house it must be taken car[e of] and cannot be boarded out as it would be by gentlefolks, or sent [to a] public or private receptacle for such unfortunate beings'. It is, in Wordsworth's view, part of the poet's task to remove false delicacy that a natural vision prevail 'to render [men's] feelings more sane pure and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature'. Wordsworth's response goes further than a claim merely that idiocy cannot be disgusting as it is part of the natural order of things; rather that idiocy can reveal higher than ordinary virtues.

---

<sup>12</sup> W Wordsworth and D Wordsworth, Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth 1787-1805 ed. by E de Selincourt, revised by C.L. Shaver, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) 352-8.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

I have often applied to Idiots . . . that sublime expression of scripture that "*their life is hidden with God*" (emphasis in original). They are worshipped . . . in several parts of the East. Among the Alps where they are numerous, they are considered, I believe as a blessing to the family to which they belong . . . It is there [in the lower classes] that we see the strength, disinterestedness and grandeur of love, nor have I ever been able to contemplate an object that calls out so many excellent and virtuous sentiments without . . . having something within me which bears down, like a deluge, every feeble sensation of disgust and aversion.'

In addition, however, to the robust and positive response to complaints that idiocy is not a proper subject, Wordsworth does reveal that he is not immune to the possibility of disgustingness. He is careful to point out that 'my Idiot is not one of those who cannot articulate and such as are usually disgusting in their persons' and that 'I have known several [idiots] who are handsome in their persons and features'.

This letter shows firstly the close connection intended between the fictional portrayal and the reality of everyday life. Secondly it reveals much about competing views of the time about intellectual impairment, as have been explored in previous chapters. Thirdly it suggests that the intellectually impaired were more often to be seen among the labouring country poor than among the gentry who were likely to keep such people secluded or even shut away. The negative feelings about the portrayal of an intellectually impaired person are not found in response to other works. It might be that they have not been preserved, but as against that as the main explanation is the existence to positive responses to Davie in Waverley. A feature that might be related to a negative response is that Johnny is the central character - but then Watty is a main character in The Entail. I would argue that there are two particular features of 'The Idiot Boy' that evoked (from some) negative feelings. First it is a poem, and people at the time expected obviously 'poetical' themes; secondly, there is no separation between Johnny and the other characters. At the end of the poem Betty's question to her son: 'Tell us Johnny, do/Where all this night you have been/What you have heard, what you have seen/And Johnny, mind you tell us true.'<sup>14</sup> is a question that might have been put in exactly those words to a 'normal' person. As will be seen, a characteristic of most of the portrayals in this chapter is that the impaired person lives a marginal and isolated life; while in Chapter 6 the impaired person has to be looked after by the 'normal' people. It as if, by showing

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

the comfortable togetherness of Johnny, Betty and Susan, 'The Idiot Boy' doesn't maintain a safe boundary between the impaired person and the 'normal' person.

Davie Gellatly in Scott's Waverley will be considered next. Davie is a kind of servant and appears from time to time in the novel. Edward Waverley, the central character, is a young well-to-do English gentleman serving as a Captain in the Hanoverian army, who seeks leave of absence to visit a family connection, the Baron of Bradwardine, in Tully-Veolan in the Scottish Lowlands. It is this connection that introduces Edward to the wild, heroic, feudal world of the Jacobite cause. Edward knocks on the door at Bradwardine, and as no-one answers he:

began to despair of gaining entrance to this solitary and seemingly enchanted mansion, when a man advanced up one of the garden alleys . . . [L]ong before he could descry his features, [Edward] was struck with the oddity of his appearance and gestures . . . [he waved his arms strangely, and] . . . His dress was antiquated and extravagant. It consisted in a short grey jerkin with scarlet cuffs and slashed sleeves . . . and a scarlet bonnet proudly mounted with a turkey's feather . . . It was apparently neither idiocy nor insanity which gave that wild, unsettled, irregular expression to a face which was naturally rather handsome.<sup>15</sup>

The strangely dressed man is Davie. Later, in spite of his odd appearance, he skilfully controls the hounds when the Baron goes hunting; and here we see Davie's connection with the natural, animal world, rather than the human and social world. Davie was one of two sons of a poor widow. The other son, now dead, had been intended for the church and had poetic gifts. The mother had been suspected of being a witch and some had supposed Davie's condition to be a punishment for her witchery; and that Davie had on one occasion saved the Laird's daughter, Rose, from a great danger. This act had created an obligation that the Laird felt for Davie and was one of the reasons why he was kept as a kind of servant.

Davie is in the background for most of Edward's Highland adventures, but he reappears near the end as the messenger and provisions carrier for the Baron (in hiding and fearing arrest because of a misunderstanding; and his last appearance is at the wedding of Edward and Rose Bradwardine. As the loyal and trustworthy, albeit eccentric and flawed, servant Davie is an emblem of the old-

---

<sup>15</sup> W. Scott, Waverley or 'Tis Sixty Years Since, ed. by C Lamont, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 37-8.

fashioned generosity of the Baron of Bradwardine who supports this unconventional follower. Davie is also an emblem of the old-fashioned Otherness and wildness of Scotland; his connection with the world of nature has already been noted. It seems then that Davie's function in Waverley is metaphorical rather than naturalistic. However, there is evidence both within and outside the novel that naturalism too was intended and was understood by readers.

Internal to the novel, as evidence for a naturalistic portrayal, there are attempts to explain what it was about Davie that was different from other people; he cannot just be accepted as quaint Scotch background, but must be accounted for. Three people try to do this in response to Edward's curiosity; the Baron's butler, the Baron and Rose Bradwardine. The butler describes him as 'more knave than fool' and as an 'innocent'.<sup>16</sup> The Baron 'gave [Edward] to understand, that this poor simpleton was neither fatuous, *nec naturaliter idiota* . . . but simply a crack-brained knave who could execute very well any commission which jumped with his own humour'<sup>17</sup>. Rose added that Davie was very fond of and deeply affected by music and song, for which he had a tenacious memory, and often used fragments of song as 'the vehicles of remonstrance, explanation or satire'; that he was 'much attached to the few who showed him kindness'; and that since becoming the Baron's protégé the village people had become jealous and accused him of being merely workshy. But Rose thought that 'he was in good earnest the half-crazed simpleton he appeared and was incapable of any . . . steady exertion . . . just so much solidity as kept on the windy side of insanity; so much wit as saved him from the imputation of idiocy . . . great kindness and humanity in the treatment of animals.'<sup>18</sup> In short, Davie is a puzzle. However, since Rose is presented as the most sympathetic and observant commentator on Davie, perhaps the reader can, like her, reject the workshy judgement. But this still leaves doubt as to whether Davie has an intellectual impairment, or a functional mental illness/instability.

The external evidence for Davie's portrayal being naturalistic comes from four sources; a letter of Scott's, a review of Tales of My Landlord, and two books giving accounts of living

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 39

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 54

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 54.



sources of Scott's fictional characters.<sup>19</sup> All say that 'fools' occupying similar social positions to Davie had been seen commonly at one time in Scotland, but that by the end of the eighteenth century they had largely vanished. This is consistent with Enid Welsford's analysis<sup>20</sup>, discussed in the Introduction that the 'fool' had had a long history of a place in great households but had come to be an anachronism by end of the eighteenth century. Chambers and Crockett also say that such people were to be found in the community in Scotland, often wandering from place to place in search of casual unskilled work and charity. The anonymous reviewer, Chambers and Crockett have a number of further reflections on the differences between the modern (nineteenth and early twentieth century) way of relating to the intellectually impaired and the old ways. Were the motives of a great householder who offered shelter essentially charitable? Did the addition of such people to a great entourage enhance the standing of the laird? Was real amusement derived from the sayings and antics of the 'fool'? The moral attitudes of these authors on the social change that they describe is ambivalent in some respects. The possibility that real entertainment was derived from the 'fools' is definitely seen as evidence of the coarseness of our ancestors, and the writers seem to be articulating the change in sensibilities in the direction of greater delicacy and refinement noted by Elias and discussed in the Introduction. They are worried that enclosing people in an institution may be more for the benefit of the non-impaired than the impaired - but on the other hand the impaired need protection from taunts and derision.

There are . . . no poor's (*sic*) rates in the country parishes of Scotland, and of course no workhouses . . . It [is almost necessary] that the house of the nearest proprietor of wealth . . . becomes a place of refuge . . . and until the pressure of the times, and the calculating habits which they have necessarily generated had rendered [supporting such a person] an object of some consideration, they usually found an asylum . . . [I]f there was a coarseness of mind in deriving amusement from the follies of these unfortunate beings, . . . their mode

---

<sup>19</sup> W.Scott, The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, 1808-1811, ed. H. Grierson (London: Constable, 1932), p. 34; 'Tales of My Landlord', Quarterly Review, 16 (1817), 430-488; R. Chambers, Illustrations of the Author of Waverley Being Notices and Anecdotes of Real Characters, Scenes and Incidents Supposed to be Described in the Works 3rd edition (London: W.R. Chambers, 1884). W.S Crockett, The Scott Originals: an account of notables and worthies the originals of characters in the Waverley novels (London & Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1912).

<sup>20</sup> E. Welsford, The Fool: his social and literary history (London: Faber & Faber, 1935).

of life was, in other respects, calculated to promote such a degree of happiness as their faculties permitted them to enjoy.<sup>21</sup>

Licensed fools were customary . . . at the Scottish court at a very early period . . . [when] the absence of more refined amusements made them . . . a necessary part of a baronial establishment. . . [Such persons in great houses more recently, that is contemporary with the fictional Davie] the encouragement given was rather extended out of a benevolent compassion . . . rather [than as] entertainment.<sup>22</sup>

Till within the last few years, these unfortunate persons were more frequently to be found in their respective villages throughout the country . . . Numerous charitable institutions now seclude most of them from the world. Yet, in many retired districts, where delicacy is not apt to be shocked by sights so common, the blind, the dumb and the insane are still permitted to mix . . . with their fellow creatures . . . [While poverty was an important consideration in keeping such children at home] superstition [made such a child rather the medium of] the blessing of heaven . . . than a burden.<sup>23</sup>

In days gone by there was not a town or country district but had its 'fool' or its 'innocent'. Conspicuous and pitiful figures on the village street . . . the butt of schoolboys and of older tormentors<sup>24</sup>

What is particularly interesting about these comments is that though they cover nearly a century, the 'present' for these writers paints always the same picture; there is more care in institutions, less freedom, but there is protection from taunts - and perhaps protection for the 'normal' from any affront to their over-delicacy. In fact, when the anonymous reviewer wrote in 1817 there was very little institutional provision, none of it specialised, though by 1912 there had been considerable development of idiot asylums.

Barnaby Rudge (1841) will be examined now because of similarities between the portrayals of Davie and Barnaby, although Annals of the Parish comes next chronologically. Barnaby's impairment, like Davie's has a supernatural cause, punishment for a crime of his father's: 'they could call to mind that when [Mrs Rudge's] son was born, upon the very day the deed was known,

---

<sup>21</sup> 'Tales of my Landlord', *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Chambers, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Crockett, *op. cit.*, p 31.

he bore upon his wrist what seemed a smear of blood.<sup>25</sup> Although Barnaby is in name the central character in the novel, he is worked upon by others than being an agent in his destiny. Like Davie he has a quaint and eccentric appearance, and he has a similar kinship with nature and animals rather than humans:

His hair, of which he had a great profusion, was red, and hanging in disorder about his face and shoulders, gave to his restless looks an expression quite unearthly. . . Startling as his aspect was, his features were good. . . His dress was of green, clumsily trimmed here and there . . . with gaudy lace . . . He had ornamented his hat with a cluster of peacock's feathers, but they were torn and broken. . .<sup>25</sup>

With two or three of these [stray dogs] . . . at his heels, he would sally forth on some long expedition which consumed the day; and though [the dogs would be exhausted] barnaby was up and off again at sunrise . . . On all these travel, Grip, [pet raven] in his little basket on his master's back was a constant [companion]. [On these excursions] Barnaby's enjoyments were, to walk, to run, to leap . . . then to lie down in the long grass. . .<sup>26</sup>

Like Davie too his language is eccentric rather than appearing limited by any cognitive impediment. Mr Varden, noticing Barnaby outside by his shadow, elicits the following:

'Oho! . . . He's a merry fellow that shadow, and keeps close to me, though I am silly. We have such pranks, such walks, such gambols on the grass! Sometimes he'll be half as tall as a church steeple, and sometimes no bigger than a dwarf. . .<sup>27</sup>

Despite occasional hints that there is something bad about him - for example his mother notices 'the little tokens he had given in his childish way - not of dulness but of something infinitely worse, so ghastly and unchild-like in its cunning<sup>28</sup> - this badness is not exemplified in his behaviour. His meaning in the novel is mostly as (2) symbol of innocence and (3) an expression of otherness and mystery, the latter shown by his kinship with nature rather than the human and everyday world. The plot hinges on his innocence. Drawn into the Gordon riots of the 1780s by others, he doesn't

---

<sup>25</sup> C. Dickens, Barnaby Rudge (London: Educational Book Company, 1910), p. 42.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 345

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 191-2.

understand what is going on and is not to be blamed for his role in social disorder. In so far as he has a limited moral nature it inclines naturally to good. For example at one point his love and respect for his mother is contrasted with the hangman's attitude to mothers:

'Where can she be? [Barnaby speaking of his mother] . . . what do I care to be gay and fine if she's not by?' [Dennis the hangman roughly enquires who is being talked of and says:] 'And have I combined myself with this here section . . . to hear men talk about their mothers! . . . his disgust was so extreme that he spat upon the ground, and could say no more.'<sup>29</sup>

Barnaby strikes the reader as a stereotyped figure; he is the archetypal fool. It is noteworthy that the novel is set in the eighteenth century, a period in which 'the fool', as evidenced by the Waverley and the commentaries on Scott's characters, seems a more characteristic figure than the nineteenth century idiot or imbecile.

Galt is the other Scottish novelist to be considered here, and like Scott, writes in the early nineteenth century. His portrayal of intellectual impairment has some affinities with Scott's, though the subject matter overall is very different, Scott writing of exciting adventures of the upper classes while Galt treats of small town life of ordinary folk in the lowlands. John Galt, 1779 - 1839, was the eldest son of a shipmaster and merchant. He started working life as a clerk in a custom house, but early showed literary interests; and he mixed business, adventure and literature for the rest of his life<sup>30</sup>. The two novels that contain portrayals of intellectually impaired people with Annals of the Parish and The Entail. The latter is notable in having an intellectually impaired person has a central character, in fact, not just in name like Barnaby. Annals of the Parish, subtitled The Chronicle of Dalmailing, is an account of everyday life in a fictional small town between the years 1760 and 1810, as seen through the eyes of Mr Balwhidder the narrator and Parish minister. It recounts everyday events and the process of social change with comments on some wider issues, mainly as they affect the Parish. The question of whether a work is realistic or naturalistic is not settled by knowledge of the author's intention, but it is important to note that Galt wanted his fiction to be

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>30</sup> I.A. Gordon, 'Introduction' to J. Galt, The Entail or The Lairds of Grippy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

regarded not as 'novels' but as 'theoretical history'<sup>31</sup>. Many of his readers found Annals compellingly lifelike, and a reviewer in 1821 wanted 'the faithful annals' to be added as an appendix to the Statistical Account of Scotland<sup>32</sup>.

The intellectually impaired characters in Annals are Jenny Guffaw and her daughter Meg who live in a small cottage and are dependent on the Parish or on private charity (one supposes, since their economic circumstances are not made plain). They are comic versions of Davie and Barnaby and they provide amusement (5 of the possible meanings listed at the start of the chapter) to the people of the village, principally by subverting accepted hierarchies - as it is a fool's role to do. One of their appearances is when a Lady Macadam, rebuffed in a request to another lady for a mantle pattern, obtains the pattern by underhand means. She then has two copies made up, but 'garnished . . . in a flagrant, fool way', and has no difficulty in persuading Jenny and Meg to wear these to church, where the attention of the congregation is distracted by 'the two vain haverels . . . setting right their finery . . . while every eye in the kirk was now on them, and now on [the mean refuser of the pattern]'<sup>33</sup>. Their next appearance also has the effect of mocking their superiors, though this time it is sober respectability rather than vanity that is the butt. The people of Dalmailing are alarmed by a late night flare of light, which they take to be a burning building, But it turns out to be Jenny and Meg dancing wildly outside their cottage in a blaze of candlelight, celebrating the defeat of the 'Popish bill'. The correctness of their religious sentiments are vitiated to a considerable degree in Mr Balwhidder's eyes by the 'ill-timed demonstration of the two irremedial naturals, that had not a true conception of the cause for which they were triumphing'<sup>34</sup>.

---

<sup>31</sup> M. Drabble, ed. Oxford Companion to English Literature New Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). Entry on Galt.

<sup>32</sup> J. Kinsley, 'Introduction' to J. Galt, Annals of the Parish or the Chronicle of Dalmailing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) p.ix. A discussion of the question of realism in Annals is found in C. Whatley 'Annals of the Parish and History' in C. Whatley (ed), John Galt, 1779 - 1979 (Edinburgh: Ramsey Head Press, 1979).

<sup>33</sup> J. Galt, Annals of the Parish or the Chronicle of Dalmailing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.77.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.103.

The next appearance of Meg (after her mother has died) is one that reveals her having mysterious access to a greater truth than ordinary folk. Mr Balwhidder learns of Jenny's death, and that Meg laid out the body 'in a wonderful decent manner with a plate of earth and salt upon it - an admonitory type of mortality and eternal life that has unadvisedly gone out of fashion'. When he goes to see her he comments that she made 'the solemnity of death, by her strange mockery, a kind of merriment, that was more painful than sorrow; but that some spirits are gifted with a faculty of observation, that . . . enables them to make a wonderful truth-like semblance of things they never saw . . .'<sup>35</sup> Meg's final appearance is when a Mr Henry Melcombe, a young English gentleman, visits his uncle in Dalmailing. Henry is friendly towards Meg in a way she evidently isn't used to, handing her 'over the kirk-stile like a lady of high degree' and she falls in love with him. She becomes ever more eccentric in her efforts to win him, and 'kithed in such a variety of cuffs and ruffles, feathers . . . furs and laces, and went about gecking and simpering . . . that it was not in the power of nature to look at her with sobriety'. But Mr Melcombe's friendliness was just that; he was in fact engaged to his cousin and his marriage precipitated Meg's becoming completely unhinged and committing suicide<sup>36</sup>.

If one relates the picture of Jenny and Meg to the various meanings associated with intellectual impairment set out early in the chapter it is evident that three are dominant. These are (5) source of amusement to a superior person, (2) symbol of innocence to contrast with the over civilized and (2) embodiment of Otherness and source of transcendence and 'truer' meaning. In all their appearances Jenny and Meg's simpleness and eccentricity provide amusement for the rest of the folk in Dalmailing. They have a role as innocents (2) though they are not so much contrasted with the overcivilized (as no resident of Dalmailing would come into that category) as with the dishonesties of the world (Lady Macadam and Henry Melcombe). Henry is the unintentional cause of Meg's death. It is interesting that he is an outsider, an Englishman. He has not intended to mislead Meg; but the implication is that he was ignorant of the ways of Dalmailing, failed to understand its delicate social balance, and by treating Meg as an equal, whether from genuine kindness or in part mockery, he was doing her a profound disservice. The Otherness (2) that Jenny and Meg display

---

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 157-62.

has something of that noted in the discussion of Davie Gellatly and Scottish 'fools'; of freedom from restricting conventions and from the responsibilities of both bourgeois and labouring life. A final observation about Meg is that, like Davie Gellatly and Barnaby her language is poetic and elegant:

'The worm - the worm is my bonny bridegroom . . . The mill-dam water's the wine o' the wedding, and the day and the clod shall be my bedding. A lang night is meet for a bridal, but none shall be langer than mine.'<sup>37</sup>

Davie, Barnaby, Meg and Jenny share several characteristics, which are more those of the fool than the idiot. They live physically and socially on the margins of society, detached from other people; they do not behave like ordinary people, and while Jenny and Meg make some attempt at normality (going to church) they only achieve a caricatured semblance of it. They all have abilities that 'normal' people don't have - control over animals (Davie and Barnaby), instinctive understanding of death (Meg). Their language is eccentric, but poetic and strange rather than deficient. Though eccentric and wild looking, none embarrasses by physical deformity, indeed Davie and Barnaby are rather handsome than otherwise:

. . . that wild, unsettled, irregular expression to a face which was naturally rather handsome.<sup>38</sup>

Startling as his aspect was, his features were good.<sup>39</sup>

It is interesting that these four characters impose no additional obligations on their communities since they manage, albeit eccentrically, without help in everyday matters. For Davie and for Meg and Jenny it could be said that they render more service than they receive, Davie in a number of services to the Baron, and Meg and Jenny in the amusement they provide.

The Entail is described by Costain as Galt's most successful novel.<sup>40</sup> It contains the most complex portrayal of intellectual impairment, in the character of Walter (Watty) Walkinshaw of any of the works considered in the chapter; it is essentially in the fool model, but its complexity makes it

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>38</sup> Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-8.

<sup>39</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby*, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>40</sup> J. Costain, 'Mind-Forg'd Manacles: John Galt's The Entail as romantic tragi-comedy' in C. Whatley, ed., John Galt, 1779 - 1979 (Edinburgh: Ramsey Head Press, 1979), p. 164.

rather different from the preceding portrayals. Watty's is unique among the portrayals examined in this chapter and the next in that the reader sees the world from Watty's point of view. However, he is not presented as an internally reflecting character, with full interiority, to use David Lodge's word<sup>41</sup>, as are some others in this novel. Nonetheless enough detail is given of Watty's concerns to reveal him and his interests as real to him rather than as merely impinging on the lives of other, more important characters, or largely as emblematic of qualities and values (as Davie Gellatly is of free innocence) - though Watty does have a symbolic function as well.

The Entail, set in a rural community near Glasgow at the end of the eighteenth century, is about the evil consequences of avarice and the neglect of human relationships as revealed through the action of its principal character, Claud Walkinshaw (*Watty's father*). Claud's grandfather lost the family estate in a business venture before Claud was born, and the novel centres round Claud's determination to restore and augment the family property. Successful in business he marries a young woman of no education but from a landed family, and then manages to buy back part of the lost estate, Grippy. There are four children of the marriage, Charles (honest and good), Walter (Watty, the 'haverel'), Meg (somewhat avaricious) and George (an unpleasant replica of Claud). Having no sons, Claud's father-in-law offers to make Charles his heir, but because of a disagreement over whether Charles would be expected to take his mother's family name, the estate is settled on Walter. Some time later, in his determination to keep the family land together, and partly also because he is angry with Charles over his marriage to a woman with no expectations, Claude decides to settle his own estate, Grippy, on Walter and his male descendants, and does so, secretly, despite the advice of the honest lawyer, Mr Keelevin.

From the moment when Claud executes the entail things go wrong. Watty's wife, Betty Bodle, dies following the birth of a daughter (so frustrating Claude of his male heirs) and soon after this the daughter dies. This double tragedy marks a downturn in Watty's ability to present himself as a credible person - or, more accurately, as someone that others are willing to accept as credible; at no time in the novel does anyone (with the possible exception of his mother) believe Watty to be truly *compos mentis*. He refuses to acknowledge his wife's death, or to go to the funeral, instead

---

<sup>41</sup> D. Lodge, 'Ambiguously Ever After' in D. Lodge, Working with Structuralism: essays and reviews on nineteenth and twentieth century literature (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 155.



transferring his affections to the baby, whom he regarded as a sort of reincarnation of his wife. Meanwhile Charles, who has financial worries following the estrangement over his marriage, suddenly learns of the condition of the entail, rushes out, distraught, in a storm, becomes ill and dies in a conveniently nineteenth century manner leaving widow and children penniless. Claud then becomes withdrawn and ill but is persuaded by the honest lawyer to rouse himself to make provision for his daughter-in-law and her children. Just in the nick of time it seems, as he is paralysed by a stroke and near death; but Girzy (wife) assuming he intends to disinherit Watty, refuses to fetch pen and ink so he can sign a document and while she is protesting, Claud expires.

Charles's widow and children are taken in by Watty who now supposes that his niece is his 'Betty Bodle'. But George now proceeds to take over his father's role as the avaricious schemer and persuades Girzy to concur in proceedings to have Watty declared *non compos mentis*. Girzy and Watty suffer greatly from this, since Watty is no longer in nominal charge of the estate, but is provided with a meagre allowance that allows him and Girzy to eke out a living in two rooms in Glasgow. George, however, does not benefit as he expected, since the estate is to be kept in trust for Watty in case he should cease to be a 'haverel'. All looks hopeless for the good guys; Watty sickens and dies; Girzy then looks like to lose even the miserable allowance. But Girzy's understanding is stimulated by George's duplicity; she outwits George's lawyers and succeeds in getting recognition that the terms of Claud's entail were legally unsound all along, and that Charles's son is the rightful heir.

The moral framework, or rather the two overlapping moral frameworks, of the The Entail are centred on Watty. There is the rational, conscious morality (that can be good or bad) of the majority of the characters. In the good version, business is conducted honestly and openly and due regard is paid to others' interests - Charles, the honest lawyer Mr Keelevin. In the bad version all is done secretly and selfishly - Claud and his third son George. There is also a second moral framework of which Watty is the centre, a holistic and largely unconscious morality that transcends the solely human. In this morality the values of the old ways of the countryside and even nature itself are goods, embodied not only in Watty, but also in his mother, and indeed several other characters. The two moralities are not shut off from one another and most of the good characters have elements of the natural morality in their makeup. Mr Keelevin is acknowledging this in his

reproving remark to Claud when the latter consults him about the entail: 'It's no right o' you to exercise your authority ower Watty; the lad's in no state to be called on to implement ony such agreement . . . He should na be meddled wi', but just left to wear out his time in the world, as little observed as possible' (emphasis added).<sup>42</sup> This morality of tolerant acceptance contrasts with George's meddling to have Watty declared *non compos mentis* and its evil consequences for Watty. Claude, in secretly executing the entail is motivated only by the bad version of the rational morality. It was not concern for Watty that led him to entail the property on his second son but simply that he wanted to augment the estate (without regard it seems for benefit to any person), indeed he often shows dislike and contempt for Watty:

' . . . is't no an afflicting things to see a brow property as the Plealands [Girzy's father's estate] destined to . . . a haveral?'<sup>43</sup>, or  
'T'ou' a born idiot,' said the father; 'wilt t'ou no do as t'ou's bidden?' [to Watty reluctant to witness the entail]<sup>44</sup>.

In contrast to Claud and George, the family that Charles's son marries into, the Eadies, embodies both kinds of morality, though particularly the natural one:

'The amusements, also, at Camrackle [the Eadies' home] were more propitious to the growth of affection than those at Kittlestoneheugh, where everything was methodized into a system, and where . . . the genius of design and purpose controlled and repressed nature. The lawn was preserved in a state of neatness too trim for the gambols of childhood; and the walks were too winding for the straightforward impulses of freedom and joy'<sup>45</sup>.

Though the good characters mostly show both rational and natural virtue, even the excellent Charles slips up slightly on natural virtue:

[Watty]'s a weel-tempered laddie, liling at the door cheek frae morning to night, when Charlie's rampaging about the farm, riving his claes on bush and brier, . . . tormenting the birds. . .<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Galt, *The Entail*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24-25.

A crucial series of events in the novel hinge round Watty's actions following the death of his wife and then his baby daughter. Watty reacts with feeling, love, and an instinctive sense for the continuation of life. But his feelings are expressed in so unorthodox a way, that, paradoxically, their expression provides George with the opportunity to have Watty declared *non compos mentis*. When his wife, Betty Bodle, dies in childbirth, Watty's immediately transfers all his affection and tenderness to the baby, refuses to acknowledge Betty's death or to go to the funeral, and sees the baby as a kind of reincarnation of his wife. On the morning of Betty's funeral Claud' goes to the room where Watty is tending the baby (ignoring the forms and proprieties of mourning and gender stereotypes) and says:

'What's t'ou doing there like a hussy fellow?' said he. 'Rise and get on they mournings . . . and leave the bairn to the women.'

'It's my bairn,' replied Watty, ' . . . Will I no tak' care o' my ain baby - my bonny wee Betty Bodle?'

. . . 'Get up, I say, and put on thy mournings or I'll have thee cognost and sent to bedlam.'

'I'm sure I look for nae more at thy hands, father,' replied Walter simply; 'for my mither has often telt me, when ye hae been sitting sour and sulky in the nook, that ye would na begrudge crowns and pounds to mak me *compos mentis* for the benefit of Charlie.'<sup>47</sup>

When the baby dies Watty's delusion about identities continues as he takes in Charles's fatherless children because he thinks now that the girl is Betty Bodle. At the trial cooked up by George to test Watty's mental capacity it is this delusional love that convinces the court of his fatuity. Thus he is declared *non compos mentis* for something more akin to mental illness than intellectual impairment.

Though Watty differs from the other fool model characters in being embedded in a family and community rather than existing on the margins of society, but he is like them in some important respects. He courted Betty Bodle and arranged himself their rather eccentric wedding. He is also, like Davie and Barnaby, well grown and good looking. His condition is on a borderline between intellectual impairment, madness or eccentricity and he needs no looking after in everyday matters.

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-8.

## Chapter 5

### INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENT IN IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE (ii): THE IDIOT

The characters to be discussed here are Smike in Nicholas Nickleby, the twins in Gaskell's Mary Barton and her 'Half a Lifetime Ago', Marie in Villette, Maggy in Little Dorrit and Christian Cantle in Return of the Native. Of these the first and last are slightly out of the definitive idiot mode, in which intellectual impairment is clearly distinguished from madness, and where the impairment has a biological aetiology - for Willie and Maggy the damage followed a childhood illness, and Marie is a cretin. Though the link between lack of iodine and the malfunction of the thyroid gland was unknown at the time, hypothyroidism was understood to be environmentally influenced.<sup>48</sup> Smike's condition has a social origin and results from his terrible experiences at Dotheboys Hall. He fits better in the idiot than the fool group because the impairment has a material cause, though social not organic, and because he is not mad, or even eccentric. The source of Smike's impairment is revealed when Nicholas tries to find out something about his background and history:

'Let me ask you a question . . . [said Nicholas] 'Have you a good memory?'

'I don't know . . . I think I had one once, but it's all gone now.'

'Why do you think you had one once?'

'Because I could remember when I was child, ... but that is all very, very long ago.'

'Think no more of that place, for it is all over,' retorted Nicholas, fixing his eye upon his companion which was fast settling into an unmeaning, stupefied gaze, one habitual to him, and common even then.<sup>49</sup>

There may be a connection between the social aetiology of Smike's difficulties and the fact that he is the most vividly characterised of all the characters considered in this and the previous chapter. Like someone who has gone mad, he can perhaps when restored to a humane environment and his proper social class (he is discovered to be a gentleman's son) recover his wits. The middle class reader is not obliged to make the uncomfortable struggle to enter into the feelings of someone remote not only by social class, but by bodily condition. However, unlike Oliver Twist who is similarly a gentleman deprived of his true due (but who mysteriously never showed any mental signs of his degradation so his rehabilitation as a gentleman needed no psychic recovery) Smike

---

<sup>48</sup> R.C. Scheerenberger, A History of Mental Retardation (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes, 1983), p. 71.

<sup>49</sup> C. Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby (London: The Educational Book Co. Ltd., 1910) pp. 275-90.

never takes up his rightful place in society but fades away and dies. Natalie McKnight in Idiots, Madmen and other Prisoners in Dickens<sup>50</sup> (wherein no distinction is made between intellectual impairment and madness) argues when Smike first escapes from Dotheboys Hall and joins Crummles's circus he thrives in that non-bourgeois and marginal world. But when he enters bourgeois society he 'begins to fade'<sup>51</sup>, and the Nickleby home functions like Pinel's and Tukes's moral treatment for the insane making him self-conscious and ashamed.<sup>52</sup> This is an ingenious point, but hard to sustain against the simpler explanation, that Smike's degradation and *déclassement* was simply too great for rehabilitation so he has to die.

In Mary Barton the intellectually impaired characters are infants, the twin sons of the Wilsons, friends of the Barton family. The novel is about working class life, in Manchester in the 1840s; John Barton is a mill worker and trade unionist. The twins have a tiny role in the novel when they become ill and die. The authorial comment is:

They had never been strong. . . and seemed to have but one life divided between them. One life, one strength, and in this instance, I might almost say, one brain; for they were helpless, gentle, silly children, but not the less dear to their parents . . . They were late on their feet, late in talking, late in every way; had to be nursed and cared for when other lads of their age were tumbling about in the street . . .

Still want had never yet come in at the door to make love for these innocents fly out at the window. Nor was this the case now, when Jem Wilson's earnings, and his mother's occasional charrings were barely sufficient to give all the family their fill of food<sup>53</sup> .

If one read only Mary Barton of Gaskell's oeuvre one might take her view to be that the deaths *ought* not to be regarded as a blessing in disguise, and that it is possible to do so is an indictment of a system that might make decent parents thankful for the death of a disabled child. However, taken in conjunction with 'Half a Lifetime Ago' it seems more likely that the message in Mary Barton is that the author knows better than the Wilsons that death is anyway the best outcome.

---

<sup>50</sup> N. McKnight, Idiots, Madmen and other Prisoners in Dickens, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>53</sup> E. Gaskell, Mary Barton (Letchworth: Everyman/Dent, 1967), p.69.

'Half a Lifetime Ago' is the only really pessimistic picture in these works of life with an intellectually impaired person. Susan Dixon, daughter and heir of a prosperous farmer, makes a promise to her dying mother that she will always look after her little brother, Willie, at the time merely a delicate child. He then contracts a fever and although his bodily strength returns his understanding is damaged. 'His appetite was something enormous, but his eyes wandered continually . . . his speech became slow and incoherent'.<sup>54</sup> Susan's suitor, Michael, repelled by Willie's 'uncouth gestures, his loose shambling gait'<sup>55</sup> offers her a choice, either send Willie to the Lancaster asylum or the marriage is off. Susan makes the morally correct choice to care for her brother, and Michael marries another. Susan lives a lonely and isolated life with Willie for many years, until at last he dies. By this time Michael too has died and his widow and children are living in poverty. On an impulse Susan takes the impoverished family to live with her, and the rest of her life is lived with 'normal' people to love and to love her. 'Half a Lifetime Ago' was a reworking of 'Martha Preston' which appeared in 1850 in the American Sartain's Union Magazine.<sup>56</sup> The story is substantially the same as the later version, but according to Sharps, is written as if recounting real events. This may be a literary device, but Sharps thinks it more likely that the story was based on fact - or at least local legend - which Gaskell was more open about in the American version where identification of the real people was unlikely.<sup>57</sup>

Marie Broc in Villette has a brief role in the novel about Lucy Snow's life of isolation as a pupil teacher at a Belgian boarding school. Marie is spoken about but never appears; nonetheless her role is important, and different from that played by any other character with intellectual impairment discussed in these chapters. Marie is mentioned apropos the long vacation when Lucy is left alone - or nearly alone - in the school: 'the house was left quite empty, but for me, a servant, and a poor deformed and imbecile pupil, a sort of crétin whom her stepmother . . . would not allow to return

---

<sup>54</sup> E. Gaskell, 'Half a Lifetime Ago', in The Cage at Cranford and Other Stories (London: Nelson, 1935), p. 195.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>56</sup> J. Sharps, Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention: a study of her non-biographic works (Fontwell, Sussex: Linden Press, 1970), pp. 87-100.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

home<sup>58</sup>. This vacation is the lowest point of Lucy's stay in Belgium: 'How vast and void seemed the desolate premises! . . . I hardly knew how I was to live to the end [of the vacation] . . . A sorrowful indifference to existence often pressed on me<sup>59</sup>'. The cretin is an emblem of Lucy's misery and isolation and her condition parallels Lucy's - she too is abandoned and shunned - though unlike Lucy she seems unaware of her loneliness: 'I did my best to feed her and keep her warm, and she only asked food and sunshine<sup>60</sup>'. Tony Tanner suggests that as Lucy's state approaches madness and loss of mind, so the cretin's different kind of lack of mind 'serves to offer an extreme image of what she could degenerate into<sup>61</sup>.' Unlike the other works considered in this chapter *Villette* is about an individual's (Lucy's) mental life rather than about a naturalistic social milieu, and Marie's existence is to reveal aspects of Lucy rather than to tell the reader anything about intellectual impairment; she symbolises (4) of the list of possible meanings for impairment - fear of one's own dissolution. Marie is also a pivot on which moral issues for Lucy turn; but there is no simple message of Lucy showing her goodness, or Marie showing intuition of the meaning of life.

