

# Feminism and Philanthropy in Victorian England: the Case of Louisa Twining

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*Feminism and Philanthropy in Victorian England:  
the Case of Louisa Twining*

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the industrial revolution transformed the employment opportunities of working-class women. At the same time, it presented middle-class women with an unprecedentedly high standard of living and large amount of leisure time, but not with the means of utilizing this time in a rewarding fashion. The dictates of refinement prescribed a life of inactivity for the lady, so middle-class women were kept at home by their ambitious male relatives who regarded idle wives and daughters as evidence of good birth, respectability, and success in business.

Throughout the Victorian age most women from affluent families accepted idleness and inferiority as part of the natural order. However, an important minority who were bored and frustrated by their purposeless existence sought outlets which would occupy their free time without jeopardizing their standing as ladies. Such women were told that if they wanted to do something useful they should undertake charitable work, particularly since the needs of the poor were great.

Charity was recognized as a Christian duty. Because of its voluntary nature it was considered becoming to the female character rather than a threat to femininity or respectability. In addition, Victorians of both sexes regarded compassion and tenderness as peculiarly female virtues and agreed that women were definitely in their "right place teaching the young, reclaiming the sinful, relieving the poor, and nursing the sick."<sup>1</sup>

As leisured women took up philanthropy in unparalleled numbers, it soon became apparent that many were completely ignorant of society and unsuited for welfare work. They viewed charity as a fashionable fad or as a sign of status which was secondary to matrimonial prospects and duties, and which could be dropped with little compunction whenever it became inconvenient or distressing. There were some, however, whose inclinations were much more serious. Pious, altruistic, idealistic, compassionate—and frequently unmarried, an intrepid band of Victorian ladies applied their intelligence, energy, and sympathy with varying success to major social problems.<sup>2</sup>

By the middle of the nineteenth century perceptive people realized the potential which lay in a more sophisticated system of female philanthropy. Admitting

that charitable ladies could “do good or harm according to the enlightenment of mind which is carried to the work,”<sup>3</sup> philanthropic and educational reformers joined to demand a practical intellectual training for women. They condemned the proprieties which diminished effective philanthropy by dictating that a charitable lady should know only the respectable poor and that she should not be allowed to do anything which might bring her into contact with really horrible sights, sounds, and smells.<sup>4</sup> Similarly damnable, they said, was propriety’s assumption that voluntary benevolence was naturally superior to hired labor and its fear that women would be unsexed if their charitable work involved financial reward. At a time when there were more females than males and too few acceptable occupations for respectable women who were compelled to support themselves, such attitudes made no sense.

Gradually, as the standard of female education was raised, some charitable functions which had previously been voluntary became professional. Gradually as charitable ladies learned that the small power of the individual would be immeasurably increased through association, they consolidated their diverse efforts into organizations for moral regeneration, sanitary reform, and workhouse visiting.

While only a few female philanthropists “achieved positions of leadership or prominence and only a handful had any discernible impact on the direction of social reform,”<sup>5</sup> as a group, charitable ladies were an important force behind the rapid growth of private and public charity during the Victorian age—and the less rapid growth of a feminist movement.

The relationship between philanthropy and feminism was extremely important. Both were a result of changes in the established order and in the structure and priorities of society, and each acted upon the other with significant consequences. In some ways the part played by women in the humanitarian movement was as remarkable for its effects on the female sex as on social conditions, for it resulted in the emergence of convinced feminists and a new respect for the capabilities of women.

As they ventured beyond the comfortable confines of their own homes and experienced many things with which they were totally unfamiliar, some women felt the thrill of exhilaration and emancipation. Some found their appetites for freedom and opportunity whetted and their consciousness of themselves as women and of the disabilities of their sex, heightened. As they attempted to find answers to “the condition of England question,” they chafed under conventional restrictions. They discovered that a line was clearly drawn in philanthropic work between the spheres of men and women, with men being expected to organize and make policy and decisions while women were to deal directly with the poor and do much of the routine, thankless labor.<sup>6</sup> They were frustrated by the difficulty which they had in being taken seriously and by their relative powerlessness to influence or effect legislative remedies.

It was no wonder that a substantial number of philanthropic women concluded that simultaneously with their fight against poverty, injustice, and disease they were fighting for the advancement of women. Prochaska explains that

at the back of their minds was the awareness that if they were to become more useful they would need more knowledge. Philanthropy pointed out the limitations imposed upon women at the same time as it broadened their horizons. It increased their interest in administration and the law through contact with organized charities. It increased their interest in medicine and diet through contact with disease. It increased their interest in education through charity schools. Moreover, as a religion of action, philanthropy slowly challenged the complaisancy of women, gave them practical experience and responsibility, and perhaps more importantly, it heightened their self-confidence and self-respect.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, by no means all female philanthropists became convinced or active feminists. Even among those who were dissatisfied with their position as women, some were more concerned about the poor and were content to concentrate on good works. A number of outstanding women like Florence Nightingale and Mary Carpenter were uninterested in, and sometimes actually hostile to the aims and methods of embryonic feminism, so their influence upon it was indirect. Nevertheless, their examples constituted an eloquent testimony to women's abilities and to the necessity of a redefinition of their proper sphere and natural rights.

During the nineteenth century, then, the participation of Victorian women in philanthropic endeavors contributed to the development of a new feminine image distinct from the old ideal of the submissive wife or daughter whose legitimate activities and interests were circumscribed by domesticity. Despite the restrictions on their opportunities for education and employment, despite their limited understanding of the root causes of poverty, and despite their inevitable mistakes and failures, the courageous work carried out by philanthropic women demonstrated that females possessed an unexpected ability to investigate, organize, and administer, and to handle difficult and disagreeable tasks with efficiency and enthusiasm. It also demonstrated that women could defy convention and make themselves conspicuous without losing their essential femininity.

