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'MAGDALENS AND MORAL IMBECILES': WOMEN'S HOMES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW ZEALAND[1]

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Synopsis—The potential for women's charitable work in nineteenth-century New Zealand was restricted by colonial women's initial isolation from each other and involvement in domestic life, and also by early government assumption of responsibility for welfare. Rescue work provided one of the few outlets for women's voluntary charity, and reflected the sanction given to women's role as a moral, civilising force in colonial society. It illustrates women's role in the development of social work, the limitations of this role in nineteenth-century New Zealand, and modifications to it in the space of three decades. The arguments used to justify women's involvement in rescuing 'fallen' members of their own sex were similar to those used in the later nineteenth-century, when women activists sought wider involvement in public life. It is argued that a power based upon moral influence was narrow in scope and ultimately restrictive in the New Zealand context.

In 1864 the Reverend Henry Torlesse, Anglican clergyman and government chaplain, addressed an appeal to the women of Canterbury, New Zealand. His plea was for a female house of refuge, a place where fallen and derelict women might be 'lifted into a position of respectability'. He addressed the women of Canterbury, he stressed, because it was they who felt most deeply the indignity put upon their sex by a shameless portion of it; it was they who had first to lend a loving, sympathising hand, and who could most practically help in the work of reform (Torlesse, 1864). Torlesse, a member of one of Canterbury's 'founding families', was clearly influenced by British example, most especially by the movement of respectable women into the 'new rescue work' based upon personal training in small institutions. In New Zealand, as elsewhere, the 'pure' were called upon to mould and influence the 'impure'.

The immediate outcome of Torlesse's crusading was the Canterbury Female Refuge, the first of a number of women's homes associated with different church denominations or run by committees of evangelical laywomen. Before the 1880s these homes were small in size and few in number and could claim, at best, only indifferent success in their task of reform. Over the next two decades came a second stage of development, one which saw the establishment of new women's homes, most notably by the Salvation Army (see Appendix). Existing institutions also experienced a change both in clientele and in management patterns, a response to previous failure and to new perceptions of moral problems.

Throughout, nearly all homes were located in New Zealand's four main centres and, although the largest, Mt Magdala, had up to 130 inmates by the late 1890s, most provided fewer than twenty beds at this time (*Northern Advocate,* 17 December 1898). Compared with the efflorescence of rescue work in Britain and the United States over the nineteenth century, this level of activity seems modest. It was nonetheless significant in New Zealand where, in 1896, only five centres contained more than 8000 persons; the largest, Auckland, having a population of less than 58,000 (Oliver with Williams, 1981: 254). It was significant, too, as *women's* voluntary welfare work in a country where welfare was more usually a responsibility of government, right from the earliest years of settlement. Rescue work illustrates European women's role in the development of social work, the particular limitations of this role in nineteenth-century New Zealand, and the modifications to it in the space of three decades. It raises the question of how to assess women who tried to assist, and at the same time monitor members of their own sex. Were women involved in rescue activities and in the wider area of moral reform from what we might identify as feminist

[1] I would like to thank Charlotte Macdonald, Barbara Brookes, Colin Davis and David Thomson for their suggestions in response to an earlier version of this paper.

motivations—sympathy for other women, combined with a sense of outrage at male sexual aggression? Or were they acting in a more repressive way—were they, consciously or unconsciously, using a strategy which meant strengthening their own position by placing limitations upon other women's behavior? In New Zealand the issue is complex, since the period under study saw changes in the country's demographic structure, increased leisure time for some women as society became more settled, and the emergence of a women's movement. At the same time, the small scale of New Zealand society proves an advantage, for it enables us to observe the pattern of provision over a range of women's homes, and to see shifts in function and in management on a national basis. It shows how changing perceptions of moral problems were reflected in assumptions about *who* was thought worthy of rescue in a colonial and racially mixed society.

As Torlesse's 'Appeal' indicated, the first women's homes in New Zealand were a response to concern about prostitution. From the early years of organised settlement, imported ideas about the 'social evil' acted upon the insecurities of colonial towns, anxious for civilisation and respectability. Torlesse himself was aware of British example and appears to have been influenced by Maria Rye, co-founder of the London-based Female Middle Class Emigration Society, to take an interest in female welfare.[2] A continuing feature of moral reform in New Zealand was its reliance on overseas literature and the import of 'expert' rescue workers from England and Australia.

Although British models, in particular, were seen as relevant to New Zealand, prostitution was considered especially inexcusable in the colony. Because of the lateness of colonisation, New Zealand was supposed to have learnt from the mistakes of other British territories. In white settler terms, New Zealand had the opportunity to become a 'new society', free from the evils of the 'Old World' and free, the settlers smugly asserted, from Australia's 'convict taint' (Neill, 1900). Instead, the contemporary estimates of prostitution were high, especially after the gold rushes of the 1860s boosted the single male population, and so the potential demand for prostitutes' services. It was believed that Dunedin in 1864 (then the largest centre, with a population of some 12,000) supplied at least 200 full-time prostitutes (Olssen and Levesque, 1978: 5). In 1889 the Auckland police claimed to know of 400 prostitutes, with a further 400 to be operating in that city (Police Prosecutions Under 'The Licensing Act 1881', 1891: 9). The actual extent of prostitution is difficult to gauge and these claims were probably exaggerated. What is important is the contemporary perception of the problem and the debate it aroused, for it needed only the high visibility of a few to stir up considerable public alarm in new communities, aware that their claims to propriety and order were, at best, tenuous. One recent study has suggested that the New Zealand prostitute was possibly more conspicuous than her English counterpart, at least before the enforcement of the English Contagious Diseases Acts. Given the small size of New Zealand communities and the fact of recent migration, the New Zealand prostitute was less able to blend in with existing working class communities and more likely to be identified as a 'notorious' character (Macdonald, 1984: 52).