Both Lucy and the Marie are saved from the deserted school; Lucy is rescued by the Brettons (a mother and son Lucy knows) and the cretin by a kindly aunt. Later Lucy meets M. Paul Emmanuel, a teacher at the school, and Lucy's only friend there, at an art gallery. He enquires after Lucy's health and how she spent the vacation, and on learning this asks 'How did you get on with Marie Broc?<sup>62</sup>'. Although it is in fact Lucy who first mentions the cretin's name, it is illuminating that it is not used until this meeting with M. Paul. It is as if it is his humanizing presence that allows 'the cretin' to have a name. His brusque and teasing though kindly manner makes it plain that he thinks Lucy's reply of: '. . . it was terrible to be alone with her<sup>63</sup>' egotistical and self-pitying. At first sight it can seem as if Marie exists only as a metaphor for Lucy's state of mind in the manner

---

<sup>58</sup> C. Brontë, *Villette*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 226.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Introduction' p 36.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

complained of by Susan Sontag<sup>64</sup> but M. Paul's comments give her a more solid existence. It is Lucy who, initially, wished to see Marie merely as a metaphor or an encumbrance, and it is M. Paul who reveals her humanity. In some respects Marie is less an Other than any of the intellectually impaired characters considered here. The implied parallel between her and Lucy's lives - isolation and mental infirmity - draws Marie into a world where she is to be understood as anyone else, not as a special category of person. M. Paul's rebuke to Lucy and what we learn of his manner to Marie - far from perfect, but that is no different from his manner to everyone - adds to the humanizing influence. Alone among the characters with intellectual impairment discussed in these two chapters (if Smike is excluded on the grounds that his impairment is socially constructed and potentially at least remediable) Marie is middle class; she must be, since the school is a private one. Thus the closeness of her and her mental condition to Lucy are emphasised by the similarity of their social status.

Maggy, in Dickens's Little Dorrit, (1855-7) developed normally for the first ten years of her life but then became seriously ill with a fever and was admitted to hospital. Following her illness her development was arrested and she remained ever after like a ten year-old child. Maggy is simple through and through. She has no special insight or access to mysteries of nature. She has a degree of clumsiness which can be readily understood to be a result of damage to the nervous system, and doesn't display the tireless capers of Davie, Barnaby, Meg and Jenny. Unlike these characters with their complex, if eccentric powers of expression, Maggy's utterances are simple and sometimes defectively structured. When she is first introduced into the story the reader at once learns everything that there is to be known about Maggy, her physical appearance and manner, her understanding, her history and her moral nature:

. . . a voice cried, 'Little mother, little mother!' Little Dorrit stopping and looking back, an excited figure of a strange kind bounced against them . . . fell down, and scattered the contents of a large basket, filled with potatoes, in the mud.

. . . Maggy was not hurt, but picked herself up immediately, and then began to pick up the potatoes, in which both Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam helped. Maggy picked up very few potatoes, and a great quantity of mud . . .

---

<sup>64</sup> Sontag, *op. cit.*



She was about eight-and-twenty, [Little Dorrit is twenty-one] with large bones, large features, large feet and hands, and no hair [its absence somewhat disguised by] . . . a great white cap, with a quantity of opaque frilling . . . <sup>65</sup>

Little Dorrit introduces Maggy to Arthur:

'This is Maggy, sir.'

'Maggy, sir,' echoed the personage presented, 'Little mother!' . . . [Little Dorrit explains that she is the grand-daughter of Little Dorrit's deceased nurse.]

'You can't think how good she is, sir,' said Little Dorrit, with infinite tenderness.

'Good *she* is,' echoed Maggy, transferring the pronoun in a most expressive way from herself, to her little mother. <sup>66</sup>

This then is Maggy, and at once the reader learns nearly everything there is to be known about her; her odd physical appearance, her defective understanding, her need for help in everyday life, her history and, perhaps most of all, her good nature and readiness to be helpful. She makes irregular appearances in the novel, looked after by Little Dorrit and trying to be helpful. When Little Dorrit's fortunes change and she is restored to her 'proper' social class and marries Arthur Clennam, Maggy goes to be cared for by a kindly but humble family.

Maggy's main role in the novel relates to the exposition of morality; but she isn't merely a passive foil to display Little Dorrit's generous care for her (though of course Little Dorrit does display virtue). Maggy has an active role in revealing the moral contrasts in the novel. Little Dorrit is surrounded by people who are weak, self-deceiving and dependent on her - of whom the weakest is her father. He allows his daughter to work as a seamstress to keep him in gentility, yet is unable to admit that she works to support him or to evince gratitude for her care. Maggy is a complete contrast; she is ever open, friendly and grateful to Little Dorrit for care she clearly needs, while Mr Dorrit is distant and ungrateful for care that he only 'needs' because of his moral failings. When she can Maggy provides simple practical help for Little Dorrit. Her basket (out of which the potatoes fell) is always with her as evidence of willingness to be useful. Maggy's practical help may not amount to much, but her affection is a different matter. Little Dorrit's brother and sister as well as her father, are cold and unloving, as well as 'needing' her help. Maggy's love is generously given,

---

<sup>65</sup> C. Dickens, Little Dorrit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 85.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

and for much of the novel she provides all the affection that Little Dorrit gets (there is Arthur Clennam, but things only go right with him at the end of the story). Sometimes Maggy is just comfortably present,<sup>67</sup> but she is occasionally more active, as when Little Dorrit was distressed, so Maggy 'tenderly embraced her [and] . . . bathed her forehead and eyes with cold water.'<sup>68</sup>

In Hardy's The Return of the Native (1878) the intellectually impaired character is Christian Cantle. He is one of the heath folk, untravelled simple people who make a living directly from the natural products of the Heath. Their role is in part to comment on the doings of the important characters, but it is more than this, as they 'are actively involved in the movement of chance and coincidence that propels the action'.<sup>69</sup> Christian is perhaps borderline as to whether he should be considered to have an intellectual impairment, and certainly no categorising terminology is ever used of him. However he is differentiated from the other Heath folk, and they seem to regard him as in need of special care:

'Whatever is Christian Cantle's teeth a-chattering for?' said a boy from . . . the other side of the blaze. 'Be ye a-cold, Christian?'

A thin jibbering voice was heard to reply, 'No, not at all.'

Come forward, Christian, and show yourself . . .' said Fairway, with a humane look

...

Thus requested, a faltering man, with reedy hair, no shoulders and a great quantity of wrist and ankle beyond his clothes, advanced a step or two . . . and was pushed by . . . others half a dozen steps more<sup>70</sup>.

Christian is in fact shaking with fear, not cold. His most defining characteristic is his timorousness; afraid, in this instance, that no woman will marry him, afraid to take part in everyday activities, such as dancing, and afraid, most of all, of the Heath itself.

Christian has some affinities with portrayals seen before, such as Davie Gellatly or Barnaby Rudge. Like Davie he is employed as a messenger by more important characters; like both he is

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 394, 849.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>69</sup> G. Woodcock, 'Introduction' to T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 25 - 6.

<sup>70</sup> T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 75.

associated with the natural world. But unlike Davie and Barnaby he is not a solitary figure; instead he is clearly a part of the society of Heath folk, and is so regarded by them. Like Davie and Barnaby, Christian is closely tied to the world of nature (the Heath); however, this is not a solitary and weird affinity but something shared with the other Heath folk - and indeed with all the characters in the novel. In fact, unlike all the other characters in Return, though Christian may be close to nature, he is not at ease with nature and frequently expresses fear of the Heath<sup>71</sup>. It is true that his fear is not of the Heath itself, but of supernatural forces that he fears are abroad on the Heath; but the other characters are comfortably matter-of-fact about their surroundings<sup>72</sup>.

Christian has some importance in the plot, notably as a bearer of information. It is he who tells Mrs Yeobright (mother of Clym, the central character) about the opening of a barrow and inadvertently reveals that Clym had given one of the finds to Eustacia rather than his mother<sup>73</sup>. His most important intervention in the plot is when Mrs Yeobright entrusts him with money to take to Clym; she entrusts him with it because she thinks him innocently honest. He is certainly honest, but his innocence, in another sense of the word, leads to the gambling loss of the whole 100 guineas to Wildeve<sup>74</sup>. This allows another turn of the plot to take place - and a further exposition of the moral landscape - as the strange figure of Diggory Venn, a quasi-supernatural moral agent in the novel, intervenes and wins all the money back (amazing luck!)<sup>75</sup> so it can be restored to its rightful owner. In his links with a non-rational world of fate and nature Christian really has more affinity with the fool model portrayals of intellectual impairment that were examined in the previous chapter.

Chapters 4 and 5 suggest that before 1845 portrayals of intellectual impairment were based on the literary and folkloric image of the fool, and that after 1845, informed by the propaganda about

---

<sup>71</sup> Return, pp 77, 249.

<sup>72</sup> Woodcock, in the 'Introduction ' indicates (p. 28) that originally Hardy thought to have more of the supernatural in Return, with Eustacia a sorceress rather than the romantic wrongly suspected of witchcraft. Whether this might have given more shape to Christian's vague fears can only be a matter for speculation.

<sup>73</sup> Hardy, op. cit., p. 249.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

idiot education, the portrayals were based on the notion of the idiot - intellectual deficiency by itself as the defining characteristic. There are some difficulties with this argument. Wordsworth had an idiot rather than a fool in 'The Idiot Boy' before the nineteenth century had started. But, as Jonathan Andrews's work, among other sources, makes plain, it was not that there was no lay notion of an idiot before 1845, but that an idiot *tout court* wasn't a nice literary subject. What of a claim that Dickens, Gaskell and Brontë had been influenced by the 1840s and 50s propaganda? As far as Dickens goes, it is not a question of whether he was *influenced* by the idiot education propaganda - he was part of it, publishing articles, visiting and praising Earlswood Asylum, as Chapter 3 shows. Brontë and Gaskell must have known about the new developments. Charlotte Brontë knew Dickens, Kay-Shuttleworth and Harriet Martineau. She stayed with the latter two at different times in 1850, and while at Martineau's listened to her reading the proofs of her debates with the philosopher, Atkinson, Laws of Man's Nature and Development,<sup>76</sup> which includes a section on idiots. Gaskell was part of the same circle; friend and biographer of Charlotte Brontë, she stayed with the Kay-Shuttleworths on the same occasion as Brontë.<sup>77</sup> Dickens was a sympathetic editor and publisher of many of her shorter works in Household Words, including 'Half a Lifetime Ago'.<sup>78</sup>

Though it seems reasonably certain that Gaskell and Brontë as well as Dickens were acquainted with the new ideas about idiot education, each brings different ideas about idiocy to their literary creations. Dickens has the fullest and most sympathetic portrayal of idiocy in the character of Maggy who is not merely a stereotype, but confronts the reader as a real person, who in this reader at least, evokes the sympathy of affection and liking, not just that of 'feeling sorry for'. It will also be noticed that Dickens uses no word to label (and perhaps stigmatise) Maggy's condition. Brontë's and Gaskell's attitudes to their creations are rather different. Unlike Dickens, neither Brontë nor Gaskell appear to like their intellectually impaired characters. Indeed the reader is hardly allowed to see them. Marie never makes an appearance in Villette as we merely hear Lucy and M. Paul talking about her. The twins in Mary Barton conveniently die while they are still loveable

---

<sup>76</sup> J. Barker, The Brontës (London: Phoenix, 1995), pp. 651, 653, 660.

<sup>77</sup> J. Uglow, Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 243.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 254-5.

babies. The shambling Willie puts in a long stint of ruining Susan's life, but readers, unlike Susan, are protected from him, as they learn about him by hearsay in the story, as they do about Marie. Lucy's repugnance at Marie is represented as a moral failing, which M. Paul rebukes her for, and his acceptance of Marie is presented as the better reaction, and in fact a perfectly normal one, when compared to Lucy's. However Gaskell conveys that idiocy is horrible, and that only a super saintly person can put up with it. Patrick McDonagh discusses changing attitudes to idiocy over the nineteenth century and the presentation of intellectual impairment in literature. He argues that in the course of the nineteenth century the notion of idiocy became stripped of its complexity (his example is Watty in *The Entail*) and became a sign of degeneration.<sup>79</sup> Certainly by the end of the nineteenth century in Britain, largely after the period of this thesis, there emerged a discourse of degeneracy. But Dickens, Brontë and Gaskell are writing in the hopeful period of idiot education. A better interpretation of the changing image in literature is that before the public discussion and promotion of idiot education the image conjured up by terms like 'idiot' 'innocent' 'haveral' could remain a fuzzy one, mixed up with literary images of fools. The fuzzy image allows a more complex idiot figure - and a more comfortable one.

As has been seen in preceding chapters the notion of the idiot *tout court* has never been a popular one - as for example, Wilson's response to 'The Idiot Boy' and the lengthy justification of the poem Wordsworth thought necessary. A reminder is pertinent here of Gilman's points about the devices that are called up in literary and artistic representation of impairment to protect the reader. The multi-faceted notion of the fool (stupidity, madness, eccentricity and cunning are all possibly present - and anyway the 'fool' can look after himself) is a protective one. The fool image solves the problem of the literary unstylishness of idiocy; Davy, Barnaby, Meg and Jenny have a kind of stylishness of their own - the strange but not frumpish dress, the special abilities with animals and the spiritual, their self sufficiency. The link with madness is a key to these characters' near stylishness, as madness, possibly curable is less alarming than idiocy. Roy Porter shows how in

---

<sup>79</sup> P. McDonagh, *The Image of Idiocy in Nineteenth Century England* (unpublished PhD thesis, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada, 1998), p.8.

Georgian England the idea at least of mental instability was quite acceptable, and such a condition might even indicate special profundity of sensibility and superior insight.<sup>80</sup>

Having explored differences between the fool and the idiot portrayal of idiocy, there is a similarity of social class shared by nearly all the portrayals. All, except for Marie (and Smike, though it has been argued that he is a special case) are from the lower orders - or are certainly not from the aristocracy, gentry or educated middle class. Watty comes from a family with property it is true, but its members are uneducated and rough country people, hardly gentry, and from a vanishing past, even from the point of view of readers of the time. The significance of social class in perceptions of idiocy has been noted in Chapter 3 where, in the moral stories about idiocy the idiot always comes from a simple country family. By contrast, in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 there are factual instances of intellectual impairment from the aristocracy, gentry and educated middle class, the classes shunned for the most part in fictional portrayals. Of course it is not suggested that intellectual impairment was in fact more common in upper social classes, simply that fictional portrayals for the most part perceived this as a lower class impairment. The Conclusion will return to the class issue in perceptions of intellectual impairment.

---

<sup>80</sup> R. Porter Mind Forg'd Manacles: a history of madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 88.

**PART II**

**Intellectual Impairment in the Family**

## Chapter 6

### THE HONOURABLE AUGUSTUS LAMB

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of Part II examine the life stories, and sometimes fragments of life stories, of individuals from privileged classes who had an intellectual impairment and the responses of their families. At the forefront of these families' concerns was the need to find an educational practice that would help the son (and in one instance a daughter) to fulfil an expected adult role. The concerns of the commentators in Part I were focused on their perceptions of idiocy - 'what is idiocy like?' and 'how should we respond?' questions. By contrast the families of Part II are concerned with the future of their child as, variously, son and heir, member of illustrious family, and/or independent adult.

Augustus Lamb (1807-1836) was the only son of Lady Caroline Lamb and William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne and Prime Minister 1831-1841. His poor health and learning problems have been noted briefly by biographers of Melbourne<sup>1</sup> and Lady Caroline Lamb.<sup>2</sup> Augustus suffered from 'attacks', as they were usually termed by family and friends, but the physician Sir Gilbert Blane referred to 'epileptic fits' in a letter to Dr Lee, who became Augustus's tutor in 1817.<sup>3</sup> It had been intended that Augustus should go to Eton, as his father had,<sup>4</sup> but because of the attacks, a private tutor was thought advisable. Augustus was born into the Whig aristocracy, a closely knit circle of families and friends who moved in a round of visits between, in the season, great houses in London and, out of season, great country houses - Bessborough House in Roehampton (Lady Caroline's

---

<sup>1</sup> W.M. Torrens, *Memoirs of the Honourable William, 2nd Viscount Melbourne*, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 72; H. Dunckley, *Lord Melbourne* (London: Sampson Low, 1890), p. 73; B. Newman, *Lord Melbourne* (London: Macmillan, p. 40); D. Cecil, *The Young Melbourne and the Story of his Marriage to Lady Caroline Lamb* (London: Constable, 1954) p. 166; P Ziegler, *Melbourne: a biography of William Lamb 2nd Viscount Melbourne* (London: Collins, 1976), p. 49); L. G. Mitchell, *Lord Melbourne, 1778-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 66-7).

<sup>2</sup> E. Jenkins, *Lady Caroline Lamb* Revised edition (London: Sphere Books, 1972), pp. 42-3; H. Blyth, *Caro: The Fatal Passion* (London: Hart Davies, 1972), pp. 68-9.

<sup>3</sup> Wellcome Library of the History of Medicine, MSS 5469, Papers of R. Lee.

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 43.



family), Brocket (William Lamb's house) and Panshanger (house of William Lamb's sister Emily, Lady Cowper), both in Hertfordshire. The centre of Whig social life as William Lamb grew up was Devonshire House, the London house of the Dukes of Devonshire, Melbourne House, his own home, and Holland House; in these establishments Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Melbourne (née Milbanke) and Lady Holland had their salons.<sup>5</sup> The political connections between these families are traced in the biographies of Melbourne, as are the social connections. These connections are also revealed, though predominantly the social ones, in collections of letters of the period.<sup>6</sup> Nothing of Victorian respectability had touched these families and drinking, gambling, love affairs, theatre and conversation mingled with politics. Emily Eden, a friend of Lord Melbourne from 1832, described Panshanger in 1828 as 'full to the brim of vice and agreeableness, foreigners and roués... I declined paying a morning visit ... to twenty people all accustomed to each other's jokes'.<sup>7</sup> It was generally accepted that William Lamb and his younger sister Emily were the children of Lord Egremont, one of the several men with whom his mother had affairs.<sup>8</sup>

If we look to the family context of Augustus's life it is evident that William Lamb had peculiarities of character, Lady Caroline was wildly eccentric, even deranged, and that their marriage ended in 1825 following her affair with Byron. William Lamb and Caroline Ponsonby, daughter of the 3rd Earl of Bessborough, were married on 3 June 1805, when he was 26 and she was 20. In later life they both said they had married for love, and the first year of the marriage was relatively unruffled. But rifts and quarrels started as early as 1805.<sup>9</sup> The marriage was not helped by the Melbournes' unenthusiastic attitude to Lady Caroline; Lady Melbourne lectured her and

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Cecil, *op. cit.*; Ziegler, *op. cit.*; Mitchell, *op. cit.*; H. Cavendish, Hary-O: the letters of Lady Harriet Cavendish 1796-1809 ed. By G. Leveson-Gower (London: John Murray, 1940); E. Cowper, The Letters of Lady Palmerston, selected and ed. by Tresham Lever (London: John Murray, 1957); Mabelle, Countess of Airlie, Lady Palmerston and Her Times, 2 vols (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922).

<sup>7</sup> E. Eden, Miss Eden's Letters ed. by V. Dickinson, (London: Macmillan, 1919) p. 167.

<sup>8</sup> Ziegler, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-63.

William's sister, Emily (Lady Cowper and then Lady Palmerston) disliked her intensely.<sup>10</sup> From early days there were quarrels, and reports of Caroline's eccentricities.<sup>11</sup> In 1810 she started an affair with Sir Godfrey Webster, Lady Holland's son by her first marriage, and in 1812 she met Byron; though this affair lasted only a few months it was public and anguished<sup>12</sup>. In the society in which William and Caroline lived infidelity was not much condemned; but for Caroline her affairs were not a matter of socially acceptable elegant dalliance. For Byron she experienced an overwhelming passion, and over both affairs she suffered extremes of misery and guilt. Her feelings of guilt are recorded letters to Lady Holland. In 1811 she hopes to be understood and forgiven about her relationship with Sir Godfrey and 'an imprudent correspondence'; that she is 'not lost enough to break everybodys (*sic*) heart and my own by abandoning my husband and child'.<sup>13</sup> In July 1813 she writes of the affair with Byron 'I have lost the opinion of others and my dishonour is complete'. In 1816 she writes to apologise for an assault on a footman, an event regarded by all her circle as deeply worrying evidence of derangement.<sup>14</sup> She wrote similar letters to Lady Melbourne; in 1813 there is a long letter saying that people shouldn't dwell on her behaviour with Sir Godfrey and about her unhappiness over the Byron affair.<sup>15</sup>

William and Caroline were on the verge of separating more than once before the final separation in 1825. But there were reconciliations too; there is a letter from Emily Eden (later a friend of William Lamb) in 1814 mentioning that her brother:

'writes me word that one story about Caroline Lamb is that a separation had been agreed . . . that Lady Melbourne set out one morning from London to try to arrange matters, & on her arrival she found the happy couple at breakfast, and Lady Caroline drawing out - "William, some more muffin?" - and everything made up.'<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1997, p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* pp. 70-73.

<sup>13</sup> British Library, Add MSS 5150, letters of C. Lamb to Lady Holland, May 29 1811, July 20th - and 6 other letters in 1811.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, July 1813, April 1816.

<sup>15</sup> BL, Add MSS 45546, 24 March 1813.

<sup>16</sup> Eden, *op. cit.* p. 3.

Probably Lady Melbourne was not best pleased to see this pleasant domesticity, but it is William's sister Emily who shows the strongest animosity against her sister-in-law; in 1817 she wrote to another brother, Frederick, that she was off to a party at Brocket but that it would be 'tarred by the Devil [meaning Caroline] and that 'the only chance we have of getting rid of her is her committing murder and getting hanged [a reference to the attack on the footman]'; later on she refers to William's 'weakness' in refusing to separate from Caroline<sup>17</sup>. Yet she noted ups (though not as often as downs) since in 1820 she was at a ball where William and Caroline were present and the latter 'did nothing extravagant or absurd, but was almost as rational as the generality of people'.<sup>18</sup> Mitchell says that after 1816 the marriage, for William, was something to 'be endured'<sup>19</sup>, but whether it was weakness or affection for his wife that let the marriage continue until 1825, is not an issue to be explored here.

Augustus was born on 29 August 1807, and that day William wrote to Lady Holland that 'Caroline was brought to bed about an hour ago of a very large boy (as Crofts expressed himself) . . . labour was hard & painful, though it was very short lasting . . . hardly an hour . . .'. He added that she was still in pain but all was well.<sup>20</sup> There was a grand double christening with a cousin; both boys were named George Augustus Frederick in honour of the Prince of Wales, who was Godfather to both.<sup>21</sup> It was a happy time, particularly in contrast to the disappointment of a miscarriage in 1806 (and there was another to come, a girl this time, in 1809).<sup>22</sup> Caroline seemed a devoted mother and Harriet Cavendish wrote to Lady Spencer that: 'We hear of nothing but the beauty, strength and size of Caro's boy, and her rapture at its birth. She succeeds in nursing it'.<sup>23</sup> Caroline wrote a verse to her son, and there is a watercolour by her of the family group, Augustus

---

<sup>17</sup> Southampton University Library, Broadlands MSS, BR 29 Box 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* Emily Lamb to Frederick Lamb, 4 January 1820

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> BL, Add MSS, 51560, 29 August, 1807, W. Lamb to Lady Holland.

<sup>21</sup> Ziegler, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> Cavendish, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

in William's arms, Caroline gazing down lovingly.<sup>24</sup> The likeness to William is excellent, judging by other portraits, but the other two are rather generalized images of 'young mother' and 'new baby'. The first hints that all was not well with Augustus's development occur in his second year; but it was not until after Caroline's death in 1828 that efforts to educate him in a normal way were abandoned. A brief sketch of Augustus's life reveals a happy beginning soon overshadowed by his mother's own problems, and perhaps too with her worries about her son. His 'attacks' started some time before 1816, so it was decided not send him to school and Dr Robert Lee became his tutor from 1817 to 1821. After that he lived at Brocket, or was sent away to be tutored, though in 1827 he spent a short time in Dublin with his father.

During this chapter the extent and nature of Augustus's intellectual impairment will be explored, but at the outset it is useful to put forward evidence that there was organic damage, and that his disability was largely owing to this rather than psychological damage, perhaps because of his parents' uncomfortable relationship or his mother's eccentric behaviour. Prima facie it is unlikely that psychic trauma would produce mental dullness as opposed to neurosis or symptoms of mental illness. Moreover there is evidence of organic damage in the post mortem examination of Augustus, carried out by Sir Henry Halford, Dr Hamilton Roe and Mr Copeland on 20 November 1836.

On examining the head of the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Mr. Augustus Lamb, the first object of our remark was a most unusual thickening of the bones of the skull, particularly of the bones of the forehead & temples.

There were marks of former attacks of inflammation on the membranes and the substance of the brain was unusually dense so as to resist the knife in an uncommon manner.

There was a larger portion of fluid at the back of the Brain than is common, probably of recent origin. The ventricles also contained more water than usual.

With this evidence of [great] disease within the brain we did not think further examination of the viscera necessary and did not open the chest of abdomen.<sup>25</sup>

The report is brief, but provides useful information; that there was long standing disease present, as shown by the density of the brain itself, and possibly also by the thickness of the bones of the skull, and that there were signs of recent inflammation (the 'fluid at the back of the brain') that could account for Augustus's death. The findings indicate that Augustus did not have what is now called

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 161.

<sup>25</sup> Hertfordshire Record Office, Panshanger MSS, D/ELb F72, Post mortem report, November 1836 by Sir H. Halford and two other doctors.

idiopathic epilepsy (epilepsy with no evident cause) but an infective process of long standing. It is possible that this was a congenital form of the parasitic infection toxoplasmosis. The congenital form is transmitted by an infected mother to the foetus. The adult form is spread in many ways, particularly by infected meat, and it causes mild symptoms or none at all. In the congenital form the central nervous system may be damaged and cause convulsions; areas of calcification can occur in the brain (the 'resistance to the knife' noted in the post mortem.) A diagnosis of toxoplasmosis must be tentative, but the post mortem report and Augustus's symptoms support it. There are the convulsions that started at least by 1816 and appeared to get worse. The congenital form of toxoplasmosis can give rise to respiratory problems and unusually small eyes; in infancy Augustus had breathing problems and in 1807 Harriet Granville wrote to her sister Georgiana Morpeth that Augustus had 'tiny eyes'.<sup>26</sup>

William Lamb does not appear as an affectionate father,<sup>27</sup> as perhaps one would not expect for that class and at that time, though later he was certainly concerned about his son's education. Towards the end of Augustus's life and after Lady Caroline's death Augustus was with him much more than in earlier years, though what their relationship was like it is not possible to say. It does not appear that Augustus can have had a happy life, though this has to be largely inferred from external events since there is very little direct evidence of Augustus's own wishes and hopes. Of course at that time and social milieu parents' influences were diluted by the presence of nursemaids and servants, and by the constant housefuls of relatives and friends. However, in collections of letters of the period there is evidence of loving relationships with children and comfortable pleasure in their company that one does not see in Augustus's relationship with his mother. For example Harriet Leveson-Gower writing to her sister Countess Morpeth in 1812 said of Harriette [her step-daughter] looking forward to the visit of other children: 'She is raving of fishings, rides on the donkey, walks & with your little girls' or in 1823: 'The joy of being here again with all my children.

---

<sup>26</sup> I am indebted to Dr Alan Tang and colleagues at King's College Hospital who examined the post mortem report and suggested the diagnosis of toxoplasmosis; see also D. Hunter (ed) *Price's Textbook of the Practice of Medicine*, ninth edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), Appendix, p.ix; Cavendish, *op. cit.*, p.244.

<sup>27</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p.67.

Suzy is une femme charmante . . . The boys are very nice satisfactory little men'.<sup>28</sup>

As to when Augustus's circle perceived something to be amiss with his development, and what they thought was the nature of his problem remains almost endlessly elastic. On the one hand there is evidence of slowness from his second year, 1808, and even earlier for peculiarity of appearance. On the other hand some people saw nothing wrong with him, or attributed his problems to being indulged and 'spoiled'. The special arrangements for his education - a private tutor between 1817 and 1821 - were explicitly made because of weakness of health, the 'fits' he was subject to, rather than intellectual impairment. After, or just before, Lady Caroline's death in 1828 it seems that William Lamb recognised that Augustus was not going to develop into normal manhood; at the same time he started to take a closer and more tolerant interest in his son than he had before. Augustus's life was shadowed not only by his developmental problems but also by his parents' theatrically tempestuous marriage. What seems to have happened is that William left the details of Augustus's life to his wife - as indeed when he was a small child would have been expected. But even for the time he appears to have been an unusually distant father until, as noted, the end of Lady Caroline's life. The vicissitudes of his parents' relationship must have had effects on Augustus, but it is impossible to determine exactly what these were. From the evidence, already discussed about the aetiology of Augustus's intellectual impairment it is clear that it had an underlying organic cause, and cannot be attributed to psychological or social damage. However, as will be seen, he had a childhood of moves from one place<sup>29</sup> to another and from the regimes of one person to another. After a brief overflowing of maternal love for the infant Augustus, Caroline became preoccupied with her emotional problems; from 1816 until her death in 1828 she continued to shock both in her behaviour and in the novels she wrote (*Ada Reis*, 1823 was a thinly disguised account of the Byron affair).<sup>30</sup> It is not that his mother became indifferent to Augustus as there is continual evidence of her concern; but this concern frequently involves finding other people to rally round her son rather

---

<sup>28</sup> H. Granville, *A Second Self: the letters of Harriet Granville 1810-1845* ed. by V. Surtees (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1990) pp. 52, 175.

<sup>29</sup> It is true that the ordinary course of life in Whig society consisted of many visits to country houses (Granville, 1990, p.13) but Augustus was more than usually moved about.

<sup>30</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

than Caroline herself. To what extent Caroline's sorrow over Augustus's developmental problems and her failure to have other children exacerbated her mental instability it is impossible to know. A picture of Caroline, desperate, trying to hide Augustus's problem both from herself and from the world, and at the same time trying to do something about it comes across in the letters of Emily Lamb even though Emily's attitude to her sister-in-law is critical and mocking.

We come now to the sources for Augustus's life, which are mostly letters. Important sources include letters from Augustus's maternal great grandmother, Lady Spencer (until her death in 1814) to her daughter Lady Bessborough<sup>31</sup>, letters from Emily Lamb, (mostly to her brother Frederick)<sup>32</sup>; and letters from Harriet Cavendish to her sister.<sup>33</sup> There were two non family members important in Augustus's life; Miss Webster who looked after Augustus in childhood, and then wrote many letters to him in his adolescent and adult life was one. The other was his tutor between 1817 and 1821, Dr Robert Lee, who was engaged because William and Caroline had decided that Augustus could not be sent to Eton. One would have wished for letters from Augustus himself. There are, it is true, two letters in Augustus's name. One, undated, but probably written in 1828, concerns arrangements for going to Town, but this is almost certainly not in his handwriting and as to content, seems really to be expressing Miss Webster's opinions. The other was written to Caroline in 1827 when he was staying in Dublin with his father in 1827 and may be in Augustus's hand. These letters will be considered later.<sup>34</sup> Augustus's life, then, has to be constructed from what other people say - as indeed do the lives of the other individuals examined in the following chapters. These letters are concerned with his health, his behaviour and his achievements, or lack of them, and very little with his feelings and wishes. There are two exceptions to this; one is Miss Webster whose correspondence with Augustus is clearly intended to interest him, and the other (and we get only the tiniest glimpse him in relation to Augustus) is his maternal grandfather, Lord Bessborough. In most of Augustus's relationships, including that with Miss Webster, anxiety and concern temper

---

<sup>31</sup> West Sussex Record Office, Bessborough MSS, F 275-279.

<sup>32</sup> Southampton UL, Broadlands MSS; Cowper, *op. cit.*; Airlie, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Cavendish, *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Hertfordshire RO, Panshanger MSS D/ELb, F. 61, Augustus to C. Lamb; W. Sussex RO, Bessborough MSS F. 163.

and interfere with affection for him; not so with his grandfather where there was shared and comfortable understanding.

Augustus's life will be dealt with in chronological order. The very different perspectives of those who write about Augustus can thus be organised into as coherent a whole as possible over his life course. Another advantage of this method is that the constant hope (punctuated by gloomier views), that Augustus would overcome his problems can be clearly shown. In his first year there is no suggestion of concern about Augustus's progress. There is however disagreement about his looks which suggests an alarmingly competitive environment for anyone whose baby was less than perfect. There are too signs of Caroline's eccentric behaviour and her family's disapproval and we see the beginnings of the atmosphere of over-cossetting, admonition and downright disapproval that cling about both mother and son in the years to come. In September Lady Spencer wrote to Caroline's mother that: 'My heart aches for your . . . dear child's irritability - she needs to be kept quiet - Craft [the doctor in attendance] should speak to her firmly,' and in December that the best exercise for Caroline would be to go to church, and that she shouldn't always be wanting to move about between London and Brompton.<sup>35</sup> Harriet Cavendish writes that: ' . . . she is very absurd . . . rides out on the high road, the horse or ass (I don't know which) led by the page in full dress, the baby on her lap and her maid and the nurses following on foot, and then wonders why the turnpike men laugh at her'.<sup>36</sup> This account is hearsay and may be exaggerated - but it shows the surrounding atmosphere of gossip, revealed to a greater extent in the question of the baby's looks.

Harriet Cavendish is the source of information about the baby's appearance. On 12 November she said:

'Caro came. Her baby is really beautiful, from a degree of strength, animation and vivacity that you do not often see in a child of a year old. She is grown very thin . . . but certainly there never was anybody whom being with child became so much . . . and when she is quiet, gentle and reasonable I am glad to see her and to believe [that stories about eccentricities and quarrels were exaggerated] . . . George [Lamb] said last night that her child was the most frightful creature he had ever beheld. I said really angrily (because it must be jealousy or spite) that it was ridiculous to pretend it. He coloured, muttered something and seemed anxious that Lord Melbourne and Lady Eldon should not hear us, but she did and told me

---

<sup>35</sup> W. Sussex RO, Bessborough MSS, Lady Spencer to Lady Bessborough, 11 September and 24 December, 1807.

<sup>36</sup> Cavendish, *op. cit.*, p. 241.



afterwards that Lady Cowper had persuaded him to think so, for that when the baby was first born they were all in admiration of it till she began sneering at it.<sup>37</sup>

On 25 November she still considered him nice-looking, in fact the prettiest of three young babies of her acquaintance. But by 2 December though he's a fine healthy baby she has revised her view of his looks, and the next day writes that she saw Caroline and Augustus, and 'We all agree about the child; his face is certainly not pretty . . . with tiny eyes and an odd helpless countenance and I thought that I perceived a slight tinge of yellow on his eyelids and eyebrows, which is very extraordinary as his hair is dark brown.'<sup>38</sup> This is the first evidence of the possibility that Augustus had congenital toxoplasmosis.

It is in his second year that hints appear that all was not well developmentally, but there is too evidence that all was thought to be normal. Mitchell says that the first signs of mental backwardness were noticed at this time, but Ziegler claims that he was three or four when it was noticed, and that by 1812 William Lamb considered his son would never lead a normal life.<sup>39</sup> But this suggests certainty about the situation, whereas it seems rather that there was a continuing cycle of worry, hope and optimism until at least the mid 1820s. In May 1808 Lady Spencer wrote to tell Lady Bessborough that 'Caro writes that she does nothing but nurse him. I fear by that and the tone of her letter that she does not feel quite easy about him'. Eight days later she writes disapprovingly that Caroline had gone to a masquerade as she is still not 'easy' about Augustus.<sup>40</sup> In August Caroline wrote to her mother:

Augustus continues well and I grow very rondelette. The wet nurse does famously as a Chambermaid . . . you have no idea how pretty little Augustus grows, his lips and cheeks have a faint tinge of pink, he tries to speak, screams and sits up but is very deficient in tricks or attempts to talk.<sup>41</sup>

These achievements aren't spectacularly advanced for a child of 10 months - but neither do they

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 242-3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* November 25, p. 243, December 2 and 3, p. 244.

<sup>39</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 67; Ziegler, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>40</sup> Lord Bessborough, *Lady Bessborough and her family Circle* (London; John Murray, 1940) pp. 169-70.

<sup>41</sup> W. Sussex RO, Bessborough, MSS, F161, 21 August 1808, C. Lamb - Lady Bessborough.

suggest grave cause for worry. However, a letter in the summer of 1809 from Caroline in Ryde to William in Southampton says of the two year old Augustus: 'I have been playing all day with that pretty Augustus of yours. He is the dearest child I ever saw and shows where you are gone by pointing to the sea'.<sup>42</sup> She mentions no attempts at talk which one might expect at two - but perhaps she just doesn't say anything about words uttered.

From 1810 through 1816 there continue to be health worries about Augustus, but no clear evidence that he was thought to be intellectually backward. He had an illness at the beginning of 1810, about which William, away at the time, wrote for news.<sup>43</sup> As to what was wrong, Caroline wrote a poem for Lord Hartington, son of the Duke of Devonshire which included 'Friend of my heart accept this letter/The child thank God is rather better/. . . 'Tis true he did not wheeze or hoop/But yet we thought he had the croupe./His breathing was so short and thick. . .'.<sup>44</sup> This description adds to the likelihood that the illness was caused or exacerbated by toxoplasmosis since, as mentioned earlier, breathing difficulties can be a symptom. Lady Spencer wrote in February wanting news of Augustus's health and in March to say that Caroline would be better off staying with her and following quiet pursuits<sup>45</sup>. Then later in March she wrote to say:

I have seen more of Augustus . . . he is much improved in every way - Rogers [doctor] saw him this morning and says he has no defect that he can perceive of mind or body. He adds, what cannot be in doubt, that if dear Caroline would but put him for a few months . . . to any good nurse he would be as fine a child as ever was - these screams he says are nothing but temper and must be corrected<sup>46</sup>.

