Picturesque Poverty: London By-ways in Evangelical Stories by Hesba Stretton and L.T. Meade

Thomas Kullmann

Abstract
The London East End, and other 'poor' parts of London, feature as major sites in evangelical novels and stories by Hesba Stretton (*Jessica's First Prayer, Little Meg's Children*) and L.T. Meade (*Scamp and I, Bel-Marjory, A Dweller in Tents, How It All Came Round*). Conversion stories are told, and sometimes deathbed scenes presented, against the backdrop of slum life, characterised by dirt, hunger, alcoholism, violence and crime but also surprising instances of charity and love. Invariably, these London by-ways are contrasted with West End localities (Belgravia, Hyde Park, Trafalgar Square), or 'neutral ground' (Regent's Park, Bloomsbury), so that the geography of London acquires symbolic significance. The article contends that Stretton's and Meade's descriptions of poverty and life in unsanitary circumstances constituted a major attraction of their stories for middle-class readers. The East End becomes an exotic and picturesque site, displaying possibilities of life which the West End cannot offer.

Keywords
evangelical fiction; London East End; exoticism; otherness; realism; spatial symbolism

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Picturesque Poverty: London By-ways in Evangelical Stories by Hesba Stretton and L.T. Meade

Thomas Kullmann

Introduction: East-End Poverty and Its Literary Representations[1]

Hesba Stretton's best-selling evangelical story, *Jessica's First Prayer,* which was first serialised in *Sunday at Home* in 1866 and published in book form in 1867, begins "in a screened corner of one of the many railway bridges which span the streets of London" (Stretton [1867] n.d.: 5), where a man is offering coffee and bread to workmen passing by on their way to work. We can assume that the railway bridge is found in the East End where most workers live. It is there that the man meets Jessica, a little girl:

> […] one morning, in a partial lull of his business, the owner became suddenly aware of a pair of very bright dark eyes being fastened upon him and the slices of bread and butter on his board, with a gaze as hungry as that of a mouse which has been driven by famine into a trap. A thin and meagre face belonged to the eyes, which was half hidden by a mass of matted hair hanging over the forehead, and down the neck; the only covering which the head or neck had, for a tattered frock, scarcely fastened together with broken strings, was slipping down over the shivering shoulders of the little girl.
>
> (Stretton [1867] n.d.: 8)

Before we are introduced to the circumstances of the little girl's life we are presented with a visual spectacle. Through the eyes of the coffee-stall keeper (whom we later get to know as "Mr Daniel") we can look at her as we would look at a picture. While we may be shocked by the girl's apparent abandonment and poverty, we may also consider her appearance as aesthetically pleasing. Poverty is described in a way which I would like to call picturesque.

In using this term I draw upon late eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, as developed in William Gilpin's *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty* (1792) and Uvedale Price's *Essay on*

[1] I thank Mariaconcetta Costantini and Helena Ifill for alerting me to critical work on the London East End, and various other suggestions.

the Picturesque (1794) and summarized in Christopher Hussey's *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (1927). Gilpin intended the term "to denote *such objects as are proper subjects for painting*" (Gilpin 1792: 36, emphasis in the original). His main idea is that a "*rough* ruin" has "picturesque beauty," while a "*smooth* building," like a Palladian palace, has not (1792: 7-8). As Stephen Copley and Peter Garside point out, the Picturesque may entail "an effacement of the political and the social" and translate "the political and the social into the decorative" (1994: 6). This is certainly what happens in novels such as Ann Radcliffe's whose descriptions of an Italian landscape in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) may resemble a painting:

> The herds and flocks of goats and sheep, browsing under the shade of hanging woods, and the shepherd's little cabin, reared on the margin of a clear stream, presented a sweet picture of repose.
>
> (Radcliffe [1794] 1980: 226)

No attempt is made to contact the shepherd or visit his cabin; they stay on another level of existence, that of a two-dimensional work of art. We also come across the picturesque in Victorian travel writing. Fanny Parks, in *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque* (1850), states that "an artist could not select a finer subject for a picture" than one of the "ghats" of Benares ([1850] 1975: 2.438) but shows only marginal interest in the crowds which populate the riverfront. What matters is the visual impact of the architecture, its suitability for a painting. Stretton's literary rendering of the poverty found in the streets of London forms part of this tradition of the picturesque in which aesthetic pleasure goes along with a certain emotional distancing.