A widespread recognition of the public function of women was achieved during the Victorian era primarily as a result of female involvement in a variety of reform movements.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, philanthropic work provided a back door through which some women entered public life.<sup>9</sup>

One such woman was Louisa Twining, the originator of workhouse reform, who was born in 1820, the youngest of the eight children of Richard Twining, a prosperous tea merchant. Her home life was quiet, secure, and happy. From early childhood she demonstrated an insatiable appetite for learning, and although she was educated at home in the usual accomplishments by her mother and elder sisters, her lack of formal training was compensated for by the scholar-

ly influences of her father and brothers and family travels around England and the Continent. Then, during the 1840's, she attended lectures by distinguished professors at the Royal Institution and Queen's College, which she always regarded as the most valuable part of her education.<sup>10</sup>

Acceptable suitors did not present themselves, and since her family's affluence freed her from the need to undertake remunerative work, Louisa remained at home. This situation appears to have caused her none of the frustration which drove the likes of Florence Nightingale to the brink of distraction.<sup>11</sup> However, beneath her unrebelling exterior lay a vigorous temperament and quick, probing mind. Both her parents were involved in philanthropic work, and by the late 1840's the lessons of service learned at the parental knee began to bear fruit. Louisa became convinced that she owed a debt to society, and once she resolved to repay that debt the whole direction of her life changed.

Twining's attention was first drawn to the poor in 1847 when she started visiting an old family nurse in the parish of St. Clement Danes. Having been sheltered from knowledge of evil, she was shocked by her living conditions. Since she knew nothing about workhouses, when one of the nurse's neighbors was reduced to taking refuge in the Strand Union Workhouse, Twining naively anticipated an improvement in the old woman's environment.<sup>12</sup> Her first fateful visit to the workhouse in February 1853 quickly changed her mind. She was confronted by overcrowding, inadequate food, and lack of proper sanitation and medical care. Opportunities for occupation and recreation were few, inmates were unclassified, and authorities were callous. Such conditions constituted a scandal in a Christian country, she said, and she determined to devote her life to humanizing the operation of the Poor Law.

Convinced that this could best be accomplished through cooperation between Poor Law authorities and private individuals, she began her efforts modestly by approaching the Poor Law Board for permission to take a group of lady visitors with her to the Strand Union. Rebuffed at first by arguments that untrained women would be overly sympathetic to inmates and that they would interfere in matters that were men's business, she nevertheless persisted. In 1854, having reminded the Poor Law commissioners that women were in their proper sphere ministering to the old, young, and infirm, she obtained their permission and that of the Strand board of guardians, on the understanding that more extensive visiting would be carried on without fuss or disturbance.

Twining quickly learned that her interest in workhouses was exceptional, that a public conscience had to be developed through publicity, and that an organization would be more effective than individuals in urging reforms.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in 1857 she began what was to become a continuous flow of correspondence on the subject to newspapers and periodicals. The same year, in the first of five papers to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, she skillfully urged the establishment of a workhouse visiting society to bring moral and spiritual comfort to inmates and to enlighten public opinion.<sup>14</sup> Two years later such a society was formed. Louisa Twining was its first secretary.

A small (350 members) and short-lived (1859-65) organization of amateurs like the Workhouse Visiting Society was incapable of coping with the complex and extensive problems of the vast workhouse system. But that was not its intention. Typical of the cautious, conservative nature of female philanthropy, the society's officials assured worried authorities that they had no desire to denounce or revolutionize the operation of the Poor Law or to challenge the male domination of its administration. Rather, they wished to make paupers more content by providing personal sympathy and consolation through the distribution of religious tracts, newspapers, books, and flowers.<sup>15</sup> Louisa Twining and her friends realized full well, however, that the discovery and public disapproval of offensive conditions were unavoidable.

Furthermore, the society did represent the first attempt to organize systematic visiting, and it did draw public attention, including that of influential people like Lord Shaftesbury, to the question of poor relief and conditions in workhouses. As far as the emancipation of women was concerned, it proved a unique opportunity for a few women to study the problems of the poor and gain experience in dealing with them. It therefore marked an important stage in a movement whereby women, first as unofficial visitors, and later as official visitors, poor law inspectors, and guardians served their apprenticeship in some of the most important branches of social service.<sup>16</sup>

Louisa Twining's other efforts at Poor Law reform concerned the training of pauper children, the care of destitute incurables, and the quality of workhouse nursing. She had no lofty conception of the educational needs of paupers. However, Twining regarded as intolerable the quality and type of education dispensed in Poor Law schools and the release of children from these schools into the world while they were inexperienced and untrained. As would be expected, they were soon back in the workhouse. About 1860 she began urging the authorities to improve existing schools and to establish homes where pauper girls could be lodged, trained, and supervised after they left school or between jobs.<sup>17</sup> With the help of Mrs. Sidney Herbert and Angela Burdett-Coutts, in 1861 Miss Twining opened an Industrial Home for the Instruction of Workhouse Girls, in New Ormond Street. This home and others like it soon got financial support from boards of guardians. Until 1878, when it was taken over by the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants, it accommodated girls of good character and gave them moral and practical training to prepare them for household service or emigration to the colonies. By so doing it marked the beginning of a scheme to rescue girls from a system which almost inevitably pushed them down the road toward degradation. As superintendent and manager of the home, Louisa noted that she received a good training in business and administration, and learned much about the character and extent of depravity.<sup>18</sup>

It was also about 1860 when Twining joined a number of other reformers to criticize the lack of special care for incurably ill paupers who languished helpless and forgotten in workhouse infirmary wards, nursed by able-bodied female inmates who had neither the training nor inclination to equip them for nursing.