This is the first hint of 'bad' behaviour and a picture of Augustus as a spoiled child – of which we will see more. It is perhaps less distressing for a family to suppose that a child's odd behaviour is caused by 'naughtiness' which can be put right, rather than intellectual impairment. Possibly too, Caroline's erratic behaviour was seen as another explicable cause of Augustus's problems, and one

---

<sup>42</sup> W. Lamb, *Lord Melbourne's Papers*, ed. by L. Sanders (London: Longman Green, 1889), pp. 75-76.

<sup>43</sup> W. Sussex RO, Bessborough MSS, F 182, 20 Jan 1809; Bessborough, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>44</sup> Bessborough, *op. cit.*, p. 202-3.

<sup>45</sup> W. Sussex RO, Bessborough MSS, F 182, Lady Spencer to Lady Bessborough, 15 Feb, 20 March.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Lady Spencer to Lady Bessborough, 22 March 1810.

which might be dealt with. The wish for her to stay quietly with her great grandmother, above, and the notion that a 'good nurse' would solve Augustus's problems suggest this. In the same letter Lady Spencer worries about Caroline moving him around too much.

On March 24 1810 we hear of Miss Webster for the first time. Thomasine Webster had started to look after Augustus, and she continued to be in contact with him by letter after she had ceased to have daily care of him. Dorothy Howell-Thomas says Miss Webster was a friend of Caroline Lamb.<sup>47</sup> However Lady Spencer's remarks suggest that she was an employee. But it sounds as if Miss Webster came from a higher social class than an ordinary servant; Lady Spencer is uneasy about her social manners, when she would hardly have bothered about the manners of most ordinary servants; it sounds as if she was more like a governess in status. Lady Spencer writes:

Miss Webster's manner is I think against her but either the child is better or she manages him well for he certainly improves visibly every hour [she has musical ability and is cheerful] ... there is no judging what she is as to character and principles - but she seems at least to wish to do well - though as I have already said there is a familiarity in her manner that will disgust many as it did me.<sup>48</sup>

However in spite of her horror at Thomasine Webster's manners she admits that she is good with Augustus and continues to think so. In May she wrote 'Caroline has been here. .. I do not know how Miss Webster will turn out, but she certainly is at present a great acquisition'.<sup>49</sup> There are references to Miss Webster in 1812. In July Lady Spencer complains that a letter that should have been from Caroline was written by Miss Webster ('a habit I do not like') and stresses that she doesn't answer 'proxy' letters. Later Lady Spencer was at Bocket where the Melbournes were staying, and notes that Lady Melbourne didn't interfere with Miss Webster's arrangements, and in another letter again praises her management of Augustus.<sup>50</sup>

Miss Webster's relationship with Augustus lasted for many years. She continued to see him and

---

<sup>47</sup> D. Howell-Thomas, *Lord Melbourne's Susan* (Old Woking, Surrey: Gresham Books, 1978) p.44.

<sup>48</sup> W. Sussex RO, Bessborough MSS, F 182, Lady Spencer to Lady Bessborough, 24 March, 1810

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid* 11 May.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*. 7 July, 25 August, 5 November.

had him staying with her after the arrival of Dr Lee. There is a collection of some thirty letters from her to Augustus between about 1815 and 1831 (many are undated).<sup>51</sup> She was known to Augustus as 'Moome', a name which she explains in a letter of 1822

. . . Moome is an appellation in the Gaelic, to which the English affords no correspondent phrase. It means a person who feels the affection, and performs the duties of a mother to children not her own . . .<sup>52</sup>

Reading between the lines one deduces that the engagement of Moome was connected with a special kind of problem with Augustus - difficult to manage and perhaps also developmentally slow. If not at the time, 1810, then subsequently, her role as indicated above as a sort of substitute mother, was probably largely because of Augustus's problems, but it may also have been because of the upsets of Caroline's life. Lady Spencer's letters are full of concern for her wayward behaviour. In 1811 she writes about her 'imprudence;, in 1812 that 'she fidgets me sadly' and that 'it is grievous to see how she trifles with her own and her husband's happiness'.<sup>53</sup>

It is clear that between 1810 and 1816 Augustus was often apart from his mother, either with other members of the family, or Miss Webster, or both. For example in May 1812 Lady Spencer had a few days visit from Caroline and Augustus during which the Caroline was 'amiable and Augustus extremely good but he has a little effort now and then in drawing breath'. In September 1812 Caroline was in Ireland and Lady Spencer visiting Broomfield said 'Pray tell Caroline her son is as well as possible'; later Lord and Lady Melbourne visited Broomfield and Augustus was 'in perfect health and fine spirits'. In November Lady Spencer writes that Augustus has been 'a long alone with Miss Webster - and I must say she does wonders with him - for he is not only in excellent health and spirits, but quite orderly and pleasant'.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, in October Caroline wrote to Lady Melbourne . . . tell Augustus I love him dearly, but cannot write very often because I have no time having all day taken about to see places . . . he need not however be jealous. I write to no other child. But while Lady Spencer's letters contain many worries about Caroline's wayward behaviour,

---

<sup>51</sup> Hertfordshire RO, Panshanger MSS, D/Elb, F 70.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 20 December, 1820.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 21 October 1811, 9 May 1811, 27 November 1812.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 September, 27 October, 5 November 1810.

she never suggests that Caroline was a careless mother. Indeed there are suggestions of her being over concerned, as in December 1810 she wrote 'Caroline came with Augustus . . . he is a fine sensible boy, but I wish she had another as her whole heart and soul are wrapped up in him' and in 1812, apropos Augustus's breathing problem, 'One is afraid of saying anything about it to her (dear child) for fear she should be doctoring and dieting him'.<sup>55</sup>

In 1813 Lady Spencer generally thought Augustus well, though she continued to worry about shortness of breath.<sup>56</sup> In 1814 her regular bulletins about Augustus ceased, as she died. She often mentioned breathing problems, but never 'fits' or 'attacks'. The first specific mentions of these come in 1816, when Augustus was ten; William Lamb writes to his mother that '[Augustus] seems to me pretty well notwithstanding the attacks' and Lady Melbourne writes, of a letter from Caroline, that 'I fear by the account that Augustus's attacks are no better'.<sup>57</sup> This wording suggests that by 1816 these attacks had been present for some time. Whenever they first started these 'attacks' were the explicit reason for a new stage in Augustus's life, the engagement of Dr Robert Lee as tutor and physician, instead of sending the boy to school.

Lee was tutor between 1817 and 1821 and after he had left he continued to write to Augustus. The physician Sir Gilbert Blane was the intermediary in arrangements, and he wrote to Doctor Lee that 'A family of high rank . . . have an only son about eleven years old who has for several years been subject to epileptic fits so as to render him unfit for being sent to school'. He explains that education and medical supervision are needed and continues:

. . . it is a situation that I mention to one of your character and talents with some diffidence [as there are] circumstances which might discourage you. First you will naturally conceive that a child brought up as this one has must possess all the faults of a spoiled child which I must say he is not free from . . . He is a child however whose understanding does not seem to be impaired. Next the family have told me that whomever undertakes this duty will have to submit to a good deal of confinement and other [privations] . . . such as living with the patient and not mixing at meals with the family.

---

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 15 December, 1811; 4 June 1812.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 12, 14 February, 1813.

<sup>57</sup> BL, Add. MSS 45546, W. Lamb to Lady Melbourne, 16 August 1816; Lady Melbourne to E. Lamb, 12 November, 1816.

He ends by saying that the family connections might lead on to something better.<sup>58</sup> Caroline wrote to Blane wanting to know what sort of manner Lee had, whether a Scotch accent (he had been educated at Edinburgh University), what his morals were, whether he had undergone 'a classical education according to the English rules', but if all this was satisfactory:

. . . the only wish I have is to place the boy under his care instantly, for he is really out of all womens power. I hope without any particular harshness this person is firm, for indeed the Boy requires one whom he can respect and look up to and whom he is sure will be consistent in the commands he gives, and not coaxed or menaced out of what is proper.<sup>59</sup>

It is interesting to note here Caroline's pejorative view of women's capability. She adds that William is going to write himself, and he did on 13 October, saying:

I have many thanks to return you for your kindness in . . . recommending a person . . . well qualified to fill the situation that has been described to you by Lady Caroline . . . I gather that you are personally unacquainted [with Lee] but you have no doubt [reliable information about him . . .] With respect to talents . . . I have no doubt he has enough for the task . . . The fear, perhaps, is lest he should possess too much. . . With regard to the management of the health of his pupil, Dr Lee will, of course, have the entire control. With respect to his education, I beg leave distinctly to state that the principal object of it at present must be to teach him the Latin and Greek languages according to the modes practised in our English schools [which William will be able to explain to him (Lee had been educated in Scotland); and this should be given principal attention] . . . he should have *carte blanche* as to the rest, and may teach him as much logic, moral philosophy, and metaphysics as he can get in.

William continues about the terms he can offer, and hopes they are sufficient (the Lambs by the standards of their circle, were not then well off). This suggests that the remuneration was going to be more than Miss Webster's whose expense is nowhere mentioned. William also hopes that Lee will not have over high expectations of the value of the connection, since he does not see that he will be able to advance him to 'any public employment' nor to provide any 'permanent provision'. He ends by saying 'Augustus has had attacks since he has been here, but appears notwithstanding, exceedingly well and strong'.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Wellcome Library, MSS 5469, Papers of R. Lee, G.Blane to R. Lee, 3 October, 1817.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. Letter (probably copy) from C. Lamb to G. Blane, no date. It is interesting that Caroline starts the letter 'Dear Sir Gilbert Blane' a style of address that would now be considered incorrect.

<sup>60</sup> R. Lee, Extracts from the Diary of the late Dr Robert Lee, F.R.S., while resident with the Hon. William Lamb (afterwards Viscount Melbourne) ed. with preface by K.L. (Privately printed, London, 1897), pp. 11-16.

In these letters a grid of gender and class issues compound the problem of Augustus's condition. There is on the one hand a fear that Dr Lee will not be English gentleman enough to be a model for Augustus; on the other that the post is a demeaning one for a person of his education and expectations. Lady Spencer was concerned about Miss Webster's unrefined manners - but she never suggested there were drawbacks to the job from Miss Webster's point of view as William Lamb worries about whether the post as tutor will further Lee's interests. There is no mention of the expense of having Miss Webster, from which one concludes her emoluments were rather less than Dr Lee's were. Then again on the issue of the less worth attributed to being female, Caroline believes that Augustus has been too much with women; and this too may underlie Blane's reference to Augustus as 'spoiled'. Thus what may be essentially a physiological impairment is defined as a behavioural problem caused by lack of a firm, and masculine, hand. Caroline's letter suggests, with its hope that Lee will be able to overcome both 'coaxing' and 'menace' from Augustus that his behaviour, whatever its cause, was a problem. This wording is very odd and one wonders how a ten year old child can 'menace'. William's emphasis on classical languages and metaphysics seems strange when there are no hints in letters before this date that Augustus had received any education at all, though one assumes that part of Miss Webster's function was as governess. In the ordinary course of events Augustus would have started Latin and Greek before ten years old, either sent to a clergyman who took in boys for tutoring, or with a private tutor, but now he is to be plunged into a classical education, weaned from women and his behaviour improved.<sup>61</sup>

What sort of a man was Lee, who was to be with Augustus for five years and was charged with such a daunting educational task? For Lee, a man without 'connections' it was a good start in life, *pace* William's concern that the post might not lead to anything. On ceasing to be Augustus's tutor, Lee went as physician with Lord and Lady Bessborough on a trip to Italy. Then he was employed in the house of Count Woronzow, in Russia, returned to London in 1827 where he became a successful obstetrician and later obtained, through William's influence (by then he was Lord Melbourne) a professorship at the University of Glasgow.<sup>62</sup> The Bessborough's evidently thought

---

<sup>61</sup> William Lamb went in 1789 when he was six years old to be tutored by the Rev. Thomas Marsham, and then to Eton (MSS of a copy made in 1873 of Lord Melbourne's Autobiography in Hertfordshire Record Office, Panshanger MSS, D/Elb F12).

<sup>62</sup> Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

well of him since they employed him as resident physician. There is no information to throw light on what Augustus thought about his tutor - but there is evidence about the kind of educational and personal ethos that Lee brought to his task. Lee was appointed to provide a conventional education in the classics for a pupil whose health didn't permit of going to school, but to make no allowance for any learning difficulties of his pupil. There is no information about what teaching methods Lee used nor what he actually tried to teach Augustus. After leaving the Lambs, Lee continued for some time to write to Augustus. In 1823 a letter from him makes it clear that he didn't think the educational project had been successful - and that this was largely Augustus's fault. After some general news he writes:

I need not say that I feel anxious for your present and future welfare . . . It is now upwards of five years since I began to take charge of you, and it is with pain & grief I say I do not consider your improvement to have equalled the attention which has been bestowed on you. I hope most earnestly that others will prove more successful than I have been in forming your mind . . . [and promoting] those virtuous feelings, without which I consider life, health and fortune anything but a blessing. I say this because I feel it to be a duty to do so, and because a little exertion only is required to enable you to act a part suitable to your age and circumstances. I shall be happy if you will write a few lines to assure me that these exertions shall not be wanting. I remain, Dear Augustus, with sincere and affectionate regard, R. Lee.<sup>63</sup>

Lee appears as a man of high standards and high principles. No mention of the Lamb's problems escapes his pen. Lee kept a diary throughout his life, but the privately printed volume *Extracts from the Diary of the late Dr Robert Lee* only contains his time with the Lamb family - and of that only the last seven months survive. Perhaps Lee suppressed them. Parts of the diary - and most parts relating to the Lambs - are in shorthand that has been transcribed by 'K.L.' who edited the printed diary.<sup>64</sup> Lee was very careful to protect the Lamb's privacy. While strong on rectitude Lee appeared to lack warmth and sympathy, and it is hard not to feel that Augustus was singularly unfortunate in the personality of his tutor. The memoir of Lee in the roll of the College of Physicians notes:

Perseverance and indomitable industry were Dr Lee's main characteristics; . . . no amount of labour in the . . . support of what he believed to be right appalled him. He was somewhat dictatorial in his manner, and intolerant of the slightest opposition to his own views, but his honesty of purpose . . . was never doubted.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Hertfordshire RO, Panshanger MSS, D/Elb F 69, R.Lee to A. Lamb, 7 Jan 1832.

<sup>64</sup> Lee, *op. cit.*; Wellcome Library, MSS 3213, Papers of R. Lee, (diary as printed by K.L.) and MSS 2314 (rest of the diary).

<sup>65</sup> Royal College of Physicians, Roll, 1878.



Then at the end of Lee's diary one of his sons has added several paragraphs expressing the view that his father neglected his family. He notes that the diary is mainly about scientific and professional matters:

. . . Lastly there are the family and private notes. Now as regards the family there is very little said. It seems to me that we have a case where the work of the scientist was out of touch with the life of the family - a wife and daughter and sons who had no sympathy with the father.<sup>66</sup>

There is little information about Augustus to be had from Lee himself, except for a few letters after he gave up being tutor. There is a lack of information from any source during the years 1818 and 1819, but from 1820 Emily Lamb's letters, mostly to her younger brother Frederick, provide a regular source of news of Augustus until 1828. Emily, as noted earlier, disliked her sister in law (to whom she refers as 'Cherubina' or the 'Fool'). Her attitude to Augustus is ambivalent; in some ways she appears concerned about him, but she is also ready to mock. As for what sort of person she was, her letters show her as intelligent, witty and urbane if not noticeably kind. However the Countess of Airlie says that there was a thoughtful and affectionate side underneath a worldly exterior<sup>67</sup> and there are some signs of that in the concern she shows about Augustus, though about Caroline she is merciless and about Lee, snobbish. There are several letters to her brother in 1820, and 1821 that tell a similar story - Caroline seeking cures, trying to hide Augustus's condition, increasingly desperate but unwilling to give up hope, flirting (if she could) with the doctors, Augustus suffering constantly from 'attacks' and his intellect increasingly affected. Sometimes Augustus is at Brocket, but often he is at Miss Webster's cottage. Early in 1820 she writes:

Cherubina doses very much and looks hideous, & makes up to a Scotch doctor they have got as a tutor. He is young and she says like Lord Byron. He is not well looking & seems a plain unpolished Scotchman . . . always reading [improving] himself & seems not to perceive her agaceries and he is astonished and bored with her absurdities . . .

and later that year:

Augustus certainly gets worse in his fits - he was very near dying in one a month ago while he was at Brocket. I believe it lasted nearly an hour . . . & they were all frightened out of their wits, even Dr Lee who seems not ready to despair . . . and says that the poor boy's

---

<sup>66</sup> Wellcome Library, MSS 3218, Papers of R. Lee.

<sup>67</sup> Airlie, *op. cit.*, Vol 1, p. 27.

memory is certainly impaired.<sup>68</sup>

In September she wrote:

I went with Papa today to see that poor boy Augustus. He is a little better [at Miss Webster's cottage at Brompton] because he is kept very quiet and half starved, but this is the only difference. Lee says the moment he gets the least into health, they return bad again - so that he is obliged to be always pulling him down. His head was covered with the marks of leeches today . . . Caroline's great object lately has been to persuade everybody that he was quite well, and I was surprised when I heard the truth for she has persuaded Papa and W[illiam], and told me only two days ago that he was quite well and that she was so happy to find him cured and that he had been weeks without having a fit. . . I thought she looked foolish when I said I would go and see him, and she said Don't be surprized if you find him with leeches on his head for it is merely done as a measure of precaution.<sup>69</sup>

Later that month she added:

One party (at a visit to Hatfield) made me sick & that was from Brocket, consisting of William and Caroline and Dr Walker; he is a friend of Lee's, always with her now. As she could make nothing of Lee, she leaves him and Augustus at Brompton, and takes this man with her into the country. It's such a low lived thing to take a Scotch doctor for her lover and William looks so like a fool, and looking as pleased as Punch, and she looked so disgusting with her white cross and a dirty gown as if she had been rolled in a kennel.<sup>70</sup>

There are two letters in March 1821 that contain similar news:

Augustus certainly goes on in a bad state, and Lee has a bad opinion of the case . . . and whether he may recover or die, or live and be an idiot, is quite uncertain. The last would be the worst effect, and I think . . . the most probable, but it is also very possible that any day a fit might kill him. His fits have been lately less violent owing to the treatment they pursue with him, hardly any meat, and leeches upon his head every tenth day.

And:

The Fool [Caroline] has a man to magnetise Augustus every morning. The Man who is the greatest Charlatan I ever knew has persuaded her that he shall conjure his fits away and draw off the obnoxious fluid which produces them . . .; she & Lee quarrel about it every day, but he is a miserable wretch & stays on in spite of everything.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Southampton UL, Broadlands MSS, 29 Box 2, E. Lamb to F. Lamb 3 March and 10 June 1820.

<sup>69</sup> Airlie, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 60.

<sup>70</sup> Cowper, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-6.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

In the summer of 1821 there were changes and Lee left to go to Italy with Lord and Lady Bessborough for some months. At the beginning of August the Bessboroughs had left Bocket, but Lee was not yet with them, as Caroline writes that she is off to Bocket where Miss Richardson (a Miss Webster sort of figure) 'will complete the party for Lee to preside over'. But the most significant part of the letter says that 'Augustus talks with tears of Lord Bessborough - it is a mournful thing to see the gap you have left'.<sup>72</sup> This is a good point at which to gather together the little information there is about what was probably the happiest relationship of Augustus's life, that with his maternal grandfather, Lord Bessborough. The trip to Italy ended with the illness and death of Lady Bessborough, but even at this anxious time Lord Bessborough took the trouble to talk to his wife's physician about Augustus. He wrote to Caroline about his wife's illness and preparedness for death, and said also 'Kiss Augustus for me. . . Dr Down the physician here had the same fits as Augustus till he was grown up, and is since perfectly well.'<sup>73</sup> Lord Bessborough is described in Ziegler as 'a dim Whig grandee'<sup>74</sup> but this was not as Augustus would have perceived him. There are two letters from his grandfather, and unlike other communications to do with Augustus there is no note of admonition or worry. In one he writes:

My Dear Augustus, Many thanks for your letter . . . I have enquired at five different shops & been informed there is no such thing as a black cricket ball, sometimes they become nearly so by age and use - so I was obliged to take up with a red one.

In the other he says:

Many thanks for your letter I was happy to receive it, I have had the gout and not able to go out and get you a Christmas box, so hope you will accept the enclosed to buy something with it.<sup>75</sup>

William and Caroline (and it seems to be mostly Caroline) had to decide what to do about Augustus after Lee left in 1821. Information is a little scrappy in the years to 1827 when William, perhaps jolted by his sister, did take a more active role in caring for Augustus. But between 1821

---

<sup>72</sup> West Sussex RO, Panshanger MSS, D/Elb F161 C. Lamb to Lady Bessborough, August 1821.

<sup>73</sup> Bessborough, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-70,

<sup>74</sup> Ziegler, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>75</sup> Hertfordshire RO, Panshanger MSS, D/Elb, F69, Lord Bessborough to Augustus, no dates.

and 1827 it seems that Augustus moved about a good deal, sometimes at Brocket and sometimes staying at Miss Webster's cottage. There were also two attempts to put Augustus to live with a tutor in a way that would have been quite normal for a boy between six and perhaps twelve, but in these years Augustus was between eleven and nineteen. In 1821 Caroline took the six year old Susan Churchill, somebody's natural daughter, to live at Brocket. Susan had lived with the Bessboroughs until Lady Bessborough's death. There is no knowing how Augustus felt about her - but she was eleven years younger than Augustus.<sup>76</sup> It is at about this date that Fanny Richardson appears on the scene, perhaps mainly to look after Susan. Howell-Thomas suggests that Susan was a companion for Augustus and that there were other children at Brocket at this time - for example Dr Roe's family.<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps the clearest evidence at about this time of a wish to provide interest and affection for Augustus is the correspondence from Miss Webster, 'Moome', and whether this was prompted only by her own affection for him, or encouraged by Caroline, it is not possible to know. There are about seventy letters written between about 1819 and 1831, most of them addressed to Brocket Hall. These letters contain information about what she has been doing, many expressions of affection for him, sometimes reminders of shared events in the past, very rarely references to public and political matters, and occasionally contributions to a collection of 'anecdotes', that Augustus apparently kept; a selection from these letters follows:

[Hopes the drive to Town did not fatigue him and will suggest to Mr Lamb or Lady Caroline that he needs drill for round shoulders] You will I know make every allowance for the interest I take in you, my early charge.

[Says she is always happy to have a letter from him, but that one of the servants could convey news] . . . I do not require you to write yourself, as I know you dislike writing. . . I am rejoiced to hear such good accounts of your health. My dearest Boy, I sincerely hope these troublesome attacks will leave you, never to return again . . . [Thanks him for a present of game, but is alarmed to hear he has been carrying a gun]

My Dearest Augustus, I have this morning received your letter, forwarded to me from the cottage . . . That the new year may prove a happy one to us both I do very sincerely hope. I hear you have some lambs at the cottage . . . Long to see my own little pet lamb such it will

---

<sup>76</sup> Howell-Thomas, *op. cit.*, p.44.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 43-4.

be to me whatever age or size it grows . . . God bless you my dearest boy. . .<sup>78</sup>

There is, however, a constant current of worry about Augustus's health, behaviour and well being, alternating, albeit gently, even apologetically, worded. Possibly the tentativeness of her criticisms is the result of an uneasiness she feels in admonishing an adult man - and one of such high social rank. There are a few letters to Augustus from Miss Richardson. In one she says she encloses a drawing book as:

... you appear to have a taste for drawing which you should by all means cultivate as your health prevents your application to serious studies - Dr Lee talked of your taking drawing lessons when you came to town, in that case [she recommends some one] . . . I hope Dr Lee and little Susan are happy and comfortable. I hope you are kind to her for she is very much inclined to be fond of you. God bless you my dear little friend.<sup>79</sup>

There is a twee note in this as in others of Miss Richardson's letters; in one she says she hopes he won't forget her when she is old, and that he will go on being 'what Dr Lee calls "the best boy in the world"'. In 1826 (when Augustus was nineteen) she says Lady Caroline has asked her to write as she is 'anxious to hear from him and know what he has been reading' and adds 'Your little wife Susan improves in every way' and that she would have written herself but she was too busy doing arithmetic.<sup>80</sup> Nice for Augustus to hear that his mother and foster sister were too busy to write to him, and one wonders what he thought of the joke of Susan as 'his little wife'. However Miss Richardson provides information about the attempts to place Augustus with a tutor; in one letter she says she hears he has been placed with Dr Trimmer, and another is addressed to him at a Mr Stewarts.<sup>81</sup> Four of Miss Webster's letters are directed to Augustus at Dr Trimmers. Dr Roe also wrote to Augustus at Dr Trimmer's to say: 'My dear Boy, I am glad to hear you continue so well, and as for happiness I can say you cannot expect to be otherwise in such a cheerful house' There follows an admonition about begging for money, as 'Mr Lamb makes you a handsome allowance'<sup>82</sup> All these letters are undated, but it was some time between 1821 when Lee left, and 1825 when

---

<sup>78</sup> Hertfordshire RO, Panshanger MSS, D/Elb, F70, 4 August 1819; 12 June 1822; 23 January 1823.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., D/Elb, F 71. F. Richardson to A. Lamb, probably 1821.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. no date, and July 25 1826.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., no dates.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., D/Elb, F 71, Dr Roe to Augustus, no date.

William began to show more practical concern for Augustus.

In 1825 William and Caroline finally separated, Caroline at first going to France; but she returned to England in October, and later lived at Brocket until her death in 1828.<sup>83</sup> In August 1825 Emily Lamb wrote a long letter to her brother Frederick, which throws considerable light on Augustus's behaviour, as his aunt saw it; on William's negligence (at least in the past) over his son; and the concern that Augustus was too much in the company of women and children. On this point at least the sisters-in-law agreed, since in September that year Caroline wrote from Calais to William saying 'Thank you for keeping the boy so much with you. I always told you it would be better than sending him to stupid places where to remain with women and children, where he learns nothing and grows simple'.<sup>84</sup> Emily begins her letter by expressing relief that Caroline has gone at last, and continues:

William has gone back to Melbourne, but I am afraid he will find a drawback to his comfort in Augustus whom he has taken with him. I am glad he has taken him, for he ought to make acquaintance with him and see what can be done with him, but it is a sad case. The boy is very strong and healthy but with the mind of a child, always in mischief and rolling the maids about, tickling Charlotte and playing pranks, and old Nanny when she does out the drawing room is obliged to lock the door or else he . . . tumbles her to the floor and sits on her [ ] and this at eighteen years old. His fits are as bad as ever and I think more frequent. I went last night to the play *Frankenstein* and the huge creature without any sense put us all in mind of Augustus . . . I am glad he is to be with William that he may really see with his own eyes what ought to be done for having seen him only occasionally I really think he has never been aware of his strange state and I never liked to speak to him about him in fear he should think it unkind, if he was not aware of it himself of what a creature he is, but when he returns from Melbourne he is to come to Panshanger [Emily's house] . . . Perhaps Stewart may not be the best man for him being shy and awkward himself, and that he should have a tutor of a very decided character who should insist upon his behaving with propriety, and keeping himself decently clean and well dressed . . . and at least try to make him behave like a gentleman. It is really a most dreadful case and I think him in no respect better for his stay at Stewarts - I believe from finding him foolish they leave him to play with the youngest boys and the girls, Stewart's daughters, and take no trouble about him.<sup>85</sup>

This is the longest single passage about Augustus and suggests that the split with Caroline produced a bit of rethinking about him. It is clear that Emily thought William had been putting

---

<sup>83</sup> Cowper, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> BL, Add. MSS 4550, E. Lamb to F. Lamb, 14 August 1825.

Augustus to the back of his mind, and she was probably right since until the separation it is Caroline who appears to have been most concerned with Augustus. The first place in his worries may well have been taken up with his marriage and Caroline's state of mind. For example in 1822 Emily said that William had 'talked more openly about Caroline . . . he says he is quite miserable; that he never has a days peace, and that her violence increases so much that he is afraid of her doing a serious mischief to the servants'.<sup>86</sup> Around that time Emily reports Caroline distressed and desperate, writing: 'She [Caroline] is always raging or fainting, and Augustus . . . was in fits all yesterday' and 'Caroline is more mad and drunk than ever. She had a consultation of six physicians to Augustus because of a plan she had heard of in France of burning the skull. I believe to please her they agreed to try it, but with Caustic, upon which she threw them all out, flew into a rage, abused them all, and threw everything in the room at Dr Roe'.<sup>87</sup> After 1825 William was more with Augustus - and worried. Emily wrote that William was 'very glad to have got rid of one of his encumbrances, but is still worried about the other, I mean Augustus . . . Caro [George] says he can never be left alone, and nothing interests him but games'.<sup>88</sup>

It is at about this time that efforts to educate and 'improve' Augustus ceased - and one can speculate as to whether this was because his father was more realistic, or was unwilling to make the efforts that his mother had. Early in 1827 we hear from William that he is pleased to hear that Lord Bessborough planned to take Augustus with him to Hastings - Augustus was probably pleased too.<sup>89</sup> Later that year William was in Ireland, as Irish secretary, and took Augustus with him, though Emily disapproved - 'William talks of going to Ireland as soon as parliament is over. He talked . . . of taking Augustus with him, which seems little short of madness. Somebody was there so I could say nothing'.<sup>90</sup> William wrote to Caroline from Ireland, saying there had been shooting, but the main news was that Augustus had fallen and hurt his thigh - 'he bruised himself a great deal'.

---

<sup>86</sup> Cowper, *op. cit.*, p.111, August, 1823.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 14 June, 30 June, 1822, pp 100-102.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 23 Aug 1825, p.139.

<sup>89</sup> W. Sussex RO, Bessborough MSS, F 182, W. Lamb to C. Lamb, 11 April 1827.

<sup>90</sup> Cowper, *op. cit.*, 28 May 1827, p. 149.

It must have been quite bad since ten days later he writes again about it.<sup>91</sup> Early in 1828 Caroline died; Emily wrote that William had not been with her, and that 'he was hurt at the time and rather low the next day, but he is now just as he was, and his mind filled with politics. Augustus looked a little grave when he saw her but nothing makes any impression on him. He is good natured, but in intellect I think rather worse than he was, in short he ranks . . . with a child of six or seven years old.'<sup>92</sup>

Between 1828 and his own death in 1836 Augustus lived mostly at Brocket, though sometimes in London. But he probably saw little of his father who was occupied with politics and with a social life that included close friendships with women, Lady Branden, Emily Eden and Caroline Norton. He had probably got to know Miss Eden in Dublin 1827 as there are mentions of dining and visits in her letters<sup>93</sup> but the friendship continued until 1835 when she left to live in India with her brother.<sup>94</sup> Lady Branden he also met in Dublin, whose husband brought an action - dismissed for lack of evidence - against William in 1828.<sup>95</sup> His friendship with Caroline Norton (grand-daughter of the playwright, Sheridan) is traced in The Letters of Caroline Norton to Lord Melbourne<sup>96</sup>. She was a literary figure particularly in the 1830 and 40s, and in 1836 her husband, as had Lady Branden's, accused William of adultery and asked for damages - but here too there was insufficient evidence. Her letters include advice to William, for example what to do with Susan who had been sent to school following Caroline's death.<sup>97</sup> She mentions Augustus only once, writing in 1831 'You never tell me if you see Augustus there; does he always stay at Brocket?'<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> W. Sussex RO, Bessborough MSS, F 182, W. Lamb to C. Lamb, 21 August and 31 August 1827.

<sup>92</sup> Cowper, *op. cit.*, E. Lamb to F. Lamb, January 1828, p. 129.

<sup>93</sup> Eden, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-5.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>95</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>96</sup> C. Norton, The Letters of Caroline Norton to Lord Melbourne ed. by J. Hoge and C. Olney (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1974).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30, C. Norton to W. Lamb, 1831.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.



That is all that one hears of Augustus during these years, until his death in 1836. Torrens says that the attacks became more frequent and Augustus more ill and that William, increasingly concerned, sat often with Augustus - but no specific evidence is given for this.<sup>99</sup> On 22 November 1836 William wrote:

Augustus was lying on a sofa near me; he had been reading and I thought he had dropped asleep. Suddenly he said to me in a calm and reflective tone: "I wish you would give me some franks, that I may write and thank people who have been kind in their inquiries." The pen dropped from my hand as if I had been struck; for the words and manner were as clear and thoughtful as if no cloud had heavily hung over him. I cannot give any notion of what I felt; for I believed it to be as it proved the summons they call the lightning before death. In a few hours he was gone.<sup>100</sup>

This only adds to the difficulty of making a summing up of the extent of Augustus's impairment, since Augustus's words as reported don't seem outstandingly clever - and he has apparently been reading without evoking any surprise. However, perhaps William went from one extreme to another; in 1817 he wanted his son to learn Latin and Greek and maybe metaphysics, yet at the end of his life is surprised at a coherent sentence. It is very possible that, as Emily Lamb's remarks suggest, that the constant 'attacks' - which are never explained in detail - had caused deterioration in Augustus's mental condition. But it seems that before Caroline's death that William had not taken a close and thoughtful interest in his son, and that Emily Lamb may well have been correct in her letter of 1825 that he was unaware of Augustus's true state.

That he was not aware of his son's state, or did not want to face up to it, fits in with other evidence which was that nobody wanted to accept Augustus's impairment. There are constant references to his reading, exhortations to behave in a manner more suited to his place in life and to write letters, yet it is not really clear whether he could write or not. This is made harder to assess because in that wealthy circle, it was easy enough to ask a servant to write a letter - as was clearly done in two letters about arrangements for visits while he was staying with Miss Webster.<sup>101</sup> There is one letter to Caroline that may have been written by Augustus himself (reproduced in Appendix) about the injury to his thigh while in Dublin. It is in a carefully formed copper-plate hand and says:

---

<sup>99</sup> Torrens, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Hertfordshire RO, Panshanger MSS, D/Elb, F 61, A. Lamb to C. Lamb, no dates.

My dear Mother, My Thigh is getting better every day I was very much obliged by your kind letter and many thanks for the enclosed. I am much obliged to you for offering to send me some books but as Mr Lamb has several books here which I can read I think it is not necessary to send any so great a distance. My best love to Susan. I hope you are all quite well at Brockett I am in very good health at present and the attacks are not near so frequent as they have been lately a good deal slighter than usual. G. A. Lamb.<sup>102</sup>

The wording doesn't sound like someone writing to his mother, so perhaps it was copied, with no attention to the sense. Whatever, things cannot have been easy for Augustus, existing it would appear for most of his life with people who could not accept him as he was - with the exception of his grandfather Bessborough. It was unfortunate that he was an eldest son, heir to a viscountcy, and more unfortunate that he was an only child. A girl, a younger son, would almost certainly have had an easier time - as also might Augustus have had if other children had followed.

---

<sup>102</sup> W. Sussex RO, Bessborough MSS, F161, A. Lamb to C. Lamb, 23 August, 1827.

## Chapter 7

### THE 10<sup>TH</sup> EARL OF LINDSEY: 'POOR LINDSEY'

Albemarle George Augustus Frederick Bertie elder son of Albemarle, the ninth Earl of Lindsey and his second wife, Charlotte Susanna Elizabeth, née Layard, was born on 4th November 1814.<sup>1</sup> Lindsey, as he was called in his sisters' diaries, had some degree of intellectual impairment. His education was abandoned after 1832, and he followed no occupation or profession, neither did he marry. He lived all his life at Uffington Hall, the family estate in Lincolnshire, and his brother Montague Peregrine (Bertie to his sisters) inherited the title. His sister Charlotte, two years older than Lindsey, returned from the Hague for the funeral with her second husband Charles Schreiber. On March 25th she wrote in her journal:

The feeling shown by all for his memory was very touching. We cannot regret him, though it seems so sad that he should be no longer amongst us with all his little innocent, child-like ways; he was always so kind and affectionate to everybody. It was a curious state of existence to have lasted 62 years.<sup>2</sup>

Lindsey's life, as Augustus Lamb's, is seen through other peoples' eyes. While for Augustus we have several people's perspectives - his parents, his tutor, his great grandmother, his aunt Emily, his paternal grandfather and Miss Webster - the account of Lindsey is mostly derived from one source, his elder sister's journal. Lady Charlotte Guest, the eldest of the three children of the ninth Earl, kept a journal almost throughout her life. Born in 1812, she died in January 1895; and her journal spans the years between 1822 and 1891. There is a gap between September 1832 and May 1833 covering the months preceding her marriage in July 1833 to John Guest<sup>3</sup>. Lindsey's two half sisters, Mary (born 1822) and Elizabeth (born 1824) both kept journals. Mary's journal covers the period 1832 to 1843 (it ceased after her marriage) and Elizabeth's from 1836 until her death by drowning in 1837.<sup>4</sup> The two girls often refer to Lindsey; but as Elizabeth died when she was thirteen and

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Guest and A.V. John, *Lady Charlotte: a biography of the nineteenth century* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989) p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> National Library of Wales, Journal of Charlotte Guest, Vol XXIV, March 25, 1877.