As an evocation of the poverty found on London streets Stretton's novel was certainly part of an ongoing literary interest. Ever since Henry Mayhew published *London Labour and the London Poor* in 1861-2, the London East End was widely known as a major site of poverty and despair (see, for example, Ackroyd [2000] 2001: 678). The almost proverbial quality of the East End as embodying poverty can, for example, be seen in the account of a traveller from India, Behramji Malabari, who in his *Indian Eye on English Life* (1893) declared London to be "that great big heart of the universe, pulsating with the highest aspirations and the lowest passions of humanity" (1893: 2).[2] Concerning English poverty, Malabari remarks:

> Poor as India is, I thank God she knows not much of the poverty to which parts of Great Britain have been accustomed – the East end of London, for instance [...] Men and women living in a chronic state of emaciation, till they can hardly be recognized as human; picking up as food what even animals will turn away from; sleeping, fifty, sixty, eighty of them together, of all ages and both sexes, in a hole that could not hold ten with decency; swearing, fighting, trampling on one another; filling the room with foul confusion and fouler air.
>
> (1893: 80)

While this description may partly be based on Malabari's own observations, it also continues the lurid sensationalism and romance of utter poverty which was connected to the East End in the popular imagination of the 1880s and 1890s.[3] As Paul Newland points out, the East End

[2] Malabari's assessment corresponds to that of Joan Prinsep in L. T. Meade's *The Princess and the Gutter* (1895): "It is a true saying that London is both the richest and the poorest city in the world. A stone's throw from luxuries the most immense lurks poverty the most squalid. Starvation, vice, underpaid work, grinds the souls of the people down into the bottomless pit" ([1895] 1910: 115).

[3] According to Seth Koven, the tendency to "romanticize and exoticize" slums "as sites of spectacular brutality and sexual degradation" amounted to an "eroticization of poverty" (2004: 4). John Marriott

had become "a mythic space, a spatial metaphor, a socio-cultural and historical referent and a symbolic territory" (2008: 18). As an archetypal site of poverty the East End was central to many social-realist novels of the 1880s, including George Gissing's *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Man* (1882) and Mary Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1888). At the same time it became the chosen workplace of "slum travellers" or social workers (many of whom were middle- and upper-class women" (Ross 2007: 1)) who wished to improve the lot of their disadvantaged fellow-humans.

As Newland notes, Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Man* "represents the East End as a distinctly exotic, 'Othered' space" (2008: 57). A connection between East-End poverty and exoticism can already be found in Mayhew's work. John Marriott points out that "the rhetoric and tropes employed by Mayhew emerge from earlier concerns of colonial authorities and travellers in India to locate the troublesome presence of nomadic populations" (2003: 154). In 1883 George R. Sims would compare his account of the London poor (*How the Poor Live*) to "a book of travel," recording his journey "into a dark continent that is within easy walking distance of the General Post Office," which will be found

> as interesting as any of those newly-explored lands which engage the attention of the Royal Geographic Society – the wild races who inhabit it will, I trust, gain public sympathy as easily as those savage tribes for whose benefit the Missionary Societies never cease to appeal for funds.
>
> (Sims [1883] 1889: 1)

Sims draws attention to the sensationalist aspects of his exploration of the London poor, implying that his readers' money would be better spent closer to home.[4] Similarly, William Booth published his best-selling report *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890) as a response to Henry M. Stanley's famous travel account *In Darkest Africa* (1890) (cf. Marriott 2003: 177-8).

While according to Newland the East End as an object of "popular mythology […] reached its apotheosis in the 1880s and 1890s" (2008: 57), my contention is that this part of London was already constructed as 'exotic' and 'other' in a group of fictional texts which has received considerably less critical attention than fin-de-siècle "slum fiction" (Robertson 2020: 154): evangelical novels and stories written in the 1860s and 1870s by Hesba Stretton and L.T. Meade. These works of fiction partake in the movement of evangelicalism in that they record acts of conversion, of 'saving souls,' usually by "preaching the gospel to those who had no knowledge of Christ" (Knight 2019: 87), with a view to evangelising or "proselytizing" readers "who were already familiar with the Christian faith" (15, 87), and perhaps motivate them to join the work of propagating the gospel. Mark Knight contends that evangelism has not been given proper attention "in our studies of Victorian literary culture" (2, cf. 10-14). While Knight focuses on canonical literature, investigating the impact of evangelicalism on *Vanity Fair, A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Moonstone*, the literary quality and cultural importance of popular evangelical tales, like those by Stretton and Meade, has also been underestimated.

Under the pen name of Hesba Stretton, Sarah Smith (1832-1911) published more than twenty evangelical novels or stories, some of which were hugely successful. *Jessica's First*

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speaks of a "racialization of the poor" in publications about the East End (2003: 177, 181). While it is arguable to what extent eroticism and race play a role in describing the London poor, we can certainly state that well-meaning reporters and novelists used manifold strategies of 'othering' the people inhabiting the East End.

[4] On parallels between urban and colonial spaces cf. also McLaughlan 2012.