While it would be an exaggeration to credit her with all the reforms which eventually occurred, undoubtedly her propaganda attracted considerable attention and contributed to an act of parliament in 1867 which revolutionized the care of the pauper sick. Henceforth, London's union infirmaries were to be separated from workhouses, and the ordinary sick were to be treated apart from those with infectious, mental, and incurable diseases.<sup>19</sup>

Twining deserves credit too for helping to lay the foundation for improvements in workhouse nursing. For forty years she worked, at first alone, then with sympathizers, and finally as the honorary secretary and vice-president of an Association for Promoting Trained Nursing in Workhouse Infirmaries and Sick Asylums, to attract and train a higher class of women as workhouse nurses and matrons.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to her major Poor Law work, during the 1860's and 1870's Louisa Twining pursued a remarkable number of other good causes.<sup>21</sup> She continued to visit an average of four workhouses a week, and travelled about England giving papers, addressing meetings, and presenting evidence to governmental inquiries on her favorite philanthropic subjects.

Miss Twining derived tremendous satisfaction from this work, but by 1882 she finally admitted the strain and resolved to retire. She sold her Queen Square home, severed ties with philanthropic pursuits, and sought rest and relaxation in European travel. However, despite the company of a niece and a maid, she found retirement difficult. Within a year she was back in London, taking up residence in Kensington.

In 1884 she was invited to run for the Kensington board of guardians. Because she was eager for occupation and had been a long-time supporter of women's involvement in the administration of the Poor Law, she accepted gladly, and was elected by a comfortable margin. For the next six years Louisa "had great happiness and satisfaction in helping to carry out the good work of that board."<sup>22</sup> As a guardian she came into closer contact than ever with the work of the Poor Law administration, and despite her age, she threw herself into her new occupation with indefatigable zeal.<sup>23</sup>

Finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the damp, foggy climate of London, Twining tried retirement again in 1890. After an unsatisfactory move to Worthing where she stopped just long enough to organize district nursing, in 1892 she settled in Tunbridge Wells. She was immediately asked to stand for the local board of guardians, and once again she answered the call of duty. Although over seventy, Louisa played an active and assertive part in the board's labors.<sup>24</sup>

When she resigned in 1896, Miss Twining had another sixteen years to live. During this time she retained an interest in her previous work and continued to write. In 1904, aged eighty-four, she even stood successfully for the presidency

of the Women's Local Government Society (an organization founded in 1888 to promote the eligibility of women to elect and serve on all local government bodies), because she was angered by the reversal of permission for women to sit on county councils.<sup>25</sup>

The same year brought Louisa Twining several honors. King Edward VII admitted her to the Order of the Lady of Grace of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, and a group of friends and admirers celebrated her birthday by presenting her with an illuminated, signed address detailing her services over half a century in improving conditions in Poor Law institutions. One can almost visualize Louisa, completely in character to the end, seriously acknowledging the address by sketching the "great legacy of work" for others to do when she herself could labor no longer.<sup>26</sup>

For a fuller revelation of Louisa Twining's character and motivations we must turn to her writings and surviving photographs. The impression created is of a plain, humorless spinster who was devoted to a public mission which excluded private interests and deep personal relationships. Although she was raised in a close family, she makes virtually no references in her recollections to her sister Elizabeth, also a philanthropist, or to a brother who gave her substantial support. Louisa's relationships appear to have been formal and limited to those who assisted in her work. These people she was quick to praise.<sup>27</sup>

In many ways she was the quintessential Victorian. Conscientious, earnest, and thrifty, she preached and practiced patience, promptness, perseverance, hard work, and self-help. There was no place in Miss Twining's life for trivia or levity. Her only recreations were sketching and travelling abroad. She even disapproved of raising money for charity in frivolous, amusing ways, for the idea of charity was to give and receive nothing in return.<sup>28</sup> She was self-confident and determined, and yet extremely modest. Her writings are full of apologies for presuming to describe her own life and work, and assurances that her intentions were not egotistical. She simply intended to clearly depict developments and encourage others to take up social work.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, Twining was intensely individualistic and believed strongly that a single person could influence many. Perhaps this conviction had religious origins, for religiosity was Louisa's most dominant characteristic. A product of the evangelical tradition within the Church of England, she had a profound sense of religious mission, of being chosen by God to do his work. Her motto, selected in 1855 from Psalm 37:5, was: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."<sup>30</sup> Throughout her writings there are references to being assisted on one's heavenward course by serving others, and to promoting the "true religion" by advancing morality among the poor.<sup>31</sup>

Like the age of which she was a product, Louisa Twining was full of paradoxes and contradictions. Very much the progressive conservative, she opposed the eight hour day, saw nothing wrong with nurses working twelve hour shifts



for £ 28 to £ 30 per year, and denounced those members of the lower class who wasted leisure time on games and amusements. Yet she admitted that the working class needed recreation to refresh body and mind.<sup>32</sup> She complained about the increased difficulty in obtaining dependable servants and about their growing desire for more liberty and education than their station in life warranted. But she condemned pew rents in the Church of England for relegating the poor to the worst pews.<sup>33</sup> The greatest paradox of all, however, was that while Twining spent her whole life criticising the operation of the Poor Law, she never questioned its necessity or basic premises.