Much contemporary bewilderment focussed upon the favourable marriage chances of colonial women which, in theory, should have reduced the supply of prostitutes. As Torlesse pointed out in his 'Appeal', 'Decent, well-to-do husbands' were so readily to be had that it was hard to believe all the rumours as to immorality in the towns. But, he lamented, it was only too true! (Torlesse, 1864: 5). In practice marriage provided no certain hedge against economic need and wife desertion was notoriously common among New Zealand's mobile population. As in other countries, some women apparently decided that prostitution provided an easier living then domestic service, despite the relatively high wages servants could command in New Zealand. Prostitution in New Zealand was less likely than in Britain to suggest economic need; more likely to be explained on purely moral grounds.

Charlotte Macdonald has suggested a link between the public debate on prostitution in New Zealand, calls for a Contagious Diseases Act, and the assisted migration of single women by provincial governments. It seems significant that the provinces of Otago and Canterbury had the largest female immigration schemes and that the call for contagious diseases legislation (in which Canterbury politicians were especially vocal) coincided with the peak influx of young women into these provinces. It was claimed that single women who had separated themselves from their 'natural protectors' were likely to succumb to the temptations of an overcrowded voyage, or to the lures of a colonial town (Macdonald, 1984: 46–48). This claim may have had an element of truth, but it also reflects the tendency of each generation of migrants to look down upon its successors. Those who arrived in the 1840s and 1850s were inevitably suspicious of the quality of later arrivals.

In Otago and Canterbury the image of the prostitute was from an early stage one of a European woman. In Auckland, close to the centre of Maori population, a growing intolerance of soliciting reflected the changing racial basis to

[2] Rye was in New Zealand from 1862 to 1864, and spent time in Christchurch during 1863.

prostitution. Maori women, who had provided a convenient supply of prostitutes in the early years of culture contact, were regarded as naturally promiscuous. There were few attempts to rescue them, and they figure scarcely at all among the occupants of nineteenth-century women's homes. With the advent of the New Zealand Wars in the 1860s a large proportion of the Maori population deserted settlements such as Auckland. This, and continued immigration meant that they were soon outnumbered as prostitutes by European women, whose degradation was viewed in quite a different light (Anderson, 1980: 91–95). Auckland's first rescue home opened in 1872.

In Auckland, as in the other main centres of population, there was greater willingness from the late 1860s to suppress public forms of immorality. The New Zealand police drew upon English Vagrancy laws and local by-laws against the keeping of disorderly houses, supplemented in 1866 and 1869 by New Zealand Vagrancy Acts. The passing of a Contagious Diseases Act in 1869, based upon the English Acts of the same name, provided another, potentially more oppressive weapon against soliciting, though it was not enforced outside Auckland and Christchurch.

Police activity and the Contagious Diseases Act, passed by male legislators and administered by male officials, represented the coercive side of new sensibilities about public order in maturing settlements. Moves to establish rescue homes represented a more subtle approach to the problem, one in which women predominated. Although the homes also had a repressive aspect, this was initially downplayed and the private, discreet nature of the institutions stressed. As those founding the first Auckland Refuge stressed, they would use only 'means the most gentle and attractive to win back the stubborn wills and depraved natures' of those entrusted to their care (*New Zealand Herald*, 13 September 1873).

All were agreed that rescue work was the proper domain of respectable women who could provide appropriate role models for the fallen. In New Zealand, as in Australia, distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' women had a special significance, for just as immoral women posed a threat to the advance of social order, 'pure' women were needed to tame the rawness of a male dominated colonial society. Because women were in a minority the responsibility of their civilising mission was all the more critical, whether they exercised their moral influence within the home or carried it into the wider public sphere (Dalziel, 1977). This is not to say that rescue work was free from male influence. Individual clergymen sometimes mobilised women members of their congregations into the work and homes were often supervised by committees of both sexes. Here the sexual division of labour found in most charitable organisations came into full play: the men took responsibility for finances and might be involved as trustees in vetting staff and endorsing rules, but the women would oversee the day to day management of the institution. In the early homes, especially, men made public announcements and dominated public meetings, while acknowledging women's crucial role in management. Responsibility for the Canterbury Female Refuge was divided between a 'gentlemen's committee' and a 'ladies committee' until 1885, when financial difficulties caused the home to be taken over and funded by the local charitable aid board (New Zealand's equivalent of the Poor Law authorities). Here female autonomy in management was maintained by the publicly financed charitable aid board, which hastily recognised the home as 'women's territory'. When the ladies later resigned the board handed over management to a local social purity organisation, the St Saviour's Guild. The Guild, it stated, was eminently qualified 'to bestow that attention to detail which such work demands and which is hopelessly impossible if attempted by other than a committee of ladies actuated by the highest philanthropic motives.'[3]

These 'highest philanthropic motives' were ambiguous, to say the least, and raise the question of just why a group of New Zealand women engaged in rescue work. In the 1860s and 1870s there appear to have been very few women involved in organised welfare activities of any kind. European women were in a minority; their all important role was as wives and mothers, breeders of an expanding white population. Because those who initiated the first women's homes maintained a low public profile, their motives are difficult to assess except through isolated annual reports and, in the case of the Alexandra Home and the Canterbury Female Refuge, sets of minute books. What comes through is a sense of social responsibility and, among the most active, a strong religious commitment. Those associated with the refuges in their early years were often the wives and sisters of public figures. They were part of an emerging colonial elite, some of them founding members of their own communities. Elizabeth Cargill, a member by marriage of Dunedin's 'first family', was a leading light of the Dunedin Refuge management committee, while Lady Martin, wife of New Zealand's first Chief Justice, helped found the Auckland Home. In the 1870s women from wealthy Canterbury 'gentry' families served upon the ladies' committee of the Canterbury Female Refuge. The wives of Wellington business and professional men formed the

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[3] Ashburton and North Canterbury United Charitable Aid Board Minutes, 26 August 1891. Canterbury Museum Library, Christchurch.

