

'PULP METHODISM' REVISITED: THE LITERATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SILAS AND JOSEPH HOCKING

by MARTIN WELLINGS

Writing pseudonymously in the *New Age* in February 1909, Arnold Bennett, acerbic chronicler of Edwardian chapel culture, deplored the lack of proper bookshops in English provincial towns. A substantial manufacturing community, he claimed, might be served only by a stationer's shop, offering 'Tennyson in gilt. Volumes of the Temple Classics or Everyman. Hymn books, Bibles. The latest cheap Shakespeare. Of new books no example, except the brothers Hocking.'¹ Bennett's lament was an unintended compliment to the ubiquity of the novels of Silas and Joseph Hocking, brothers whose literary careers spanned more than half a century, generating almost two hundred novels and innumerable serials and short stories.² Silas Hocking (1850–1935), whose first book was published in 1878 and last in 1934, has been described as the most popular novelist of the late nineteenth century.³ By 1900 his sales already exceeded one million volumes.⁴ The career of Joseph Hocking (1860–1937) was slightly shorter, stretching from 1887 to 1936, but his output was equally impressive. The Hockings' works have attracted interest principally among scholars of Cornish life and culture.⁵ It will be argued here, however, that they have significance for the history of

¹ Arnold Bennett, 'The Potential Public', in idem, *Books and Persons: Being Comments on a Past Epoch, 1908–1911* (London, 1917), 101–8, at 103. The article first appeared on 18 February 1909, signed 'Jacob Tonson'.

² ODNB, s.n. 'Hocking, Silas Kitto (1850–1935)', online at <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/33912>>, accessed 18 August 2009. This article seriously underestimates the output of the brothers, for which see Alan M. Kent, *Pulp Methodism: The Lives and Literature of Silas, Joseph and Salome Hocking. Three Cornish Novelists* (St Austell, 2002), 221–6. There are brief biographical articles in John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Harlow, 1988), 301.

³ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), 131.

⁴ Indicated in endpaper advertisements in, e.g., S. K. Hocking, *The Strange Adventures of Israel Pendray* (London, 1899). Some sources (e.g. ODNB) suggest that a single title sold a million copies, but this is not supported by the contemporary catalogues.

⁵ Kent, *Pulp Methodism*, 11–25; Charles Thomas, 'Methodism in Cornish Litera-

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late Victorian and Edwardian Nonconformity, both reflecting and reinforcing the attitudes, beliefs and prejudices of their large and appreciative readership.

The Hockings were born in Cornwall, and both entered the ministry of the United Methodist Free Churches (UMFC), one of the products of the mid nineteenth-century convulsions in the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion.⁶ Silas became a UMFC minister in 1869, serving in a succession of appointments in major northern towns. Like a number of his fictional heroes, Silas began writing stories for newspapers and magazines before producing his first novel, *Alec Green: A Tale of Sea Life*, in 1878. This story, serialized in the *Burnley Advertiser* and taken up by the publisher Frederick Warne, was only a modest success. The following year, however, *Her Benny*, a tale of a Liverpool street arab, published first in the *UMFC Magazine* and then by Warne, became a best-seller.⁷ *Her Benny* made Silas's name, and thereafter he produced one or two novels almost every year for the next four decades. Silas gained increasing celebrity, and was in much demand as a guest preacher and lecturer. In 1896 he resigned from the ministry, although he continued to preach regularly. A staunch opponent of the Boer War, he stood unsuccessfully for Parliament in 1906 and 1910.⁸ By the time of his death in September 1935 Silas had written some ninety-six novels and earned over £60,000 from his literary endeavours.⁹

Joseph Hocking, ten years younger than his brother, followed him into the ministry of the UMFC, training at Victoria Park College, Manchester, from 1881 and serving circuits in Leicestershire, London and Lancashire.¹⁰ Like Silas, Joseph began with short stories and serials, and his first novels, *Harry Penhale: The Trial of His Faith* and *Gideon Strong: Plebeian*, were published by the UMFC Bookroom in 1887 and 1888 respectively. A travel book,

ture', in Sarah Foot, ed., *Methodist Celebration: A Cornish Contribution* (Redruth, 1988), 52-6.