Generally, Victorian philanthropists were idealistic, courageous, and industrious, but they lacked understanding of the causes of poverty, the real needs of the poor, and the interrelationship between social ills. Often, as conservative members of the middle and upper classes, they were distinctly aware of the sharp social divisions between themselves and the objects of their beneficence, and they regarded charity as a means of humanizing the social structure without disturbing its basic configuration. They rarely reflected that their charitable activities represented an admission of unjustifiable inequalities; they rarely had the time or inclination to reconsider fundamental assumptions.<sup>34</sup>

One of Louisa Twining's fundamental assumptions was that the Poor Law was a great and important branch of England's national social system.<sup>35</sup> She accepted the deterrent principle on which the New Poor Law of 1834 rested, agreeing with the law's supporters that if relief by the state were rendered attractively, pauperism would be encouraged. She agreed too that people who needed welfare should have to relinquish their personal freedom and enter a workhouse.<sup>36</sup> As a result, when the law's strictures against out-door relief were relaxed during the second half of the nineteenth century, Twining condemned "the evils of lavish, or even liberal, out-relief," because "the result was to create any number of paupers who naturally turned to the Poor Law for help of every kind, with no compunction and no thought of self help. . . ."<sup>37</sup>

She parted company with the Poor Law's strict constructionalists regarding the deserving poor. Experience convinced Louisa that contrary to popular opinion, all those who claimed relief were not sinful, lazy, or improvident. Rather, many became destitute through no fault of their own, and had no choice but to enter a workhouse, however degrading the experience. It was these people who deserved to be treated with much more care, respect, and sympathy than the Poor Law normally afforded them.<sup>38</sup> Once this happened workhouses would be turned into nurseries for religion, virtue, and industry, and there would be no need to abandon the existing Poor Law system in favor of something new and untried.<sup>39</sup>

There is little doubt that time and circumstances by-passed philanthropists like Louisa Twining. During the late Victorian period, while some social reformers began to change their views on the nature of distress in light of new statistically based evidence about its extent, Louisa seemed unwilling or unable to adjust her ideas. It was beyond her to realize that poverty was the concern of

the whole of English society or that it was so extensive that the government was the only institution which could even begin to remedy it.<sup>40</sup> Until the end of her life she continued to believe that a reformed Poor Law administration working with private philanthropists would be sufficient.

Fear and incomprehension of the lower class can be detected in her expression of regret "that the increased power which the growth of democracy places in the hands of manual labourers is not unlikely to be used in the direction of diminishing the deterrent character of our Poor Law administration."<sup>41</sup> In her last published work she demonstrated disapproval of the principles of socialism and the practices of the embryonic welfare state. Announcing that there were already too many things like free medical relief, free education, and partially free food and clothing which induced the poor to become dependent on the state, Louisa Twining could express only chagrin that there would soon even be pensions for the elderly, "whereby all will be saved from the trouble of taking thought for the future, and will thus be able to spend more in the present on their own comforts, or . . . in a more liberal support of the public house. . . ."<sup>42</sup>

This last statement, pronounced after a lifetime of philanthropic work, epitomizes the dilemmas and ambiguities inherent in Louisa Twining — dilemmas and ambiguities which are extremely important because they characterized the Victorian age in general and Victorian philanthropy in particular.

Louisa's personality and emotions were at odds with her social conscience. She did not really like the poor and her charitable impulse was derived more from a compulsion to satisfy personal needs than from simple compassion. But circumstances drew her beyond herself into philanthropic work; and ultimately they pulled her across barriers imposed by her own personal disposition, by society on women, and by a strict interpretation of the Poor Law.

Without a doubt, Twining sincerely desired a major revision of the Poor Law's operation; and by informing officials and the public of the horrible truth about workhouses, she helped to effect such a revision. Yet she was completely unaware of the inherent contradiction between the principles on which the Poor Law was based and the reform movement for which she was primarily responsible. She failed to comprehend that the reforms she desired could be accomplished only as the structures and priorities of English society were transformed, for she was quite content with structures as they were and left to their defense when she saw them threatened. All the while, however, by her Poor Law work — and by her support of feminist causes — she was helping to produce the very social changes which she did not want.

As a result of her philanthropic labors Miss Twining learned that what concerned the community at large concerned women, and what concerned women concerned the community at large. So she became a sympathetic feminist. Throughout her career she expressed unqualified support for all the "great movements" involved with broadening the sphere and rights of women and

hoped that the future would see greater power and privileges conferred on the members of her sex.<sup>43</sup>

Twining was thoroughly cognizant of the deficiencies of her own education and criticized the useless accomplishments to which girls of her class were subjected at home and school. "There is really nothing of an industrial or useful character taught in the present girls' schools for the upper classes," she said. "Some supplementary education would surely, therefore, be desirable for such as look forward to the management of their own households or to practical life in any sphere."<sup>44</sup> Certainly "those who wish to learn and carry out any of the various works of charity which are calling for the assistance of women" needed access to special training schools.<sup>45</sup> The movement for the higher education of women impressed Louisa as a great advance, and she called the establishment of ladies' colleges at Oxford and Cambridge epoch making, "especially when the boldness of the experiment is considered, at the very centre of ancient learning, hitherto reserved exclusively for men. . . . In no instance has 'the wall of Chinese prejudice' been more effectually and beneficially thrown down with results beyond our knowledge and conception."<sup>46</sup>

As far as the key feminist question — votes for women — was concerned, Twining was "from the first warmly in favor of the bestowal of the parliamentary franchise on women."<sup>47</sup> Women needed the vote, she felt, because many of the matters acted upon by the House of Commons were social questions, and the influence of women would guarantee that solutions to them would be more just. For this reason, in 1884 she signed a petition to parliament requesting that female heads of households be included under the terms of the reform bill. She was also appalled that the bill and its 1867 predecessor enfranchised illiterate working men, but refused the vote to respectable women, some of whom were beginning to be used by the Conservative and Liberal parties as political canvassers.<sup>48</sup>

The feminist issue which concerned Louisa Twining the most was that of the employment of women. She conceded that women's natural sphere of employment was the home, and never for a moment suggested that women should abandon their domestic duties. At the same time, however, she asserted that domesticity was not their only legitimate occupation. Those women like herself who did not need remuneration but desired employment she urged to pursue charitable activities. "The life spent for others will be at least as happy and healthful as that of the solitary 'old maid' who dwells upon her own petty sorrows and ailments because she has no other object for her thoughts and no call for her affections," she said.<sup>49</sup>

Twining was greatly troubled by the problem of redundant women. She was well aware that there were women who had to work, that there were few employment opportunities open to them, and that the few acceptable ones which did exist were overcrowded and under paid.