<sup>3</sup> Guest and John, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xi, xxi.

<sup>5</sup> Northamptonshire Record Office, Mary, Countess of Aboyne (née Pegus), Diaries for the years 1832 and 1834 - 44,.

Mary was ten when she started her journal their accounts present mostly a child's eye view of Lindsey. Neither were Mary nor Elizabeth as gifted and serious minded as their elder sister. Thus the account we have of Lindsey's life is more systematic than that of Augustus's, in that Charlotte recorded what she perceived as significant events in her brother's life during the whole time that she kept her journal. Not surprisingly there are more records of everyday events that include Lindsey, such as visits, walks, rides and similar diversions before Lady Charlotte's marriage and move to Wales. After Charlotte's marriage her records of Lindsey's activities are mostly of those which posed problems - to her, to the family, and according to her view, to Lindsey himself. Lindsey might not have agreed with his sister about which events and behaviour were important enough to record, and even less might he have agreed with her perceptions of what were problems. The difficulty for a biographer in writing about an individual who is almost wholly perceived through the eyes of others has already been noted in the case of Augustus Lamb<sup>6</sup>.

This chapter will start by saying something about the family members and immediate milieu of Lindsey's family circle. Then the details of Lindsey's life will be considered. The ninth Earl of Lindsey, and his second wife, had three children, of whom Lady Charlotte Bertie was the eldest. Lindsey, the eldest son and heir to the title was born in 1814 and the third child, Montague Peregrine, known generally by the family name, Bertie, was born a year later. The ninth Earl died in 1818 at the age of seventy four; in 1821 his widow remarried, the Reverend Peter William Pegus, a first cousin. At the time of this second marriage Charlotte, Lindsey and Bertie were respectively nine, seven and six years old.<sup>7</sup> Mr Pegus and Charlotte Susanna had two daughters, Mary in 1822 and Elizabeth in 1823. Elizabeth died in 1837. These six family members, Charlotte Susanna Pegus, the Reverend Pegus, Charlotte Bertie, Montgomery Peregrine Bertie (Bertie), Mary Pegus and Elizabeth Pegus formed the household in which Lindsey grew up. A seventh member of the household, was Frederick Martin who came as tutor in 1827 to prepare the boys for Eton. He left in 1828 when Lindsey and Bertie went to Eton, but returned later that year when Lindsey was withdrawn from Eton. Mr Martin was an important influence in the lives of both Lindsey and Charlotte. He became a good friend of Charlotte - too good a friend in her family's opinion, and the rows this connection occasioned may have had something to do with the interrupted education Lindsey experienced. For Lindsey Mr Martin provided support and patience - he is the only person apart possibly from Charlotte herself who took a sustained and supportive interest in Lindsey; however Charlotte's concern for Lindsey appears to have sprung more from duty than affection. Mr

---

<sup>6</sup> The difficulty of finding individuals who speak for themselves in writing about learning difficulties still continues. See H. Dickinson, 'Narratives of Learning Difficulties' *Lives and Works: Autobiography* 3 (1 & 2), 1994, 93 - 104.

<sup>7</sup> Guest and John, *op. cit.*, pp. 255 - 6 .

Martin was born in 1796 and graduated from Trinity College Cambridge in 1828. After leaving the Bertie/Pegus household he was ordained in 1833, became chaplain to the bishop of St Davids, and rector of South Somercotes in Lincolnshire and wrote a small number of theological works. He died in 1864.<sup>8</sup>

In many respects the setting of Lindsey's life was like Augustus's; both male, both heirs to a title and living at almost the same dates. But on the other hand Augustus was born to the glittering Whig social and political, focused on London, while Lindsey was from a Tory country family. It is true that any aristocratic family of the time had much in common materially and socially; leisure, wealth, patterns of social life, gender roles, education. There was a conventional time to be in the country and another for the London season; but the Bertie/Pegus family took little interest in the London season, except in that the daughters had to be presented at Court. The most dynamic member of the family, Lindsey's sister, the formidably gifted Lady Charlotte, was bored by conventional social life, writing of 'the parade, . . . the stupid evenings, the continual ennui'<sup>9</sup> and she married the iron master from Wales, John Guest, in 1833,<sup>10</sup> linking herself with an industrial world that was a foreign country to the Lamb's circle. However she was not cut off from sophisticated London society, and her tenth child Blanche married the eighth Earl of Bessborough, a descendant in fact of Augustus's paternal grandfather, the third Earl.

But what separated the Bertie/Peguses most firmly from the urbane Whig circles was a difference in morals; adultery and unconventional liaisons were not tolerantly accepted, and as will be seen, this had a bearing on attitudes to Lindsey's (tenuous and unsatisfactory) relationships with women. This point about the family moral views needs qualifying; it was Charlotte who had the strict standards, while her stepfather, in her view, had shoddy standards. As well as differences in mores between Augustus's circle and Lindsey's there were differences of family composition and structure which were probably of importance. Augustus was an only child, while Lindsey had Lady Charlotte as an elder sister, a younger brother and two half sisters. His father died when Lindsey was a small child; we do not know Lindsey's views of his stepfather, Mr Pegus, but we do know that his sister Charlotte had a low opinion of him. Augustus's mother was the wildly eccentric Lady Caroline. Lindsey's mother, Lady Lindsey was easy going; too much so it seems from her daughter, Lady Charlotte's journal though Charlotte, filially, makes no explicit criticism of her mother.

---

<sup>8</sup> Entry for Frederick Martin in *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, 1860.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Guest and John, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

Charlotte is the main source of information about Lindsey's life, so she will be the first of his circle to be described here. She has been the subject of a biography by Revel Guest and Angela V. John<sup>11</sup>. From early years Charlotte, unlike any of her siblings, had outstanding gifts of intellect and industry. In a passage from her journal, quoted by Guest and John she writes:

Italian, Latin exercises, my journal and practising till dinner . . . Then I read, refer to Moreri etc. for a fuller account of characters and things mentioned in my morning's Russell, read Latin with Mr Martin [Lindsey's tutor]. . . [In the evening] Mamma reads from the Literary Gazette while I work at my beadwork which advances rapidly.<sup>12</sup>

After her marriage her activities expanded. She continued to study languages; she added Arabic and Welsh and translated *The Mabinogion*. She took an effective part in the administration of her husband's iron works at Dowlais and she founded schools for the worker's children<sup>13</sup>. She had ten children who all grew to adulthood, eight of whom married. Throughout her girlhood her mother's remarriage was a continual source of tension for Charlotte. She never got on well with her stepfather while living *en famille* at Uffington before her marriage; and after it Mr Pegus, in Charlotte's view, was a constant cause of difficulties, encouraging Lindsey in unsuitable sexual ventures, trying to borrow money on the security of the estate and often drunk. Apart from Mr Pegus's character failings his social position was a grave flaw in his step-daughter's eyes. Charlotte had a keen sense of family pride in the Lindsey lineage, and Mr Pegus being merely a clergyman represented something of a *declassement*<sup>14</sup> and created social awkwardness - for example Charlotte, but not Mary and Elizabeth, Mr Pegus's daughters, was invited to the King's ball.<sup>15</sup> She also had a highly developed sense of duty both personally and in relation to what she saw as the family reputation. Both these aspects of her sense of duty were important motivations for her decision, in 1830, to take on the role of tutor to her brother when no other solution to his educational and behavioural problems appeared practicable. This she did in spite of a disinclination for the task, which grew greater if anything in the actual experience of her new responsibility.

Charlotte's mother, Charlotte Susanna Pegus,<sup>16</sup> though constantly referred to in Charlotte's

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 62 - 74.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> When Charlotte, Lindsey and Bertie were born, Charlotte Susanna was of course Lady Lindsey, and she will be referred to from now on as Lady Lindsey even after her marriage to

journal, remains a shadowy personality, and is described by Guest and John as though at one time 'extraordinarily active and vivacious [she] rapidly retreated into the ailing lady, supine on the couch'<sup>17</sup> which they suggest may have had something to do with the tensions of the Uffington menage. The Reverend Mr Pegus, Charlotte's stepfather has already been introduced, and he appears frequently in her journals. Sometimes, and at best, his doings are recorded as a neutral chronicle, but more often he appears as a source of difficulty, particularly in relation to Lindsey. He married Lady Lindsey in 1821, three years after Lord Lindsey's death.<sup>18</sup> Charlotte was nine years old at the time. Charlotte's second brother, Bertie, was nothing like his sister, since he was neither diligent nor systematic, a keen but indiscriminating reader who was 'crammed full of information which even with his great memory, he was totally unable to make any use of to himself or others'<sup>19</sup>. He went to Eton, entered the army, married Felicia Welby in 1854, and inherited the title on Lindsey's death. He led an unremarkable, but relatively trouble free life, in contrast to his elder brother. Mr Pegus and Charlotte Susanna had two daughters; the younger, Elizabeth, was drowned in an accident in 1837. Mary, the elder, married Charles Huntly, later 6th Earl of Aboyne.<sup>20</sup> She too kept a journal which throws a little light on Lindsey's experiences, though it is far less informative than Charlotte's. She was of course ten years younger than Charlotte, but even allowing for the age difference it is plain that she didn't have her half sister's gifts of insight and application, nor her powerful sense of duty. She does however record a less fraught relationship with Mr Pegus than Charlotte; but he was her father not her stepfather. Mary also records life at Uffington in a more light hearted tone than her elder half sister.<sup>21</sup>

Charlotte married John Guest in 1832 and moved to Dowlais in Wales. At this point her journal ceases to record everyday details at Uffington, but there continue to be frequent references to notable events - among which were Lindsey's difficulties. Charlotte and John Guest had ten children, the first born in 1834, the tenth in 1847. The children had little contact with their uncle Lindsey, since the relationship between the Guests and the Peguses was cool. Lady Lindsey died in

---

Mr Pegus. This usage emphasizes the Lindsey line that continues with the children of her first marriage.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>18</sup> Earl of Bessborough, ed., The Diaries of Lady Charlotte Guest (London: John Murray, 1950), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Montague Guest, Lady Charlotte's son, quoted in Guest and John, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> Northamptonshire, Diaries of Countess of Aboyne.

1857, and the tension with Mr Pegus increased; Charlotte wrote that she wished her own children to have as little contact with him as possible.<sup>22</sup> By this time John Guest had died, and Charlotte had married again, Charles Schreiber who had been her son Ivor's tutor. As a widow Charlotte had independence and was able to suit herself; many years previously she had loved Mr Martin, Lindsey's tutor, but had bowed to the family disapproval of the match, and probably to her own sense of family duty. In 1855 however nothing prevented her marriage to Charles Schreiber.<sup>23</sup> But there was plenty of disapproval of it from her family; not only was Schreiber only a tutor but he was fourteen years younger than Charlotte.<sup>24</sup> The eighth Guest child, Enid, who married Henry Layard and lived mostly abroad, kept a journal. In it Charlotte is mentioned little and Lindsey only once, on his death.

Having outlined the family setting in which Lindsey grew up, the account turns to Lindsey's experiences. Since most of information about these comes from Charlotte, it is as well to consider whether Lindsey's educational problems lay in Charlotte's perceptions rather than in himself, that being so able herself, she might have regarded a merely average mental endowment as deficient; but such an interpretation cannot be sustained. Charlotte regarded neither her other brother, nor her half sisters as in any way posing problems. Then Lindsey's problems were perceived by others than Charlotte; vividly in the family debates about whether he should continue at Eton after a brief and traumatic beginning there. There is too circumstantial evidence that neurological damage might underlie Lindsey's difficulties. This possibility is supported by the constant references to his extreme clumsiness - often falling off his pony - in Charlotte's journal. It seems possible that, like Augustus's, Lindsey's problems became worse as time went on. On October 26 1845 Charlotte wrote:

Poor Lindsey seems much worse. They [Felicia and Bertie, Charlotte's sister-in-law and brother] talked a long time - of the necessity of making some change about him, and having some person constantly with him.<sup>25</sup>

and on January 26 1853 that:

In the afternoon Mr Pegus called. He shocked me by telling me that my poor brother had had a fit; this is not by any means the first, and he says his general health is much

---

<sup>22</sup> Guest and John, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xii.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186-7.

<sup>25</sup> Nat. Lib. Wales, Journals of C. Guest, Vol. XIII, 26 October 1845.



undermined<sup>26</sup>

It is impossible to be certain that there was neurological damage, though it seems very likely. But Lindsey's behaviour caused problems for his family from at least the age of thirteen. From that time onwards there are entries in Charlotte's journal recording a range of worries about Lindsey.

These concerns fall into four areas. Firstly there are educational worries, secondly worries about sexuality and possible marriages. Thirdly there are worries about whether Lindsey was competent to manage his affairs. Fourthly there is a general worry which continues through Lindsey's life about clumsiness, accident proneness and general peculiarity. The educational worries and special arrangements for it started in 1828 and continued until his education was abandoned in about 1832 when Lindsey was eighteen. The sexual entanglements started in 1830 when Lindsey was seeing a Miss Posnett, and occurred from time to time until 1859. The concern over Lindsey's competence started explicitly in 1832, sparked by an escapade when he was led astray by Miss Posnett, and as soon as that was over led into another unsuitable relationship by Mr Pegus. The issue became acute when Lindsey came of age in 1836, a problem exacerbated by Mr Pegus's manoeuvres in trying to raise money for his own ventures on the Bertie estate. Thus in a sense the problem was Mr Pegus rather than Lindsey; after Bertie's marriage to Felicia Welby he caused trouble for them too. Matters were not resolved until after Lady Lindsey's death, when in 1859 Mr Pegus was persuaded by the offer of an annuity to leave Uffington for good.

But to record only the worries about Lindsey would be to distort the character of the day to day life that Lindsey, the other members of his family and their extensive circle of relatives, friends and acquaintances lived at Uffington and (when the Bertie/Pegus children were older) on visits to London. The journals of Mary and Elizabeth Pegus, and to a much lesser extent, Mary's husband's journal, are the source of most of this information. The record left by these three is not contradicted in any way by Charlotte's journal; it is rather that she has less interest in recording the mundane - and of course she left Uffington in 1833 when she married John Guest. The record of daily life shows how Lindsey took part in the life of the household with no explicit acknowledgment that there was a problem. Yet it can be seen that Lindsey's activities, particularly with his younger half sisters, were 'childish' for a person of his age.

The education planned for Lindsey and his brother Bertie was a standard one for the date and for a family of the Lindseys' social standing - preparatory school, followed by a private tutor, public school and possibly Oxford or Cambridge. But Lindsey couldn't cope with it. In 1826 Charlotte

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. XVI, 26 January 1853.

noted that the boys were at school in East Sheen,<sup>27</sup> probably Temple Grove School. On May 22nd 1827 she recorded the arrival of Mr Frederick Martin<sup>28</sup> who was to tutor the boys in Latin in preparation for Eton. In January 1828 Lindsey and Bertie went to Eton and Mr Martin left Uffington for Blatherwycke Hall, about ten miles from Uffington, the home of the O'Brien family, neighbours and friends of the Bertie/Pegus family. There he was to tutor Henry, the son of the O'Brien family<sup>29</sup>. Almost as soon as he started at Eton, at the age of 13, Lindsey's problems began. On January 5th 1828 Mr Pegus wrote complaining of the 'infamous treatment' Lindsey had received at Eton from other boys, and on 12 January he had a reply from Mr Yonge (Lindsey's housemaster). The case was that:

The poor child was nearly poisoned by being made to drink a quantity of tobacco and water instead of tea. At another time he was shut in a chest. It seems very much to have subdued him and everyone must be struck with the alteration these cruelties have produced in his spirits<sup>30</sup>.

Public schools at the time, as discussed in Chapter 1 were famous - or infamous - for the barbaric treatment of younger boys, principally by the senior boys. However it is interesting to note that Lindsey's family did not accept the bullying as a matter of course, but took action to counter it. On March 16 1826 Charlotte noted that her mother had gone to accompany the boys on their return for the Easter holiday, putting off the arrival of Miss Galway (governess for Mary and Elizabeth) to do so. The putting off of Miss Galway suggests that Lady Lindsey would not have collected the boys herself had the bullying not happened. So the crisis at Eton was severe enough to propel Lady Lindsey to activity, even if in general she had become the lethargic nineteenth century 'ailing lady'.<sup>31</sup> In addition to Mr Pegus's letter to Eton, Charlotte notes that 'Mamma is determined to watch well ... and to withdraw him if he is not happier'.<sup>32</sup> Mrs Johnson, a friend of the family, was involved as she wrote to Lady Lindsey promising 'to go and see the boys at Eton and procure them some favour by the agency of their friend Mrs Kent'.<sup>33</sup> Discussions took place over whether Lindsey should be removed, but 'It is resolved that Lindsey shall try Eton a little longer - everyone

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Vol. III, 13 June, 1826.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Vol. VI, 22 May 1827.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1 January 1828

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 5 January 1828

<sup>31</sup> Guest and John, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Nat. Lib. Wales, Guest Journals, Vol VIII, 22 April 1828

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

says a public school is such an advantage.' However Charlotte was very doubtful about whether Eton could ever work out for her brother and wrote:

I think it scarcely possible he can stay . . . he is too much alive to all unkindness and great unkindness has he experienced at Eton; the great depression of spirits and settled melancholy this has produced are but too evident, and to dispel them will be no easy task . . . everyone says that to take him away would not be giving him a fair chance, that after the first half year all difficulties cease . . . [To this advice] Mamma at last acceded, Mr Yonge having promised to take every precaution to prevent a recurrence of the hardships from which he has suffered, and Mr Pegus assuring her that he will remain in the neighbourhood for some time . . . and even bring him away if such a step appears necessary. . . Parting from them makes us very low<sup>34</sup>.

Both boys set out to return to Eton in April 1828, in the company of Mr Pegus. However

They were scarcely off an hour before Mamma received a letter from Mrs Matthews using very strong arguments to dissuade her from giving Lindsey a public school education. It was not without much debate and with great reluctance that Mamma consented to his making a second trial.

Charlotte went on to reflect on a possible solution to the problem which was in fact the course adopted: 'Might not Lindsey derive benefit from private tuition while Montague [Bertie] remaining at Eton when he seems comparatively happy'. On April 23 'This morning's post brought only a letter from Mr Martin in which he expresses a conviction that Eton will never suit Lindsey and seems very desirous to return to teach him'. Meanwhile Lindsey's state of mind at the prospect of returning to school was such that Mr Pegus decided to keep his promise to bring Lindsey back if it seemed necessary, as on April 24 we learn that he had written to tell his wife Lindsey would be returning to Uffington. The day after Charlotte writes of her relief; 'how serious another year at Eton might have been'. Mr Martin's offer to tutor Lindsey again was accepted and on May 21 1828 Mr Martin arrived as tutor for the second time<sup>35</sup>. This marks the point at which special arrangements were made for Lindsey, while his younger brother continued at Eton; Lindsey was thirteen at the time. From this time, until teaching was abandoned in 1832, Lindsey's education posed problems for which there was no well tried or standard solution, as the frequent changes and

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 26 April 1828.

worried debates reveal. The problem was compounded, however, by the affection that grew up between Charlotte and Mr Martin. He left abruptly in June 1829, and returned for a third time in 1830 very briefly. As the course of Lindsey's education at this time is confusing, a chronology, before any discussion of the events, may make what happened clearer.

#### CHRONOLOGY OF LINDSEY'S EDUCATION 1829 – 1832

- 1828 April: Lindsey leaves Eton. Mr Martin returns as tutor
- 1829 June: Mr Martin leaves (possibly ill health). Lady Lindsey has 'other plans' for his education, though nothing seems to come of them until:
- 1830 Lindsey visits Lake District with Mr Martin, who stays a short time at Uffington afterwards and seeks to persuade Charlotte to teach Lindsey. She reluctantly agrees. First mention of Miss Posnett, in August.
- 1831 April: Charlotte ceases to teach Lindsey who is to go to Tinwell (a neighbouring house) to be tutored by a Mr Roberts.  
July: Discussion of Lindsey's education, Mr Roberts's tutorship evidently not having worked out.  
August 1: Charlotte reluctantly agrees to teach Lindsey again, but by:  
August 30: Charlotte is ill and the doctor forbids her the responsibility of teaching her brother.  
November: Mr Martin is back at Uffington.
- 1832 February: Charlotte will 'not be sacrificed for [her] brother' – so presumably the possibility that she might resume her teaching of Lindsey had been mooted:  
April: Concern over Lindsey's relationship with a Miss Posnett increases when he is encouraged to take part in a mock marriage service with her at Tixover, a neighbouring house. This episode marks the end of educational efforts for Lindsey, possible because other worries became more pressing than educational ones.

To take up the story from the start of the confused period of Lindsey's education, Mr Martin arrived on May 21st 1828. There are occasional references to Lindsey in Charlotte's journal, but then on June 10th 1829 she writes:

I regret very much to say that Mr Martin is going to leave us and Mamma has another plan, I know not what, for Lindsey's education. I am quite certain that no-one could have done more or have been more kind and judicious in his treatment of him than Mr Martin. What an alteration has been effected since he left Eton. He was then likely to have been brought

into a state of health and spirits that was quite distressing, and now he is most promising.<sup>36</sup>

The departure of Mr Martin at this point ended for Lindsey a short period, a year, of consistent education with a teacher he like and trusted. On July 14 1829 Charlotte's journal records that Mr Martin left at midday, and that Lindsey was 'inconsolable'.<sup>37</sup> From this point onwards, the family was evidently unable to decide what was best to do for Lindsey's education, and changes of plan for him, without any clear rational base, took place several times until 1832, when educational endeavours ended. It is not clear why Mr Martin left in 1829; it is possible, as Guest and John say, that he was ill, but it is also possible that the attachment between him and Charlotte that was the explicit cause of him leaving in 1832 was causing difficulties in 1829.

Whatever the cause of Mr Martin's departure in July 1829, a period of worry and indecision followed, but it is evident from her journal entries that Charlotte took little part in such deliberations. The discomfort over her feelings for Mr Martin might have contributed to her exclusion. But other reasons could equally well account for it. Charlotte did not get on well with her mother, she was, after all, only sixteen, just two years older than Lindsey, and a sister's role was not normally to decide the future of the eldest son. Charlotte wrote on July 10th, conjecturing that Lindsey:

has now come to that age that I suppose he will either leave home or be put on a more independent footing. Whatever it may be, I truly hope he may improve under it in the same proportions as he has done under Mr Martin.<sup>38</sup>

Charlotte regrets the loss of Mr Martin on her own account, but expresses more concern over the effects of the sudden interruption of his education on Lindsey:

I will not expatiate here on the advantages I firmly believe Lindsey had derived from his tuition. On my brother's account I am sorry this successful [plan] for his education should have been interrupted so prematurely. I don't know what is to be done with him now. Mamma is for giving him society and more liberty<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 June 1829.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 July 1829.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

There is at this point a hiatus in information about Lindsey's education; possibly he experienced 'society and more liberty'. Mr Martin kept in touch. In October Charlotte says that Lindsey had 'another of Mr Martin's clever letters' but she noted with concern that he also said he had been very ill, an illness that Charlotte feared was consumption,<sup>40</sup> but there is no information about how Lindsey occupied his time.

But in July of the following year, 1830, Mr Martin and Lindsey went on a trip to the Lake District, and there are several references in the journal to letters from Mr Martin and Lindsey. For example on July 15th there was a letter, the first page and a half of which was 'a letter to Mamma from Lindsey, the rest was to me from Mr Martin'. This told of him and Lindsey having had tea with Southey. On July 24th the travellers returned, and Mr Martin spent some days at Uffington.<sup>41</sup> Mr Martin's stay had important results for Lindsey's education and Charlotte's responsibilities. A definite plan for Lindsey, education or a giving of more independence to him, had come to nothing between the summers of 1829 and 1830. During his stay at Uffington Mr Martin represented to the family that things should not be allowed to drift; Lindsey was only fourteen, rather young to abandon education. However clearly Lindsey's difficulties were more than ordinary dislike of a public school of the time, and more than an ordinary inaptitude for Latin; it would be hard to find a suitable tutor. Mr Martin urged Charlotte to take on the task, a prospect that was far from agreeable to her. On 27th July she wrote that Mr Martin:

talked of Lindsey whose welfare interested him above all - yet he did not persuade me that it would be no detriment to me to devote all my time and care to my brother. I did not think him as impartial as usual. [But she reflected] and conquered as much by my love of Uffington and pride in the name as by Mr Martin's reasoning [at luncheon she told her mother that she would become] the director of Lindsey's studies, stipulating only that I might have entirely my own way<sup>42</sup>

While elder sisters at the time commonly taught younger sisters and sometimes very young brothers, fourteen was old to be taught by a sister, particularly one only two years older. The unusualness of the arrangement suggests it was a solution to an otherwise intractable problem. It was not as if Charlotte felt any inclination to teach her brother, as a constant flow of journal entries shows her distaste for the plan and her feeling that she was unsuited for it by temperament: 'an irksome project, [as I am] accustomed to spend time alone and not having much patience' (July 27,

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 24 July 1830.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 July, 1830.

1830) 'utterly tired out' (July 30) 'worn out' (Aug 1st) 'wearies me to death' (Aug 7) 'thraldom' (Nov 14).<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps her regard for Mr Martin was one reason for taking on the unwelcome task, but, explicitly, she says she was:

conquered as much by my love of Uffington and pride in the name as by Mr Martin's reasoning. . . Now that I have agreed to the place I will, however, reluctantly, execute it to the best of my endeavour . . . [it will be] irksome, being accustomed to spend much time on my own and not having much patience . . . but since I have no chance to distinguish myself . . . [I shall] strive to contribute to the happiness of a fellow creature<sup>44</sup>.

Family pride, then, was a powerful reason for taking on the task, and Charlotte started her eight month period of 'thraldom'. Her remark about 'having no chance' to 'distinguish' herself reveals her feelings, usually suppressed even in her journal, about the lack of opportunity in her life (happily she was wrong about this). Her situation as a gifted young woman tutoring a totally ungifted brother, who was more important than she simply on account of his sex, must have made the thraldom even more irksome. Yet another worry was voiced in her entry on November 4th 1830: 'on this day I always feel sad . . . worst of all will be this day five years ... when I shall lose the home of twenty three and a half years<sup>45</sup>', a reference to the time when Lindsey would be of age and (she assumes) Lindsey would turn her out of Uffington. Her mix of feelings about the task sound as if, in spite of her determination to do her duty, that the period of her tutorship cannot have been a happy period for Lindsey either.

In February 1831 Charlotte is looking forward to the end of her 'sad thraldom'<sup>46</sup> and she notes cryptically that 'Lord Carbery . . . has taken a fancy to him [Lindsey] . . . his destinies are perhaps opening up . . .'<sup>47</sup> but nothing comes of this and she isn't released from her task until early April. Towards the end of February Mr Pegus went to Stockerston to 'get a tutor for Lindsey, which is most necessary', and at the beginning of April Lady Lindsey had 'arranged for Lindsey to go to Mr

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 27, 30 July, 1,7 August, 2 November 1830.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 27 July, 1830.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 4 November 1830.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 2 November 1831.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 20 February, 1832.

Roberts for the present' [at Tinwell, about two miles West of Stamford]<sup>48</sup> so it looks as if it had been agreed in February that Charlotte should stop tutoring her brother, but that it took some time to make alternative arrangements. These arrangements, however, were a disaster as in July there is anxious discussion. Mr Martin wrote to Mr Pegus about Lindsey, evidently offering to return. 'Nearly the whole morning spent in talking about plans. Everything looks dark - I am only quite certain of one thing, that [Mr Martin] should not be allowed to do any more'. The day after Charlotte writes 'Down late . . . conversation about my brother . . . I cannot see my brother going to ruin without making one more effort' (to tutor him a second time). Exactly what went wrong is not explained, but evidently Lindsey was not welcome at home, yet Mr Roberts was no help since Charlotte writes 'Mamma says her health is too delicate to have him at home - so he must take his chance - it makes me miserable since I am sure that they none of them see how he is gone back at Tinwell'.<sup>49</sup> On 1st August Lindsey should have gone back to Tinwell, but 'Mamma came to my room . . . she has considered [what to do] - and [Lindsey] is to remain with me'. Charlotte ran into the garden 'to give vent to my feelings' but remained 'a willing victim to my duty'.

This second phase of tutorship was very brief as by the end of August Charlotte is ill, and the doctor says she must give it up. In spite of her misgivings Mr Martin is to return, and is at Uffington in November. This time the problem is, without doubt, her feelings for Mr Martin and the family's discovery and disapproval. The trials of this period are recorded in *Lady Charlotte* - the rows, the involvement of her uncle, anguished journal entries about the feeling of being spied on, and her own loss.<sup>50</sup> Guilt about being the cause of Lindsey losing Mr Martin contributed to her unhappiness 'I have .. done mischief and . . . nearly ruined Lindsey's only hope'.<sup>51</sup> From this point on there is no more about Lindsey's education which is tacitly dropped; and from the middle of 1830 concern about Lindsey's relationships with women starts to take over from educational worries. Before turning to these, the content and teaching methods of the education Charlotte provided for her brother will be explored.

In spite of her distaste for teaching Lindsey, Charlotte took the task very seriously, corresponded with Mr Martin over how to approach it, and recorded many activities in her journal. These entries are rare and valuable evidence, since there is little information about details of

---

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 February and 2 April 1832.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 and 28 July, 1832.

<sup>50</sup> Guest and John, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>51</sup> Nat. Lib. Wales, Guest Journals, Vol. VIII, 18 December, 1831.



teaching methods at the time, either in ordinary circumstances, or for those with special difficulties. History, French, arithmetic and even, it seems from one reference, Latin, were on the curriculum. So too was an area that might be termed English and general education. The subject matter made no concessions to Lindsey's educational problems; it was a bookish, liberal education, such as an educated gentleman of the time might expect. Charlotte says nothing about useful knowledge, such as running an estate, or practical activities. Much later, in 1843, Mary's journal says that she 'worked with Lindsey's carpenter's tools in his bedroom with him. I started a [illegible] but getting out of patience with it gave it to [illegible name] the carpenter to finish'.<sup>52</sup> So somebody had thought of carpentry, or Lindsey had asked for the equipment; but clearly teaching it was the carpenter's job, not a lady's. Lindsey rode, though falls and difficulties with his pony are noted.<sup>53</sup> He was interested in the country gentleman's pastime of shooting, though evidently bad at it since on two occasions he shot a dog instead of a bird<sup>54</sup>. He played the violin, though not well, as Charlotte mentioned him 'playing hymns in such a style as to induce toothache' (Charlotte was an accomplished pianist).<sup>55</sup> Mary's journal often notes games of billiards with Lindsey, which suggests something of practical ability. However, as Mary was five years younger than Lindsey it may suggest a very small degree of ability - or on the other hand a kindly willingness to entertain his younger sister. But the shooting and the billiards were not on the formal curriculum, which was decidedly bookish and traditional.

However Charlotte took considerable trouble over teaching methods to try to make the tasks varied and even game like. She received advice by letter from Mr Martin, but there is no evidence that either of them drew on any educational theories of the time in trying to make learning palatable and accessible. This was some time after the publication of Emile and the Edgeworths' *Practical Education*,<sup>56</sup> and ideas about improved educational methods were in the air, as it were, at the time, but there is no means of knowing whether they influenced either Charlotte or Mr Martin. The journal entries give a vivid impression of the exertions of the days, of Charlotte's serious commitment to a task she found alien to her nature, and of Lindsey's lack of interest and application. In July she wrote:

---

<sup>52</sup> Northamptonshire RO, Countess of Aboyne, Diaries, 5 August 1843.

<sup>53</sup> Nat. Lib. Wales, Guest Journals, Vol. VII, 15 October 1828; Vol. VIII, 13 August 1830.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 October, 1831.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 December, 1830.

<sup>56</sup> J-J Rousseau, *Emile, ou de l'éducation* (Paris, 1762); M. and R.L. Edgeworth, *Practical Education* (London, 1798).

Lindsey came and copied from the Spectator substituting from the dictionary synonymous words for those that were beyond him. The plan is excellent and promises to be more beneficial than anything I have known attempted - It was suggested by Mr Martin - I then played to him by way of relaxation. We read going through his journey to the lakes of the remarkable places he saw . . . to imprint on his memory. [Lindsey has a break while Charlotte is busy] ascertaining passages he should read tomorrow. Was utterly tired out and could do no more than get up as much arithmetic as would serve for his lesson tomorrow.<sup>57</sup>

Mr Martin provided advice to the unwilling teacher, for example getting Lindsey to write and use the dictionary to find words he didn't understand, and Charlotte wrote to him for advice.<sup>58</sup> She took her duties seriously, noting that 'I am constantly with him and when he does not occupy me I am forced to search for future occupations for him . . . I go to bed so tired out with teaching that I cannot get up early'.<sup>59</sup> On 7 August Lindsey went to Stamford to see Miss Posnett (*the disapproved of girl*) but later that day he had been learning a collect and 'is now constantly talking to me'. On Aug 14th she has a letter from Mr Martin 'who talked of the importance of gentleness' and that unless there were affection he should despair of any plan'. This prompts Charlotte to reflect on her unsuitability for her task:

I have told him 1,000 times Lindsey is not fond of me - no child, no-one younger than myself ever has . . . I am too vigilant and have too much to correct . . . He has been very nearly ruined and I have an immense deal to eradicate that I hope with care the natural rectitude of his character will prevail.

What it is that needs eradicating is not plain, unless it is merely lack of application and diligence. Plainly Lindsey did not match the high standards expected by Charlotte. On August 15 she wrote 'Lindsey has not made his appearance yet. I suppose he thinks being Sunday he may indulge his sleepy propensities' and on September 12th that 'Lindsey claimed an hour's exemption it being Sunday.' Yet even so 'He read to me and copied what he had extracted of the English history I have put on cards to make a game of it, in which Mary will join, so his toil will be lightened without him losing any advantage.' What Lindsey's achievements were, it is hard to say; and this is less important than the fact that they were clearly far less than was expected of him. As with Augustus there is a blurring over of what he could or couldn't do, so that at one time an activity that suggests a fair

---

<sup>57</sup> Nat. Lib. Wales, Guest Journals, Vol. VIII, 29 July 1830.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 August, 7 September, 1830.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 August, 1830.

amount of ability is mentioned, at another a much simpler task. For example there is a mention of Lindsey 'pars[ing] his Horace in the garden'<sup>60</sup>, yet the history task suggests a great simplification of what history would normally involve. The days were not wholly taken up with lessons, but on these occasions Charlotte thought it necessary to be with Lindsey. On August 31 Lindsey went shooting, riding the pony with Charlotte walking by his side. On September 3rd he wanted to go shooting again and although Charlotte was not keen she 'resolved that he should have to reproach me with no want of energy. He killed one bird, his only shot. I fagged on through the day'. On September 11th they went riding and 'Lindsey returned pleased with his day and I am happy to have done my duty'.

It looks as if it was Mr Martin, supported by Charlotte, who supported the continuing effort to educate Lindsey, as evidenced by his pressure after the trip to the lakes in 1830, while Lady Lindsey and Mr Pegus were more inclined to let things slide. Lindsey's relationships with unsuitable women, to be examined now, start in July 1832 with Miss Posnett, and after this there is only one reference to what was possibly an educational plan. In August 1832 Charlotte mentions that Mr Pegus talked of 'sending Lindsey to some clergyman'<sup>61</sup>; but it seems likely that this, at least from the Pegus point of view, was more to get him out of the way than for educational reasons. The friendship with Miss Posnett seems to have been the only relationship with a woman that Lindsey pursued for himself. The later ones, according to Charlotte, were initiated by Mr Pegus. Two of these had marriage as an object, while others, because of the character of the women in question, were for companionship. Because Charlotte had such a low opinion of Mr Pegus and his motives, and disapproved unquestioningly of any connection with an 'unrespectable' woman, it is as well to consider whether Mr Pegus might have had Lindsey's interests in mind. He might have felt it would be desirable for Lindsey himself to marry; and if marriage did not prove possible, that Lindsey might derive pleasure from relationships with women. It is also possible of course that Mr Pegus himself derived pleasure from the women he introduced to Lindsey. Charlotte clearly thought that Mr Pegus's efforts were solely to get Lindsey out of the way; and on the whole, evidence in later years of her stepfather's activities and his antipathy to Bertie's wife suggests that her harsh judgement was a correct one.

Lindsey's association with Miss Posnett is first mentioned in August 1830, when Charlotte wrote that Lindsey had been to Stamford to see her, and that 'he rode home from Stamford alone'.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August, 1831.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 7 August 1832.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August 1830.