Prayer (1867) reputedly sold two million copies (Cutt 1979: 135). Its readership comprised "children and newly-literate adults," middle-class as well as the "rising lower-class" (144, 136). As Anna Davin notes, "waif stories" such as Stretton's were "produced at different prices for different markets," in all kinds of editions, "according to the class of children they were intended for" (2001: 71-3). L. T. Meade (1844-1914) published about 270 books, including children's stories, historical novels, sensation fiction, detective fiction and female career novels. She wrote one of the first girls' school stories (*A World of Girls*, 1886) and one of the first university novels featuring female students (*A Sweet Girl Graduate*, 1891). As Beth Rodgers remarks, she is "most famous as a writer of girls' books, which played a key role in the formation of teenaged girls as a discrete readership in the late nineteenth century" (2019: 264). The initial phase of her career as a writer, which lasted from 1876 to about 1883, however, was marked by stories which carry a conventional evangelising message. Conversion stories are told, and sometimes deathbed scenes presented, against the backdrop of slum life, characterised by dirt, hunger, alcoholism, violence and crime, but also surprising instances of charity and love. Several of these stories are set in the poor parts of London, notably the East End.

Both Stretton and Meade chose the picturesque mode as a prime way of interesting their readers in the plight of the London poor. Rendering poverty picturesque allowed them to maintain an equilibrium between engaging their readers' sympathies and allowing them to keep a comfortable distance.

The East-End and the Picturesque Mode: Hesba Stretton, *Jessica's First Prayer, Little Meg's Children*

The little girl who in *Jessica's First Prayer* appears at the coffee-stall is sometimes given coffee and bread for free, which she accepts with gratefulness and love. She has more or less been abandoned by her mother, who was once an actress and now lives in utter destitution. The place where Jessica and her mother live is described in minute detail:

> [Jessica's home] was a single room, which had once been a hayloft over the stable of an old inn, now in use for two or three donkeys, the property of costermongers dwelling in the court about it. The mode of entrance was by a wooden ladder, whose rungs were crazy and broken, and which led up through a trap-door in the floor of the loft. The interior of the home was as desolate and comfortless as that of the stable below, with only a litter of straw for the bedding, and a few bricks and boards for the furniture. Everything that could be pawned had disappeared long ago, and Jessica's mother often lamented that she could not thus dispose of her child.
>
> (Stretton [1867] n.d.: 25-6)

Jessica's home stays remote from the reader, as a picture representing poverty. Accessing the hayloft room may be uncomfortable, but the wooden latter with its "crazy and broken rungs" certainly makes for a wonderful picture. Just as "Picturesque touring" at the beginning of the nineteenth century rendered Britain "a spectacle to be consumed" by middle-class travellers (Bermingham 1994: 86), the description of Jessica's home serves as an article of consumption by middle-class readers. Its picturesque quality may respond to a "new developing taste for the Picturesque" which, according to Malcolm Andrews, is found in "a particular genre of travel literature, somewhere between the reliable guide-book and the anecdotal exploration of the more obscure, old-fashioned street life of London" (1994: 290). Stretton's description of Jessica's home, however, cannot be read as an invitation to "Picturesque tourism" (1994: 291), but rather as a literary construction of an out-of-the-world, fairy-tale-like place.

The moral ambivalence of the aesthetic appreciation of poverty which is implied by the term 'picturesque' was commented on by Charles Dickens and John Ruskin (Andrews 1994: 288-189). Ruskin, in a chapter of *Modern Painters* entitled "Of the Turnerian Picturesque" mentions "the modern feeling of the picturesque, which, so far as it consists in a delight in ruin, is perhaps the most suspicious and questionable of all the characters distinctively belonging to our temper, and art" (Ruskin [1856] n.d.: 1). Ruskin complains of the lack of sympathy which goes along with this delight in ruin. Stretton can certainly not be accused of failing to sympathise with the inhabitants of the room "which had once been a hayloft." Still, the environment described is an exotic one, as remote from the implied readers' everyday lives as are the Apennine valleys or the Benares riverfront.[5] All of these places are "other," in that they represent "not self," embodying aspects distinct from one's own sense of identity. Elleke Boehmer considers "this symbolic conflict of the Other" "the keystone of colonialist ideology" (1995: 79). It also functions as a marker defining the readers' identity as distinctly different from that of the slum-dwellers described. Like the heroes and heroines of other waif stories, Jessica will be 'rescued' from this place, but the site itself is left untouched.[6] At the same time, this picture, like Pre-Raphaelite paintings, can take on an allegorical significance. The place becomes the exotic, or fairy-tale, setting of Christian virtues; and we may even wonder if the donkeys which share Jessica's living quarters are meant to allude to the Biblical manger and its pictorial representations.