Ladies' Christian Association, which founded the Alexandra Home in 1876. This is not to say that all these women were equally energetic or longstanding members of the committees, but association with a charitable enterprise of this kind was clearly one way of fixing status within a relatively fluid social order. It is likely that involvement in rescue work in the early years of the colony stemmed less from a sense of female solidarity than from a need to establish social distinctions and to clearly demarcate the respectable from the unrespectable. As their men held public meetings decrying the problem of vice in local communities, the ladies set up the rescue homes in order—vice would be eliminated by removing prostitutes from circulation. In this early stage reference to changing male behaviour do not appear.

Among the most persistent women committee members the religious motivation was apparent. All the refuges were associated with particular church denominations or run by ladies united in a common christian outlook. As we have seen, individual churchmen sometimes publicised a need for such homes. It is perhaps significant that Canterbury, the province with the strongest religious establishment, had the first refuge and in later years the largest number of women's homes.

A basic tenet of nineteenth-century charity was the blessings it would bestow on both receiver and giver. Those involved entered upon rescue work with a strong sense of duty, but they also saw their efforts as building up credits for the afterlife. As the Dunedin ladies concluded after a particularly discouraging annual report, 'We know what our duty is, but results are not in our hands . . . . We desire to have it said of us, "She hath done what she could"' (Dunedin Female Refuge, 1878). The constitution of the Wellington Ladies' Christian Association firmly stated that group's priorities. Only as a secondary consideration did the ladies note their intention to assist young women who came to the cities as strangers: the Association's main purpose was to promote the spiritual interests of its members. Significantly, its second annual report rendered this as 'the promotion of personal piety in its members and in others . . . and to make best use of the simplest and least costly means to this end'.[4]

Though doing good was never so attractive as when it could be done on the cheap, the ladies were also being realistic. Cost as well as ideological considerations entered into the decision to embark upon rescue work. New Zealand was never characterised by the large reserves of private wealth which sustained philanthropy elsewhere and women, least of all, were able to mobilise vast resources for their causes. Initial publicity always stressed that the homes would be self-supporting through the proceeds of inmates' labour, and implied that all that was needed was to acquire a house, employ a matron, and call for laundry work. The reality proved rather different, but all homes continued to regard inmates' labour as a marketable commodity. As the founders of a later institution optimistically stressed, 'There are to be none but busy bees at the "Door of Hope"' (*New Zealand Herald*, 4 July 1896).

Other less altruistic motivations may also have influenced involvement in this area of welfare activity. New Zealand and Australia were chronically short of domestics since single women servants had a tendency to up and marry. (The numerous single men in the colonies were likewise looking for housekeepers, but wives did not have to be paid.) Newspaper reports fulminated at length about 'servantgalism', claiming that their scarcity made servants notoriously 'uppity' and independent (Macdonald, 1983; Holland, 1975). But as long as employers were not too fastidious about the antecedents of their slaveys the refuges promised a useful supply of domestic labour and a source of cheap laundry work. In theory the domestic regime of a refuge would rub any rough edges off inmates and make them fit to enter respectable homes. Alternatively, it would turn the women into suitable mates for colonial men. The records of the Canterbury Refuge certainly show the ladies and their friends taking on refuge 'graduates' as domestic servants, though the practice declined as the women so employed proved unreliable, unwilling, and all too often foul-mouthed.[5]

In the 1870s and the 1880s the ladies themselves were the first to acknowledge the limitations of their work. The committee of the Dunedin Female Refuge declared in 1878 that the results of their attempts to rescue 'these women' were not very cheering at all: 'Only those who have had practical experience in the work can adequately . . . measure the fearfully depraving and enthralling power of the life which abandoned women pursue' (Dunedin Female Refuge, 1878). In 1883 the Canterbury ladies reported that their reformatory cases (who by this time were separated from their 'first fall' cases) nearly all expressed a preference for prison life, rather than confinement and laundry work in the Refuge (Canterbury Female Refuge, 1883).

The reasons for this lack of success reflected partly the ladies' own ambivalence about their work and partly the determined resistance of their clientele to any attempts at rescue. The ladies were

[4] Ladies' Christian Association, Second Annual Report, 1880, Alexandra Home, Wellington.

[5] Canterbury Female Refuge, Minute Book, 1876–1910, Christchurch Public Hospital.

few in number and faced difficulties in funding their activities. Most homes came to depend upon government assistance. The Canterbury Refuge had to be re-established with government funding in 1876. When provincial government funds did not eventuate in Auckland the refuge there was forced to close, and it was not succeeded by another until 1884. In Auckland the leading 'philanthropic ladies' already managed the Old Women's Refuge on behalf of the Provincial Government. It appears involvement in two activities was beyond their resources, and the Auckland *Weekly News* implied that, on balance, local women preferred to help the elderly rather than 'sinful' members of their own sex (*Weekly News*, 20 February 1875).

Where the ladies continued their rescue activities, these were limited in scope. The committees relied on prostitutes coming to them of their own accord or being sent by the police. Aggressive street work was not practised, and an attempt by the Dunedin ladies to conduct midnight meetings proved unsuccessful. A committee member attributed this to lack of experience, briefly concluding that 'circumstances were different in London' (*Otago Daily Times*, 20 October 1875).