The emphasis suggests that Charlotte was surprised at the solitary ride. This was during the time when Charlotte was still teaching Lindsey, and no doubt her sense of responsibility towards him increased her worries. On the same day that she wrote about his visit to Miss Posnett, Charlotte was worrying about the responsibility of Lindsey's education, musing on the fact that Lindsey didn't like her and writing to Mr Martin for advice. Four days later she wrote that 'Mr Pegus consented to ride with Lindsey who accompanied him most triumphantly to Greatford to enquire after Dr Willis'.<sup>63</sup> Her tone suggests that while she was worrying about the serious matter of education, Lindsey was thinking about frivolous matters. It is worth noting that while there is little evidence of Augustus being able to take an active matter in anything, Lindsey did manage to have things just a little more to his own inclination.

While Charlotte bore the responsibility for Lindsey's education she was not the only teacher and she describes an hour snatched for herself with Beethoven while Lindsey was doing French with Mr La Segne.<sup>64</sup> However, the French teacher one of the people criticised for encouraging the Miss Posnett affair, as on 20 August Charlotte set Lindsey to copy something while she reflected on her own 'misery' and of 'discoveries made ... [that] Miss Posnett's conduct has been infamous and Mr La Segne is not exempt from blame' and of Miss Posnett's 'deep laid plans of treachery. She has done the principal mischief in giving a taint of duplicity to Lindsey's mind'.<sup>65</sup> Charlotte gets a break from her efforts at teaching Lindsey, accompanying him on tedious (to Charlotte) shooting expeditions and trying to prevent meetings with Miss Posnett, when Lindsey went away for three weeks with Mr Pegus.<sup>66</sup>

Miss Posnett is next heard of on 1 February 1831, when Lindsey danced with her at a ball 'after promising to the contrary, a circumstance which with her customary deceit she induced him to disguise . . . His falsehood and obstinacy in supporting wrong is indeed provoking'.<sup>67</sup> This coincides with the end of Charlotte's first period of tutoring Lindsey, the period with Mr Roberts that didn't work out and the brief return of Mr Martin. There are two mentions of Miss Posnett - in September Charlotte and Lindsey went riding with her and 'some manoeuvring on my part

---

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 August 1830.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 August 1830

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 September 1830

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 September 1830.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 February 1831.

prevented anything ensuing'.<sup>68</sup> Then in April 1832 there was a major crisis over Lindsey and Miss Posnett. Lindsey vanished, and 'Mamma and Mr Martin severally went in search of Lindsey who had been missing nearly an hour'. Messengers and horses were sent all about, Mr Brownlow and Mr Layard searched while Mr Pegus '[swore] not to return until my brother was found' and Lady Lindsey nearly fainted. Then Brownlow and Mr Pegus found Lindsey 'well and happy at Tixover' (where Miss Posnett lived, about five miles south west of Stamford). Lindsey's friends then tried to persuade him to leave, but the O'Briens, who were present, and Miss Posnett 'refused to let him go... The abuse was terrible'. Lindsey however 'showed no contrition and was in high spirits', and didn't return to Uffington until about two in the morning, where Charlotte and Lady Lindsey were anxiously waiting up. Lindsey's visit to Tixover, Charlotte records with relief, was spur of the moment rather than premeditated; he had been out for a walk and 'gave in to a long cherished plan to see Miss Posnett. He reached Tixover at about six 'very tired and was induced to take no dinner, but wine, by the family... [who] encouraged his protestations of love for Miss Posnett'. Then, presumably fired by the wine, he fell in with an escapade in which one of the company put on a sheet and read the marriage service'. The episode was 'deeply and painfully impressed on [Charlotte's] memory',<sup>69</sup> Lady Lindsey said that 'the name of O'Brien has been a curse to me (earlier trouble had been Charlotte's affection for one of the O'Brien sons)'.<sup>70</sup>

So seriously did the family view this escapade that Lord Brougham, then the Lord Chancellor was contacted, and the O'Briens, Miss Posnett and Mr Hodgkin (who had read the marriage service) were called to see him. Charlotte, Mr Pegus and Mr Martin also went to London and the latter two met with the offenders and Brougham. Of this meeting Charlotte says 'Many lies were told but nothing done'.<sup>71</sup> Charlotte and possibly Lady Lindsey were not satisfied. On May 15 there is a cryptic entry about 'suspicions' of Mr Pegus, and Charlotte herself went to see Brougham. Charlotte noted at the time 'kind, Mr Pegus is not but he has never been severe or cruel'.<sup>72</sup> But Mr Pegus's actions on behalf of Lindsey were in doubt and the plan was to arrange through the Lord Chancellor for Lady Lindsey to be her son's legal guardian. It seems that the matter was left at that time without any legal declaration, since the issue of guardianship arose again a little later. However the problem about unsuitable entanglements for Lindsey became worse, and segued into financial issues and the doubts over Lindsey's competence.

---

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 September 1831.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 April 1832.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 April 1832.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 7 May 1832.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 May 1832.

In July, soon after the Miss Posnett episode, Charlotte wrote that 'Mamma called me into the garden. She had heard from Mr Pegus how his plan had been to marry Lindsey to Miss Mallish a very rich heiress of about £400,000. The father who called on us was all favourable' - but not surprisingly he wanted to meet Lindsey. There might have been nothing wrong with this match, and Charlotte's concern here - it was about the time of the rows over Mr Martin - seems really to have been because she feared she would be the next object: I . . . dreaded that if this succeeded they would amuse themselves with some horrible plan for me'.<sup>73</sup> However when Mr Mallish met Lindsey in London he 'declined any further transaction . . . [and] when he spoke to his daughter found she was naturally revolted at such a marriage'.<sup>74</sup> After this Mr Pegus largely gave up on respectable women, and introduced Lindsey and Bertie to a Mrs Sargeant, who had been Sir Keith Jackson's mistress. Mr Pegus said that her 'society would advantage Lindsey . . . that she was very clever and finally that he was to go with her to the [Beggars] Opera this evening.' Charlotte could think of no way of preventing this, but 'the idea of such a companion for a boy of Lindsey's mind distressed me'.<sup>75</sup> The next day Mr Pegus appeared '*en deshabelle*' to say he had made plans for Lindsey to go to Brighton with her for a fortnight. Charlotte was horrified at the thought of Lindsey with a 'woman of no character or principle - whom I know had once travelled in male attire with Sir Keith' and opposed the scheme saying that Lady Lindsey's permission was needed, which Mr Pegus countered saying there was no time to get this (apart from Lady Lindsey, they were all in London at this time). Charlotte had promised her mother that Lindsey would return to Uffington after the week in London, but Mr Pegus's persisted with the scheme, and 'I took a desperate step - I wrote a letter to the Lord Chancellor [Brougham] to request an audience the next day'. As she herself observed, this was a remarkable step for a young woman to take. Brougham agreed to see her and, while Mr Pegus went 'to Dulwich to enquire more of . . . the character of Mrs Sargeant', Charlotte went to see Brougham. The trip to enquire about Mrs Sargeant suggests something of a climbdown by Mr Pegus and Brougham wasn't required to take any action. By agreement it seems, Lady Lindsey was made her elder son's guardian.<sup>76</sup> The significance of this was presumably that it recognised Mr Pegus's faults. Since Lindsey was only seventeen the issue of his competence as an adult was yet to be dealt with.

---

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 July 1832.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 July 1832.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 August, 1832.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 3, 5, 6, August 1832.

It is at this point that Charlotte destroyed her journal entries (between late September 1832 and May 1833).<sup>77</sup> It starts again just before she married John Guest (29 July 1833) and moved to Wales. Her connection with Uffington might have waned almost entirely because of her dislike and disapproval of Mr Pegus. But two things ensured continued contact; one was her attachment to her step-sister Mary<sup>78</sup> and the other was Lindsey. Most of her mentions of Lindsey after 1833 are to do with problems; more unsuitable women and, from 1837, her record of various attempts by Mr Pegus to take advantage of Lindsey's vulnerability to raise money on the Lindsey estate. However, before looking at Charlotte's record of these difficulties, a digression to look at the perspectives of Lindsey's two half sisters is in order. Mary kept a journal between 1832 and 1844 (when she married Lord Aboyne) and Elizabeth from 1836 until her death in 1837. There are a few relevant entries too in Lord Aboyne's journal. The value of these journals is that they give a far less troubled picture of Lindsey's life. The two girls being much younger than Lindsey and, for most of Mary's journal and all of Elizabeth's, being children it is not surprising that the tensions of Uffington life are not found in their accounts, and of course Mr Pegus was their real father.

These records of day to day life at Uffington convey that there was more fun in Lindsey's life than emerges in Charlotte's account, and also that the company of these much younger sisters suited him. In Mary's journal are records of billiards, card games, walks, picking flowers and outings, often with Lindsey and sometimes with Bertie as well. For example, she played billiards and battledore and shuttlecock with Lindsey and in the evening bagatelle with Bertie and Lindsey. In London Charlotte and Lindsey went to the opera. On Lindsey's birthday there was a big party at Uffington 'and afterwards we all sat down to a game of commerce, and in December 'I ran a race on the gravel walk with Lindsey and stayed out so late that at last Mamma was forced to send after us'. After that 'we washed papa's hair but when I began [pinching] his hair was put a stop to'. In the evening they went to a ball.<sup>79</sup> In March, 1834 Bertie was home, and:

I walked in the park with Lindsey and he read Ivanhoe to me and then to the spring where we were met by Bertie and Elizabeth and we all walked to a little haystack . . . Bertie made a seat between two trees which he sat upon, Lindsey on the camp stool, Elizabeth on the hay . . . and me seated on the stack in the middle. . . I read Ivanhoe out loud to them, not without some difficulty for Bertie kept . . . going to get wood to throw on his seat and Elizabeth made a great noise first by trying to climb up the stack then throwing straw over

---

<sup>77</sup> Guest and John, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>78</sup> Bessborough, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> Northamptonshire RO, Countess of Aboyne, *Diaries*, 4 November 1832, 2 March, 26 June, 4 November, 31 December 1833.

Lindsey and Bertie . . . then the whole stack overturned<sup>80</sup>

This may have been an particularly diverting day as the description of it is unusually long, but other entries also convey an easy relationship between Lindsey and his younger sisters. In the haystack episode Lindsey was nineteen to his sisters twelve and ten years. His backwardness appears in her journal simply in terms of what they did, there is never any comment about his abilities. In 1835 Mary gave Lindsey a drawing lesson and on other occasions Mary works at Italian and French sometimes with Lindsey, as on 16 June when 'I wrote a French exercise with Lindsey'. So his education - or a pretence of it - was not entirely neglected after 1832. Elizabeth too writes of activities with her elder brother, for example playing billiards, going with Mary and Lindsey to feed their pet lamb, Daisy, riding with Lindsey and Mary to Stamford. This was in 1837 when Elizabeth was thirteen and Lindsey twenty three.

In respect of independence there is evidence that Lindsey led a fairly normal life. In 1835 the family is in London in June and July and Lindsey and Bertie were in lodgings not staying with the rest of the family. It is not clear though whether the brothers were sharing the same lodgings. Bertie at the time was on leave from his regiment. The same sort of arrangement continues, as in London in 1843 Lindsey and Bertie call on the rest of the family rather than live with them.<sup>81</sup> After Mary's marriage to Lord Aboyne he mentions Lindsey and Bertie coming to stay for a few days.<sup>82</sup> However, while Lindsey sometimes travels short distances on his own, such as in the environs of Uffington, or the West End of London, there is no record of him travelling a long distance on his own. However, servants would to some degree camouflage problems, in that a servant present as protector would not be immediately distinguishable from a servant simply as servant. There must have been some anxiety about Lindsey on his own because of the physical awkwardness which led to the falls from ponies and accidental shootings of dogs that have been noted. The most alarming accident that Lindsey caused was in 1836. Charlotte and John Guest were spending Christmas at Uffington and her journal records that they were:

aroused by dreadful screams . . . Somebody said the house was on fire . . . the cause of the alarm was that Lindsey had set fire to his shirt, and being unable to extinguish the flames . . . ran calling for assistance. Mr Pegus put out the flames [burning himself] . . . Lindsey was put to bed and had all the proper remedies applied.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 16 March, 1834.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 27 June, July 1 and 5, 1835; 13 June, 1843.

<sup>82</sup> Northamptonshire RO, Wickham MSS, 13/3, Earl of Aboyne, Diary, 8 May 1844. There are no more references to Lindsey and the journal ends in 1849.

<sup>83</sup> Nat. Lib. Wales, Guest Journals, Vol. X, 25 December 1836.



Elizabeth was distressed, writing:

Poor dear Lindsey set fire to himself. He ran down to Mama's room surrounded by flames, everybody was as white as a sheet. Charlotte, Mr Guest, Mama and I had nothing on but our nightgowns . . . They found he had burned himself all down the back of his legs . . . I was very miserable and went to bed early.<sup>84</sup>

On boxing day the servants' ball had to be cancelled because of Lindsey's injury and Lady Lindsey was 'constantly nursing him'; it is hardly surprising that Charlotte thought it 'a melancholy Christmas'.<sup>85</sup> The Guests left on 3 January in spite of deep snow, and it is left for Elizabeth to record Lindsey's slow recovery. On the 27th he was 'a little better' and on the thirtieth he was up on the sofa and Elizabeth read to him, by mid January he was a great deal better, and in February playing billiards.<sup>86</sup>

In November 1835 Lindsey was twenty one, and this brought up the question of precedence at table, and the more serious matter of Lindsey's competence to act in legal and financial affairs. When the Guests were staying at Uffington in March, Charlotte noted that on the precedence issue Mr Pegus 'seems to domineer over everything. Now that Lindsey is of age he might have had a semblance of deference but though Lindsey is head of table it is Mamma who is displaced for Mr Pegus keeps his seat'.<sup>87</sup> His step father had not yet given up hope of getting Lindsey married off to a Miss Ross, as in February Charlotte had discovered that Mr Pegus 'seems to have matrimonial schemes for my brother which I fear he will not succeed in' - and he didn't as Miss Ross married someone else.<sup>88</sup> In 1837 John Guest is 'trying to help with Lindsey's affairs'; Mr Pegus was trying to borrow money on the security of the estate. The issues seems to be that if Lindsey signs documents and no-one disputes his ability to do so, it will be taken that he is a competent person of sound mind, '... yet it may chance to become imperative for us to dispute Lindsey's competency'. The point is presumably that it is much better for everyone if all the family of a person of dubious competency provide discreet guidance in a way which protects the interests of the incompetent individual and other members of the family. But if things are upset - in this case by Mr Pegus's selfishness - it

---

<sup>84</sup> Northamptonshire RO, Elizabeth Pegus, Diary, 25 December 1836.

<sup>85</sup> Nat. Lib. Wales, Guest Journals, 25 and 26 December, 1836.

<sup>86</sup> Northamptonshire RO, E. Pegus, Diary, 25 and 28 December 1836; 15 January, 18 February, 1837.

<sup>87</sup> Nat. Lib. Wales, Guest Journals, Vol. X, 6 March 1836.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 14 February 1836.

might be necessary to challenge Lindsey's competence in court. Four months later Mr Pegus still hasn't been fended off, but clearly Charlotte has got the lawyers to see the problem, and they 'hesitate to take so bold a step without my concurrence'. Charlotte's ultimate aim is to protect the estate for Bertie 'as it is his by just right, for Lindsey not being able to dispose in any way of his property.'<sup>89</sup>

The issue emerges again in 1839 when Charlotte says that the:

system pursued with him is scandalous. They pander to his passions to keep him within their power. I am now told they have made him cut off the entail on the estate. Poor fellow, he is all kindness and thinks he has done right. We should not have known this but for their coming to [John Guest] to borrow money for new improvements'. He didn't lend it because neither he nor I can or will do anything by which we can be considered to recognise that Lindsey is competent to transact business.<sup>90</sup>

Mr Pegus probably miscalculated in taking the matter to the Guests. It was at this point that relations between Uffington and the Guests reached rock bottom. Mr Pegus, it seems, retaliated by telling Lindsey that the Guests were taking out a statute of lunacy against him. ' . . . it is very spiteful to make such assertions that are so entirely groundless and I today insisted on it being explained to him.' As a counterploy Mr Pegus told John Guest that 'he would take care that Charlotte and the children should never receive sixpence from the estate'.<sup>91</sup> This was in July, and by October Charlotte said that all contact was cut off with Uffington and that Mr Pegus 'had managed to set all against' her.<sup>92</sup> The next year, however, Charlotte is in touch with her mother again. In 1841 and 1842 the Guests were abroad a good deal of the time – and south Wales is anyway a long distance from Lincolnshire. In the years that follow there are occasional references to Lindsey; in 1843 that 'he seemed better and happier than usual', but in 1845 'Poor Lindsey seems much worse. They talked . . . of the necessity of making some change about him and having some person to be constantly with him'<sup>93</sup>

The early 1850s brought changes for members of Lindsey's family. John (now Sir John) Guest died in 1852, Lady Lindsey was becoming infirm and deaf, in 1854 Bertie, Lindsey's brother,

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 22 March, 10 July, 1837.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Vol. XI, 26 May, 1839.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 17 June, 1839.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 17 October 1839.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 26 October 1845.

married Felicia Welby and in 1855 Charlotte married Charles Schreiber.<sup>94</sup> On her marriage Felicia joined Bertie in the uncomfortable Uffington household, another victim for Mr Pegus as she and Bertie were made uncomfortable by his 'tyranny and violence'.<sup>95</sup> In 1853 Mr Pegus called on Charlotte in London. One of his bits of news was that Lindsey had had a fit and that his general health was weakened. Charlotte wanted to go and see her brother but 'I found that he was staying at the house of a woman Mr Pegus pays to live with him. My going was out of the question . . . A man who ought to have screened his poor weak mind from such things.'<sup>96</sup> Mr Pegus seemed intent on remaining the villain of the piece until the end. Charlotte, visiting Uffington, noted that her mother was increasingly infirm and deaf, though mentally still alert.<sup>97</sup> According to Charlotte she certainly noticed problems caused by her Mr Pegus, telling Charlotte about his dislike for Bertie and Felicia, and worrying about another plan she feared he had for an unsuitable marriage for Lindsey.<sup>98</sup>

In November 1858 Lady Lindsey died; Mr Pegus cried and was in a 'wretched state'. Lindsey and Bertie were executors of Lady Lindsey's Will and Charlotte persuaded Bertie to live at Uffington, and hoped that Mr Pegus would give them advice.<sup>99</sup> This optimism about Mr Pegus was shortlived, as in December Charlotte was writing to him about her mother's 'serious injunction [expressed before she died] to have Lindsey guarded from the influence of a certain Mrs Maitland, of indifferent character. My mother's chief dread was that she might get him to marry a daughter of hers'. Bertie and Felicia too were worried about this, and Felicia wrote to Charlotte asking whether Bertie could prevent Mr Pegus taking Lindsey to London (where schemes with Mrs Maitland could go on). Charlotte's reply is that she thinks not as that would be raising the question of Lindsey's competency.<sup>100</sup> On this occasion as previously Charlotte and the Berties turned to informal legal help, this time by involving the solicitor, Richard Du Cane (who married Charlotte's eldest daughter, Maria). Called to see Du Cane, Mr Pegus denied that he had any marriage scheme for Lindsey, and a few days later wrote to Du Cane with further denials. But he admitted taking

---

<sup>94</sup> Guest and John, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

<sup>95</sup> Nat. Lib. Wales, Guest Journals, Vol. XVI, 14 May, 1854.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 January 1853.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 14 May 1854.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. XVIII, 21 November, 9 December 1858.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. XVI, 14 May 1854; Vol. XVIII, 23, 28, 29 November 1858.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 15 December 1858.

Lindsey to Bridgenorth where Mrs Maitland was and then on a trip with her to Bangor: 'Was there ever so mad a proceeding?'.<sup>101</sup> The problem rumbled on into 1859. In March Mr Pegus was being 'disagreeable' to the Berties 'chiefly because they had made an engagement to come and stay a short time with Charles and me, bringing Lindsey with them'. The story becomes positively gothic as:

[Bertie and Felicia] say his language was fearful and that he told Lindsey his brother and Felicia had an interest in poisoning him and meant to do so and that as soon as he got to 'that den of iniquity, Roehampton'<sup>102</sup>, as he designated this house, I should contrive to put him in a lunatic asylum. What a wicked man he is.<sup>103</sup>

Mr Pegus had gone too far, and a week later Charlotte was at Du Cane's to arrange to terminate Mr Pegus's 'residence and control' at Uffington, to tell him he would never have the Uffington living, but to allow him an annuity of £1,00 a year. The next day:

Poor Lindsey was very restless all morning and would talk to me and to Charles about Mr Pegus and his late violent conduct. He expressed a very strong wish that Mr Pegus would 'remain with his friends as he was doing at present' and that he would no more come near Uffington. We told him if he really desired this nothing could be easier than to arrange it so, and that he had only to speak to Richard Du Cane and it would be done. Lindsey asked when he could see him - and we lost no time in asking him to come over at once.<sup>104</sup>

Meanwhile they had heard that Mr Pegus seemed pleased at the idea of leaving Uffington and having an annuity. Mr Du Cane came,

and had a long interview with Lindsey at which I was present and my poor brother expressed himself with a clearness and propriety of words and thought surprised me. He declared his desire to get rid of Mr Pegus entirely and to give him £1,000 a year. . . He is in great dread of Mr Pegus's control and authority.<sup>105</sup>

Lindsey then signed a memorandum to this effect, and before the end of a week things were settled; Du Cane was to be manager and auditor of the estate, the living was to be sold and the Berties were to have an annual sum of money for upkeep of the estate. A few days later Charlotte wrote of a 'ride and drive in Richmond Park, enjoying the emancipation' and that 'Poor Lindsey was as happy

---

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 22, 27 December, 1858.

<sup>102</sup> By then the Schreibers lived in Roehampton.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 March 1859.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 16 March 1859.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

as the day was long'.<sup>105</sup> However this wasn't quite the end of the Mr Pegus problem. In May, while the Berties and Lindsey were in Cambridge for the boat races, he went to Uffington 'playing the great man and laying claim to a great many things as belonging to him in right of my poor mother' He ordered Lindsey to return, but instead the Berties sent Du Cane to see him, and there was a very stormy meeting' in which his 'abuse of all of us, especially Felicia, was something shocking' <sup>17</sup>

This was, at last, the end of the Pegus trouble, and he died in 1860. Lindsey continued to live at Uffington with the Berties but there is no news about them in Charlotte's diary, until January 1877. The Schriebers were in Boston (Lincolnshire) for the day when a servant came with a note from Felicia to say Lindsey was dangerously ill. They hurried to Uffington, but Lindsey rallied for a while. On 17 January Charlotte noted that he was confined to bed, and she feared it was the beginning of the end 'but he has no pain, and is happy and cheerful'. On 21 January the Schriebers, staying in the Hague, had a telegram to say Lindsey had died and they set off for Uffington. The funeral was on 25 March and three of Charlotte's sons were there as well as Richard Du Cane and Cecil Alderson, another son-in-law. It was not the custom then for women to go to funerals but Charlotte did so:

although they had tried to persuade me not to follow . . . But as his only sister I could not forbear paying him this last tribute of respect and love . . . It was a mercy to feel his burden of life had ended without actual suffering . . .<sup>108</sup>

The other person who recorded Lindsey's death was Enid, Charlotte's eighth child, married to Austen Henry Layard, diplomat and discoverer of Nineveh. She was in Spain at the time of his death, and travelling: 'on arriving at the Seville junction we were met by W McPherson who gave us a "Times". In it we saw the announcement of the death of "Milord", my poor old imbecile uncle. We did not regret him, but one felt a link with one's youth was gone'.<sup>109</sup>

Charlotte referred to Lindsey's 'burden' of life, and while it may simply have been a conventional phrase, suggestive of the better world of the hereafter, it prompts one to ask whether his life could be described as a burden to him - or to anyone else. His experience at Eton was obviously horrible, but thankfully brief. There is the unsuccessful episode at Tinwell, but it may be that it was Charlotte

---

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 20 March 1859.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 31 May, 1859.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* 13 January; 17, 21 and 25 March 1877.

<sup>109</sup> British Library, Add MSS 46155, Journal of M.E.E. Layard, 27 March 1877.

rather than Lindsey who regarded it so negatively. Certainly Mr Pegus was a problem, but only in later years was he clearly a thorn in the flesh for Lindsey. Charlotte was an exacting teacher and guide, but this was for a period in all of less than nine months. On the positive side there was Mr Martin's tutorship, and while Charlotte may not have suited as a teacher she was a determined defender of Lindsey's interests.

What was Lindsey like to live with? The shooting accidents, the falls when riding, the setting fire to his shirt suggest that there was a constant undercurrent of worry. While she was teaching him Charlotte found his conversation and violin playing trying, and Mr Pegus made efforts to eject him from Uffington. In his later life there are the mentions of him needing someone to be constantly with him; but happily the family was not short of money. Lindsey's relationship with his younger half sisters appears to have been easy and pleasant, and, significantly, Bertie and Felicia lived with him peaceably at Uffington from Mr Pegus's exit until the end of Lindsey's life. We have almost nothing of outsiders' views, though to some degree Enid Layard, though Lindsey's niece, was an outsider having had so little to do with him. Her comments, 'Milord' and 'poor old imbecile uncle' distances herself from him, constructing an image, an Other, rather than a known individual. The only other outsider's view comes from a curious episode in Lindsey's adult life. Dickens, no doubt through Charlotte's persuasion, arranged for him to visit the artist, Cruikshank. Cruikshank said of the visit:

. . . what a rum'un eh? - My wife saw him first and came and told me there was a man either drunk or mad - I said, "Show him up!" - and when he got into my room hang me if I do not think that he thought he was making hay - he pitched the papers about so!<sup>110</sup>

The out and out eccentricity of this doesn't tally with other things known about Lindsey and it seems likely that Cruikshank wanted a good anecdote. But Enid Layard's comments evoke a more seriously impaired person than most of the information about Lindsey suggests. Of course it is likely that the close family members, of whom Charlotte is by far the most important source on her brother, were interested in minimising Lindsey's peculiarity. One remembers Charlotte's family pride overcoming her reluctance to teach her brother. But if he were so very odd and wild it seems unlikely that his younger sisters would have had the easy relationship with him that their journals show. Possibly Lindsey had got odder as time went on.

Another mysterious matter is indicated by the Dr Willis journal entries. Dr Willis was a neighbour and lived at Greatford where he had a private madhouse. He was on the one hand simply

---

<sup>110</sup> C. Dickens, *Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol 2, 1840-1841, ed. by M. House and G. Storey. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)

a neighbour, and Mary records a donkey party and outing he arranged. But there are also scattered throughout her journal and Charlotte's, references to visits to Dr Willis. It is usually Lindsey and 'Papa and Mamma' who go on these outings, not other members of the family, and it is possible these visits were also professional consultations. Lindsey was in no respect hidden away from other people, but the 'problem' of Lindsey was never explicitly aired. As with Augustus, his educational achievements, or lack of them, are never specified, and the references are vague, sometimes suggesting surprising skill, as with Lindsey parsing Horace, and sometimes far more limited achievement. The question of his competence or otherwise was not so much a wish to keep the problem quiet (though that may have been something of an issue) but a practical matter. As the Guests saw it, Mr Pegus wanted to suppress any such question arising because that would certainly put a stop to him siphoning money from the estate for his own use. Charlotte and John Guest wanted to keep their options open, so that as a last resort Mr Pegus might be stopped by declaring Lindsey *non compos mentis*. But that would have meant the estate being taken over by the Crown until Lindsey's death, which would have been in the interest of no one. The issue of Augustus's competence never arose - or was never referred to - since his father was in healthy possession of the Viscounty and it became clear that Augustus was going to die before he did.

This account of Lindsey's life, as did that of Augustus's, sought answers to question about what kind of life these individuals had. While aspects of and periods of time in an individual's life can be examined asking whether they were agreeable or otherwise, and one can ask whether other people had that individual's interest at heart, there is a more fundamental issue. This is the question of autonomy - whether a person is able formulate and carry through a plan of action for their own interests. This issue has been considered in the Introduction, drawing on the work of Doyal and Gough.<sup>111</sup> Lindsey did carry his own aims through in some matters - he went shooting when Charlotte would have preferred him to be studying, and he pursued Miss Posnett (though that was soon stopped). It is interesting to note exactly what happened in the most important action of his life, the offer to Mr Pegus of an annuity to get rid of him. On 15 March Charlotte writes that she was at Du Cane's to arrange to end Mr Pegus's control at Uffington. It is the next day that Lindsey is restless and expresses the wish that his stepfather 'would no more come near Uffington'. Charlotte says that nothing could be easier, and asks Mr Du Cane to come and arrange this. The point about autonomy is that while Lindsey obviously does want Mr Pegus to go, it is not plain that he could have articulated this desire and carried it through had it not been that Charlotte was his ally, indeed had already been thinking on those lines herself.

---

<sup>111</sup> L Doyal and I. Gough, *A Theory of Human Need* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

## Chapter 8

### INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENT IN THE FAMILIES OF THE GENTRY AND UPPER MIDDLE CLASSES

This chapter will examine the lives of five intellectually impaired people from the gentry and the middle class. Three of them were born at the end of the eighteenth century; Jane Austen's brother George (1766-1838), her cousin once removed Hastings de Feuillide (1786-1801) and Golding Constable (1774-1838) the elder brother of the painter John Constable. Two were born in the middle of the nineteenth century; Byron Woodhull (1854-1932), son of Victoria Woodhull, the American suffragist, politician and magazine proprietor who came to live in England in 1877, and Laura Stephen (1870-1945), daughter of Leslie Stephen and his first wife Minny. The lives in this chapter are considered in chronological order, with the exception that Hastings's life will be dealt with immediately after George Austen's. Since the two come from the same family and were very close chronologically it seems sensible to juxtapose their stories. The evidence about most of these people comes principally from family letters, but for Byron Woodhull it is largely from Theodore Tilton's 1871 *Biographical Sketch*<sup>1</sup> of Victoria Woodhull's life. This *Sketch* is the least satisfactory of the sources, firstly because there is little about Byron and secondly because Tilton is seeking to create an image of Woodhull and her environment, whereas the kind of family letters used here and in the previous two chapters tend to deal with issues as they arise and are immediately perceived, without thought for creating a public image.

George Austen (1766-1838) was an elder brother of Jane Austen, and the second of the eight children (James, George, Edward, Henry, Cassandra, Francis, Jane and Charles) of the Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Leigh. George's life was unlike those of any of the other people examined here since he lived at home only for a very brief part of his childhood. He was then boarded out with a family, possibly more than one, for the rest of his long life. It is probable that many more people with cognitive or other impairments were similarly accommodated. There is no indication that anyone was surprised by or critical of George's fate. Jane Austen's uncle Thomas, her mother's younger brother, was also considered abnormal and was similarly boarded out, for some time with the same family as George<sup>2</sup>. But there is no reason either to assume that what

---

<sup>1</sup> T. Tilton, *Victoria Woodhull: a Biographical Sketch* (New York: Golden Age, 1871).

<sup>2</sup> D. Nokes, *Jane Austen: a life* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997) p. 25.



happened to George was routine since at almost the same time Hastings de Feuillide (1786-1801), George's cousin once removed, was cared for lovingly by his mother, grandmother and two trusted women servants for his fifteen years of life, yet he too was mentally impaired, though less severely than George. One must be careful about drawing conclusions about what 'usually' happened to an intellectually impaired child. It is interesting to compare George Austen's life with the very different life of his cousin Hastings. Historical and social class location and gender are the same; but family position, number of children in the family, the presence of people able to share in the care, and, probably, temperamental variations between the Reverend and Mrs Austen and Eliza de Feuillide were different for George and Hastings.

Very little can be discovered about George Austen's life; a little more about Hastings's, and for both of them the essential facts can be found in published sources.<sup>3</sup> But the two children have been perceived and written about as background to Jane Austen's life, whereas here their lives and the ways in which they were perceived and cared for are the focus of attention. George Austen was the Reverend Austen and Cassandra Leigh's second son. He was baptised the day he was born, August 6<sup>th</sup> 1776 and christened on 29<sup>th</sup> September. Saul Tysoe Hancock, husband of the Reverend Austen's sister Philadelphia, was one of the godparents - the Hancock's were staying with the Austens at the time. The other godparents were a cousin of Mrs Austen and a Mrs Cockell.<sup>4</sup> Like his elder brother, and the subsequent siblings he was breast-fed at home and, at about three months, weaned and sent to spend his early childhood with a country family nearby.<sup>5</sup> Judging from mentions of the children in letters, they normally returned from the village family at the age of two or three - except for George. During George's early childhood there are scattered comments about him in letters but then nothing more until the end of his life. Nothing is ever said specifically about what was the matter with him, except that he had fits; but it seems plain that his intellectual development was the greatest problem, and that no one wanted to give his condition a name.

---

<sup>3</sup> For example R.A. Austen-Leigh, *The Austen Papers, 1704-1856* (Privately printed by Spottiswood, Ballantyne and Co., 1942); D. Nokes, *op. cit.*; C. Tomalin, *Jane Austen: a Life* (London: Viking, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> W. Austen-Leigh and R. A. Austen-Leigh *Jane Austen: a family record*, revised and enlarged by D. Le Faye (London: British Library, 1989) p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Nokes, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

In July 1770, when George was four, the Reverend Austen wrote to his sister-in-law Philadelphia: 'I am much obliged to you for your kind wishes for George's improvement, but from the best judgement I can form at present we must not be too sanguine; be it as it may, we have this comfort, he cannot be a bad or wicked child.', and in December that year Mrs Austen told Philadelphia that she was going to stay with the Leigh-Perrots (relatives) for ten days, and would take James and Edward with her (five and three respectively) - but George was to be left behind. In the same letter she says: 'My poor little George is come to see me today, he seems pretty well, though he had a fit lately; it was near a twelvemonth since he had one before, so I was in hopes they would have left him, but I must not flatter myself so now.'<sup>6</sup> Her comments on George contrast with her pleasure in the achievements of the other children. In 1772 she writes: 'My little boy [Henry, born 1771] is come home from nurse, and a fine stout little fellow he is'; then in August 1775: 'My last boy [Frank, born 1774] is very stout and has run alone these past two months, and he is not sixteen months old. My little girl [Cassandra, born 1773] talks all day long, and in my opinion is a very entertaining companion'.<sup>7</sup> However George did spend some time with the family since in 1772, in the same letter to her sister in which she comments on Henry's good progress, Mrs Austen adds: ' . . . so now I have all four at home and some time in January I expect a fifth [Cassandra].'

The only recorded comment about George from someone outside the immediate family is in a letter of 1772 from Saul Hancock in Calcutta to his wife in England in which he says: 'That my brother and sister Austen are well, I heartily rejoice, but I cannot say that the news of the violently rapid increase in their family gives me much pleasure; [Hancock and Philadelphia had only one child, Eliza (or Betsey)] especially when I consider the case of my Godson who must be provided for without the least hope of his being able to assist himself.'<sup>8</sup> This makes it plain that by 1772 when George was six it was generally thought that there was no hope of normal development. It seems there was no plan for education or training for George, but only for care of his physical needs. In *A family Record* there is a suggestion that George may have been deaf and dumb, based

---

<sup>6</sup> Austen-Leigh. *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 26-7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

on a reference in a letter of 1808 from Jane Austen to Cassandra. In this letter Jane describes meeting a Mr Fitzhugh who was completely deaf and that she 'talked to him a little with my fingers, which was funny enough'. Possibly this was how she had communicated with George is suggested in *A Family Record*, Tomalin and Nokes.<sup>9</sup> However, this possibility has been constructed out of very little evidence, merely a single sentence, and knowledge about sign languages at the time make it a very remote possibility.

There are two kinds of sign system for the deaf; one is the finger spelling of the letters of English (or French or whatever) words while the other is the use of manual signs to represent whole words and syntactical relationships.<sup>10</sup> British Sign Language (or American Sign Language) are of this sort and have a grammar and vocabulary of signs entirely separate from spoken languages. This kind of Sign is learned as a first, or an entirely new, language. The other kind, finger spelling, is relatively quick and easy to learn for a person with normal speech and hearing or for someone who has become deaf. It is a yet further obstacle for someone born profoundly deaf who has first to learn and become literate in a spoken language that they cannot hear. If George had communicated with by finger spelling there can hardly have been anything wrong with his brain as he would first have had to be literate. The finger talk however might conceivably have been some kind of manual Sign language; a simple version of this kind of communication is possible for someone with intellectual impairment. But if George had been taught this, it suggests a systematic attempt by the family to educate him. But nothing in the traces of George we have suggest anything more than concern for his physical care. One can approach the matter the other way round, and consider what Jane Austen meant by talking with her fingers. It is far more likely to have been finger spelling of English words. From the seventeenth century there were versions of finger spelling, not very different from that in use today. But Sign as a language in its own right was not well documented until the nineteenth century<sup>11</sup> and it unlikely that Jane Austen knew any formal version of this - far more

---

<sup>9</sup> J. Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, Collected and edited by D. Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 160-1; Austen-Leigh and Austen-Leigh, *op. cit.*, p. 20; Tomalin, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Nokes, *op. cit.*, p.347.