On all sides [she said] there is a cry for 'employment for women.' The old and very comfortable and convenient doctrine that they are, and must be, and ought to be supported by some male relative, is, or I hope will be soon, exploded, because it is a wrong, cruel, and utterly false statement. . . . There is work for every class of women, and for every individual to whom God has given health and strength, and mental capacity for serving Him. Yet some lives are being sadly wasted. Many are calling out for work, and know not where to find it. Many more are equally wanting it, yet know not the cause of their weariness, their dissatisfaction, their vague craving after unrealized objects, and vain endeavour after happiness.<sup>50</sup>

Miss Twining's earliest visits to workhouses and industrial schools convinced her that the domination of their management by men was an anomaly. God, after all, had ordained that women's highest privilege was to care for the poor, sick, and helpless, exactly the type of people who predominated in workhouses.<sup>51</sup> Thus, for years she and her supporters struggled to recruit a better class of women as matrons, nurses, and superintendents, and to convince men of their suitability and utility.

Similarly, it was the exclusion of women from their natural sphere and the anomalous situation whereby workhouse regulations concerning such womanly things as domestic management were made exclusively by men, which prompted Twining to campaign for the appointment of women as poor law inspectors and their election as guardians.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, she pointed out, women were peculiarly qualified because of "the greater amount of leisure possessed by them without neglecting other duties, such as men in business must be mainly occupied with."<sup>53</sup> To assuage conventional sensitivities she was careful to make it clear that she did not envisage lady inspectors and guardians interfering in the "gentlemen's province," by which she meant all matters affecting male paupers, finance, and general administration.<sup>54</sup> But for years her arguments fell on deaf ears. The idea of women sitting at the same table with men to discuss the management of public institutions was unacceptable. Some male guardians resented even the idea of the presence of "female busybodies" at their meetings, resorting to the familiar anti-feminist argument that women who undertook public duties would be assuming an unwomanly role.<sup>55</sup>

However, a dent was made in the male monopoly of Poor Law administration in 1873 when James Stansfeld, the president of the Local Government Board, appointed Mrs. Nassau Senior as the first female Poor Law inspector. Louisa, who had discussed the possibility of a woman inspector with Stansfeld and who accompanied Mrs. Senior on some of her visitations, called the appointment "one of the greatest onward steps taken in Poor Law reform."<sup>56</sup>

Twining was even more delighted by two additional "onward steps" which were taken in 1875 — the passage of an act enabling women to stand for election as Poor Law guardians and the immediate election of Miss Martha Merrington to the Kensington Board. She naively anticipated the immediate selection of many women inspectors and the election of numerous female guardians, predict-

ing that when this happened Poor Law administration would be humanized and the remaining workhouse evils would disappear.<sup>57</sup> She was quite wrong. Following Mrs. Senior's premature death in 1877, no more female inspectors were appointed for years, and while a few middle and upper class spinsters were returned as Poor Law guardians, on the whole women were much more willing to stand as candidates for school boards.

In 1881 Twining became one of the prime movers behind the formation of a Society for Promoting the Return of Women as Poor Law Guardians. The society fought an uphill battle, for lady guardians "worked under a certain amount of prejudice against any reform introduced by a lady, a strange idea being current that women like to talk about what they do not understand, and that their most practical suggestions are the babblings of well-meant enthusiasm!"<sup>58</sup> To Louisa's chagrin some lady guardians acted irresponsibly by resigning at will, strengthening the opinion that women were undependable. Fortunately, in the long run the example of conscientious female guardians like Louisa herself eroded male prejudices and encouraged women to come forward for Poor Law work.<sup>59</sup> Gradually it was realized that lady guardians did more working than talking and that they were useful in an undemonstrative way. After the property qualifications for election were dropped in 1894, the number of female guardians increased significantly.<sup>60</sup>

Despite Twining's statement of unqualified support for broadening the sphere and rights of women, there were limits to her feminism. She did not believe that men and women were or should be completely equal. For example, while she felt that charitable men and women must work together in a communion of labor, she also felt that this labor should be divided into different spheres. This explains her assurances that lady Poor Law inspectors and guardians would not interfere with the "gentlemen's province," and her traditional arguments that existing Poor Law practices denied women access to their natural sphere. Furthermore, her doubts about women's physical strength were revealed by her fear of the results of the "excessive" increase in athletic pursuits like bicycling among late Victorian girls.<sup>61</sup> And she supported slow, gradual changes in the position of women through alterations in the law and public opinion rather than by force.<sup>62</sup>

Among middle-class Victorian feminists, however, such attitudes were not exceptional. A good many women's rightists were inconsistent, uncertain how far they should go, and unsure what tactics they should use. They were often afraid to join several movements in case the opposition united. Most failed to see beyond the barriers of class, and thus their efforts were conservative and class-oriented.<sup>63</sup>

Although Louisa Twining did not actively participate in organizations which comprised the early women's movement and although her feminist aims and methods were circumscribed, she deserves to be listed among the pioneers who furthered the emancipation of English women. Even if she did not reflect

upon the broad implications of her support for women's causes, she understood very well the mentality and interests of women of her own class. She worked deliberately for an expansion of women's opportunities, and she was fully aware that the examples of successful women like herself contributed substantially to a redefinition of women's natural rights and abilities.

In conclusion, it should be noted once again that women like Louisa Twining were the exception rather than the rule during the Victorian age, for the number of ladies who concerned themselves with feminism and philanthropy was never more than a small minority. However, among the social reformers of the period was an impressive group of women who played a notable part in the practical application of an ideal of service and in demonstrating women's real and potential abilities. To their philanthropic endeavors can be traced improvements in the lives of the helpless and erring, and the realization that both men and women had something significant to contribute to human welfare. An even more select few became involved in reforming activities on the managerial level and actually participated in the formulation of social policy. Twining was one of these.