Nor did initial ideals about prostitutes' desire for reform help the ladies' committees face later realities. Publicity was based upon a particular stereotype of the woman they intended to help. She was the Magdalen who, however abandoned, however outwardly brazen, was supposed to loathe her degraded existence. If she could only be offered the helping hand of a virtuous woman, repentance would rapidly follow. This stereotype, soon under strain, gave rise to a genre of 'Magdalen's poems' which were used in fund raising ventures as late as the 1900s. Most of these were derived from overseas publications, though the Salvation Army was later energetic in producing home-grown versions. From the Catholic Mt Magdala came 'Dead in the Streets' by 'Lizzie', with its usual salutory tale of youthful beauty and energy destroyed in the inevitable slide toward disease and death:

> 'Oh! it is pitiful, look at her face,
> Once the bright mirror of virtue and grace,
> Now it is traversed by furrows of crime,
> Sullied and darkened by infamy's slime . . . .'[6]

When inmates failed to display gratitude and submissiveness the ladies' sisterly feelings, such as they were, soon dissipated, and the basically hierarchical nature of the relationship between rescuer and client became obvious. Lists of rules show the ladies' perceptions of their charges. The regulations of the Dunedin Female Refuge, for example, forbad entry if the applicant was intoxicated, they banned all immoral and bad language, and insisted upon attendance at prayers morning and evening. They suggest that the ladies were pessimistic about their chances of persuading prostitutes to stay voluntarily in the Refuge, for having had their own garments taken from them, inmates were to be charged with larceny if found outside the home in institutional clothing. An early rise and early retirement to bed, locked doors, and the expectation or work carried out in cheerful obedience to the matron complete the picture of a stern regime (Dunedin Female Refuge, 1875). Such regulations were characteristic not only of women's homes in their attempt to order every aspect of the inmates' day and to impose values of order and self-discipline. But the stress on secrecy and seclusion and on separation from the opposite sex was far more intense than in other institutions. Women's homes severed inmates from past associations by placing strict controls on letter writing, visits and other external contacts. As well as physical separation from the outside world, all reference to the past was discouraged and the use of first names only permitted. Overall, the 'gentle and attractive' means which were supposed to typify womanly enterprises were not greatly in evidence.

However notorious, inmates did not necessarily regard themselves as stained for life by their past sexual conduct. For them the most repellant aspect of the refuge regime was the requirement of a long period of residence, between one and two years in the first homes. This particular condition promised a number of benefits from the management's point of view. It would enable the homes to maintain their labour supply and to exact a profitable amount of work from inmates in return for their keep. It would protect the community by removing immoral women from circulation. It would expose the women themselves to a sustained period of moral influence and, by conditioning them to regular hours of work, would break the habits of excitement and indolence to which they were supposedly addicted. If they were pregnant on entry it enabled them to care for their babies after birth: the idea was to awaken a sense of maternal responsibility and to make the woman aware of the consequences of her sin. To the inmates this was not so very unlike a gaol sentence, with the difference that a gaol term was likely to be shorter. The impersonal supervision they received in a gaol may, indeed have been infinitely preferable to the ladies' ministrations.

Detailed records of the Canterbury Female Refuge show a fairly typical pattern of interaction between the two groups of women. Those seeking admission did so for a variety of reasons. Some were pregnant, out of work—of whatever kind—or in danger of being run in by the police if they did not make themselves scarce for a while. Some were sent

[6] Loose among miscellaneous material held by Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Wellington.

on discharge from gaol, others were ill and had nowhere else to go. A number are on record as entering the Canterbury Refuge in the 1880s suffering from 'the horrors'.[7]

On admission the women were desperately grateful for the shelter provided and appeared to have internalised the shame associated with their immoral life. Initially they were described as well behaved, then unsettled, discontented, and even violent. Subsequently a note might appear on the file: 'Lucy went over the fence last night' or 'left saying she hated us all and meant to go and make her living on the streets as it was easier than working'. Despite locked doors and long stay requirements, it proved impossible to prevent escapes. The unrepentant escapee would soon resurface, charged with a minor offence or reported as living in some notorious local establishment.

Life in the Canterbury Refuge wavered between these moments of high drama and excruciating boredom. Day after day the matron's notes lament 'Nothing dried today due to the rain'. Then one of the inmates would quarrel with the others, strike or kick the matron, or steadfastly refuse to work. The ladies would rush in, attempt to restore the peace or, more usually, expel the troublemaker. (There were dangers in such a course. Ladies associated with the Canterbury Refuge had more than one drunken and abusive former inmate lay seige outside their own homes.) Minutes of the Ladies' Committee seldom stop deploring the insubordination and mutinous outbursts of women within the Refuge. Their constant additions to the rules and complaints about the 'leniency' of the Gentlemen's Committee suggest a good deal about the abuse of power by those to whom it is customarily denied. But whatever the ladies' aspirations to power and influence, the inmates' resistance seemed stronger. Efforts to promote virtuous domesticity proved counterproductive among those who did not care to be rescued, and when the homes no longer suited their purposes such women simply absconded or stopped patronising them unless forced to do so by the authorities. The situation was one of struggle between two groups of women, a struggle in which the ladies, despite their status, connections, and sense of moral righteousness, often lost the upper hand.

Not surprisingly, the annual reports of the refuges concluded that rescue work was the most difficult and discouraging of all christian endeavours. In response, the ladies' committees tended to withdraw from direct involvement, either by mass resignation, as with the Canterbury Ladies' Committee in 1890, or by handing increasing amounts of responsibility to live-in staff. By the late 1890s the matron of one Auckland home had cause to complain about a lack of practical support from 'professed Christian women and mothers'.[8]

By this time rescue work had entered into a second stage of development, one characterised by a more 'professional' attitude to management and the establishment of new institutions. A major impetus to both developments was provided by the Salvation Army, which commenced work in New Zealand in 1883. Within two decades the Army had opened rescue and maternity homes in each of the four main centres; not to be outdone, the Anglican and Catholic churches also began to extend their social outreach. The new women's homes were based upon a rather different conception of moral problems from their predecessors. Some quite deliberately targetted a younger, more impressionable clientele, engaging in preventive and maternity work rather than the reclamation of women 'hardened in vice'.