<sup>10</sup> J.G. Kyle and B. Woll, *Sign Language: the study of deaf people and their language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-50.

difficult anyway for a hearing person than finger spelling. It is most likely that her conversation with Mr Fitzhugh was in finger spelling which is not difficult for a literate person to learn. Taking into account the difficulties of learning finger spelling for an intellectually impaired person, the unlikelihood of anyone knowing a Signed language, and - most telling of all - the lack of interest in George's development once it had become clear to everyone that he was not 'normal', it is very probable that the 'finger talk' had nothing at all to do with George.<sup>12</sup>

After 1772 George fades out of the family picture. Tomalin says that George was 'probably' still in Steventon in 1776, and that in 1779 'arrangements must also have been made' for George, along with his uncle Thomas, to be settled at Monk Sherborne with a family called Culham - but she gives no reference for this taking place in 1779.<sup>13</sup> The end of George's life is recorded in Tucker's *History of Jane Austen's Family*, 1983, and Lane's *Jane Austen's Family through Five Generations*, 1884. He died of dropsy (oedema, probably a symptom of heart failure) at Monk Sherborne on 17 January 1838 at the age of seventy two. The information on the death certificate was provided by a George Culham (spelt Cullum in Tucker) and George was buried in an unmarked grave in All Saints church in Monk Sherborne. This village was near Sherborne St John, Hampshire, where James Austen was vicar between 1791 and 1819.<sup>14</sup>

Steventon Rectory in the period of George's childhood was a busy place. In 1773 when Cassandra was born the Austens had five children (including George) under ten years old, and there were still Frank, Jane and Charles to come. The Reverend Austen, like many clergymen of the time, took in boys for tutoring. In 1772 in the same letter that spoke of Cassandra's progress Mrs Austen said that 'Jemmy and Neddy are very happy in a new playfellow, Lord Lymington, whom Mr Austen has lately taken charge of'.<sup>15</sup> He was five years old, was 'backward' and had a stammer;

---

<sup>12</sup> A friend of mine who would now be a hundred told me that she and her friends used to communicate in finger spelling in class at school to avoid detection by the mistresses.

<sup>13</sup> Tomalin, *op. cit.*, pp. 7; 25.

<sup>14</sup> G. H. Tucker, *A Goodly Heritage: a history of Jane Austen's Family* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1983), p. 20; M. Lane *Jane Austen's Family Through Five Generations* (London: Robert Hale, 1984) p. 94.

<sup>15</sup> Austen-Leigh, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

he didn't stay long as in 1773 he has been sent to London in the hope a Mr Augier would cure the stammer, and there was a new pupil in his place.<sup>16</sup> Mr Austen said, apropos Lord Lymington as a pupil, that he had 'little toleration for want of capacity in man or woman'.<sup>17</sup> David Nokes, on recounting that Cassandra and Jane were sent to boarding school in 1785, observes that 'girls and idiots' were sent away so that the serious business of educating boys could be got on with.<sup>18</sup> In fact Mrs Austen's letters show great pleasure in all her children's accomplishments (and all except George were clearly healthy, lively and intelligent), the two girls as well as the boys. But in the busy Rectory with poultry and dairy to look after as well as her own children and the boys being tutored there certainly was no place for worrying over much about George and thinking of ways in which his faculties might be developed. But the small family circle in which Hastings de Feuillide grew up was very different from that at Stenventon.

Hastings de Feuillide (1786-1801) was George and Jane Austen's first cousin once removed, the grandson of the Reverend Austen's elder sister Philadelphia. Hastings remained with his mother, grandmother and two trusted servants all his life and his health was a continual focus of concern. Three key factors that probably influenced his treatment, apart from individual differences of personality which are hard to gauge at this distance in time, are firstly, that he was an only child, and secondly his mother lived apart from her French husband for long periods. Thirdly, though Hasting's mother, Eliza de Feuillide, was cousin to George Austen and his seven siblings, her upbringing and life experiences were radically different from those of the Reverend Austen's family. Mr and Mrs Austen were a cultivated but outwardly conventional Church of England family in a country living. The Reverend Austen's sister Philadelphia had set off for India on her own in 1752, at the age of twenty one, in the hope that her lack of a dowry would be little impediment in a country where there were few unmarried European women.<sup>19</sup> Tomalin comments that it was not unknown for single undowried women to go to the colonies to find a husband, but even so Philadelphia showed courage and independence in so doing. The trip served its purpose and in

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> R. A. Austen-Leigh and W. Austen-Leigh, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Nokes, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> Tomalin, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

1773 she married Tysoe Saul Hancock, forty-two and an employee of the East India Company.<sup>20</sup>

Hancock and Philadelphia had one child, Elizabeth (Betsey, later Eliza) born eight years after the marriage. Warren Hastings had become a friend and business partner and was Eliza's godfather. Eliza's only son was later named after him; it is possible that Warren Hastings, not Hancock, was her father. At all events, Warren Hastings provided money for Eliza, increasing the amount after Hancock died in 1775 (when Eliza was ten) so that she had £10,000 held in trust for her.<sup>21</sup> Though both Hancocks were in England in 1776 (that was when Hancock became godfather to George Austen) Philadelphia and Eliza remained in England for Eliza's sake. Letters from Hancock to Philadelphia show concern for Eliza's well-being and education, and that the education should be of the best: 'I will request you to get her the best writing master that can be procured by money' and 'When you buy a harpsichord [for Eliza] let it be of the best; mind not the price' (different letters in 1772). In 1773 he says he has sent Eliza a horse and wants her to have a graceful seat, though is worried about the danger of fox-hunting and thinks it 'in some degree an indecent Amusement for a young Lady'.<sup>22</sup> Eliza, unlike the Austen children, grew up accustomed to being the sole centre of her parents' attention and to having considerable resources lavished on her education. In 1775 Hancock died, and afterwards Philadelphia and Eliza lived mostly in France. In 1781 Eliza married a French officer Jean Capot de Feuillide who had family estates in South West France.<sup>23</sup> History repeated itself in that Eliza, like her mother, lived for long periods apart from her husband because of the upheavals of the revolution in France. She came to England, with Philadelphia, in 1786 so that her son should be born there and thereafter lived mostly in London. De Feuillide died in 1794 and in 1779 she subsequently married Henry Austen, the Reverend and Mrs Austen's fourth son and Jane Austen's favourite brother.

Though accustomed to some wealth and the amusements of Paris and London it is clear that

---

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> British Museum, Additional MS 2923, Warren Hastings Papers, Folio 10, Letters from Tysoe Saul Hancock to his Wife, 1769-1775,.

<sup>23</sup> Nokes, *op. cit.* pp. 68-9.

Eliza was not frivolous and superficial. She became a valued friend of Jane Austen<sup>24</sup> and was a devoted mother to little Hastings. Philadelphia lived with her until her death in 1792 as did two trusted French servants, Madame Bigeon and her daughter, who became friends as well as servants<sup>25</sup>. Madame Bigeon's worth was appreciated by Jane Austen, who left her a legacy of £50; Claire Tomalin comments that it was 'a very striking provision . . . to an old Frenchwoman with no claim on her but of friendship . . . and long service to her cousin and her cousin's child.'<sup>26</sup> These four women, Eliza, Philadelphia, Madame Bigeon and Madame Périgord, looked after Hastings. It is from Eliza's letters that we hear of Hasting's problems, of the efforts to find a cure and the care that she and the other women took of him. We first hear of Hastings in Eliza's letter to her cousin Philadelphia Walter in January 1786 saying she was expecting a child and that his father wished him to be born in England. She adds:

I shall supplicate your aid for the brat I am to introduce you to, and which I am sure I shall be much at a loss what to do with, as never was a being less qualified, nor had less taste for the cares of the nursery as your humble servant.<sup>27</sup>

Though the tone is part joking, it seems that Eliza didn't expect motherhood to be the serious concern as it turned out to be. Two letters to Philadelphia in April and November 1778 include mentions of Hastings<sup>28</sup>.

The first sign of Hasting's problems is in a letter from Philadelphia Walter to James Austen July 23rd 1788 when Hastings was just two, saying:

Madame de Feuillide and my aunt are returned to London. Poor little Hastings has had another fit; we all fear his faculties are hurt; many people say he has the appearance of a weak head; our fears are of his being like George Austen. He has every symptom of good health but cannot yet use his feet in the least, nor yet talk, though he makes a great noise continually.<sup>29</sup>

But Eliza didn't take such a pessimistic view and in August 1788, after a visit to Ramsgate for the

---

<sup>24</sup> Tomalin, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>27</sup> Austen-Leigh, *op. cit.* p.116.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 123; 128.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

sake of Hastings' health, wrote Philadelphia a letter which started with accounts of visits and amusements, and went on:

I don't know what beaux I can give you a more satisfactory account of, unless it is a young gentleman whom you recollect there was some little scandal about during your stay in Orchard Street; don't be alarmed for I mean your morning visitor, little Hastings. He now sports twelve teeth, eight of which he has acquired since Ramsgate, and what is still better he has cut the last without concussions: upon the whole I think he is much better for sea-bathing. He acquires new accomplishments every day, and his last is a very elegant one: he doubles his prodigious fists and boxes quite in the English style.<sup>30</sup>

But to a non-maternal eye these accomplishments alone would be worrying in a two year old.

However there is more encouraging news in February 1789, when Hastings is two and a half, and Eliza writes:

I [will] . . . tell you all the wonderful endowments of my wonderful brat, whom I think you would think much improved . He endeavours to chatter both in French and in English and says a great many words and tries to say still more, is most comfortably rude and riotous, hitherto somewhat spoilt, but his grandmamma declares that as soon as he can be made to understand and hear reason , he shall cease to be indulged. As it would be very unnatural to disparage one's own offspring in a friend's opinion and as I have shown you the worst side of the picture . . . it is but justice likewise to make you observe his perfections . I must tell you this son of mine is exceedingly good tempered and I do not think he will ever be a Alderman or Lord Mayor as he has not the least of greediness . . . and will offer his half-munched apples or cakes to the whole company .

In January 1791 she writes that she remains in Margate for the sake of Hastings's (then four and a half) health though there are 'no balls and plays etc. by now' as she has been told that 'one month's bathing at this time of year was more efficacious than six at any other time.' 'Was not this heroic?' she adds (of her devotion to her son's health) and continues:

Hastings begins to lisp English tolerably well, his education is likewise begun, his grandmamma having succeeded in teaching him his letters. The sea has strengthened him wonderfully.<sup>31</sup>

The weakness of his legs mentioned in 1788 by Philadelphia Walter had not gone away, and Eliza writes in August 1791:

My son and heir, who promises to be as great a pickle as any . . . has laid aside his feminine garb and now makes a most manly appearance in jacket and trousers, my reasons for . . . this . . . is that I think it will make him hold himself more upright and walk better now that he has got rid of the terrible encumbrance called petticoats.

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.139-142.



The next news of his progress is a letter of December 1796 when he was nine and a half, which says:

I must bid you adieu for Hastings chatters so intolerably that I know not what I write - He is putting the map of England together and sticks Kent close to Durham, because he says his two best friends live in those counties. Have I told you I have begun teaching him to write and that he regularly comes to school with me every day, for that and French and English reading? You would laugh to see how grave we both are on these occasions.

In 1797 Hasting's health took a turn for the worse. In the same year (December) Eliza married Henry Austen, Jane Austen's elder, and favourite, brother, but this did not prevent a great deal of care being taken of Hastings's needs. Eliza wrote to Philadelphia Walter about Henry's 'excellence of heart, temper and understanding . . . steady attachment to me, his affection for my little boy'.<sup>32</sup> In September she took Hastings to Lowestoft as he had been unwell and had 'gradually sunk into a state of such extreme debility' that she had sent for Sir Walter Farquar who had recommended 'sea and clear dry air' but in spite of this he was taken ill in December with a 'seizure of the convulsive kind' and a high temperature. In February 1799 she told Philadelphia that she and Henry were living near Dorking and had a garden in which Hastings 'takes constant air and exercise'. But Hastings's health continued to deteriorate and in October Eliza wrote:

[He] suffers very much from frequent and violent returns of fits which I believe to be epileptic and which have hitherto baffled all the aid of medicine; their effects on his mental powers if his life shod not be destroyed by them, must be of the most melancholy nature.

Hastings died in 1801.

Since so little is known of George, it is difficult to make any comparison of his abilities with those of Hastings. It is illuminating to compare Philadelphia Walter's gloomy letter of 1788 when she likened Hastings to 'poor George Austen' with Eliza's cheerful account of him 'boxing in the English style'. But from Eliza's letters, optimistic as they are, one would conclude that Hastings's mental abilities were probably affected before his mother wrote of the possibility after his illness of 1799. At four and a half he 'lisp'd English tolerably well' - but this sounds like a kindly way of describing rather limited competence. At nine he is learning to write and read English and French; rather late for reading and writing a mother tongue, though the French is an added challenge. But for none of these skills is there any indication of his level of achievement. Certainly Hastings could

---

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

not have been described as an idiot but when his education is compared with what was expected of other nine year old boys - often sent away to tutors or to a prep school to study Classics - much less was expected of Hastings. But still Eliza continued to teach Hastings, at least until he became severely ill in 1797 when the lessons may have ceased. If she had been pessimistic as Philadelphia Walter was in her letter of 1788, she and her mother might never have tried to teach him anything. On the other hand if George Austen had been cossetted and encouraged perhaps he might have developed some modest skills. Impossible to say, and therefore useless to speculate. But it is possible to say that Hastings was clearly fortunate in the love and attention that was centred on him (though perhaps with the exception of the sea-bathing in January).

Golding Constable was born in 1774, the third child and eldest son of Golding Constable (1739-1816) and Ann Constable. He had three sisters, Ann (Nancy) born in 1768, Martha (Patty) born in 1769 and Mary, born in 1781. There were two brothers, John Constable, the artist born in 1776 and Abram born in 1783. As the eldest son it was expected that Golding would take over the family business but he lacked the necessary ability; John became a painter and it was the youngest son, Abram who went into business with his father<sup>33</sup>. Without question Golding is the least impaired of all the individuals who form part of this study. He travelled on his own, was a good shot and in 1821 had a house of his own. It is possible that his problem was physical ill health or weakness of some kind rather than intellectual impairment. Indeed it is clear that his physical health was not good, but the concern in the letters suggests worry about his mental capacities as well as physical. In 1807 Ann Constable included news about the family's health 'Thank God your Father is tolerably well . . . Abram has had a very bad cold. Golding is well but gains possession of more apathy than ever - yet good tempered as usual<sup>34</sup>'. In a long letter from Abram to John in 1819, there are several references to Golding:

Golding has now returned three weeks and appears really better than when he first arrived, indeed I never saw him better in his life, except perhaps some days he shows a greater indecision than others, which you know he always did, certain it is his mind is very weak, but very little otherways than it always was . . . Golding has this afternoon gone to Harwich . . . He continues charmingly . . . and has amused himself with shooting but can't bear so

---

<sup>33</sup> R.B. Beckett, *John Constable's Correspondence: The Family at East Bergholt 1807-1837* (London: HMSO, 1962) p.7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

much fatigue. I think it would be wrong for him to engage in any business, however small<sup>35</sup>.

In 1821 Abram wrote to John:

Golding continues very well. Sometimes he has a fit but not very lately, they drop him and take away his senses for the moment, but he soon recovers. He is however far from right and totally unable to do anything, that is to say, to be left for him to do, which perhaps you will say is nothing new. He seems to have lost all kindness for anybody or anything, but is entirely engrossed in himself, his mind more contracted than ever<sup>36</sup>

The family are concerned about Golding having social contacts and going out, in a way that they are not about other family members: 'Golding, for a wonder, has promised a visit to his friend Torin, about the 8 of May<sup>37</sup>. Torin, though referred to here as Golding's friend was evidently, with his wife, a friend of the family, and in general the remarks about Golding's social contacts suggests that he did not find it easy to make his own friendships. Ann Constable wrote to John in 1815 that 'Mr J.R. has been truly agreeable and has made Golding a very pleasant walking companion<sup>38</sup> and Abram to John in 1817 that:

We have this afternoon all of us (emphasis in original) drunk tea by invitation at the Doctors, and a very pleasant evening we had. We met Captain Bowen and his two sisters . . . , Golding went with us with some solicitation, the Doctor was very polite to him, and we took it as a compliment, as Golding so seldom goes out, and has never been there before . . . the doctor told him he would be glad to see him at all times<sup>39</sup>.

In spite of his problems of physical/mental health he was able to have a house built for him, with financial help from Abram, and lived there on his own<sup>40</sup>. He also managed to obtain employment in 1821. John Constable's patron, the Earl of Dysart died, and the title and property passed to his sister who became Countess of Dysart; John was able to obtain the post of warden of some woods near East Bergholt for Golding<sup>41</sup>. Golding was forty seven when he commenced this work, and continued with it until 1837, when he was sixty three, a year before he died. There are several

---

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183-4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 80.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 216; 244;249.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

references in the family letters to difficulties with his wardenship. Problems were caused for him by two people, Mr Wenn, Lady Dysart's land-steward, and John Purcell Fitzgerald M.P., who rented one of the Dysart properties, and we learn of help that his brothers gave him in these two, and other, matters. The first reference to the Wenn trouble is in 1824 when he had been complaining to his employer about Golding; Abram wrote: 'I hear Mr Wenn has made every exertion to get the Woods again but I hope without success'. Beckett says that Wenn had been cheating Lady Dysart for years and resented the arrival of a newcomer. The extent of the cheating didn't emerge until 1834 when John wrote that: 'Lady Dysart applies to me for advice now that it is too late - her steward Wenn is dead. I always told her of his going on . . . It is now found that he has been ruining her and her estate'<sup>42</sup>. Fitzgerald tried to get Golding to give up one of the woods within his wardenship, and when Golding refused '[I]t now seems he [Fitzgerald] has applied to her Ladyship for the wood away from G.C., but which I hope he will not obtain'<sup>43</sup>. And he didn't, and John wrote to his wife, Maria, that: 'I shall have a great deal to tell Lady Dysart - about Mr Fitzgerald who has certainly behaved ill to Golding - and is now rightly served as Golding had given him ample liberty to sport in Old Hall Wood. He was not content with that but tried to get it into his hands altogether - and now has neither . . .'<sup>44</sup>

There are instances of Abram or John helping or advising him in other matters to do with the wardenship:

Lady Dysart wants me to see the woods which she has given into the care of my brother, that I may bring a report to her, as he cannot leave them'<sup>45</sup>

Golding has not inserted anything in the Ipswich paper yet . . . and he thinks just before the shooting season (emphasis in original) will be a favourable opportunity . . . So I told his to do as he liked, he has not written to Her Ladyship and appears afraid to write, but I shall continue to urge him until he has'<sup>46</sup>.

---

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* pp.205;208;284.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

Ann Constable wrote to John in 1833 that:

Golding has had his book, and I am sure thanks you sincerely as in duty bound he ought, he owes much to you for what you have done for him - put him into possession of what gives him great pleasure - what he is quite competent to manage, - and it is the only thing he is fit for, and her Ladyship has a faithful honest steward<sup>47</sup>

Golding didn't marry, but then only two of the five siblings (Patty and John) did so. But as evidence for an impairment the failure to go into the family business can be cited, and the constant note of concern about Golding in letters. It seems most unlikely that Golding had become some strange focus of family tension and his difficulties exaggerated; the letters all indicate a comfortable family life and individuals at ease with themselves and other people. It was of course possible for them to reallocate the role of inheritor of the family business to a younger son, in a way that is impossible for a titled family like the Lambs (anyway, Augustus was the only son) or the Berties. But the Constables might not have reallocated family roles, or they could have done so resentfully and complainingly. But the impression that comes over from the letters is of a particularly affectionate family that managed to act for the good of the family as a group, and with regard to the individual wishes and needs of its different members – no mean achievement.

Next to be considered is Byron Woodhull, born in 1854 and first child of Victoria Woodhull the American Suffragist and journal proprietor, who lived in England from 1877 to 1927<sup>48</sup>. Of lives looked at in this study, Byron had the most unusual and untypical family background. Victoria Woodhull was born Victoria Clafin in 1838 in Ohio. Her mother was interested in spiritualism, her father worked at lumbering in the summer and in his various commercial ventures in winter. In 1839 and 1853 he suffered financial disasters and took to drinking and violence. Victoria left home in 1853 and married, at the age of fifteen, a Doctor Woodhull, and the following year Byron was born<sup>49</sup>. Woodhull had a remarkable career. She made a fortune and became a woman suffragist in 1869; with her sister she founded a stockbroking firm, and announced her intention to run for the U.S. presidency. In 1870 she and her sister founded Woodhull and Clafin's Weekly. She was a

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 279. The book referred to Beckett says is probably a copy of English Landscape.

<sup>48</sup> L. B. Underhill, The Woman Who Ran for President: the many lives of Victoria Woodhull (Bridgehampton, New York: Bridge Works Publishing, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.11-25.

believer in spiritualism, and a supporter of free love. In 1872 she made a more serious attempt at the presidency, nominated by the Equal Rights Party. Dogged by scandal and law suits about her unorthodox views and private life she left for England to establish a new respectable life. It was then that she abandoned her ideas about free love. Apart from a brief attempt at a return to the U.S. she spent the rest of her life in England. There she married her third husband, John Baddingly Martin of Martin's Bank, and founded *The Humanitarian: a Monthly Magazine of Sociology*. She died in 1927<sup>50</sup>.

Her son Byron outlived her. He was born when she was only sixteen, and he lived with her, in spite of the upheavals of her life until her death. Other members of her family were involved in his care and after her death her daughter Zula looked after him. The most that is to be learned about Byron directly is in her friend and lover Theodore Tilton's biography of her. He claims that she was forced by her parents to marry Dr Woodhull who drank and squandered money and that::

To add to her misery she discovered that her child, begotten in drunkenness and born in squalor was a half idiot; predestined to be a hopeless invalid for life; endowed with just enough intelligence to exhibit the light of reason in dim eclipse: - a sad and pitiful spectacle in his mother's house today, where he roams from room to room, muttering noises more sepulchral than human; a daily agony to the woman who bore him . . . and heightening the pathos of the perpetual scene by the uncommon sweetness of his temper, which, by winning everyone's love, doubles everyone's pity<sup>51</sup>.

The passage lays on the alleged misery, perhaps to emphasise Woodhull's heroic nature. There is too some of the contradictory perceptions and the extravagant sentimental language that has been seen in Chapter 3 in writing to encourage education for idiots. On the one hand Byron's 'sweetness of temper' is mentioned, and on the other the 'daily agony' *he aroused. That he 'roamed' about the house and the reference to the 'perpetual scene' suggest that he lived with the family rather than being secluded in a separate part of the house, even if his presence produced mixed emotions.*<sup>52</sup>

There are many indications in Underhill's and Tilton's biographies of Woodhull that Byron was

---

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid. Passim.*

<sup>51</sup> T. Tilton, *Victoria Woodhull: A Biographical Sketch* (New York: Golden Age, 1871) pp. 14-16.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

much in her mind, and that some of her actions and interests were influenced by his condition, and we get glimpses of how Byron fitted into family life. In 1860 Woodhull moved to San Francisco with her husband and Byron where they were supported by her (then meagre) earnings. In the same year Byron was seriously ill with scarlet fever; Woodhull had a vision of Jesus and said she would not 'permit' Byron to die, and 'caught up his lifeless form and went into a trance'<sup>53</sup>. He recovered and Woodhull felt she had a 'calling' to cure<sup>54</sup>. Though her mother was interested in spiritualism it seems that it was this experience with Byron that led Woodhull into her interest in clairvoyance and spiritual healing - and it became for a while her major source of income. In 1861 her daughter Zula was born, and she met her second husband to be, Colonel Blood. She moved to New York in 1867, met Cornelius Vanderbilt and in 1869 both made a great deal of money from a gold mine. She became a supporter of woman suffrage, and founded, with her sister, Woodhull and Clafin's Weekly<sup>55</sup>. From this point on she had no financial worries, and she was able to support a large household of her children, husband, ex husband and lovers<sup>56</sup> though she wasn't able to escape scandal about her way of life.

In 1871 Woodhull's mother went to court claiming that James Harvey Blood, Woodhull's second husband, had alienated her daughter's affections. Much was made of the unorthodox family, particularly the fact that Dr Woodhull lived in the Woodhull/Blood household. Blood was asked to tell the court why Dr Woodhull lived in the same house, and who supported him:

The firm of Woodhull, Clafin and Company has supported the whole of them; Mrs Woodhull's first child is idiotic and Dr Woodhull takes care of him.<sup>57</sup>

It is probable that 'care' meant medical attention rather than day today care - and in any case the motif may have been introduced as a justification for Blood's presence. The trial aroused press criticism of the family mores and of Woodhull's espousal of free love. As part of what Underhill describes as damage limitation Woodhull claimed in the New York Times that Dr Woodhull was a

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-1.

<sup>54</sup> Underhill, *op\_cit.* p.28.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-57.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.

<sup>57</sup> James Blood, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 137.

sick man and was in the household because he needed looking after<sup>58</sup>; Tilton says Dr Woodhull had D.T.s<sup>59</sup>. This was not the only occasion when she used her son's condition to gain sympathy; later that year she began to cultivate spiritualists as supporters for the Equal Rights Party she had founded and used readings from Tilton's biography to raise sympathy over her difficult early life and handicapped son<sup>60</sup>. In 1875 there was more trouble with court cases and attacks on her way of life and Underhill says that Woodhull started a search for respectability, abandoned her free love ideas, moved to England (South Kensington) in 1877 with her mother, two children and Tennie where she married for the third time and founded The Humanitarian: a Monthly Magazine of Sociology. Like her spiritualism, aspects of this venture appear to have some connection with her concerns for Byron.

Much of The Humanitarian was about improvements in health and welfare - food purity, medical examination of children, family planning and eugenics; Woodhull believed that the mentally unfit should not marry. Zula outlived her mother and Byron (who died in 1932) and the residuary legatee was the Royal Institution which was to use the bequest to set up a Victoria Woodhull endowment for the study of eugenics<sup>61</sup>. In 1894 Woodhull got her to promise never to marry, concerned that Byron should have someone to continue to look after him, and also apparently because of fear that his condition might be hereditary<sup>62</sup>. Woodhull died in 1927 and Byron in 1932. Woodhull, it seems, was not interested in the institutions for the education of idiots that sprung up in Byron's childhood, rather her response to his disability was her concern for eugenics. This of course was an issue discussed in both the U.S and Britain from the 1870s, concern intensifying at the end of the century and the start of the new one. But it is interesting that it was the eugenics issue (always stronger in the U.S than England) that she chose to focus on. Woodhull's feelings about her son and the condition that affected him are distinctly different from those of any of the other families. Moreover, she, alone, as far as we know, among the parents of children discussed

---

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>59</sup> Tilton, *op\_cit.* p. 25.

<sup>60</sup> Underhill, *op\_cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>61</sup> Underhill, *op\_cit.* pp 292, 296, 310.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.296.



here, blamed herself for Byron's condition, and 'fell to accusing her innocent self for Byron's condition'.<sup>63</sup> Tilton, as we have seen, talked about the 'drunkenness' and 'squalor' that had surrounded the child's conception so it may be these unpropitious circumstances that influenced both the guilt and the interest in eugenics. But it may have been that her American background spurred the concern for eugenics. It may have been that her experience as journalist and politician inclined her to seek causes to support; or it may have been that Byron was more seriously impaired than the other individuals considered, and so caused more emotional upheaval. With the information that we have about Woodhull and Byron it is only possible to speculate about what influence or influences shaped Woodhull's response.

Laura Stephen (1870-1945) was the only child of Minny (Harriet) Thackeray (1839-75) and Leslie Stephen (1832-1904). Stephen was the first editor of the DNB and father, in his second marriage, of Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf. Laura was premature, weighing under three pounds, and although she was slow in teething and learning to talk her mother didn't notice anything seriously wrong, and it was only after her death that Leslie started to worry about her<sup>64</sup>. Minny's sister, Anny, and his sister Milly (Caroline Emilia) helped look after her. But Milly could not manage Laura and Leslie Stephen considered Anny 'too soft' - though it is interesting that according to Lee, Anny was the only person in later years to whom Laura responded with affection and behaved normally with<sup>65</sup>. Laura talked 'excessively', had a 'queer squeaking or semi-stammering or spasmodic utterance', often spat out or choked on her food, was accident prone and experienced 'dreadful fits of passion'.<sup>66</sup> Virginia Woolf wrote to Vanessa about a visit made by Katherine Stephen (Leslie's niece, and Laura's guardian) to Laura in 1921 that 'she was the same as ever, and never stops talking, and occasionally says "I told him to go away" or "Put it down, then" quite sensibly; but the rest is unintelligible'.<sup>67</sup> After visiting Laura in a private institution where she had been sent in 1897 her father wrote that 'when I saw her the other day I was pained by her looks and

---

<sup>63</sup> Tilton, *op. cit.*, p.

<sup>64</sup> H. Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (Vintage: London, 1997), pp. 74-5.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>66</sup> Letters from Leslie to Julia, 1879 and 1884, cited in Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in Lee, *Ibid.*, p. 103.

her ways. She is unable apparently to recognise any of us clearly<sup>68</sup> It is not clear whether this 'unintelligibility' and inability to recognise was a regression. Though her intellectual development was affected it doesn't seem to have been severe enough to affect her ability to talk; her speech may in later years have been sloppily enunciated rather than true aphasia.

In the early years of Laura's childhood she was perceived as a problem, but not, it seems, as intellectually impaired. After a falling out with Anny in 1877 over her marriage Leslie turned to the widowed Julia for advice over Laura's behaviour and many letters were exchanged (in 1877 Leslie Stephen appointed Julia her guardian). In one of these letters, apropos education for women, he said he wanted Laura to be educated enough to earn her living.<sup>69</sup> In the *Mausoleum Book* he wrote that 'her strange waywardness and inarticulate ways of speaking and talking did not fully open my eyes, and even for some time after our marriage Julia still believed in her ultimate development'.<sup>70</sup> In 1879 'We had sent Laura to a 'kindergarten' and the mistress told me she would never learn to read. I resolved to try, and succeeded in getting the poor child to read after a fashion, although I fear that I too often lost my temper and was overexacting'.<sup>71</sup> It was in 1882 when Laura was twelve that the Stephens decided that something was seriously wrong: 'We afterwards tried governesses at home, then a governess in the country.'<sup>72</sup> She was sent to Earlswood Idiot Asylum; Lee says it is not clear when this happened, but that she was being visited there by Julia in 1893.<sup>73</sup> Later she went to Brook House, Southgate, a private asylum run by a Dr Corner, as Leslie had heard 'some complaints' about Earlswood.<sup>74</sup> Southgate was where Laura's unintelligible speech and inability to recognise the family was noted.

---

<sup>68</sup> L. Stephen, *Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book*, edited by A. Bell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977) p.103. This was a biographical letter to his second wife Julia about the children of their marriage, Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia and Adrian.

<sup>69</sup> Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>70</sup> Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>73</sup> Lee, *op. cit.* p. 102.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 103.

It could be argued that for the purposes of this thesis the question of what was 'really' wrong with Laura doesn't matter; those round her, particularly Leslie and Julia Stephen, came reluctantly to the conclusion that she was intellectually impaired and would never be able to live a normal independent life. However it seems appropriate to enquire whether her impairment was primarily of social or organic origin; whether, that is, in a different environment she would have been perceived as 'normal'. There are two aspects to this; it is possible that in another environment, where less stress was laid on intellectual achievement, her peculiarities would have been unnoticed or happily tolerated. On the other hand it may have been that her deficiencies became 'real' but that they had been induced by her environment. Both questions may seem to be striving for the chimera of the 'trans historical idiot'. The first question is almost certainly unanswerable without far more detailed knowledge of exactly how Laura behaved. The second is probably unanswerable, but deserves some consideration. There were many things in Laura's childhood which were potentially disturbing. Her mother's death, the care by Anny and Milly, Laura's attachment to Anny (described as the 'only grown-up whom she could remember had shown her love') which was interrupted by family friction, the arrival of Julia, the governesses who were tried, and the arrival of step siblings, all healthy and clever. All these seem influences likely to produce a difficult childhood, without the abundant evidence of other things wrong. There was Leslie's anxiety, impatience and guilt for the burden put on Julia; in the *Mausoleum Book* he says 'my dear George, then a schoolboy, remonstrated with me saying that his mother ought not to have such a task. I thanked him (and said I) fully agreed'. George's observation, and Virginia's reactions suggest that her relationship with her step siblings wasn't a happy one. Virginia referred to her as 'Thackeray's grand-daughter [not as a half sister] a vacant-eyed girl whose idiocy was becoming daily more obvious, who could hardly read, who would throw scissors in the fire, who was tongue tied and stammered and yet had to appear at the table with the rest of us'.<sup>75</sup>

However, to set against that is the evidence that Laura was slow from the beginning, in teething and learning to talk. That her mother noticed nothing wrong (and Laura was a first baby so there was nothing to compare her with) does not mean there was nothing wrong. Leslie Stephen's comment in the *Mausoleum Book*, noted above, about having fully opened his eyes suggests

---

<sup>75</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 102.

strongly that he felt that he and Julia had been hiding the truth from themselves for a long time. Although there were difficulties and strains in Laura's childhood, they were not unlike those that many other children experienced. Many people have emotional scars from early bad experiences, but it is very rare for these to cause intellectual damage. Hermione Lee concludes that Laura had 'a mental disability, possibly a form of autism, which may have been inherited from either side of the family'.<sup>76</sup> There is no reason to conclude that Laura was autistic as opposed to intellectually impaired in a general way; brain damage at the time of the premature birth is a more parsimonious explanation. There is no reason either to suppose the condition hereditary (very few kinds of intellectual impairment are).

---

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

THE LONG REACH OF THE INSTITUTION: INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENT IN MIDDLE AND LOWER CLASS FAMILIES

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 have examined the upbringing of a child with an intellectual impairment in families, not only very privileged and fairly privileged financially, but families whose history is well known and carefully preserved because of an eminent or even famous member. No family letters or diaries have come to light for this study for a lower middle class, trade or labouring family who had a member with an intellectual impairment. Such families rarely preserve family papers, and even more rarely have a famous family member whose existence would encourage the preservation of papers. In order to see anything about life for such families when there was an intellectually impaired member an eclectic range of sources have been drawn on. For rural working class people in Scotland there is a consistent source of evidence in Arthur Mitchell's *The Insane in Private Dwellings*, 1864. Mitchell was one of the Lunacy Commissioners for Scotland, and his book is based on evidence gathered for the Commissioners. There is one other source of evidence used here on a number of families, the letters from parents, relatives and friends of patients to Earlswood asylum (in Redhill, Surrey) between 1849 and 1887<sup>1</sup>. Many of these letters provide information about life at home, usually about its difficulties as a support to a request for a longer stay or remission of fees, so these letters need cautious analysis as a source of 'facts' about home life. Although Earlswood admitted fee paying patients, the letters used here are from the modestly off since they are the people who are having difficulty paying fees or who are seeking free entry as subscription patients. As well as these sources of evidence about numbers of people, there are two minor sources of information that are used here. There is a brief mention in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1861-2, of children with evident intellectual impairment, and Francis Kilvert mentions in his diary a visit to an 'idiot' woman in 1877.<sup>2</sup>

Because these sources are so diverse, no advantage would be got from considering them

---

<sup>1</sup> Surrey History Centre (Record Office), Records of Earlswood Hospital, 'Letters to the Board, 1861-1869', 392/2/8/1 and 'Letters of Thanks, 1849-1887', 392/2/8/2.

<sup>2</sup> H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, Vol. 4 (New York: Dover, 1968); A. Mitchell, *The Insane in Private Dwellings* (Edinburgh: Edmondston Douglas, 1854); F. Kilvert, *Selections from the Diary of the Rev. Francis Kilvert, 14 May 1874-13 March 1879*, ed. and introduced by W. Plomer, Vol.3 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960).

chronologically with an idea of looking at changes over time, so the two minor sources will be looked at first. Mayhew's discussion of people with intellectual impairment, found in the chapter on 'Beggars and Cheats', is brief but raises two interesting points, to be pursued after seeing what Mayhew observed about these people. He says that:

[A]mong the petty trading beggars there are a good many idiots and half-witted creatures, who obtain a living - and a very good one it is too - by dancing in a grotesque and idiotic manner . . . to amuse children. Some of them are not such idiots as they appear, but assume a half-witted appearance to give oddness to their performances, and excite compassion for their misfortune.