⁶ Oliver A. Beckerlegge, *The United Methodist Free Churches: A Study in Freedom* (London, 1957), remains the only history of the UMFC.

⁷ Kent, *Pulp Methodism*, 66-8; Silas K. Hocking, *My Book of Memory* (London, 1923), 69-70, 78-83.

⁸ Kent, *Pulp Methodism*, 72, 77-80; Hocking, *Book of Memory*, 163-90.

⁹ Kent, *Pulp Methodism*, 87.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 99-103.

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From London to Damascus, followed in 1889, and this enabled Joseph to begin a fruitful relationship with Ward, Lock and Company. *Jabez Easterbrook: A Religious Novel*, published in 1890, brought Joseph popular and commercial success. He matched his brother's output, writing ninety-four novels between 1887 and 1936. Like Silas, Joseph retired from the ministry in middle age; unlike his brother, Joseph adopted a strong pro-war stance during the 1914–18 conflict.¹¹

In seeking to explain the phenomenal success of the Hocking brothers, several points need to be borne in mind. First, they took up the writing of popular fiction at a time when the British reading public was expanding, when the novel reigned supreme as a literary vehicle, and when the publishing industry was geared to the mass production of cheap fiction. During the second half of the nineteenth century the population increased considerably, with England and Wales alone growing from 17.9 million people in 1851 to 36 million in 1911.¹² This expansion was matched by a drive to improve levels of literacy, first by voluntary societies, then by the pressure of government grants and inspection, and finally (from 1870) by legislation to facilitate the building of schools and gradually to encourage and then to compel attendance.¹³ In 1870 adult literacy stood at an estimated 80% of men and 70% of women; by 1913 less than 1% of the population was functionally illiterate.¹⁴ Adding the burgeoning American and colonial markets, it has been suggested that between 1830 and 1890 the reading public for books published in English mushroomed from 50,000 to 120 million people.¹⁵ This growing readership was eager for novels. Anthony Trollope, a beneficiary of this trend, observed in 1870: 'We have become a novel-reading people.'¹⁶ More than 40,000 novels were published during Queen Victoria's reign,¹⁷ and, with expanding markets and developments in printing technology, the price of

¹¹ Ibid. 109, 170.

¹² P. J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation: England 1850–1914* (Oxford, 1983), 7.

¹³ E. J. Feuchtwanger, *Democracy and Empire: Britain 1865–1914* (London, 1989), 14–15.

¹⁴ Waller, *Town, City and Nation*, 268–9; David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750–1914* (Cambridge, 1989), 4.

¹⁵ J. A. Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (Chicago, IL, 1976), 64.

¹⁶ Philip Davis, *The Victorians* (Oxford, 2002), 226.

¹⁷ Ibid. 223.

books fell dramatically. In the 1840s a penny would purchase a 250-word broadside. By the 1880s the same sum would buy a 20,000-word novelette, and through the 1890s and early 1900s enterprising publishers established Penny Libraries to supply cheap editions of classic works.¹⁸ The hitherto dominant form of the three-decker thirty-one-shilling novel fell into disfavour in the last decade of the century: finally embargoed by the powerful circulating libraries in 1894, it was replaced by single-volume works priced at six shillings.¹⁹ Hocking titles typically retailed at a more modest three shillings and sixpence in book form, but they were also accessible even more cheaply as serial publications in newspapers and magazines.

Secondly, the rise in the general reading public was matched by a growing constituency of literate Nonconformists. All the major Nonconformist denominations increased in membership in the last third of the nineteenth century, with about a million members in the Baptist, Congregational, Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Churches by 1901.²⁰ Bearing in mind that chapel communities typically represented four times the official membership, clearly Nonconformists comprised a significant segment of the British reading public. As important for the success of the Hockings as the numerical growth of Nonconformity, however, was its evolving attitude to novels and novel-reading.

In *Methodism Divided* Robert Currie argues that the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a gradual process of cultural accommodation, as behaviour and practices previously regarded as 'worldly' by Methodists were permitted or even endorsed. Currie cites novel-reading as an example of this process, finding evidence of changing attitudes particularly in the 1870s, as Silas Hocking began writing fiction.²¹ A similar case is made for Nonconformity in general by Richard Helmstadter, who dates the erosion of a distinctive Nonconformist culture to the mid 1880s and cites the reading and writing of novels by ministers as an indication of

¹⁸ Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, 211; Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT, 2002), 132–6.