The employees of rescue institutions had always been crucial to their success, but from the 1880s such workers began to maintain a higher profile and to become closely identified with what was in some cases a lifetime's work. A few homes were run by the increasing number of religious guilds or sisterhoods established in New Zealand. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd who founded Mt Magdala in Christchurch were part of a world-wide Catholic order specialising in rescue work. The design of Mt Magdala itself was based upon a similar home in Victoria, Australia (*Lyttleton Times*, 17 February 1886). In 1894 a group of Anglican women formed themselves into the 'Mission to the Streets and Lanes', and were eventually recognised by the Anglican Church as a separate sisterhood, to engage in missionary and rescue work in Auckland (Mission to the Streets and Lanes, 1895). In 1924 they took over the day to day management of the Auckland St Mary's Home. During World War One an American sisterhood, the Order of St Anne's, was introduced into Christchurch to reinvigorate Anglican rescue activity there.[9]

A number of individual matrons were also recruited overseas, among them Janet Hancock, Superintendent of St Mary's in Auckland until her death in the 1918 influenza epidemic. She and her

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[7] This, and material in the following two paragraphs, is based upon the following North Canterbury Hospital Board files: Canterbury Female Reformatory, Register of Inmates, 8/1; Female Refuge Report Books, 7/1; Canterbury Museum Library; Female Refuge, Minute Book, 1876–1910, Christchurch Public Hospital.

[8] Minutes of Second Annual General Meeting, Door of Hope Association, 4 July 1898, Auckland Museum Library.

[9] Sister Mary Magdalene, MS Papers 1656 (1918–23), Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

predecessor, Lucy Hudson, were both experienced English rescue workers, personally recruited by members of the Anglican hierarchy. Others were women of considerable local repute and years of involvement in what we would now call social work, and one woman's career in particular shows how an Australasian-wide reputation could be built upon the management of women's homes. Annie Hutchinson, Superintendent of the Door of Hope from 1904 to 1917, was born in Ireland and had migrated as a child to New Zealand with her family. She married in 1866 but, having no children, began social work among women in Auckland. In the early 1880s she left for Australia, apparently with her husband, and 'there entered whole-heartedly into all that tended for the uplift of young girls and women'. This work took her to Melbourne and Brisbane and involved her in prison gate work with the Salvation Army. Equipped with testimonials from the police force and from the Chief Justice for Queensland, she returned to Auckland (*New Zealand Herald*, 18 April 1925). Not surprisingly, the Door of Hope committee considered her a substantial catch and proudly proclaimed their matron's 'Australasian fame as a rescue worker'.[10] Hutchinson continued her police court work and in 1903 was gazetted an official prison visitor. The influence of women such as these extended beyond the institution walls and overshadowed the committees that employed them.

Although the Door of Hope's work was non-denominational, it is significant that Hutchinson's experience before her appointment was with the Salvation Army. Salvationist women came to dominate rescue and maternity work in New Zealand, engaging in the most aggressive forms of outreach through their prison gate brigades and midnight patrols. With its early talk of 'women warriors', the Army offered an outlet for energetic New Zealand women, some of them from well-to-do families. In 1892, when more than one-half of the Army's full-time commissioned officers were women, the five largest corps in the country were commanded by women. If articles in the *War Cry* are any indication, these officers displayed a strong awareness of women's issues and asserted their right to full participation in Army life, not simply as the marriage partners of male officers. One woman writing in 1892 claimed, for example, that 'The Army has broken down the orthodox ideal that a woman's place is at home, and has given us what has long been needed, unrestrained liberty of action and thought' (Bradwell, 1982: 123). The later history of the Salvation Army in New Zealand suggests limitations to this feminist rhetoric, but in the 1890s the Army affiliated with the major women's organisation in New Zealand, the National Council of Women, and sent delegates to its annual conventions.

The Salvation Army women had strong associations with other welfare organisations and formed part of a network which extended beyond New Zealand. They, and women such as Hutchinson and Hancock, brought to rescue work motivations and experience which differed from those of the lady volunteers, who usually had homes and families of their own. For the matrons and superintendents their positions meant a livelihood, albeit a hard-earned one, and the chance of public recognition and esteem. Their knowledge and experience gained government endorsement, as from the 1890s a number of them were appointed prison visitors or called upon to testify at official inquiries into social conditions in New Zealand. It is possible that developments within the homes such as the shift toward a younger clientele, the expansion of maternity care, and the building of babies' nurseries made the work more rewarding and eased relationships between matrons and their charges. Claims were certainly made that matrons had a considerable effect upon young women who came under their protection and who kept in touch for years after the birth of their child. Whatever our views on a moral code which prompted single mothers to hide themselves away from their normal social contacts, it is likely that they found the staff of the homes more practically helpful than others told of their situation, and that the homes met what their clients also saw as a need in their particular situation. In other words, there was a greater identity of interest between inmates and management than when women's homes simply offered shelter as an inducement to moral reform. This should not be taken too far: in the 1900s the popular weekly *Truth* was critical of exploitation in what it termed 'Boodler Booth's soapsuds homes' for women (*New Zealand Truth*, 8 December 1906; 8 April 1911), and a statement by Lucy Hudson of St Mary's in Auckland suggests that, for her, there was certainly an element of ambivalence remaining:

> 'Knowing what I know of the difficulties some of my sister women have to contend with I should not dare to sit in judgement on the most degraded rag of humanity. I should not dare to say there was no good in the most depraved, abandoned specimen of womankind, for even the dirtiest pool of water gives back some of reflection if only the sun shines on it, and even the very scum of womanhood will respond in some manner if only the sun of love is made to shine on her' (*New Zealand Herald*, 22 December 1906).

The words Hudson uses to describe her charges are highly symbolic, her langage seeming almost to contradict her sentiments.