He adds:

The idiot performer has a sad life when the boys gather about him. They pull his clothes, knock off his hat, and pelt him with lime and mud. But this persecution sometimes redounds to his advantage; for when the grown-up folks see him treated thus, they pity him the more. These beggars also take care to carry something to offer for sale. Half-penny songs are most commonly the merchandise.<sup>3</sup>

Mayhew gives an example of 'the little half-witted Italian man' who had an organ with one string which emitted only a 'feeble tink-a-tink', and adds that a gentleman offered to get the organ repaired. The offer to repair the organ was turned down, Mayhew supposes, because the organ grinder would appear more pathetic with a defective instrument - and also because in repair it would only have been damaged by the street boys.<sup>4</sup>

The first point of interest here is that it reveals a world of the intellectually impaired not seen in other sources on living people - though it does recall the writers on Scott who sought living models that Davie Gellatly had been based on (see 4). But these writers were referring to Scotland in the late eighteenth century, and alleged that these wandering mentally disabled people were hardly to be seen at large in the present (that is, the nineteenth century). The scene Mayhew observes is rather like the world of the fool in the early nineteenth century novel (Davie Gellatly, Meg and Jenny Guffaw, Watty Walkinshaw and Barnaby Rudge). In *Waverley* there is the conversation about whether Davie is an idiot, mad or cunningly workshy, and Mayhew expresses similar doubts about the people he discusses. They are 'idiots and half-witted creatures', persecuted by the street boys - but some are 'not such idiots as they appear'. Many are able to obtain and sell 'half-penny ballads' and an informant told Mayhew that the 'half-witted' organ grinder had 'a great

---

<sup>3</sup> Mayhew, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

deal more of the rogue than of the fool' in him.<sup>5</sup> Here then is something akin to the folkloric notion of the fool. Mayhew's idiots, like Davie, are a puzzle, perhaps rogue, perhaps fool. They, like the early fictional characters are socially marginal and Other, and like them (and unlike the living people studied here) are able to fend for themselves. Mayhew's idiots, unlike the early fictional ones, are not close to nature, but there wasn't much nature in London for them to be close to.

The second point of interest is how distant, socially, is Mayhew is from these 'half-witted' people. Elsewhere in the investigations that were first published in the *Morning Chronicle* that became *London Labour and the London Poor* Mayhew talks to pickpockets, burglars, mudlarks<sup>6</sup> and others he meets. But the 'idiots' are viewed as from a distance, and the most specific account (of the organ grinder) is hearsay. One wishes he had talked to some of these people, found out where they lived and whom they lived with, if anyone; this might have answered some questions to whether they were 'natural fools' or 'artificial fools'. Mayhew went among the most deprived of the poor and the working class, where most of his contemporaries wouldn't have dreamed of venturing, but perhaps here we see some of the anxiety about idiocy that has been seen elsewhere - Thelwall in Chapter 2 assuring people that he doesn't take on 'disgusting' objects, writers in Chapter 3 who urge people to overcome what is seen as 'natural' revulsion or Elizabeth Gaskell, in Chapter 5 regarding life with an 'idiot' as a terrible penance.

There is no revulsion expressed over Kilvert's visit to 'idiot woman' which is recorded with the positive acceptance he accords to nearly everything he sees. The visit is recorded in his 1877 diary while he was vicar of Bredwardine, Herefordshire. He received a message to say that an old parishioner, Priscilla Price, was ill and wanted to see him. He found her:

. . . and the idiot woman, her stepdaughter, sitting at their teas by the fire. [Prissy is 77 and the idiot is 55.] 'Ar Tader, Ar Tader!' cried the idiot. 'She means "Our Father,"' explained her stepmother. 'She has been wanting to see the clergyman, the gentleman that says "Our Father".' Prissy detailed to me the story of an illness she had suffered, illustrated by a dramatic performance by the idiot as a running commentary. Occasionally in addition to the

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 318, 349, 370.

<sup>7</sup> 'Tad' is Welsh for 'father', so possibly the 'idiot woman's' language is less defective than it appears. Kilvert did not speak or understand Welsh.

acting of the details of the illness, the bursting of a blood vessel, the holding of the head of the invalid, the idiot roared out an affirmative or negative according to the requirements of the tale. 'The blood spouted up,' said Prissy. 'Yes!' thundered the idiot. 'She held my head,' explained Prissy. 'Yes!' roared the idiot. . .

After some talk Prissy asks Kilvert to read and pray for her.

The reading was accompanied by a running fire of ejaculations and devout utterances from Prissy. She put a mat on the floor for me . . . and knelt down herself . . . 'Kneel down, my dear,' she said reprovingly to the idiot. The idiot knelt humbly down in front of the fire.<sup>8</sup>

It is interesting that this vignette of an almost eighteenth century bucolic golden age of 'an idiot in the community' occurs so late; but Herefordshire was rural and far from industrialisation. It is a useful reminder that social change occurs at different rates in different regions and social strata. The vignette also raises questions about Kilvert's interpretation of the scene, as, having said that his records are positive and accepting, this particular episode has some hint of an uncharacteristic depersonalising in that the 'idiot' is not named - and Kilvert nearly always names people. But otherwise the observation is sympathetic and accepting of a way of life. Kilvert rarely makes judgements about his parishioners. It has been noted that the peculiar quality of his diary is that it is literary in an uncalculating way, imbued with a general Wordsworthian consciousness, and very direct, with little of the writer imposing himself between the subject matter and the text. The latter is found in the non judgmental record of the scene, and the former in the way that the 'idiot's' Greek chorus accompanying Prissy's narration is echoed in Prissy's own 'ejaculations and devout utterances' accompanying Kilvert's reading. It is unlikely that the companiability between the idiot and her stepdaughter is misread.

Mitchell's The Insane in Private Dwellings is based on the work of the Scottish Lunacy Commission, of which he was a member, and provides data for the years 1858-1862. Scottish lunacy law was different from English in that it made two kinds of provision, as in addition to care in asylums the mentally disabled might be financially supported in private homes, with relatives or as lodgers. He observes of those having the latter care that 'the Scotch law differs from [the English] and is beneficent in a wider fashion'- and for the historian the beneficence is that the Commission reported on the conditions of those in private dwellings.<sup>9</sup> Because of this system

---

<sup>8</sup> F. Kilvert, *op. cit.*, pp. 352-3.

<sup>9</sup> A. Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 1.



Scotland provides a much better record of the prevalence of insanity than the rest of Britain - though it is unlikely that all insane people were identified. Non pauper as well as pauper insane were included, but the comfortably off were in no need of the scheme. Insane covered 'idiots', 'imbeciles' and 'acquired insanity' (mental illness), of which idiots and imbeciles formed the largest group, 67.2.<sup>10</sup> For 1862 Mitchell says that there were 8,207 insane in Scotland, 3,628 of them in private dwellings. He comments that Scotland is the only country which sought to identify all the insane, and it had led people to say that Scotland had particularly high lunacy rates, a claim he disputes, asserting that there was no reason to suppose that there was more lunacy in Scotland than other countries, just a more efficient system of identification.<sup>11</sup>

There was a system of inspection run by the Board of Lunacy for those supported in private homes, but Mitchell points to many inadequacies in the system, particularly that there was no effective method to prevent abuse when it was identified. Nonetheless, between 1858 and 1862 the Commissioners made 4,922 visits to private homes,<sup>12</sup> and it is the records of these visits that forms the substance of this section. Before turning to these, there is some information to be drawn about home circumstances from Mitchell's table about age of onset of mental disability.

**Age of onset of mental disability in 936 cases.**

Age of onset	Idiocy and imbecility	Acquired insanity
0-5	5	0
5-10	42	0
10-15	87	0
15-20	106	4
20-30	201	24
30-40	112	57
40-50	65	49
50-60	17	57
70-80	7	22
80-90	1	3

From A Mitchell, *The Insane in Private Dwellings*, p. 7.

The age of onset of 'acquired insanity' is what one would expect in view of medical opinion of the

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

time, that is that it was an adult affliction. However the advanced age of onset, mostly between 15 and 40, is a surprise in that idiocy and imbecility were thought to be evident from birth or in early childhood. However it is likely that what the table records is not so much age of onset, as age when a condition was perceived as a problem, at the point where individuals were expected to be able to care of themselves, or when parents had died or were infirm. The table suggests that intellectual impairment became a problem in adulthood. This is interesting in that the Earlswood Asylum education was intended for children; it was difficult to get a place for an adult (except by paying fees), and as will be seen, many of the letters to Earlswood are about the problem of adult children.

The bulk of The Insane in Private Dwellings work describes the conditions the Lunacy Commission inspectors found on their home visits - which were all to adults or near adults. Mitchell's evidence is of particular interest because he, along with other members of the Scottish Commission, approved of the system of supporting people with their family or in lodgings (which cost less than an asylum). His evidence is different from that submitted to the later English Royal Commissions<sup>13</sup> where all the evidence submitted pointed to the need for special institutions. It is not, as will be seen, that Mitchell finds evidence only of satisfactory living conditions, far from it, but as he is not ideologically inclined to see only a need for institutional care his records of mistreatment or inability to cope carry more weight than those of the English investigators. The Commission's aim was that support should enable the mentally disabled to have a standard of living similar to unimpaired members of the community 'treated in all respects like the sane poor around them . . . It is enough if the patient is really treated as a member of the family in which he lives, if he is not half naked in rags, while they are warmly and sufficiently clothed; if he does not sleep in an outhouse or on a bare floor while they have comfortable beds'.<sup>14</sup> The role of the Commission's visitors was to give advice so that the idiotic or mad person could stay where they were in improved conditions, failing that to move the person to other lodgings and only as a last resort to use the asylum. The inspectors found many cases far from satisfactory, such as the two brothers 'both congenital idiots' who couldn't speak, are restless and destructive, 'are wholly ineducable and

---

<sup>13</sup> Great Britain, Report of the Departmental Committee on Defective and Epileptic Children (Cd 8746, 1898); Great Britain, Report of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded (Cd 4215, 1908).

<sup>14</sup> Mitchell, op. cit., p. 35.

unproductive'. One was in bed, burned when his clothes caught fire, and the other's clothes showed fire damage. Both were dirty. Their mother spoke in a 'heartless, unfeeling manner' of them and it was recommended that they should be moved to a lodging house for the poor.<sup>15</sup> This woman had had 'three idiot children' (whether that means five in total or three is not clear). Whichever, she too had a hard time of it. It is interesting that there are other cases where more than one idiot child is found in one family.

Mitchell says that many of the cases of neglect were caused by ignorance or lack of resources, and that advice often improved things. Many:

apathetic and melancholic patients [were] allowed or encouraged to be constantly in bed [which] tends to increase the malady and to lead to filthy and degraded habits. But besides this the patient lies crouched up in bed . . . until the legs become permanently and rigidly fixed on the body.<sup>16</sup>

Mitchell notes that solitary seclusion makes mental disabilities worse and that improvements can be made by encouraging the person to be admitted to the family circle. He gives an example of a man who suffered 'chronic mania implanted on congenital imbecility' who lived with a seventy year old mother. She was very attached to her son, but he lived in one room with a boarded up window, lying on wet straw, emaciated and pale. 'He was dumpish and refused to answer all questions and . . . muttered incessantly'.<sup>17</sup> This was one of the Commission's successes as fifteen months later he was 'well dressed, clean and happy looking' and was working at a nearby saw mill, not paid, 'but for his own amusement as suggested at the previous visit'. He had gained weight and 'answers all questions addressed to him though in a childish manner'.<sup>18</sup> Mitchell stresses the advantages of urging the 'guardians' of 'young imbeciles' to educate and train them 'as far as possible at home' and to give instruction as to what 'would be desirable and advantageous to teach'. It is clear from this passage that Mitchell doesn't regard the standard legal tests of the time as of relevance for the education of

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57-9. The Commission's findings may be compared with a BBC *Hearts of Gold* (May 1998) programme that showed children in Romanian orphanages whose limbs had become deformed as a result of confinement to bed.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

a seriously impaired person, since he gives as a good example that of a woman who 'didn't know how many fingers she had, or day of the week, or how many pennies in the shilling' (standard tests for legal competency) but who goes to church, 'had cleanly habits; was easily managed . . . is affectionate; has long lived with a stranger; is well cared for'.<sup>19</sup> It would be possible here to accuse Mitchell of Victorian stress on order and cleanliness rather than intellectual development; but it is also possible that he was correct in supposing the woman better off without struggling with counting and working out shillings and pence.

After giving several examples of improvements effected Mitchell observes that:

To teach them self-control, to make them able to put on or off their own clothes, [to encourage] cleanliness [and to be] to some degrees useful . . . is to diminish the burden their defect of mind imposes on their friends and the public, and by so much indeed to diminish the defect itself [is to effect an improvement] which can only be appreciated by those who have had much dealing with this class of the insane.<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes the visitors found people who were managing well without the Commission's help. He describes a house where five 'idiots or imbeciles' lived with their mother, 'a thrifty, tidy old woman' and their unafflicted brother, a day labourer, of which visitors reported: 'cleanliness, order and propriety . . . everywhere within doors . . . comfort with a complete absence of luxury . . . a flourishing vegetable garden'. One of the five disabled children is described as 'wholly unproductive' though he took an interest in the garden and the pigs. The other three 'break stones' and can do 'harvest work under direction' while the sister is 'useful' in the house. This family had also managed to obtain outside help for itself - £17.00 yearly, a ton of coal and a suit of clothes each from the parish, while a 'nobleman' in the neighbourhood gives the house rent free.<sup>21</sup> This perhaps shows the advantages of being clean and evidently deserving - or of being willing to ask for help rather than secluding impaired family members. Except for the 'unproductive' brother this family's impaired members' problems seem much slighter than others Mitchell describes, so an inclination to hide the problems was less likely to exist.

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-3.

The cases Mitchell reports fall into three categories - first, those where it was impossible to find family or lodging arrangements in a private dwelling, because of the severity of an individual's problem or simply because no one was found willing to take a person in. Second there were the cases where the Commission was able to produce great improvements in a person's living conditions by advice and or a move to a more sympathetic household, and third, as the last example given here, of people who were managing well without the Commission's help. There is also a fourth category - of those who were not seen as a problem by their families, but who worried the visitors. It was sexuality and 'erotic tendencies' that were the worries, as a man who 'grinned, chattered and screamed like a monkey', hunted for lice on his body and often dropped on all fours. 'He is muscular and active . . . sits on the floor in ape fashion, with his genitals always exposed', He lived with father, brother and his wife and family 'and all these persons constantly witness the indecent exposure . . . without any evidence of their perceiving anything improper'.<sup>22</sup> Mitchell also disapproved of 'grown up idiots' of opposite sexes sharing beds, or adult 'idiot and imbecile men' sharing beds with their sisters or mothers. He shows some of the worry about female sexuality which was to become intensified in the later part of the century as he observes that imbecile women often have children and 'have to be protected against' their 'strong erotic tendencies' - but he does also observe that 'more frequently still' such women 'have to be protected against advantage being taken by unprincipled men'.<sup>23</sup> Related to sexuality is a concern about inheritance of intellectual impairment; Mitchell cites evidence that of fifty-four children of a number of impaired women, two in five were defective.

Mitchell's model of intellectual impairment is for the most part, that of the educable idiot as member of the human race. But it has also been seen that in the cases where 'shocking' behaviour was observed he also uses both the model of 'idiot with animal nature' and that of 'disorderly and sexual idiot'. The former is an older model than the approved post 1840 educable idiot; the latter a model that became increasingly a focus of concern towards the end of the century. Mitchell relied on the visitors' reports on the behaviour of intellectually impaired people, so it may be rather that he accepts without question the report of the man who 'chattered like a monkey' and sat 'ape fashion' since the same behaviour could just as well have been reported as 'made inarticulate noises' and 'sat

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

on the floor'; such an alternative report would have constructed this man as far less Other than the animal analogies did. It is a useful reminder that behaviour is always reported through a filter of expectations. The concern about the alleged numbers of intellectually impaired people in one family also needs some discussion. It is hardly surprising that people worried about heredity if this was the case - or they thought this was the case. It is puzzling. The Earlswood material, the only other source that gives information about reasonably large numbers indicates intellectual impairment as an isolated event in a family. The only possible explanations for the alleged large numbers in one family are first, that the impairments noted were not in fact somatic neurological ones, and were rather socially induced; that negative expectation and restricted education caused those who had normal nervous systems to become impaired. The second is that there were inherited conditions, that untreated or not prevented as they would be today, such as phenylketonuria or damage to rhesus negative babies, which led to several members of a family being affected. But this does seem unlikely in the light of the Earlswood material, only a little later, and no advances in medical knowledge. The visitors were not medically qualified.

The Earlswood archive contains two volumes of letters to the Board of Guardians, one Letters to the Board, 1861-69 and the other Letters of Thanks to the Board, 1849-87. Several of these letters are in fact letters to the Guardians of the Colchester Asylum, but since the training and five year election system was the same as Earlswood these letters will be treated as a single source of data. The former volume consists mainly of letters from parents, friends and other intermediaries thought likely to carry weight, such as a vicar. Nearly all are asking for special arrangements, such as admission for a person above the normal age limit or for a person to remain there as an adult (these two were particularly common), or remission of fees on grounds of hardship, particularly to tide over a period before an election when parents or friends hoped to gain votes for free admission. The latter volume has a slightly misleading title; while a few of the letters are simple thanks, in most the thanks are a preliminary to asking the same kind of favours as Letters to the Board. The aim of Earlswood was to provide a five year period of training for a young person, after which it was supposed that he or she would be able to return home, improved and possibly self-supporting. It is clear from the letters that many parents and friends thought that a five year period of training had been insufficient, and some are seeking a lifetime place for an adult. It is not the aim here to try to find what proportion of families were entirely satisfied with a child's period of training, but rather to use the letters for the light that they shed on home circumstances and the

problems families experienced having an intellectually impaired member at home. They must be interpreted with caution since they are letters from people who believe it would be difficult to have a child at home - and with the aim of Earlswood care in mind it would not be surprising if they exaggerated the difficulties of life at home. On one occasion a letter of application in 1861 from John Henry Snellings's family laid it on so strong that Earlswood rejected him on grounds of his uncontrollable behaviour. It fell to an intermediary to write to ask the Board to reconsider the application on the grounds that the family had given the wrong impression and that: 'this decision was founded on the statement of his parents "that he is dangerous to others and extremely passionate when he becomes quite uncontrollable." I find that they did not mean to state the facts so [broadly] and strongly, but to speak with reference only to his bothers and sisters. . . .' <sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless these letters provide many insights into what it was about their intellectually impaired members that families and friends worried about; and in outlining their worries many writers give much circumstantial detail about home arrangements and the problems of negotiating the complexities of Victorian charity. David Wright has used Earlswood records in two articles <sup>25</sup> about Victorian perceptions of idiocy using the admissions forms. These have the advantage that they are a consistent source of data, since they were filled in for every entrant whereas not every family wrote to Earlswood officials, and there is no knowing whether there were other letters that have not been preserved. However, if the purpose of using the letters were to show *levels* of satisfaction with the Earlswood training, or the percentage of those returned successfully to their homes, they would be a rather defective source. But their purpose here is to show the kinds of issues and family situations which were perceived as problems by families of intellectually impaired people, and for this purpose they are useful, and give far more information about life outside the asylum and its problems than the admission forms.

The section will start with examples of the relatively few families who wrote simply to thank

---

<sup>24</sup> Surrey RO, Earlswood Records (henceforth EW), Letters to the Guardians of Earlswood Asylum, 1861-1869, 391/2/1, p. 8..

<sup>25</sup> D. Wright, 'Childlike in his innocence: lay attitudes to 'idiots' and 'imbeciles' in Victorian England' in D. Wright and A. Digby, *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency: Historical Perspectives on people with learning disabilities* (London: Routledge, 1996); D. Wright, 'Familial care of "idiot" children in Victorian England' in P. Horden and R. Smith, *The Locus of care: families, communities, institutions and the provision of welfare since antiquity*

Earlswood for the training their child had received, or (less often) was currently receiving. These are few, but it is of course very possible that more were happy for their child to return home but did not write to Earlswood. The significance these letters have for this a study is not as evidence about satisfaction with the Earlswood training, but as evidence of a positive attitude to the child and its impairment. These parents seem primarily concerned with the welfare and progress of their child. This is in contrast to the majority of the letter writers who are concerned about such things as an impaired child's effect on the rest of the family, on whether the child would become economically independent or who would care for him or her as an adult. The latter two concerns may of course be centred on the child's well being, but they are tied up with anxieties about how society will treat the child, and in some cases with parents' negative perceptions of a child. But the letters in appreciation of Earlswood's work (when unconnected with follow-up requests for favours) often also go with expressions of affection for and interest in the children. Occasionally letters simply thank the asylum without giving any details, as, in 1859, for 'the care of our son Robert', the 'great improvement' seen in a daughter after five years and an undated letter which thanks the Asylum for its 'kindness' to Ellen Johnson, and adds that 'she is quite well . . . and she talks about them all [presumably staff and pupils] and sends love to them all'.<sup>26</sup> There are a few letters about the progress of a child currently at the asylum, or about other current matters. In December 1852 a father wrote to arrange a visit home in the Christmas period (but not until after Christmas day) for a son who had been at the Asylum two years, and adds that the family is glad to hear 'he is progressing in every respect'.<sup>27</sup> In 1853 a mother writes in thanks for 'great improvement in [son] William Franklin Cooper who now knows the letters of the alphabet and 'tells me he is learning to write on the slate'. She sends thanks to the Master and the Matrons and says her son talks about other boys in the Asylum and talked of 'the happy voices and joyous exclamations of the children'.<sup>28</sup> There is a copy of this letter in another hand, which suggests that this particularly enthusiastic endorsement had been copied for promotional purposes. Harriet Hands wrote in December 1856 (to the Eastern Counties asylum) about her son who had recently died, thanking the staff for their

---

(London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> Surrey RO, EW, 'Letters of Thanks', 392/2/8/2, pp. 1 and 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



'motherly care and tenderness over the child of my love, for though he had little comeliness in the eyes of others, he was very dear to me'. Mrs Hands had evidently made friends with a woman member of staff as she sends greeting and hopes that Mrs Grimshaw will come to stay with her at some time.

A correspondence 1864 between the Reverend Wilshere and Dr Down, then Superintendent at Earlswood,<sup>29</sup> is included in the section on satisfied parents, although he is writing to withdraw his son, because the emphasis in this section is on acceptance of the children and satisfaction with their attainment, rather than satisfaction with Earlswood (though of course the two tend to go together). Wilshere writes to say that he has decided to keep his son at home:

"My Dear Sir, . . . It is evident that he [son] was most kindly treated and assiduously superintended at Earlswood [and when brought home for a holiday had no desire to disturb the discipline] . . . But we are sorry to see that his mind is quite stationary. There seems no be no development of faculty under your kind endeavour, and he has the most resolute preference for home . . . [in these circumstances is] unwilling to force him back unless you think that his intellect will be decidedly improved. Moral training (and intellectual too) he has at home - and the painful question to my mind is whether his intellect will gain more than his affections and nervous system will lose [if he returns to Earlswood]. I grieve to say that my own opinion is . . . it will give him much mental pain without corresponding mental improvement. But I should like to have your decision. My wife writes with kind regards to yourself and Mrs Down."

Wilshere is in some additional embarrassment since his son has been funded by a third party whom he is anxious not to offend. Down's reply said: 'I have given much consideration . . . and having regard to the whole circumstances of the case I cannot urge on you to part with your little boy from home' He continues with arrangements about the return of the boy's clothes, and ends with regards from Mrs Down and a comment on her health - in response to an enquiry in Rev. Wilshere's letter. Wilshere writes again with further compliments to the Earlswood training, even though it hadn't been right for his son and his absence so far from home was trying to both himself and his parents' He adds too that if his son survives him he intends to leave him, with a sum of money, for life care at Earlswood.<sup>30</sup> The correspondence is untypical in its evidence of great affection for and concern for the welfare of a child. It is possible that Mr and Mrs Wilshere had never been eager to send their son to Earlswood but it was the friend who funded the place there who urged its suitability. It is

---

<sup>29</sup> John Langdon Down, who described Down's syndrome in 1862, was medical superintendent at Earlswood at the time.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

also interesting to note in this letter as in that from Mrs Hands that these two families had established a friendly relationship with staff at the asylums. The letters from Mrs Hands and the Rev. Wilshire also suggest more than most of the other letters a loving relationship with their impaired children, and it seems possible to suggest that the two matters are connected - parents who do not feel over distressed or embarrassed by the behaviour of their children find it easier to establish a comfortable relationship with those who care for them, rather than thrusting the whole matter out of mind. Of course the numbers are far too small for this to be more than a suggestion, but at least one should note this evidence that there isn't an entirely predictable nineteenth century attitude to intellectual impairment.

Much more frequent are letters seeking an extension of a stay in Earlswood in the hope of greater improvement, because of difficulties with residence at home, or because there wasn't a home for the child. There is what might be termed an in between sort of response from a clergyman in 1860; it is not that the stay in Earlswood has removed a problem entirely, but the family seems ready to accept limited improvement. He writes on behalf of the mother of Sarah Raine who had recently been at Earlswood, now twenty years old. 'and as having made exertions for her election . . . and I think her much improved, in the quietness of her behaviour, but her countenance seems to indicate confirmed imbecility. I am informed however that she can take care of herself better than before . . . and that she can and does wash herself and attends a little to the tidiness of her dress and person . . . I understand too that she can hem or sew a little when the work is set for her. We allow her to attend my Sunday and day schools, and I do not hear that she behaves badly . . . I do not think that we could undertake another election if she should relapse. I think her mother must put her under the protection of the board of guardians for the poor'.<sup>31</sup> He concludes with thanks from the mother, father and friends of the girl.

The majority of the letters in both letters books are concerned with extending the stay of children and adults, or arranging entry for someone above the normal age for admission. There are essentially three issues that recur; first is the perceived disruption caused to a family by the behaviour of an impaired child, second and most frequent, there is concern that a young adult will be or is unable to support him/herself, and third there is the worry of what would happen after the

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

death of a parent or carer. In the case outlined at the start of this section, of the parents who had written of their child in such lurid terms that Earlswood thought him too challenging, the intermediary who writes to give a modified account nevertheless shows the difficulties of having a child with an intellectual impairment in the family. The revised version of the problem draws on family circumstance rather than solely on the alleged unruliness of the child:

The father is constantly [occupied] as park keeper and the mother goes out as monthly nurse. In her absence the care of the five youngest children of whom John . . . is the eldest, is committed to the second daughter, who is only sixteen years old, and has not a proper control over them. Being a weak, helpless boy, they treat him very ill and if any of them slaps his face he will seize whatever comes to hand and throw it at the offender . . . When his father and mother wish him to go where he does not like, he will throw himself to the ground and struggle violently. This appears to be the whole amount of his violence and want of control. He is constantly in the habit of playing with neighbours' children and doing them no harm: on the contrary they all like him. He has been entrusted with a small child, whom he will take out and amuse for hours and bring him back quite safe. Ladies are fond of talking with him in the park, as his manners are mild and amiable, as [the writer has] frequently done myself: and on one occasion I took him into my house for some time and committed him to the care of a female servant, who is much pleased with him.<sup>32</sup>

This new picture of John is very different from that initially presented by the parents. It now appears that the 'problem' is as much the family as John – several children not sympathetic to their impaired brother in charge of an elder sister who is scarcely more than a child herself. The shift in perspective is a warning to take the situations outlined in the letters cautiously. But however one looks at the difficulties of the Hays family, whether as caused by a disruptive John, or by unsympathetic siblings, it does have a problem. A fundamental problem is that the five year term given to entrants by subscription is based on the wholly unlikely premise that such a short period could possibly restore a person with a marked intellectual impairment to normal life. In 1861 a correspondent writes about eldest child of the gardener of a Sir James Mehill 'an idiot without any hope of becoming better' who had been elected in 1856 for a five year period in the hopes that he would improve, but he had returned 'in a hopeless state of idiotcy'. The father is 'a most respectable man . . . [with] a large family and a delicate wife, and is of course very anxious that his son should be away from home, as is also Lady Mehill and her family, the [gardener's] home being in the

---

<sup>32</sup> Surrey RO, EW, 'Letters to the Guardians of Earlswood Asylum, 1861-1869', 392/2/8/1, p. 8.

region of her home ' (emphasis added).<sup>33</sup> The exigencies of life for a working class family are clearly revealed; it wouldn't seem to help them much even if the parents of the child wanted him at home.

A constant theme is the problem of a person who cannot earn a living. Richard Jones in 1862 wrote to say he was at the time unable to pay for his brother who had been 'many years in Earlswood'.<sup>34</sup> The parents were both dead and Richard had two sisters and another brother to support, but he hoped the brother would be allowed to remain as he hoped later to be able to pay the fees. In 1866 a letter from Mary Agg says:

'I am distressed beyond measure to learn [that son has to leave Earlswood]. I really cannot take him home as I am holding a situations as housekeeper to Lady Barrington, and I have no means of providing for him nor any place to receive him [she is hoping for life election for her son] . . . I have three other children, one in the London Orphan Asylum who will leave there in May and be thrown upon me, and others in situations who are still dependent upon me for help . . . If I had the means I would only be too happy to take charge of my poor demented son, now twenty four years old'.

In 1853 Isabella Burland was concerned about her son who had been in Earlswood for five years and made 'excellent progress', but his time being nearly up she didn't know how she could 'provide for him, being in straitened circumstances and my health being weak'. He was learning shoemaking 'but does not yet know the business to get a living by it and I could not possibly apprentice him'. Mrs Burland hopes he will be able to stay another twelve months by which time he may be able to earn his living, but for the present she adds, 'my state of health renders it impossible for me to exert myself as formerly to procure his re-election'.<sup>35</sup> There are many other complaints about the effort of canvassing votes, including parent who noted in 1863 that although his son received 800 votes, it was insufficient to get a place.<sup>36</sup> Several parents write to ask for a child to stay at Earlswood indefinitely in consideration of services they could provide. In 1861 there was a request from Susan Wise hoping her son would be able to stay on 'as he is of great value in the workshop'.<sup>37</sup> For the most part the letter books do not reveal the outcome of the requests, but a correspondence in 1863

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>35</sup> Surrey RO, EW, 'Letters of Thanks', p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Surrey RO, EW, 'Letters to the Board', p.16.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

about Edward Keeling shows the kind of negotiations. Keeling was 33 at the time and had been at Earlswood since 1855, presumably as a paying patient. Money that had been raised to support him was running out, but 'he is decidedly unfit for the outside world, [though] is docile and orderly within your wall'. Indeed he had been engaged as a 'kind of monitor' (which doesn't sound like a key role) and the Asylum is asked to continue to make use of him, if some money could be raised for his support. Keeling's father was a Methodist minister by then 75 and his income was £92 per year. Down replies that Keeling's services are worth £10 per year, that the fee of 30 guineas annually including clothes paid by his friends is already a reduced payment, but offers to take £25, adding that for £400 he could be admitted for life.<sup>38</sup>

A few families describe how they tried to settle their son or daughter in a job, as did a Mrs Hammer whose daughter's case is taken up by a local clergyman in 1865. He says Mrs Hammer had been his housekeeper for four years in his parish in Cheshire and was 'of the highest moral and religious character [and]. . . struggled manfully with her young family.' The daughter in question had gone to 'small families as servant to see if she could be improved, but she always betrayed the silly, but harmless, nature of an imbecile'. He hopes she might be admitted to Earlswood, and 'perhaps with . . . the kind and wise training of your own institution she may yet be able to get her own bread.' His request is supported by a letter from a curate in Sheffield who says: 'For the sake of Mrs Hammer whom we know to be a pious and industrious woman, we took her daughter into our house as a servant girl, . . . not having seen her, but found her so completely incapable of doing her work in consequence of evident infirmity that we were obliged to dismiss her at the end of three weeks'<sup>39</sup>. The reply is not preserved, but the daughter would probably be too old for Earlswood's policy for charity admissions. There is an 1866 letter in support of a man who it seems was admitted to Earlswood by some error and had been turned out. The writer knows the rule that a person over eighteen is not admitted even for a probationary term of five years, but argues that as the man had been admitted, even though by error, he ought to be allowed to stand for life election.<sup>40</sup> In 1868 there is a letter on behalf of a 'poor idiot, now nearly fifty years of age, whom I

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62

have known personally for more than forty years [who] . . . is perfectly innocent and at times intelligent - takes pleasure in good sermons and at times comments on them, but he is still an idiot - brought on by teething and, or, fits in infancy it is believed. He is supported and cared for by a benevolent old lady who knew his parents, and is attended to by a female servant of hers with exemplary care and attention'. However, the kind lady is old and worried about what will happen at her 'death or incapacity since he has no other relations or friends'. The writer hopes the man can be admitted to Earlswood when the old lady can no longer care for him, and 'that you will not discard the consideration on account of age as he may be years older before he requires your home'. He adds further assurances that the man in question is 'without a grain of mischief or a spice of insanity' and that he 'is not helpless but has been attended to as a child, and perhaps would still look to it'.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to the families examined in Chapters 6-8, resource concerns are constantly present for the Earlswood families. While for the comfortably off families earlier considered, an intellectually impaired child certainly gave rise to psychological and social difficulties, but he or she would not need to earn a living, and there were no worries about how the child would be supported when the parents died. Additionally, it is clear that psychological and social difficulties were more pressing in families where there were several children to be looked after, with little or no domestic help. As the letter about John Henry Snelling so clearly shows, the problem could be described as 'disruptive idiot' – or more simply as the presence of too many children or incompetent persons present, and an insufficient number of competent carers. There were problems perceived as disruption or similar in the well off families. Augustus's behaviour is often reported as being very strange; but there were many people to attend to him, often in a location geographically distant from his parents or other family. Lindsey's presence was evidently tiresome to some of the family, for example his mother and his stepfather, and Virginia Woolf complained about Laura's behaviour. But there were always more people about than for the Earlswood families; and these latter often had more seriously impaired dependents than the better off families. All the individuals with an intellectual impairment considered in this thesis are seen at one remove in that they do not speak for themselves but are spoken for and of by other family members. Some of the people considered in this chapter, as reported by Mitchell, Mayhew and Kilvert, are seen at two removes, by an outsider,

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40

usually in some official capacity. But most of the letters to the Earlswood Guardians were written by family members. Although for the most part their reports are biased in that they are seeking extensions of care, not, as the writing used in Chapters 6-8, giving news in a letter, or writing a journal, there is something comparable in the attitude to the mentally impaired person. He or she for the most part is an individual, not an Other, not an Idiot. The Reverend Wilshire's son is his 'little boy', Mrs Cooper's son 'William Franklin . . . is learning to write on a slate' and though Mary Agg is desperate for practical reasons for her son to remain longer at Earlswood, he is her 'poor demented son', rather than an Idiot.

## CONCLUSION

Part I looked at perceptions of intellectual impairment in different contexts from 1780 to 1880. The dominant concept of intellectual impairment at the time was that of idiocy, though dominant concepts of idiocy would be a better way of expressing the situation, since the image of idiocy differed from context to context. The medical context before 1840 took idiocy to be a bodily condition of failure of brain development not capable of amelioration. After 1840 doctors and charity workers adopted the notion of the educable idiot, a notion that they were eager to promote. Thus far the broad picture agrees with that presented in previous histories of learning disability. But this thesis has argued that there was no single notion of idiocy, rather that different images were called up in different situations. There was 'fool' notion of impairment, more acceptable than the unadorned idiot, sanctioned by literary precedent and the fact that the 'fool' was an imagined creation rather than a real person. The idiot *tout court* notion comes in a number of overlapping versions. Before the 1840s there were positive and negative notions. On the positive side there were images of the 'harmless innocent' or the 'natural' who nonetheless had a deep intuitive or religious insight into the mysteries of the world. Perhaps even such insight was not so much in spite of mental simplicity, but because of it, in that this idiot was untrammelled by 'civilisation' and its vices.

On the negative side there were images of the disgusting, deformed, idiot and the morally bad idiot. The medical image of intellectual impairment was without value judgement, but before the 1840s hardly existed because the idiot was considered beyond the reach of medical science. Then came the 1840s and a novel image of the educable and orderly idiot. But this positive image did not unproblematically replace existing notions, since ideas of the 'hopeless', 'disgusting' and 'bad' idiot continued to hover around. There was always the notion of the fool as a potential image to replace or merge with that of the idiot. By moving between the many notions of idiot or fool, or adopting one rather than the other in different situations commentators were able to deal with the problem that the notion of idiocy *tout court* was, more often than not, a distressing one during the whole period of this study. This set of negative ideas that had long existed makes the emergence of the extreme hostility to the feeble-minded at the end of the nineteenth century more explicable. Certainly the socio-historical reasons commonly given for this moral panic, fear of the disorder and degeneration thought to be inherent in rampant industrialism, are convincing. But on their own these seem insufficient for the intensity of hostility many writers displayed. If it seen that already existing fears and dislikes – of which as has been shown many commentators in the 1840s and 50s



were ashamed and tried to overcome – suddenly achieved a focus and a respectability, the emergence of the ‘threat of the feeble minded’ is additionally explicable.