¹⁹ Sutherland, *Longman Companion*, 2.

²⁰ James Munson, *The Nonconformists: In Search of a Lost Culture* (London, 1991), 10–11.

²¹ Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London, 1968), 133–6.

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'assimilation into the mainstream of English society'.²² At first sight, the Hockings and United Methodism may stand as an example of this trend. Salome Hocking, sister of Silas and Joseph, recalled a local preacher denouncing novel-reading 'as a special sin to be shunned', while her father James was dismayed when Silas published a novel.²³ After the serialization of *Alec Green* Silas found his congregation in Burnley divided over his new-found fame, and one member of the church was so unused to fiction that he assumed Alec Green must be a real person, and suggested inviting this interesting character to give a public lecture on his adventures.²⁴ Against this anxiety, antagonism and plain incomprehension may be set the publication of stories, serials and reviews in the *UMFC Magazine* through the 1880s, and the issuing of Joseph Hocking's first novels from the denominational press. By the 1890s the *Magazine* had been redesigned, with fiction as a significant element of its contents and with full-page advertisements for novels, penny stories, fiction-based 'reward books' for Sunday schools, and even a 'service of song' built around *Her Benny*.²⁵

The picture of Nonconformity's slide into cultural accommodation through the acceptance of novels, however, needs to be qualified. Silas Hocking wryly reminded the anxious editor of the *UMFC Magazine* that even denominational obituary notices often employed the skills of creative writing; less provocatively, E. E. Kellett recalled 'a large and fascinating literature' of historical and missionary biographies, rivalling adventure stories in their narrative appeal. Allegory was familiar through the works of Bunyan, and there was an extensive subculture of edifying tracts and moral stories for children which were acceptable even to the most strait-laced among the devout.²⁶ Moreover, Methodists and Noncon-

²² R. J. Helmstadter, 'The Nonconformist Conscience', in Gerald Parsons, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, 4: *Interpretations* (Manchester, 1988), 61–95, at 87.

²³ Salome Hocking, *Some Old Cornish Folk* (London, 1903), 175–6; Kent, *Pulp Methodism*, 67.

²⁴ Hocking, *Book of Memory*, 71–2.

²⁵ The *Magazine* was renamed *The Methodist Monthly* in 1892; see April 1894 endpapers for an advertisement for the 'service of song', a sequence of songs and readings designed for an informal or midweek service.

²⁶ Hocking, *Book of Memory*, 81; E. E. Kellett, *As I Remember* (London, 1936), 117–18. On missionary biographies, see, in this volume, Benjamin Fischer, 'A Novel Resistance: Mission Narrative as the Anti-Novel in the Evangelical Assault on British Culture', 232–45. On children's literature, see Margaret Nancy Cutt, *Ministering Angels*:

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formists were reading fiction proper well before the 1870s.²⁷ Wesleyan Methodist masters at Woodhouse Grove School read Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* as the serial parts were issued; Benjamin Gregory found his circuit steward in Ilkeston in 1841 to be 'the literary oracle' of the town, an avid reader of Scott and 'a devotee of modern English literature'; and Gregory's precocious son Alfred owed his spiritual development in the early 1860s to the inspiring example of Esther Sommerson in *Bleak House*.²⁸ While some Nonconformists had little time to read and little taste for fiction, others read widely, bringing theological reflection to their engagement with contemporary literature.

In 1872 the respected UMFC minister Joseph Kirsop published an article 'Concerning Works of Fiction' in the denominational *Magazine*.²⁹ Acknowledging that older Methodists would be surprised to see novelettes in the religious serials, Kirsop argued that the basic principles of Methodism had not changed. It was legitimate, he asserted, to use fiction for instruction and for recreation, but novels should be chosen carefully and read sparingly. It was 'incessant and indiscriminate novel-reading' that should be avoided.³⁰

Rather than a model of cultural capitulation, or perhaps of emancipation from the restrictions of a world-denying piety, Kirsop's case for a discriminating approach to fiction reflects the position of many Nonconformists in the late nineteenth century. It is possible to analyse the appeal of the Hockings in terms of Kirsop's categories, and to consider their fiction as didactic, recreational and wholesome. Thus they met the needs of a market eager to read novels, but novels of the right sort.