Nevertheless, it is women like Hudson who bring

[10] Door of Hope, Minutes 1911–1931.

us to the first real expressions of outrage at male aggression and sexual irresponsibility. Hudson urged every 'clean-minded' woman to refuse to know any man who had harmed a woman by deed or word. The Door of Hope's Sister Laura Francis referred to fallen sisters brought down by the hands of 'cruel men',[11] while Ensign Annette Paul, the Salvation Army's rescue secretary, fiercely denounced 'fiends in men's clothing, WAITING LIKE WILD BEASTS to pounce upon their prey' (*War Cry*, 26 December 1891). Such statements were made against the background of an organised women's movement and a situation where women were for the first time in a majority in New Zealand's cities: it may have been easier by this time to launch a direct attack on male sexuality. Even so, the new emphasis on male behaviour had its limitations, linked, as it was, with that very ambiguous social purity rhetoric which characterised the women's movement at that time. Seldom do you find the broader analysis put forward by Eveline Cunnington, one of the more advanced members of the St Saviour's Guild in Christchurch, who claimed that 'neglected children, cruel parents, miserable homes, drink, and a lack of technical and industrial education of young women' were the major factors in producing 'fallen women' (Cunnington, 1918: 69). Even Cunnington's statement smacks of elitism, and it was left to the Secretary of Labour, Edward Tregear, to state unequivocally that it was better to support a trade union than a Magdala (Department of Labour, 1896: iv). And it was, perhaps, ironic that the homes still trained their inmates in domestic work as the means to betterment. An analysis of their own 'first falls' might have suggested that domestic service had dangers all of its own.

This brings us to the clientele of the women's homes who, like their rescuers, had altered somewhat by the 1900s. At one level, this was the result of conscious policy changes, as the managers of the homes became dismayed by their earlier efforts and sought a younger, more responsive clientele. More generally it reflected different social needs as society became more settled, the sex ratio more balanced, and as the proportion of young unmarried males in the population declined. With new employment opportunities for women in factories and offices, fewer may have needed to turn to prostitution. In the 1890s the Alexandra Home and the Canterbury Female Refuge were restricted to women having a first child outside marriage while St Mary's in Auckland allowed inmates one admission only. By World War One only Mt Magdala and the four Salvation Army rescue homes were handling 'rescue' cases in any numbers. Other homes had either closed, like the Dunedin Female Refuge, or were restricting entry to young 'endangered' girls and maternity cases.

Even at the Salvation Army rescue homes and at Mt Magdala 'fallen' women gave way to an increasing proportion of elderly derelicts, handicapped women and alcoholics who may or may not have had histories of immorality. By World War One Mt Magdala had a whole wing of 'dirty and epileptic' cases, many of whom were totally institutionalised and would live out their days in the home (Department of Public Health and Hospitals, 1914: 100). Younger delinquents still entered, but were increasingly likely to be committed by the courts. In the past, magistrates could give female prisoners suspended sentences if they agreed to enter a women's home, but women taking up this option soon realised that the homes had no real power to detain them, and absconded. New legislation in 1909 enabled Mt Magdala and the Salvation Army homes to be gazetted 'Reformatory Institutions'. This meant that women guilty of offences such as soliciting, vagrancy, concealment of birth, and disturbances of the peace, could be transferred to a church institution and immediately imprisoned if they breached its rules (Reformatory Institutions Act, 1909). As the only Catholic women's home Mt Magdala was also able to put pressure on the Education Department to send Catholic girls from the state reformatory and from the industrial schools.[12] These remaining rescue homes relied increasingly on state sanction and on government grants. In effect, they became part of a network which included industrial schools, the state's Te Oranga Reformatory for girls, the lunatic asylums and, ultimately, the prison system. Even so, the age balance continued to move toward the old and the handicapped, and the Salvation Army's rescue homes eventually became eventide homes for the elderly.

The major development in women's homes was the extension of maternity work. Initially maternity cases had been sent from the homes to public hospitals or the charitable aid board's benevolent institutions for their confinement. This was found to interfere with the rescue homes' control over inmates, and they consequently began to provide their own lying-in facilities. The Salvation Army, of course, established separate maternity homes. In the 1900s Midwives' and Private Hospitals' legislation brought these facilities under closer government inspection and caused the standard of care to improve. Staff began to seek midwifery qualifications and state registration. This increased the

[11] Minutes of Second Annual General Meeting, Door of Hope Association, 4 July 1898.

[12] Government Wards Sent from Te Oranga to Mt Magdala, Child Welfare 40/15/4, National Archives, Wellington.

tendency for 'professional' management, further removing inmates from the influence of goodly 'ladies'. Overall, maternity work promised far more satisfactory results and the women managers were quite explicit about the need to strike while their charges were at their weakest and most vulnerable. As the report on St Mary's in Auckland stated in 1905, 'There is no time when so great an influence for good can be exerted on a girl on the downward path, as when she is about to become a mother' (St Mary's Homes, 1904–5).

By the 1900s it appears that a high proportion of maternity cases were domestic servants, a fact that was little publicised. Evidence given to an 1899 Select Committee of the Legislative Council confirmed that women in the Alexandra Home were 'generally servant girls, and that class; but there are no prostitutes' (Report of Select Committee on Young Persons' Protection Bill, 1899: 12). In the early 1900s over 80 per cent of those in the Salvation Army's Wellington Maternity Home described themselves as domestic servants.[13] These figures provoked no comment in annual reports. The homes still stressed domestic training as the means to moral reform and sent young women to positions in private households upon discharge. Since they were dealing with women who already had experience in employment of this kind, such 'rehabilitation' proved relatively easy.