Twining represented the clever, middle-class woman who was dissatisfied with her sex's traditional role, who needed something useful to do, and who turned for relief to philanthropy. Once she did, she discovered a world full of pain and suffering, a world in which women who wanted to help were discriminated against. She discovered too, undeveloped abilities within herself, and an unexpected opportunity to acquire a variety of skills and to enter public life. Louisa did not understand the broad implications of her philanthropic or feminist impulses, nor did she understand the causes of poverty or sexual discrimination, but she did appreciate that both were wrong and so worked to alleviate them.

Twining overcame opposition, indifference, and ignorance on the part of public opinion and Poor Law authorities; she overcame as well her own inexperience, uncertainty, and personal inclinations. As a result, despite her lifetime contentment with existing social structures and with cautious progress, she originated workhouse reform and ultimately helped to raise the whole tone and standard of Poor Law administration. In addition, her work "as a pioneer in improving the lot of the inmates of workhouses and in securing practical reforms in workhouse management generally, went far indeed in the direction of showing how well qualified a woman might be to take her part in the administration of the poor law."<sup>64</sup>

An examination of the life and attitudes of women like Louisa Twining, who usually get only brief mention in standard histories of philanthropy and feminism, is extremely revealing. It demonstrates the connection between two of the most interesting and important Victorian reform movements; and it assists students of the period in understanding the way in which an individual could contribute — in this case at times almost in spite of herself — to the transforma-

tion of society. Despite her inherent conservatism and the limitations of her reforming zeal, Louisa Twining was living proof that women could be effective instruments in articulating social needs, and that they deserved their rights as citizens.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Frances Power Cobbe, *Essays on the Pursuits of Women* (London, 1863), p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>Brian Harrison, "Philanthropy and the Victorians," *Victorian Studies*, IX (June, 1966), pp. 359-60; F.K. Prochaska, "Women in English Philanthropy 1790-1830," *International Review of Social History*, XIX, Pt. 3 (1974), pp. 328-41; Harriet Warm Schupf, "Single Women and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century England: The Case of Mary Carpenter," *Victorian Studies*, XVII (March, 1974), p. 301; and Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London, 1928), p. 80.

<sup>3</sup>Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (London, 1837), III, p. 145.

<sup>4</sup>Lady Katherine Amberley, *The Claims of Women to the Suffrage* (Bristol, 1870), p. 18; Emily Davies, *The Higher Education of Women* (London, 1866), pp. 77-78; Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff, *Thoughts on Self-Culture* (London, 1854), p. 23; Anna Brownell Jameson, *The Communion of Labour* (London, 1856), pp. 42, 62, 121-22; John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London, 1912), p. 169, 190, 532; and Barbara Leigh Smith, *Reasons for and against the Enfranchisement of Women* (London, 1872), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Schupf, "Single Women and Social Reform," p. 302.

<sup>6</sup>Alan Deacon and Michael Hill, "The Problem of 'Surplus Women' in the Nineteenth Century: Secular and Religious Alternatives," *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, V-VI (1972-73), pp. 98-99; and Prochaska, "Women in English Philanthropy," p. 432.

<sup>7</sup>Prochaska, "Women in English Philanthropy," p. 441.

<sup>8</sup>Schupf, "Single Women and Social Reform," p. 301.

<sup>9</sup>For a general treatment of female philanthropy and social welfare see Kathleen E. McCrone, "The Advancement of Women During the Age of Reform 1832-1870" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1971), pp. 165-209.

<sup>10</sup>Louisa Twining, *Recollections of Life and Work* (London, 1893), pp. 8-63.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 93-104.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 111-12. See also Josephine Kamm, *Rapiers and Battleaxes: The Women's Movement and its Aftermath* (London, 1966), pp. 35-36.

<sup>13</sup>Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 113-19, 139-40; Louisa Twining, *Recollections of Workhouse Visiting and Management During Twenty-Five Years* (London, 1880), pp. 92-93, 101-4; Louisa Twining, *Thoughts on Some Social Questions Past and Present* (London, 1903), p. 33; Louisa Twining, "Workhouse Inmates," *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* (1860), p. 830; Louisa Twining, "Workhouse Cruelties," *Nineteenth Century*, XX (November, 1886), p. 709; and Louisa Twining, *Workhouses and Pauperism and Women's Work in the Administration of the Poor Law* (London, 1898), pp. 41-45, 64-68.

<sup>14</sup>Louisa Twining, "On the Condition of Workhouses," *TNAPSS* (1857), pp. 571-74.

<sup>15</sup>Louisa Twining, *The Duty of Workhouse Visiting* (London, 1890), p. 7; Louisa Twining, *Morning and Evening Prayers, for Workhouses and Other Institutions* (London, 1866); Louisa Twining, "The Objects and Aims of Workhouse Visiting," *TNAPSS* (1858), pp. 666-67; Louisa Twining, *Readings for Visitors to Workhouses and Hospitals* (London, 1865); Twining, *Recollections of Workhouse Visiting*, p. 23; "The Workhouse Visiting

Society and the Duty of Workhouse Visitation," *English Women's Journal*, 1 (August, 1858), pp. 390-91; and Great Britain, Parliament, *Parliamentary Papers* (House of Commons), "Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Poor Relief, 1861," Vol. IX (Minutes of Evidence, June 25, 1861), pp. 2-3.

<sup>16</sup>Elizabeth M. Ross, "Women and Poor Law Administration 1857-1909" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London, 1957), pp. 13-14, 49-66.