In justifying their turn to fiction, Silas and Joseph Hocking

A Study of Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Writing for Children (Wormley, 1979); J. S. Bratton, *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* (London, 1981).

²⁷ Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford, 1975), 56–61.

²⁸ Benjamin Gregory, *Autobiographical Recollections* (London, 1903), 235, 272, 280; Benjamin Gregory, *Consecrated Culture: Memorials of Benjamin Alfred Gregory* (London, 1885), 17.

²⁹ O. A. B[eckerlegge], 'Kirsop, Joseph (1825–1911)', in John A. Vickers, ed., *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (Peterborough, 2000), 194. Kirsop was elected President of the UMFC Annual Assembly in 1875.

³⁰ Joseph Kirsop, 'Concerning Works of Fiction', *UMFC Magazine* 15 (1872), 103–12, quotation at 104.

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made much of the potential of the novel as a vehicle for religious teaching. Writing in the *Methodist Monthly* in October 1894, Joseph described the novel as 'one of the best means for communicating knowledge to the popular mind'. Contrasting the readership of *Robert Elsmere* with that of A. M. Fairbairn's *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, Joseph claimed that '[t]he work of the storyteller, rightly understood, is more effective to teach than that of the teacher at his desk, and not less sacred than that of the divine in the pulpit.'³¹

Hocking fiction certainly contained a strong didactic element, captured by John Sutherland as 'a tendency towards preachiness'.³² *Jabez Easterbrook*, Joseph's answer to *Robert Elsmere*, was summarized by a hostile reviewer thus: 'a sturdy young Wesleyan minister encounters a fascinating young lady of agnostic tendencies. They argue throughout the tedious length of the novel.'³³ Theological debate, signalled by representative stereotypical characters and carried on through ponderous dialogue, was a Hocking staple, whether in the battle between traditional orthodoxy and 'modern thought' in Silas Hocking's *Where Duty Lies* (1895) or in controversy between Protestants and Catholics in Joseph's *The Scarlet Woman* (1899), *The Purple Robe* (1900), *The Woman of Babylon* (1906) and *The Soul of Dominic Wildthorne* (1908). Setting some of his scenes in Rome allowed Joseph to recycle descriptive material about the Eternal City published elsewhere, while placing Protestant polemic into the mouths of his characters.³⁴

The Roman Catholic Church as an institution seldom fared well in the Hocking corpus, with Joseph in particular attacking its theology and spirituality; the sinister Jesuit Father Anthony Ritzoom was one of Joseph's most memorable villains.³⁵ Although the brothers were nurtured in Methodism, the Free Churches were not immune from criticism: witness, for example, the callous leaders of the Trevisco chapel in *Where Duty Lies*, who seek to

³¹ Joseph Hocking, 'Novels and Novel Writers', *Methodist Monthly*, October 1894, 304–5.

³² Sutherland, *Longman Companion*, 301.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Compare the descriptive passages in *The Purple Robe* with Joseph's articles: 'A Protestant Pilgrimage to Rome', *The Puritan*, April 1899, 183–6; May 1899, 312–15.

³⁵ On the portrayal of Jesuits as villains, see, in this volume, John Wolfe, 'The Jesuit as Villain in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction', 308–20.

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exploit the death of three young fishermen to foment a revival. In their fiction as in their careers in ministry, both Silas and Joseph Hocking increasingly turned away from conservative dogmatism, and sought to promote practical charity over ecclesiastical order.