The image of idiocy *tout court* both before and after the 1840s was alarming and threatening to many people, so it is hardly surprising that it was not a word used by parents for the children whose lives are examined in Chapters 6-8. Emily Lamb (aunt) used the term once when writing of a serious illness Augustus was suffering, to say that either he would die, or live and be an idiot – and that the former might be the better outcome. She also likened him to Frankenstein’s monster (being staged at the time). Laura Stephen, as an adult, went to an idiot asylum, but she is never described as such in her childhood. No name is given to Lindsey Bertie’s condition, except once, on his death, when his niece, Enid Layard, who had had little contact with him, described him as ‘Milord, my old imbecile uncle’. It’s a phrase unlikely to be used of someone regarded with respect and affection. It could not possibly have been used by Lady Charlotte, who often shows in her journal determination that her brother should get the respect due to him and to the Bertie name. Theodore Tilton is the only person to use the term idiot (of Byron Woodhull) simply as a description, and not, as did Emily Lamb, with an element of mockery. But there is some image creation going on in his biography of Victoria Woodhull, and the picture of helpless idiot nobly cared for by plucky mother is part of it. The parents and friends in Chapter 9 who write to Earlswood rarely refer to patients as idiots (though of course in a sense had to accept the label since it was an idiot asylum). George Austen is probably the most severely impaired of the individuals whose lives are explored in Chapters 6-8, but the term idiot, or indeed any term for mental impairment, is never used. Evidently while ‘idiot’ (or occasionally imbecile) is a term that can be used of distant and possibly unknown people, it is not a term to be used for those one is close to.

Idiocy was for most people in the nineteenth century a very extreme condition of intellectual impairment – as well as probably having the additional attributes of disgustingness and deformity – and imbecile was not much better. Implicitly then, if a person was not an idiot, he or she could be educated like any other person in a similar class position. On the other hand, if a person was an idiot, education would be a waste of effort (or perhaps after 1840 could be undertaken in a special institution). Here then was a problem for the families examined in Part II, whose child didn’t seem up to the expected processes of socialization and education. The discourse of the time told them that if their child was not an idiot (a label that only one family in the detailed life stories examined in chapters 6, 7 and 8 accepted) then a normal education should be pursued. In most cases the

families did start off by following the expected route. But when this appeared obviously unworkable they adopted their own, *ad hoc*, strategies. These turned out to be very similar and were the adaptation of existing educational means, but on special terms arranged by the different families. George Austen and Byron Woodhull were exceptions in that they were evidently considered beyond the help of education.

The families of the individuals who are the focus in the first three chapters of Part II were all at least comfortably off and having a child who needed special care during its lifetime was not a financial burden. In other respects the families were very different – Augustus Lamb and Lindsey Bertie from aristocratic families; Golding Constable the son of a prosperous tradesman; George Austen and Hasting de Feuille from the gentry; Byron Woodhull the son of a ‘new woman’ and Laura Stephen from the middle class intelligentsia. What is striking is how similar were the responses to the educational problem; for all except Byron and George Austen, the first response was to try to proceed as normal if at all possible; then to adapt the context, providing private tuition supplemented in some cases by family members (sister for Lindsey, mother for Hastings, and father for Laura). The details of the education are known in only a few cases, but here it is clear that the initial response, for Augustus and Lindsey was to stick to the expected curriculum. For both this plan was tacitly simply abandoned, but for Lindsey, only after his sister and his tutor sought to develop themselves more appropriate methods and content for his abilities. For Hastings too his mother adapted and simplified the tasks he was set.

A noticeable feature of the set of people considered in Chapters 6-8, hitherto unremarked, is that Laura is the only girl. While intellectual impairment is slightly more prevalent among boys, it is most improbable that this accounts for the gender imbalance seen here. Boys at the time were important in a way that girls were not; boys had to be prepared for a public arena, whether as heir to a title or as bearer of a profession or trade, and in all cases as people to carry on the family name. These things were not expected of girls (though some did achieve public roles) who were expected to remain in domestic and private settings. It would clearly be very much easier for an intellectually impaired girl, than a boy, in a well off family to live a sheltered and unnoticed life. Laura Stephen’s case has two features that made her problems, though she was a girl, hard to hide. She was the only child of Leslie Stephen’s first marriage. When he remarried, the additional burden, as he saw it, on his second wife, was a source of guilt for him. Secondly this was a family where girls too were educated and clever (rather spectacularly in the cases of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell) so that

Laura's problems became conspicuous in a way that in a different family setting they would probably not have done. For the Earlswood families however, girls too often needed to earn a living, and they appear in the letters from worried families nearly as often as do boys.

Some of the differences between the family responses seem connected, not with social class or gender, but with details of family structure. The Constables had several sons so Golding's lack of competence was not an insuperable problem and the third son, Abram, stepped into the role of eldest son. Augustus and Lindsey were heirs to titles so no brother could take over the role. But perhaps if Augustus had had a sibling Caroline's desperation would have been less, and certainly other family members thought so. The class into which George Austen and his cousin Hastings were born was similar; but the family circumstances were very different. George was one of a large family, with a mother occupied with many duties. Hastings was an only child, with a mother and grandmother free to devote themselves to him. The special family circumstances that made Laura's impairment conspicuous and troubling, though she was a girl, have already been discussed.

The families' responses, seen in Chapters 6-8 could be described as *bricolage* in an unexpected situation for which there was no recognised procedure. It was not even evident to them, or to their medical and educational practitioners, what the situation was, since idiocy as well as being an undesirable state was also a very all or nothing state. The idiot educators of the 1840s and 50s wanted to make the term idiot an acceptable one, but they were not very successful – as can be seen particularly in Chapter 3 as, in their keenness to dispel the picture of the idiot as disgusting or non human, they revealed their own doubts about the reality of the new desirable educable idiot. An interesting question about nineteenth century practice is why the early educators set out unquestioningly to make the term idiot acceptable. It was in fact not long before, implicitly, the negative qualities of the term were acknowledged. Writers about intellectual impairment in the 1860s began to use the term 'imbecile' rather than idiot;<sup>1</sup> the Rev. Edwin Sidney's stark title 'Teaching the Idiot' of 1854 suggests its earlier date<sup>2</sup>. Imbecile was not a new term as the OED cites its use from 1775 to mean 'fatuous, stupid or idiotic', but in the usage by reformers of the

---

<sup>1</sup> For example 'The education and management of the imbecile' *The North British Review*, vol. 38 (1863), pp. 120-133; D. Greenwell, *On the Education of the Imbecile* (London: Strahan, 1868).

<sup>2</sup> E. Sidney, 'Teaching the Idiot' *Lectures in Connection with the Educational Exhibition of the Society of Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce*, (London: Routledge, 1854)

1860s 'imbecile' includes less severe impairment than idiocy implies. When Dr Langdon Down and Mary Down opened Normansfield in 1869, a private home and school for intellectually impaired people it was described as being for the feeble-minded.<sup>3</sup> Similarly his 1876 pamphlet was entitled The Education and Training of the Feeble in Mind.<sup>4</sup> However the earliest promoters of the idea that the intellectually impaired could be educated and no longer had to be consigned to hopeless oblivion boldly used the term 'idiot'; and the earliest institutions for the care and education of the intellectually impaired were called idiot asylums. Just as the early reformers did not explicitly say that they intended to redeem the word idiot, neither do the later writers justify the new terms; they just appear. This is in so great a contrast to the late twentieth and twenty first century practice of making the reform of terminology an integral part of the struggle to have disabled people accepted simply as people, that the very different nineteenth century practice merits some discussion.

It is not being claimed that the twenty first century method miraculously works in contrast to a benighted nineteenth century (since evidently if advances have been achieved at all, many factors have been involved). What is interesting is the absence of debate in the nineteenth century, since it is very apparent from the changes in terminology at the time, that, implicitly a need for new terminology was recognised. The putting forward of suggestions as to why the nineteenth century was silent on this matter is tempting - and the temptation will not be resisted. But the matter will be dealt with briefly since an explanation must remain speculative. Nineteenth century self confidence and optimism may be part of the reason for the retention of the term 'idiot' - if enlightened reformers announced that idiots were no longer 'hopeless', that was enough to render them educated and industrious. But more important probably is the dominance of charity in the nineteenth century context. Idiotic and crippled children have a claim on pitying 'normal' people and the words themselves conjure up an instant impression of neediness. It is interesting that the first real attempt at a new non-stigmatising term was 'feeble-minded' which was derived from the old notion of a person whose religious faith was failing. In the seventeenth century this was the meaning of the term, in for example Satan's Sophistrie Answered by our Saviour \_\_\_\_\_ To which is Added a Comfort for the Feeble Minded.<sup>5</sup> Mr Feeble-Mind in The Pilgrim's Progress is short on

---

<sup>3</sup> O.C Ward, John Langdon Down: a caring pioneer (London: Royal Society of Medicine Press, 1998), pp. 77-9.

<sup>4</sup> J.L.Down, On the Education and Training of the Feeble in Mind (London: H.K. Lewis, 1876).

<sup>5</sup> W. Perkins, Satan's Sophistrie Answered by our Saviour Christ \_\_\_\_\_ To which is Added a

faith, not brains. Thus feeble-minded was linked with the Christian religion and the good works that, for so many British reformers, were an integral part of their religion. It was rather bad luck that the term had so brief a life as a general and more kindly term for intellectual impairment as in Down's use of it. All too soon, and after the period of this study, it became the term for people who were less mentally impaired than idiots, but much more morally impaired.

This study, which starts at the end of the eighteenth century in order to encompass the *mentalités* that were the precursors of mid-century reform, extends to the point just at, or before, the phrase feeble-minded ended, in Britain, its short existence as a broad and non-stigmatising term. After 1880 it became the term (as used by Potts on page 17) for people from whom the 'normal' population needed to be protected, (and this is hardly an exaggeration) rather than themselves being in need of care. A new set of negative perceptions and *mentalités* were to come into play, at least on the part of those who took on the task of the care and guidance of the intellectually impaired. But, as this study has shown, there existed negative perceptions of the intellectually impaired for the whole of the period since 1780. There were also positive views (such as the harmless or educable idiot) and fanciful views (such as the idiot as fool), which co-existed with or alternated with the negative ones. Furthermore, such negative perceptions as existed were held in abeyance and were rarely applied to actual living individuals who might then be defined as threats to the unimpaired. The process of the separation of perception, which might be positive but might too be negative or fanciful, from practice, is seen in Thelwall's writing (Chapter 2) where the morally bad or ineducable child is largely a perceived possibility, rather than an actual child he admits to his school. It is seen too in some of the writing of the disseminators of idiot education (Chapter 3), perhaps most clearly in Martineau's work wherein the impaired man whom she knows as an individual can be spoken of with sympathy while she expresses dread of the supposed progeny of hypothetical unions of blood relatives. The distinction between perception and practice is seen most clearly in the life stories examined in part II, where families' focus was on practice, on solving the problem of a child who didn't learn in the expected way. Moreover, as perception intertwined with practice, the perception was usually of an educational or health problem rather than of idiocy or a related notion. It was rare that a perception of a family member was articulated as idiocy or imbecility, and then, as Emily Lamb of Augustus, Enid Layard of Lindsey Bertie and Tilton of Byron Woodhull,

---

Comfort for the Feeble Minded (London, 1604); J. Park, A General Epistle to all the Called and Chosen of God, Wherein is Comfort for the Feeble Minded (London, 1676).

only by people who were not members of a central network of socializers of the child. Laura Stephen, as an adult, lived in two of the new institutions for the education and care of the intellectually impaired which had developed after the 1840s – but as a child, within the period of this study, her parents' reaction to her difficulties was similar to that of parents of the early part of the nineteenth century as they tried to adapt existing modes of education to her needs.

This brings us, finally, to the question of change between the 1780s and the 1880s. There was, of course, the well-documented emergence of idiot education in the 1840s and efforts to disseminate this, but in other respects this thesis has demonstrated the variety of notions about intellectual impairment that were drawn on by different sets of people and in different contexts rather than a smooth replacement of one set of ideas by another. When one turns to the individuals of Part II, there is no immediate response to new ideas by the two families who were bringing up a child after the notion of idiot education had been unfurled. When Laura Stephen was a child her father's reaction was similar to that of earlier families in seeking to adapt ordinary education to fit her particular needs, and neither did he define her problems as idiocy or even imbecility or feeble mindedness. Byron Woodhull was brought up initially in the States; but idiot education developed there at about the same time as in Britain, yet his mother did not it seems draw on these ideas nor make use of the new institutions that were available too in the U.S. Her reaction was an up to the minute one it is true, but it was to worry about eugenics, earlier an issue in the States than in Britain, rather than education.

The clearest indication of change over time in respect of *mentalités* rather than in the specific activities of a defined set of reformers, is found in imaginative literature. Here an ancient image of the fool, perhaps supernaturally caused, perhaps endowed with mystic wisdom as well as folly, dies away, and leaves only the image of the idiot, or imbecile, who is intellectually impaired, *tout court*. If the major change in thinking about intellectual impairment during the hundred years of this study was the advent of idiot education, perhaps a muted and inconspicuous change – which occurred at about the same time – was the final fading away of the fool. The fool, whether natural or artificial, was becoming an anachronism in the eighteenth century and the nineteenth finished him off. The very ambiguity of the concept (natural fool? or artificial?) was hardly suited to the scientific precision increasingly demanded by the nineteenth century. While it's all right to laugh at a person who sets out deliberately to entertain, developing refinement makes one flinch at the thought of

laughing at the blundering of a natural fool. Related to, and part of, the new refinement, people become more self aware, readier to acknowledge the fool, the wild man or woman, inside themselves, and have less need – or at least are too sophisticated to admit a need – for a living wild man to act out the idiocies and follies that are forbidden though desired.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources: manuscript

#### BRITISH LIBRARY

Holland House MSS, Add MSS 51500, 51560, letters of Lamb family to Lady Holland.

Lamb MSS, Add MSS 45546.

Layard MSS, Add MSS 46115, Journal of Enid Layard

Warren Hastings MSS, Add MSS 29230, folio 10, letters from T.S. Hancock to his wife.

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE, Hertford, Panshanger Papers, D/Elb

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF WALES, The Journals of Lady Charlotte Guest, Vols III, VI-XXXI

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE RECORD OFFICE, Northampton, Wickham Papers, Diaries of Countess of Aboyne (née Mary Pegus); diaries of John, Earl of Aboyne; diaries of Elizabeth Pegus.

SOUTHAMPTON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, Broadlands Papers, BR 29, Box 1, letters of E. Lamb

SURREY HISTORY CENTRE, (Record Office), Woking, Records of Earlswood Hospital, Letters to the Board of Guardians, 1861-1869. 392/2/8/1 and Letters of Thanks, 1849-1887, 339/2/8/2

WELLCOME LIBRARY FOR THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE, Papers of Dr R. Lee, MSS 3213, 3214, 3218, 5469

WEST SUSSEX RECORD OFFICE, Chichester, Bessborough Papers, MSS F 161, 182, 275-279

### Primary sources: published

#### Books

London is the place of publication unless otherwise stated.

Airlie, Mabelle, Countess of, Lady Palmerston and her Times, 2 Vols, (Hodder and Stoughton, 1922)

Arnold, T., Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes and Prevention of Insanity, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2 Vols, (Richard Phillips, 1806)

Austen, J., Jane Austen's Letters, ed. by D. Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Austen-Leigh, R.A., ed., The Austen Papers, 1704-1856 (Privately printed by Spottiswood, Ballantyne, 1942)



Beckett, R. B., John Constable's Correspondence: the family at East Bergholt 1807-1837 (H.M.S.O., 1962)

Belhomme, E., Essaie sur l'Idiotie (Paris: Germer-Baillière, 1843)

Bessborough, Lord, Lady Bessborough and her Family Circle (Longman Green, 1940)

Brontë, C., Villette, ed. by M. Lilley, introduction by T. Tanner, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

Burrows, G., An Inquiry into Certain Errors Relative to Insanity and their Consequences (Underwood, 1820)

Burrows, G., Commentaries on the Causes, Forms, Symptoms and Treatment, Moral and Medical, of Insanity (Underwood, 1828)

Cavendish, H. Hary-O: the letters of Lady Harriet Cavendish, ed. by G. Leveson-Gower, (John Murray, 1940)

Chambers, R., Illustrations of the Author of *Waverley*, Being Notices and Anecdotes of Real Characters, Scenes and Incidents Supposed to be Described in the Works, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (W.R. Chambers, 1844)

Combe, A., Observations on Mental Derangement: being an application of the principles of phrenology to the elucidation of the causes, symptoms, nature and treatment of insanity (Edinburgh: Anderson, 1831)

Cowper, E., The Letters of Lady Palmerston, selected and ed. by T. Lever, (John Murray, 1957)

Crockett, W., The Scott Originals: an account of the notables and worthies in the *Waverley* novels (T. N. Foulis, 1912)

Dickens, C., Barnaby Rudge (Educational Book Company, 1910)

Dickens, C., Nicholas Nickleby (Educational Book Company, 1910)

Dickens, C. Little Dorrit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979)

Dickens, C., The Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol 2, 1840-1841, ed. by M. House and G. Storey, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)

Down, J. L., The Education and Training of the Feeble in Mind (H.K. Lewis, 1876)

Eden, E. Miss Eden's Letters, ed. by V. Dickinson, (Macmillan, 1919)

Edgeworth, M. and R. Edgeworth, Practical Education (J. Johnson, 1798)

'E. G.', Narrative Poems and a Beam for Mental Darkness for the Benefit of the Idiot and his Institution (Dean and Son, 1852)

- Forbes, J. A Physician's Holiday, or a Month in the Country in Switzerland in the Summer of 1848, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (London, 1852)
- Froebel, F., Autobiography of Friedrich Froebel, trans. by E. Michaelis, (Swan, Sonnenschein, Lowrey, 1888)
- Galt, J. Annals of the Parish, or the Chronicle of Dalmailing, ed. by J. Kinsley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)
- Galt, J., The Entail, or the Lairds of Grippy, ed. by I. Gordon, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)
- Gaskell, E., The Cage at Cranford and Other Stories (Nelson, 1935)
- Gaskell, E., Mary Barton (Everyman, 1911)
- Gausson, L. The Abendberg, an Alpine Retreat Founded by Dr Guggenbuhl for the Treatment of Infant Cretins, introduction by J. Coldstream, (Edinburgh: W.P. Kennedy, 1848)
- Granville, H., A Second Self: the letters of Harriet Granville 1810-1845, ed. by V. Surtees, (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1990)
- Haslam, J., Observations on Madness and Melancholy, including Practical Remarks on those Diseases, together with Cases and an Account of the Morbid Appearances on Dissection (John Callow, 1809)
- Hardy, T., The Return of the Native, introduction by G. Woodcock, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)
- Ireland, W., On Idiocy and Imbecility (Churchill, 1887)
- Itard, J., The Wild Boy of Aveyron, trans. by L. Malson, (New Left Books, 1972 [first published 1806])
- Kilvert, F., Selections from the Diary of the Reverend Francis Kilvert, May 1874-March 1879, Vol 3, ed. by W. Plomer, (Jonathan Cape, 1960)
- Lamb, W. Lord Melbourne's Papers, ed. by L. Sanders, (Longman Green, 1899)
- Lee, R., Extracts from the Diary of the Late Dr Robert Lee, while Resident with the Hon. William Lamb (afterwards Viscount Melbourne), ed. with preface by K.L. (Privately printed, 1897)
- Martineau, H., and Atkinson, H.G., Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development (London, 1851)
- Mayhew, H., London Labour and the London Poor Vol 4, (New York: Dover, 1968)
- Mitchell, A., The Insane in Private Dwellings (Edinburgh: Edmonton Douglas, 1854)

- Norton, C., The Letters of Caroline Norton to Lord Melbourne, ed. by J. Hoge and C. Olney (Ohio: Ohio State University Press)
- Park, J., A General Epistle to all the Called and Chosen of God, Wherein in is Comfort for the Feeble Minded (London, 1676)
- Perkins, W., Satan's Sophistrie Answered by our Saviour Christ \_\_\_\_\_ to which is added Comfort for the Feeble Minded (London, 1604)
- Pestalozzi, J., Letters on Early Education, Addressed to J.P. Greaves Esq (Sherwood, Gilber and Piper, 1827)
- Pinel, P. A Treatise on Insanity, trans. by D. Davis, (New York: Hafner, 1962 [facsimile of the 1806 edition])
- Prichard, J. C., A Treatise on Diseases of the Nervous System (Underwood, 1822)
- Rousseau, J-J., Emile, trans. by B. Foxley, (Everyman, 1911[1<sup>st</sup> published 1762])
- Scott, W., Waverley or 'tis Sixty Years Since, ed. by C. Lamont, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)
- Scott, W., The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, 1808-1811, ed. by H. Grierson, (Constable, 1932)
- Scott, W.R., Remarks, Theoretical and Practical, on the Education of Idiots and Children of Weak Intellect (London: Hamilton Adams, 1847).
- Séguin, E., Hygiène et Education des Idiots (Paris: Baillière, 1843 [facsimile in Y. Pelicier and G. Thuillier, Edouard Séguin, Paris, 1980])
- Séguin, E., Idiocy and its Treatment by the Physiological Method (New York: Augustus Kelley, 1971 [facsimile of the 1866 edition])
- Spurzheim, J., Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of Mind, or Insanity (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970 [original publication 1833])
- Stephen, L., Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book, ed. by A. Bell, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977)
- Thelwall, J., Results of Experience in the Treatment of Defective Utterance from Deficiencies in the Roof of the Mouth and other Imperfections and Malconformations of the Organs of Speech, with Observations on Cases of Amentia and Tardy and Imperfect Development of the Faculties (J. McCreery, 1814)
- Thelwall, J., A Letter to Henry Cline Esq. On Imperfect Development of the Faculties, Mental and Moral, as well as Constitutional and Organic; and on the Treatment of Impediments in Speech (J. McCreery, 1819)
- Tilton, T., Victoria Woodhull: a biographical sketch (New York: Golden Age, 1971 [first

published 1876])

Wordsworth, W., and S.T. Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads (Oxford: Woodstock, 1993)

Wordsworth, W. and D. Wordsworth, Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth 1787-1805, ed. by E. de Selincourt, revised by C. L. Shaver, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967)

W., The Brontës in Ireland or Facts Stranger than Fiction, 2nd edition (Hodder and Stoughton, 1855)

Yonge, C.M., Hopes and Fears: scenes from the life of a spinster (Macmillan, 1889)

### **Pamphlets**

Cretins and Idiots: a short account (Dean, 1853)

Cretins and Idiots: a short account of the progress of the institution for their relief and cure (W.A. Wighton, 1853).

The Education of the Imbecile and the Improvement of Invalid Youth (Edinburgh: Home and School for Invalid and Imbecile Children, 1856).

Greenwell, D., On the Education of the Imbecile (London: Strahan, 1869)

Greenwell, D., ed., Harmless Johnny, or the Poor Outcast of Reason, by C. Bowles, (Strahan, 1868)

Greenwell, D., ed., A Poor Boy, abridged from the French of the Countess de Gasparin, (Strahan, 1868)

Greenwell, D., ed., The Wow of Rivven, or the Idiot's Home, by G. MacDonald, (Strahan, 1868)

Greenwell, D., ed., Benjie of Millden, (Strahan, 1869)

Guggenbuhl, J., 1845, Extracts from the First Report of the Institution of the Abendberg, ed. and translated by W. Twining (John Parkes, 1845)

Sidney, E. Teaching the Idiot Lectures in Connection with the Educational Exhibition of the Society of Arts, (Routledge, 1854)

Twining, W., Some Account of Cretinism and the Institution for its Cure on the Abendberg (John Parkes, 1843)

Witless Willie: the idiot boy (Hodder and Stoughton, 1885)

## Articles

Dickens, C., 'Idiots' in Charles Dickens' Uncollected Writing from *Household Words*, Vol 2, 1850-1859, ed. by H. Stone (London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press,) First published 1853.

Down, J.L., 'Observations on the ethnic classification of idiots' London Hospital Reports, 3 (1862) pp.259-62.

'Education of idiots at the Bicêtre', Chambers Edinburgh Journal, 7 (1848), pp. 71-73 and pp. 105-107.

'Education of the imbecile' North British Review, 38 (1863) pp. 120-133.

'Hospital for infant cretins', Chambers Edinburgh Journal 9 (1848), pp. 296-299.

Martineau, H., 'Idiots Again' Household Words, 9 (1854) pp. 197-200

Potts, W. 'The importance of health conditions in juvenile delinquents', National Health, 13 (1921), pp. 178-180.

'Visit to the Bicêtre' Chambers Edinburgh Journal, 7 (1847), pp. 22-23.

## Government publications

Report of the Departmental Committee on Defective and Epileptic Children, Cd 8746, 1896

Report of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded, Cd 4215, 1908

## Secondary sources: published

### Books

London is the place of publication unless otherwise stated

Abercrombie, N. et al., eds. The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994)

Archer, R., Secondary Education in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921)

Atkinson, D. et al., eds., Forgotten Lives: exploring the history of learning disability (Kidderminster: British Institute of Learning Disability, 1997)

Austen-Leigh, W., and R. Austen-Leigh, Jane Austen: a family record, revised and enlarged by D. Le Faye, (British Library, 1989)

Barker, J., The Brontës (Phoenix, 1995)

- Berrios, G., and Porter, eds. History of Clinical Psychiatry (Athlone Press, 1995)
- Bullock, A. and O. Stallybrass The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought (Fontana, 1977)
- Bartlett, P. and D. Wright, eds. Outside the Walls of the Asylum: the history of care in the community (Athlone Press, 1999)
- Berger, P. and T. Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)
- Bertaux, D., Les Récits de Vie (Paris: Nathan, 1997)
- Bewell, A., Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: nature, man and society in experimental poetry (Newhaven: Yale University Press)
- Blyth, H., Caro: the fatal passion (Hart-Davies, 1972)
- Bourdieu, P., La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979)
- Cecil, D., The Young Melbourne and the Story of his Marriage to Lady Caroline Lamb (Constable, 1954)
- Coard, B., How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System (1971)
- Davis, L., Enforcing Normalcy: disability, deafness, and the body (Verso, 1995)
- Digby, A., Madness, Morality and Medicine: a study of the York Retreat, 1796-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- Digby, A., and P. Searby, Children, School and Society in Nineteenth Century England (Macmillan, 1981)
- Doyal, L., and I. Gough, A Theory of Human Need (Macmillan, 1991)
- Drabble, M., Oxford Companion to English Literature, new edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- Dunckley, Lord Melbourne, (Constable, 1890)
- Durkheim, E., The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, trans. by J. Swain, (Allen and Unwin, 1915)
- Elias, N., The Civilising Process: the history of manners, trans. by E. Jephcott, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978)
- Ford, B., The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. 5 and 6 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957 and 1958)

- Foucault, M., Madness and Civilization: a history of insanity in the age of reason, trans. by R. Howard, (Tavistock, 1971)
- Foucault, M., Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison, trans. by A. Sheridan, (Allen Lane, 1977)
- France, P., ed. New Oxford Companion to Literature in French (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955)
- Gates, D., ed. Learning Disabilities (Churchill Livingstone, 1998)
- Gilman, S., ed., The Face of Madness: Hugh W. Diamond and the origin of psychiatric photography (New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1976)
- Gilman, S., Seeing the Insane (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1982)
- Goffman, E., The presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959)
- Guest, R. and A. V. John, Lady Charlotte: a biography of the Nineteenth Century (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989)
- Heilbrun, C., Writing a Woman's (The Women's Press, 1989)
- Honey, J., Tom Brown's Universe: the development of the public school in the nineteenth century (Millington, 1977)
- Horden, P., and R. Smith, eds., The Locus of Care: families, communities and institutions and the provision of welfare since antiquity (Routledge, 1998).
- Howell-Thomas, D., Lord Melbourne's Susan (Old Woking, Surrey: Gresham, 1978)
- Hunter, D., Price's Textbook of the Practice of Medicine, 9<sup>th</sup> edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956)
- Hughes, K., The Victorian Governess (Hambledon Press, 1993).
- Hunter, R., and I. Macalpine, Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry, 1536-1810 (New York: Carlisle Publishing, 1982)
- Jalland, P., Women, Marriage and Politics, 1860-1941 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)
- Jenkins, E. Lady Caroline Lamb, revised edition, (London: Sphere, 1972)
- Kanner, L., A History of the Care and Study of the Mentally Retarded, (Illinois: C. Thomas, 1964).
- Kyle, J. and B. Woll, Sign Language: the study of deaf people and their language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

- Lane, M., Jane Austen's Family through Five Generations (Robert Hale, 1984)
- Lawson, J. and H. Silver, A Social History of Education in England, (Methuen, 1973)
- Lee, H., Virginia Woolf (Vintage, 1997)
- Lodge, D., Working with Structuralism: essays and reviews on nineteenth and twentieth century literature (Routledge, 1991)
- Mack, E., Public Schools and British Opinion, 1780-1860 (Methuen, 1938)
- Mangan, J., and J. Walvin, eds., Manliness and Morality, 1800-1940 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987)
- McKnight, N., Idiots, Madmen and Other Prisoners in Dickens (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993)
- Melling, J., and B. Forsythe, eds., Insanity, Institutions and Society: a social history of madness in comparative perspective (Routledge, 1999).
- Mitchell, L.G., Lord Melbourne, 1778-1848 (Collins, 1997)
- Newman, Lord Melbourne (Macmillan, 1910)
- Newsome, D., Godliness and Good Learning: four studies on a Victorian ideal. (John Murray, 1961)
- Nokes, D. Jane Austen: a life (Fourth Estate, 1997)
- Pelicier, Y. and G. Thuillier, Edouard Séguin (1812-1880) "l'Instituteur des Idiots", (Paris: Economica, 1980)
- Peterson, J., Family, Love and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989)
- Porter, R., Mind Forged Manacles: a history of madness from the Restoration to the Regency (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987)
- Pritchard, D., Education and the Handicapped (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963)
- Rix, B., The History of Mental Handicap and the Development of Mencap (Nottingham: School of Education University of Nottingham, 1990)
- Roach, J., A History of Secondary Education in England, 1800-1870 (Longman, 1986)
- Roper, M., and J. Tosh, eds., Manful Assertions: masculinities in Britain since 1800 (Routledge, 1991)
- Ryan, J., The Politics of Mental Handicap, revised edition, (Free Association Press, 1987)



- Scheerenberger, R., A History of Mental Retardation, (Baltimore: Brookes, 1983)
- Shanley, E., and T. Starrs, Learning Disabilities: a handbook of care (Churchill Livingstone, 1993)
- Sharps, J., Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention: a study of her non-biographic works (Fontwell, Sussex: Linden Press, 1970)
- Sigmon, S., Radical Analysis of Special Education (Falmer, 1987)
- Silber, K., Pestalozzi: the man and his work (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960)
- Sontag, S. Illness as Metaphor, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983)
- Stone, L., The Past and Present Revisited (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985)
- Talbot, M., Edouard Séguin: a study of an educational approach to mentally defective children (New York: Teachers College Press, 1964)
- Tomlinson, S., A Sociology of Special Education, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982)
- Torrens, W. Memoirs of the Honourable William, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Melbourne, 2 Vols, (Macmillan, 1878)
- Tomalin, C., Jane Austen: a life (Viking, 1997)
- Tompson, R., Classics or Charity? The dilemma of the eighteenth century grammar school (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971)
- Trent, J., Inventing the Feeble Mind: a history of mental retardation in the United States, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994)
- Tucker, G.H., A Goodly Heritage: a history of Jane Austen's family (Manchester: Carcanet, 1983)
- Uglow, J., Elizabeth Gaskell (Faber, 1993)
- Underhill, L. B., The Woman Who Ran for President: the many lives of Victoria Woodhull (New York: Bridge Works Publishing, 1995)
- Ward, O.C., John Langdon Down: a caring pioneer (Royal Society of Medicine Press, 1998)
- Welsford, E., The Fool: his social and literary history (Faber, 1935)
- Whitredge, A., Dr Arnold of Rugby, (Constable, 1928)
- Whatley, C., ed., John Galt, 1779-1839 (Edinburgh: Ramsey Head Press, 1979)
- Wright, D., and Digby, A., eds. From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency: historical perspectives on people with learning disabilities. (Routledge, 1996).

Ziegler, P., *Melbourne: a biography of William Lamb, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Melbourne* (Collins, 1987)

### Articles

Andrews, J., 'Begging the question of idiocy; the definition and socio-cultural meanings of idiocy in early modern Britain', *History of Psychiatry*, 9 (1998), Part 1, pp. 65-95, Part 2, pp. 179-200.

Atkinson, D., and J. Walmsley, 'Using autobiographical approaches with people with learning disabilities', *Disability and Society*, 14 (1999), pp. 203-216.

Bogdan, R. 'Exhibiting mentally retarded people for amusement and profit, 1850-1940', *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 91 (1986) pp. 120-126.

Daniel, D., "'Education or care and control?'" The development of provision for mentally handicapped children in England and Wales, 1870-1914', *History of Education Society Bulletin*, 57 (1996) pp. 17-29.

Dickinson, H. 'Accounting for Augustus Lamb: theoretical and methodological issues in biography and historical sociology', *Sociology*, 27: 3 (1993) pp. 121-132.

Dickinson, H. 'Narratives of learning difficulties', *Autobiography: 'Lives and Works'* 3: 1 and 2 (1994) pp. 93-104.

Digby, A., 'Contexts and Perspectives', in D. Wright and A. Digby, eds., *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency* (Routledge, 1996).

Devlieger, P., '(In)competence in America: a comparative perspective' in R. Jenkins, ed., *Questions of Competence: culture, classification and intellectual disability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Erben, M., 'The problem of other lives: social perspectives', *Sociology*, 27:1 (1993), pp.15-26.

Goodey, C., 'The psychopolitics of disability in seventeenth century thought' in D. Wright and A. Digby, eds., *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency* (Routledge, 1996)

Houston, R. A., "'Not simple boarding": care of the mentally incapacitated in Scotland during the long eighteenth century' in P. Bartlett and D. Wright, eds., *Outside the the Walls of the Asylum* (Athlone Press, 1999).

Jones, D., 'A biographical approach to the history of education: nineteenth century nonconformist lives and educational expansion', in M. Erben, ed., *Biography and Education: a reader* (Falmer, 1998)

Kanner, L., 'Johann Jakob Guggenbuhl and the Abendberg', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 33 (1959) 498-504.

Laqueur, T., 'Working class demand and the growth of English elementary education, 1750-1858'

in L. Stone, ed., *Schooling and Society: studies in the history of education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976)

Neugebauer, R., 'A doctor's dilemma: the case of William Harvey's mentally retarded nephew', *Psychological Medicine*, 9 (1978) pp. 569-72.

Ortner, S., 'Is female to male as nature is to culture?' in M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974)

Porter, R., 'Keeping them down on the farm', *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 June, (1994) p. 29.

Rushton, P., 'Idiocy, the family and community in early modern north east England' in D. Wright and A. Digby, *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency* (Routledge, 1996).

Simpson, M.K., 'The moral government of idiots: moral treatment in the work of Séguin', *History of Psychiatry*, 10 (1999), 227-243.

Suzuki, A., 'Enclosing and disclosing lunatics within the family walls: domestic psychiatric regime and the public sphere in early nineteenth century England' in P. Bartlett and D. Wright, *Outside the Walls of the Asylum* (Athlone, 1999)

White, H., 'The Forms of Wildness' in E. Dudley and M. Novak, *The Wild Man Within: an image in Western thought from the renaissance to romanticism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972)

White, H., 'The metaphysics of narrativity', in D. Wood, ed., *On Paul Ricoeur* (Routledge, 1991)

Williams, P., ed., *The Fool and the Trickster: essays in honour of Enid Welsford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

Wright, D., 'Childlike in his innocence: lay attitudes to "idiots" and "imbeciles" in Victorian England' in D. Wright and A. Digby, eds. *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency*. (Routledge, 1996)

Wright, D., 'Familial care of "idiot" children in Victorian England' in P. Horden and R. Smith, eds. *The Locus of Care* (Routledge, 1998)

### **Unpublished theses**

Gelband, H., 'Mental Retardation and Institutional Treatment in Nineteenth Century England', (PhD thesis, University of Maryland, 1979)

McDonagh, P., 'The Image of Idiocy in Nineteenth Century England' (PhD thesis, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada, 1998)

Wright, D., 'The National Asylum for Idiots, Earlswood, 1847-1886' (D. Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1993)

## **APPENDIX**

Letters from Augustus Lamb

Dearest Minnie

I shall have the  
pleasure of leaving you  
tomorrow, probably  
about five o'clock.  
I am quite well &  
hope to find you so.  
I begin to think that the  
journey to Brighton  
will not be such a  
as such needs to be

panion with the  
Members of Parliament.

with have a short vacation.  
I hope the weather will  
be more favorable  
and it will be delightful  
at the sea.

Believe me, dear Minnie,

Your affectionately yours,  
G. Augustus Lamb

Thursday  
March 20

Hertfordshire Record Office  
Panshanger Papers D/E/66

Phoenix Park August the 31<sup>st</sup> 1827.

My dear Mother

My High is get-  
ting better every day I was very  
much obliged by your kind letter and  
many thanks for the enclosed.

I am much obliged to you for  
offering to send me some books but  
as Mr Lamb has several books here  
which I can read I think it is  
not necessary to send any so great  
a distance. My best love to Susan  
I hope you are all quite well at Brock

I am in very good health at present  
and the attacks are not near so frequent  
as they have been lately a good deal  
lighter than usual God Lamb.

West Sussex Record Office  
Bessborough Papers F161