<sup>17</sup>Twining, "Objects and Aims," pp. 667-69; Louisa Twining, "On the Training and Supervision of Workhouse Girls," *TNAPSS* (1859), pp. 696-702; Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 164-171; Louisa Twining, "Workhouse Education," *TNAPSS* (1861), pp. 335-38; Twining, "Workhouse Inmates," pp. 832-36; Twining, *Workhouses and Pauperism*, p. 6; Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers*, "Report of Select Committee on Poor Relief," pp. 3-8, 12-15; and Great Britain, Parliament *Parliamentary Papers*, "Report of the Royal Commission appointed to Inquire into the State of Popular Education in England, 1861," Vol. V (Answers to Circular of Questions), pp. 432-36.

<sup>18</sup>Frances Power Cobbe, "Social Science Congresses, and Women's Part in Them," *Macmillan's Magazine*, V (December, 1861), p. 86; and Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 171-79, 187-88.

<sup>19</sup>Louisa Twining, *A letter to the President of the Poor Law Board, on Workhouse Infirmaries* (London, 1866), pp. 11-12; Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 119-21, 169-70; Twining, *Recollections of Workhouse Visiting*, p. 40; Twining, "Workhouse Inmates," pp. 832-33; Twining, *Workhouses and Women's Work*, pp. 13-19; and Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers*, "Report of Select Committee on Poor Relief," pp. 7-13.

<sup>20</sup>Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 220-31, 238-39. See also Twining's numerous writings on the subject of workhouse nursing and her evidence before governmental bodies. For example: Louisa Twining, *A Letter on some matters of Poor Law Administration* (London, 1887); Louisa Twining, *Nurses for the Sick* (London, 1861); Louisa Twining, *Thoughts on the Diet of Nurses in Hospitals and Infirmaries* (London, 1887); Twining, "Workhouse Cruelties"; Great Britain, Parliament, *Parliamentary Papers* (House of Lords), "Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Poor Law Relief, 1888," (Minutes of Evidence, June 7, 1888), pp. 336-37, 340-42; and Great Britain, Parliament, *Parliamentary Papers* (House of Lords), "Second Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Metropolitan Hospitals, 1891," (Minutes of Evidence, June 8, 1891), pp. 585-94.

<sup>21</sup>She urged the opening of Lincoln's Inn Fields to the public, joined a Universities Mission to Central Africa, helped to form a Ladies' Diocesan Association, taught writing and needlework at F.D. Maurice's Working Men's College, assisted in raising a subscription to establish a refuge for convalescent cholera patients, and belonged to a women's dress association. She acted as superintendent of a Parochial Mission Women's Society, supervised a mission house and working men's club, acted as vice-president of the Charity Voting Reform Association, helped to establish an art students' home in Brunswick Square, served on the council of the Provident Medical Association, tried to assist people discharged from asylums to reintegrate into society, participated actively in the temperance work and mother's meetings of the parish of St. George the Martyr, and established a shelter for epileptics and aged female incurables in conjunction with her Queen Square residence.

<sup>22</sup>Twining, *Recollections*, p. 258.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 261-64, 280-84. The variety of Miss Twining's philanthropic impulse was demonstrated once again by her activities as a Kensington guardian. She served on the workhouse and outdoor relief committees, labored to secure the appointment of properly trained and paid infirmary nurses, and agitated for dietary and recreational improvements for workhouse inmates. She did temperance work, supported lady visiting of unmarried mothers, promoted Florence Nightingale's scheme for district nursing among the poor, agitated for the appointment of police matrons in the police stations and courts of London



to look after female prisoners, and worked to secure the participation of more women in Poor Law administration. Louisa even interested herself in the question of garbage containers and collection in Kensington.

<sup>24</sup>While a guardian in Tunbridge Wells Twining served with her usual diligence on the provisions committee and the workhouse and lunatic asylum visiting committees. She encouraged improvements in workhouses, and helped to start district nursing.

<sup>25</sup>Twining, *Thoughts on Social Questions*, p. 19. See also Strachey, *The Cause*, p. 208.

<sup>26</sup>*The Times* (London), September 27, 1912.

<sup>27</sup>Ross, "Women and Poor Law Administration," pp. 265-66; Louisa Twining, *A Few Words about Working Men's Clubs and Temperance Societies* (2nd ed., London, 1879), p. 3; and Twining, *Workhouses and Pauperism*, pp. 39-40, 53.

<sup>28</sup>Twining, *Thoughts on Social Questions*, pp. 22-23. See also Louisa Twining, *Symbols and Emblems of Early and Medieval Art* (London, 1852); and Louisa Twining, *Types and Figures of the Bible, Illustrated by the Art of the Early and Middle Ages* (London, 1855).

<sup>29</sup>Twining, *Recollections*, p. 290; and Twining, *Workhouses and Pauperism*, p. vii, 97.

<sup>30</sup>Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 170-71; and Twining, *Recollections of Workhouse Visiting*, p. xx.

<sup>31</sup>Twining, *Duty of Workhouse Visiting*, p. 5; and Twining, *A Few Words*, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup>Twining, *A Few Words*, p. 4; Twining, *Thoughts on Social Questions*, p. 29, 35; and Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers*, "Report from Select Committee on Metropolitan Hospitals," p. 591.

<sup>33</sup>Twining, *Thoughts on Social Questions*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>34</sup>B. Gilbert, *The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain: The Origins of the Welfare State* (London, 1966), p. 22; Harrison, "Philanthropy and the Victorians," pp. 364-68; Prochaska, "Women in English Philanthropy," pp. 439-41; and A.S. Wohl, "Octavia Hill and the Homes of the London Poor," *Journal of British Studies*, X (May, 1971), p. 115.

<sup>35</sup>Twining, *A Letter on some matters*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>36</sup>Cobbe, *Essays*, p. 176; Gilbert, *Evolution of National Insurance*, pp. 12-22; Twining, *A Letter on some matters*, pp. 14-15; Louisa Twining, *Metropolitan Workhouses and Their Inmates* (London, 1857), pp. 29-30; Twining, *Thoughts on Social Questions*, p. 25; and Twining, *Workhouses and Women's Work*, pp. 3-4, 22, 35.