Increasingly, the success of the homes was gauged not only by their efforts for 'fallen women', but by their role in saving child life. In the earliest homes the death of a newborn baby had not caused great distress, for the mother's later employment was more easily achieved without a baby in tow. By World War One, the homes were likely to stress their role in saving not one life, but two: those of mother and child. As New Zealand's birth rate declined, even 'illegitimates' began to have their value. Attention to child life had obvious advantages in attracting funds, an emotive appeal which unrepentant rescue cases had lacked. Furthermore the involvement of innocent infants gave credibility to the open attack on male behaviour by some matrons and social purity advocates.

While the ultimate success for maternity homes came with the marriage of one of their 'old girls', as some liked to call them, failures were likely to be excused by a new rationale, by affixing another set of labels to the women concerned. Fallen women in the 1870s and 1880s could still be viewed as 'Magdalens' whose unhappy state was the result of individual sin. Whether or not they had chosen their unfortunate lifestyle, they did have the choice of its rejection. With prayer, and with assistance from their betters, even the worst among them might be saved. While these assumptions operated, however shakily, rescue work had some point.

In the early twentieth century, rhetoric was different. The 'problem' was being redefined. A new tone starts to enter the reports of the women's homes and to find an echo in other welfare agencies. Once again we see ideas derived from overseas sources, particularly from the eugenics movement. Once again, New Zealanders were urged to learn from the example of other nations, and Janet Hancock, matron of St Mary's, warned of England, with its 'vast army of feeble-minded paupers' (St Mary's Homes, 1909–10). The implications were clear. Women with one child could still be seen as victims, and helped to hide a temporary mistake. 'Second falls' were a different proposition altogether, for their vices were inbred, their degeneracy inevitable. The exclusion of these cases from church homes was only proper, since they had shown themselves quite incapable of responding to christian teaching. As Hancock claimed, 'Hardly ever does a girl with normal brain capacity yield again to temptation after her stay in the Homes' (St Mary's Homes, 1912–13). A new and more pernicious stereotype, that of the moral imbecile, was replacing the 'Magdalene'.

By the 1900s the women's homes had undergone a number of changes. A more professional attitude to their management had emerged, with experienced women superintendents making this their full-time work. The clientele of the homes tended to be younger, more reformable women. Where pregnancy was involved, there was a closer identity of interest between management and clientele, and a focus upon the child's welfare as well as the mother's reform. In the few institutions where the rescue of 'hardened' cases was still attempted, there was a more obvious link between state and voluntary effort, with state enforcement of long-stay requirements. Most important, the analysis of moral problems was different from earlier decades: illegitimacy rather than prostitution was the main concern.

These changes restricted the occasions on which 'respectable' women could intervene in the lives of the 'fallen'. Parallel with developments in Britain and the United States, socially concerned women in New Zealand sought legislative rather than individualistic solutions to moral problems. Under the influence of a new social purity movement women's groups added their voice to calls for a higher age of consent, the punishment of persons frequenting brothels and, above all, restrictions on youthful behavior which they saw as leading to later immorality.[14] Behind this was genuine outrage at

[13] Salvation Army Maternity Home, Wellington, Admissions Register, November 1899–January 1905; Salvation Army Headquarters, Wellington.

[14] On the social purity concerns of the women's movement in New Zealand see Bunkle (1980). More

the sexual double standard and at male sexual control of women, inside and outside the marital relationship.

None of these developments were unique to New Zealand: they reflected, in part, an exchange of ideas and information between local women's organisations and their overseas counterparts. Nonetheless, the ideological links between earlier, more direct attempts at rescue and the new women's movement assumed a special significance in the colony. When the first women's homes were established in New Zealand, British and American women were already using philanthropy and voluntary associations to acquire considerable collective power in their own right (Berg, 1978; Scott, 1984; Prochaska, 1980). In New Zealand, as we have seen, the potential for such activity was rather less. European settlement occurred relatively late, and not only were women isolated from each other in the early years of settlement, intensely involved in motherhood and the simple tasks of survival, but the idea of state activism has been accepted from an early stage of New Zealand's colonial history. Government responsibility for immigration, education, hospitals, asylums, charitable aid and child welfare was well established by the mid-1880s when New Zealand women first sought an organised voice in public life. Public health and labour conditions would soon become the concern of new government departments. While many women did become active in benevolent associations, temperance organisations and church groups, their influence was limited. To have any real impact on social conditions, women had to participate in political life, to win election to education and charitable aid boards and to liquor licensing committees, or to gain appointment as paid administrators and official visitors to public institutions. This helps explain why New Zealand women fought so early and so vigorously for the vote. Unable to make headway through their own woman-centred initiatives, they were forced to negotiate access to existing, male-dominated structures.[15]

The women's homes show something of the basis on which they did this, and constraints upon the approaches used. Arguments emphasising women's 'civilising influence', 'special moral capacities' and the need for these female qualities to counterbalance the male perspective became standard. They may have constituted a necessary tactic, given the strength of domestic ideologies and the relatively narrow opportunities in New Zealand for influence outside the home (Dalziel, 1977), but tactically they proved limited. In a masculine society the women's homes were unusual as 'women's territory', places where female governance was actively encouraged by clergymen and politicians. Through the supervision of the 'fallen', respectable women gained an early very limited foothold in public life and a base from which to launch later claims. Their influence was, however, safely contained within an institutional framework where women attempted to control and restrict delinquents of their own sex. While in theory much was made of women's 'civilising' influence on men, it gained practical endorsement when unleashed upon other women.

Despite the early enactment of female suffrage in New Zealand (1893) arguments based upon women's unique abilities provided slight leverage to public power. When efforts were made to extend these claims, to turn a vague moral authority into formal jurisdiction, to provide for women parliamentarians or women police, politicians showed considerable misgivings. Moral influence was permissible only within the narrowest of boundaries, and preferably when used to regulate female behaviour. Any wider application was regarded with suspicion, or undermined by ridicule. This history of the women's homes indicates, moreover, that even when mobilised in an approved capacity and judged upon its own terms, women's authority had practical limitations. The retreat of the ladies' committees and the determined resistance aroused by their attempts at reform suggest the weakness of a power based upon 'womanly influence'.