Fiction could only be educationally effective if it was also entertaining and therefore appealing to an audience. Judging by the notices in the press, their longevity and their remarkable sales figures, the Hockings succeeded in reaching a large readership in search of respectable recreational fiction. Reviewing *The Day of Recompense* in August 1899, *The Puritan* commented of Silas Hocking: 'Mr Hocking understands the taste of his vast public to a nicety'. Six months earlier, the same journal noted of the brothers that 'each has a distinct style of his own, and there is little in their books to denote the relationship the authors bear to one another'.³⁶ It may be agreed that their *oeuvre* had some variety: Silas's early novels included examples of waif fiction, for instance, whereas Joseph wrote more historical novels than his brother; Silas tackled the moral issues of the Boer War from an anti-war standpoint in works which struggled to find a publisher, while Joseph wrote popular patriotic fiction during the Great War; Silas gradually moved away from the explicit Methodism of his early works, while Joseph set one of his last novels (somewhat improbably) against the background of the Methodist reunion of 1932.³⁷ There were some experimental works, such as *The Strange Adventures of Israel Pendray*, in which Silas touched on Gothic themes of ghosts and witches. More typical of both brothers, however, was a contemporary setting, often in Cornwall, the industrial North or the Home Counties, with characters close to the life experience, aspirations or fantasies of a lower-middle-class readership: the dutiful son of a widowed mother, struggling to run a small shop while writing his first novel and simultaneously wooing the squire's daughter, was a standard Hocking hero, reflecting familiar experiences of financial hardship, untimely bereavement and limited opportunities, leavened by dreams of romance, fame and fortune. Whatever

³⁶ 'Books and Their Writers', *The Puritan*, August 1899, 586; Howard Cameron, 'Free Church Links with Literature', *The Puritan*, February 1899, 13.

³⁷ Joseph Hocking, *Not One in Ten* (1933), for which see Kent, *Pulp Methodism*, 174–5. The cover design showed the heroine watching the celebration of Methodist Union at the Royal Albert Hall.

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the setting, whether contemporary or historical, there was a strong element of adventure, with the marks of the serial story's end-of-episode cliff-hanger still visible in most chapters. Every novel had clearly identifiable heroes, heroines and villains, a couple of romantic plots and a satisfactorily tidy and comprehensive denouement, in which innocence was vindicated, virtue rewarded and vice exposed and duly punished.

Contemporary opinions varied on the quality of the Hockings' fiction. The *Free Methodist* called Silas 'a prince of story-tellers' and the *Bristol Mercury* described him as 'a master of his craft'.³⁸ Reviewing Joseph's *Ishmael Pengelly* in April 1894 the *Methodist Monthly* enthused that 'without any perceptible effort, Mr Hocking rises superior to the mere story-teller, and gives evidence of the novel-writer of remarkable power'. The reviewer was anxious, however, that there was a risk of overwork: in order to produce a great book, Joseph should 'curb his labour by patience' and resist the temptation to write too much. As if in rebuke to this warning, two months later two more of Joseph's novels were reviewed – favourably – in the same journal.³⁹ Silas, too, drew critical reviews for over-production. An anonymous reviewer in *The Puritan* for July 1900 described *When Life is Young* as 'the kind of thing Mr Hocking has accustomed his readers to expect – even more so', counselling Silas 'against the results of a more rapid production of books than the author's creative ability warrants'. 'Life must be very young indeed,' concluded the review tartly, 'to find anything stimulating or satisfying in the book entitled *When Life is Young*.'⁴⁰

Even those who were reluctant to praise the Hockings for their creativity or literary merit agreed that their novels were respectable. 'Wholesome' was the adjective most frequently deployed to describe their works, and it was reported that only Campbell-Bannerman's death deprived Silas of an honour in recognition of his services in 'providing healthy fiction for the young people of this country'.⁴¹ James Britten, the Roman Catholic controversialist who lambasted Joseph for the inaccuracies in his polemical Protes-

³⁸ Endpapers of *The Quenchless Fire* (1911) and *The Strange Adventures of Israel Pendray* (1899).

³⁹ *Methodist Monthly*, April 1894, 128; June 1894, 191.

⁴⁰ 'Books I have been Reading', *The Puritan*, July 1900, 588.