<sup>37</sup>Twining, *A Letter on some matters*, p. 4; and Twining, *Workhouses and Pauperism*, pp. 142-43, 159-60, 222.

<sup>38</sup>Twining, *A Letter on some matters*, pp. 59-60; Twining, *Metropolitan Workhouses*, p. 51; Twining, "Objects and Aims," pp. 670-71; Twining, "On the Condition of Workhouses," pp. 571-74; Twining, *Workhouses and Women's Work*, pp. 6-35; and Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers*, "Report from Select Committee on Poor Law Relief," pp. 333-35, 337-40.

<sup>39</sup>Twining, *Duty of Workhouse Visiting*, p. 17; Louisa Twining, "Women as Official Inspectors," *Nineteenth Century*, XXXIX (March, 1894), p. 494; and Twining, *Workhouses and Women's Work*, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup>Gilbert, *Evolution of National Insurance*, pp. 15-38; and Wohl, "Octavia Hill," pp. 129-30.

<sup>41</sup>Louisa Twining, *Poor Relief in Foreign Countries, and Out-Door Relief in England* (London, 1889), p. 6: quoting Professor Henry Sidgwick.

<sup>42</sup>Twining, *Thoughts on Social Questions*, p. 26. See also Twining, *Poor Relief in Foreign Countries*, p. 63; and Twining, *Recollections*, p. 249.

<sup>43</sup>Twining, *Recollections*, p. 288; Twining, *Thoughts on Social Questions*, p. 7; and

Louisa Twining, *Women's Work, Official and Unofficial* (London, 1887), pp. 3-11.

<sup>44</sup>Twining, *Nurses for the Sick*, pp. 22-23. See also Twining, *Workhouses and Women's Work*, pp. 29-31.

<sup>45</sup>Twining, *Workhouses and Women's Work*, pp. 25-26. See also Twining, *Nurses for the Sick*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>46</sup>Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 237-38. See also Twining, *Workhouses and Pauperism*, p. 182.

<sup>47</sup>Twining, *Thoughts on Social Questions*, p. 19.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 19-20. The argument concerning the beneficial social effects of a female electorate was frequently used by suffragists. For example, Helen Taylor said in 1867 that "the vote would result in the rapid and efficient adaptation of women's instincts to philanthropic legislation." Helen Taylor, *The Claim of Englishwomen to the Suffrage Constitutionally Considered* (London, 1867), p. 36; reprinted from Helen Taylor, "The Ladies Petition," *Westminster Review*, LXXXVII (January, 1867), pp. 63-79. See also McCrone, "The Advancement of Women," pp. 208-9.

<sup>49</sup>Twining, *Workhouses and Women's Work*, p. 36.

<sup>50</sup>Twining, *Nurses for the Sick*, pp. 5, 21. See also Twining, *Recollections*, p. 169; and Twining, *Workhouses and Women's Work*, p. 30.

<sup>51</sup>Cobbe, *Essays*, pp. 198, 211; Jameson, *Communion of Labour*, pp. 90-103; Edwin A. Pratt, *Pioneer Women in Victoria's Reign* (London, 1897), pp. 170-71; Twining, *Letter to President of Poor Law Board*, pp. 3-4; Louisa Twining, *Our Poor Laws and Our Workhouses* (London, 1862), p. 8; Twining, *Recollections*, p. 239; Twining, *Recollections of Workhouse Visiting*, pp. 65-74; Louisa Twining, *Suggestions for Women Guardians* (London, 1885), p. 3; Twining, *Women's Work*, pp. 4-11; Twining, "Workhouse Inmates," p. 834; and Twining, *Workhouses and Women's Work*, pp. 24, 32.

<sup>52</sup>Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 259-61; Twining, *Thoughts on Social Questions*, pp. 20-21; Twining, "Women as Official Inspectors," pp. 490-93; Twining, *Women's Work*, p. 11; Twining, *Workhouses and Pauperism*, pp. 113, 197; Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers*, "Report from Select Committee on Poor Law Relief," pp. 342-43; and Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers*, "Second Report from Select Committee on Metropolitan Hospitals," pp. 593-94.

<sup>53</sup>Twining, *Recollections*, p. 261. See also *Ibid.*, pp. 288-89; and Twining, *Workhouses and Pauperism*, pp. 130-54.

<sup>54</sup>Twining, *Letter to President of Poor Law Board*, p. 32; Twining, *Recollections*, p. 273; Twining, *Recollections of Workhouse Visiting*, pp. 65-66; and Twining, *Suggestions*, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup>Pratt, *Pioneer Women*, pp. 176-77.

<sup>56</sup>Twining, *Workhouses and Pauperism*, p. 53. See also Hilda Martindale, *Women Servants of the State 1870-1938* (London, 1938), p. 30; and Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 210-11.

<sup>57</sup>Twining, "Workhouse Cruelties," p. 710.

<sup>58</sup>E.G. Wilson, "A Woman's Work as guardians of the Poor," *English Woman's Review* XVII (July 15, 1886), p. 290. See also Twining, *Workhouses and Pauperism*, p. 215.

<sup>59</sup>Twining, *Recollections*, p. 289; and Twining, *Suggestions*, p. 15.

<sup>60</sup>Pratt, *Pioneer Women*, p. 178; and Ross, "Women and Poor Law Administration," pp. 217-21.

<sup>61</sup>Twining, *Thoughts on Social Questions*, p. 16.

<sup>62</sup>Twining, *Women's Work*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>63</sup>Kathleen E. McCrone, "The Assertion of Women's Rights in Mid-Victorian England," *CHA Historical Papers* (1972), pp. 50-51.

<sup>64</sup>Pratt, *Pioneer Women*, p. 179.