New Zealand's experience confirms not only the fragility of such claims to influence, but their dangers and ambiguities. The danger, apparent all too soon in the birthplace of Truby King and the Plunket Society, but evident, too, in other western countries, was the ease with which they could be turned upon themselves, to justify women's continued relegation to the home. It was proposed that if women had such unique qualities, they could most effectively use them in childrearing and in domesticity. They could, after all, wield power through the socialisation of children and by breeding 'the race'.

Where moral reform was channelled into active social work, its ambiguities were plain. Studies of women's philanthropy in Australia, Britain and the United States have shown how these activities opened up new opportunities for relatively privileged women, but often at the expense of those they attempted to help (Berg, 1978; Godden, 1982; Summers, 1979). Welfare work is often seen to

generally on shifts on the debate about sexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Dubois and Gordon (1983).

[15] Kate Sheppard, one of the leaders of the New Zealand suffrage campaign, described how the cavalier treatment accorded petitions she organised against the sale of intoxicants to children prompted her fight for women's suffrage. *Prohibitionist*, 7 October 1893.

divide women, by reinforcing distinctions between the respectable and the unrespectable, helpers and helped, and, more critically, between controllers and controlled. Whatever the level of woman-identification behind women's entry into rescue work, the implications of their efforts were repressive, since they involved women in attempting to restrict other women's behaviour. The women activists of the later nineteenth century proved as ready as the very first ladies' committees to denounce women who fell short of their own high ideals, or who consistently resisted their influence.

APPENDIX

WOMEN'S HOMES ESTABLISHED IN NEW ZEALAND 1860–1910

1864 *Canterbury Female Refuge*: opened in 1864 in association with the Anglican Church and re-established in 1876 with Provincial Government funding. From 1885 the Refuge became the responsibility of the local charitable aid board, but management was continued by the existing ladies' committee. In 1892 its management was contracted out to the Anglican St. Saviour's Guild, providing maternity care for 'first falls' only. In 1918 it became the hospital board's Essex Maternity Home for poor and unmarried women.

1872 *Auckland Women's Home*: Opened on the initiative of Lady Martin and a group of Parnell ladies and supported by private aid. After anticipated government funding was not provided the amalgamated Magdalen Society was wound up in 1875.

1873 *Dunedin Female Refuge*: Opened June 1873 and run by a committee of women from local churches. From 1885 the Refuge was funded principally by the local charitable aid board. In 1904 it was closed down through lack of patronage, but in 1907 was renovated and reopened under medical management as the 'Forth Street Maternity Hospital' for destitute women—mainly to train medical students.

1879 *Alexandra Home* (Wellington): Opened to provide accommodation for 'friendless and destitute women', including immigrants and prostitutes, and run by the Ladies' Christian Association. In the 1890s the Home was restricted to 'first fall' maternity cases, but by World War I it had begun to provide beds for private married cases. Now a hostel only.

1884 *St Mary's (Anglican)*: Opened at Parnell, Auckland, as 'Mrs. Bishop Cowie's Home'. Maternity care was provided from the 1890s, for first admissions only. In 1904 the home was enlarged and shifted to the Otahuhu site, adding a children's nursery to its facilities.

1885 *Salvation Army Rescue Home* Christchurch): Later becomes a 'Women's Industrial Home' and, in 1947, a Women's Eventide Home.

1886 *Mt Magdala Asylum* (Christchurch): A Roman Catholic Institution run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, it eventually became the largest women's home in New Zealand, with up to 300 inmates. Mt Magdala never provided maternity care, and contained increasing numbers of old women until its closure in the 1960s.

1886 *Salvation Army Rescue Home* (Wellington): Popularly known as the 'Paulina' Home after Major Annette Paul. In 1915 it became a 'Women's Industrial Home' and, in 1957, an 'Autumn Lodge' for the elderly.

1886 *Salvation Army Rescue Home* (Dunedin): In 1912 it became a 'Young Women's Industrial Home' and in 1944 a home for the elderly.

1887 *St Mary's* (Christchurch): An Anglican institution run by the St Saviour's Guild. In 1909 it became an Orphanage.

1891 *Salvation Army Rescue Home* (Auckland): Later becomes a Women's Industrial Home and, in 1949, a Men's Eventide Home.

1891 *Salvation Army Maternity Home* (Christchurch): For 'first falls' only, it later took in a few married patients, but not on a large scale.

1896 *Door of Hope* (Auckland): Run by a committee of women from the evangelical protestant churches. It soon provided maternity care and a babies' nursery, but in 1921 moved from 'rescue' to 'preventive' work, providing hostel accommodation for young women in service.

1896 *Samaritan Home* (Christchurch): Located in a former gaol and financed mainly by the charitable aid board. It mainly provided for 'second falls' by then refused entry to other homes, but also took in destitute elderly men and women. Closed 1912.

1897 *Salvation Army Maternity Home* (Auckland): First called a 'Receiving Home' for less serious moral cases, it soon became a maternity home for first fall cases. Became a hostel in 1977.

1899 *St Mary's* (Karori, Wellington): An Anglican home which mainly provided for young, 'endangered' girls.

1900 *Victoria Home* (Invercargill): Run by a matron and ladies' committee, this was mainly a maternity home for 'first cases', but because there were few other charitable institutions in the city, it also took in some destitute women, 'defectives', and small children.

1900 *Salvation Army Maternity Home* (Wellington): Opened for 'first falls' only, by the 1920s it was also an important maternity home for married women.

1903 *Salvation Army Maternity Home* (Dunedin): Opened for 'first fall' cases only, and later known as 'Redroofs'.

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