⁴¹ 'Mr Silas K. Hocking: Moral Purpose in Fiction', *The Times*, 16 September 1935,

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tant novels, conceded that he avoided the 'filthy fictions' of popular anti-Catholicism.⁴² Hocking plots involved manly heroes, chaste heroines, decorous romantic encounters, exemplary characters able to resist the temptation to behave meanly or dishonourably, and an inevitably satisfactory moral resolution at the end of the book. There was perhaps some development over time, from an explicit, often Methodist, piety to an ethic of practical Christianity without denominationalism, but the tone of the books was always thoroughly respectable. The Hockings touched on contemporary issues, including crime and punishment (*Gripped*), slum housing (*Smoking Flax*), intemperance (*Alec Green*) and loveless marriage (*The Quenchless Fire*), but without adopting the approach of the 'problem novel', with its exploration or exploitation of the grey areas of morality. This made Hocking fiction less profound and more predictable, and also commercially more successful.

Although three of Joseph's novels were still in print in the late 1950s as part of Ward, Lock's 'master novelist' series, the Hockings had passed their heyday twenty or thirty years earlier. Their obituaries in 1935 and 1937 spoke of 'novels of the simple old-fashioned type' and suggested that *Her Benny* was Silas's greatest success.⁴³ To recognize, as James Munson does, that Hocking novels 'are now mainly collected for their colourful bindings',⁴⁴ however, is not to underestimate their influence and representative significance in the world of late Victorian and Edwardian Nonconformity, as evidenced by their commercial success. Three concluding observations may be offered.

Firstly, the Hockings may be located in a wider group of Nonconformist and Methodist writers of novels and popular fiction. Preceded by Mark Guy Pearse and James Jackson Wray, whose first novels appeared in the early 1870s, the brothers were followed by Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler and W. H. Fitchett, as well as by the lesser literary figures who supplied serial stories for the denominational newspapers and magazines. When Howard Cameron reviewed 'Free Church Links with Literature' in *The*

⁴² James Britten, 'The Scarlet Woman', in J[oseph]. Keating, ed., *A Brace of Bigots (Dr Horton and Mr Hocking)* (London, 1909), 7. This volume is a collection of pamphlets with separate pagination, consisting mainly of articles reprinted from *The Month*.

⁴³ *The Times*, 16 September 1935, 14.

⁴⁴ Munson, *Nonconformists*, 230.

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Puritan for February 1899, he concluded that the popular authors with Free Church antecedents were 'too numerous' to list.⁴⁵

Secondly, the Hockings reflected the outlook and concerns of their faithful Nonconformist readership. Their contemporary stories were largely set in the world of the upwardly mobile or aspiring classes, well represented in the chapels of the period. If some protagonists achieved a higher social class, this was usually the result of hard work, professional success or an unexpected legacy. Miners and fishermen, small shopkeepers and journalists and even provincial solicitors might be Hocking heroes, but not the landed gentry and their admirers, nor usually prosperous farmers. Free Church ministers were generally well regarded, and so were some of the clergy of the Church of England, provided they were open-minded, generous and manly, and free from sacerdotal pretensions. The ideal of Englishness expressed in such characters was echoed too in Joseph's Protestant and historical novels. The underlying ethic endorsed by the Hockings was one of earnest endeavour, honour and honesty, thrift and generosity, courage and sobriety, with a respect for the Sabbath, a horror of alcohol and a preference for practical Christian charity over dogma.

Thirdly, the novels supplied some evidence of the changing place and outlook of Nonconformity across two or three generations. There were strictures against narrow or judgemental theologies and against Christians reluctant to assimilate 'modern thought'. Even if the prosperous lifestyle of the Hockings' protagonists was only an aspiration for their readers, the fiction implicitly endorsed such ambitions. The constituency reflected in the novels became less of a 'peculiar people', identified by its own subculture and shibboleths, and it may be asked whether this indicated a broadening of Nonconformity or an attempt by the brothers to reach a new readership.

Historians are familiar with the often hostile portrayal of Nonconformity in the classical fiction of the nineteenth century. The work of the 'brothers Hocking', among others, shows that there is more to be made of this relationship than might be deduced from a concentration on Dickens, Trollope and Hardy, or even on Mrs Gaskell, George Eliot and Mark Rutherford. Nonconformists were not only consumers of fiction, but also producers; not only

⁴⁵ Cameron, 'Free Church Links with Literature', 12.

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targets of popular culture, but also discriminating critics, able to deploy the print media to serve their own purposes. In so doing, of course, Nonconformity was itself shaped, influenced and changed by its ventures into popular fiction.

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