When Jessica is beaten by her drunken mother one evening and runs through the street sobbing, she sees the figure of her friend, Mr Daniel, who is now dressed "in a suit of black, with a white neckcloth" (Stretton [1867] n.d.: 27). She follows him to the church of which he is the verger. Daniel who had been so friendly with Jessica under the railway bridge, now is very determined to turn her away, as this church, he claims, "isn't any place for such as you. It's for ladies and gentlemen" (29). Daniel is afraid his double existence might be discovered and that he might be dismissed for this reason. Jessica manages to find a hiding place to witness the service, and is finally discovered by the clergyman's little daughters whose father now takes it upon him to support and instruct Jessica. Readers might have expected him to adopt her, but then it is Daniel who takes her to his home when she is sick. While the text is ostensibly about Jessica's conversion, it is in fact Daniel who is in need of salvation, and it is Jessica who makes him discover his Christian impulses. He has never realised that his sideline as a coffee-stall keeper in the London East End constitutes the Christian side of his existence, while his occupation as verger, which consists in driving poor people away from the church, is his unchristian one. The division of London into high- and low-ranking places runs counter to these places' respective potential for Christian charity and Christian thankfulness. Jessica, an emblem of Christian humility, thankfulness and love, will live with Mr Daniel because, quite obviously, he needs her more than does the clergyman's family.

Little Meg's Children (1868), a story about a sailor's wife who dies before her husband comes home, leaving three little children to shift for themselves, is set "in the East End of London, more than a mile from St. Paul's Cathedral, and lying near to the docks" (Stretton [1868] n.d.: 5) in a "dismal yard, bearing the name of Angel Court" (6). As Anna Davin notes, the reference to St. Paul's "establishes" the location's "distance from the readers' world" (2001:

[5] Discussing the social work done by women in the London East End towards the end of the nineteenth century, Ellen Ross remarks: "[...] the slums of London were exotic and unknown enough to the reading public before 1918 to enable these women to be thought of as real 'travelers' [...] rather than the derogatory 'excursionists,' 'tourists,' or even 'commuters'" (2007: 26).

[6] As Anna Davin notes, "the happy endings" of waif stories "do usually involve the removal of the waifs rather than requiring them to lead transformed lives in the same slum courts. They are always rescued, whether by death, by Christian friends or by long-lost (and converted) relations" (2001: 85).

91). As the narrator points out, the "labyrinth of roads and dwellings" provides the outsider with no sense of direction, any more than the "pathless solitudes or deserts of shifting sands" (5) found in explorers' accounts from Africa or central Asia; the analogy renders the "sense of otherness" (Davin 2001: 91) explicit. The East-End byways become an exotic backdrop to the story about to unfold. The labyrinthine setting may also remind us of castles in Gothic novels, and of course, Charles Dickens. Readers feel that they would be lost in the "tangled knot of narrow streets and lanes," with its "blind alleys" and "dark gullies" (Stretton [1868] n.d.: 5). Where Dickens at the beginning of *Bleak House* renders central London exotic by a reference to a "Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill" (Dickens [1853] 1971: 49), Stretton's narrator claims "that one needs a guide to thread a way among" the streets and alleys (Stretton [1868] n.d.: 5), alluding to the myth of the Minotaur, with Theseus being in need of Ariadne's thread to find his way back. The references to the houses "dingy and grimed with smoke," the "gloomy light" and the "thick atmosphere" (6) may be inspired by Dickens's evocation of fog (Dickens [1853] 1971: 49-50). At the same time "the squalor of Meg's lodging is […] softened. […] There is no mention of the disgusting realities of the filth in the gutters where the children played […]," as Margaret Nancy Cutt observes (1979: 147). Like Jessica's home, the "dingy" and "dismal" place has a picturesque quality.

The name of Angel Court is of course also significant. The reader will indeed meet with fellow-humans living there whose angel-like virtues form a stark contrast to the squalidness around them, characterised by poverty, alcoholism and prostitution. To her younger siblings, ten-year old Meg acts as an angel; she also takes good care of a treasure of money, which she believes was given to her mother in safekeeping for a sailor. The children are befriended by Kitty, a young woman released from jail who accuses herself of failure and sinfulness, and feels unable to return to her family. Quite obviously she earns some money as a sex-worker.[7] The narrative point is clearly that even in the strange and exotic world of these East-End tenements evidence of God's grace may be found, in unexpected manifestations of human kindness. This evangelical message, as well as the picturesque mode of representation, however, seem to preclude an overly critical attitude with regard to the social conditions described. As with *Jessica's First Prayer*, readers will enjoy these glimpses into a foreign world and admire the Christian virtues displayed by the girls living there, but not feel called upon to effect social change.

Spatial Symbolism: L. T. Meade, *Scamp and I*, *Bel-Marjorie*, *A Dweller in Tents*, *How It All Came Round*

In Stretton's tales, the contrast between the rich and the poor people of London is also given a spatial dimension: Jessica's home belongs to the poor and Mr Daniel's church to the rich parts of London, and Angel Court is situated a mile east of St. Paul's Cathedral. To reach the Cathedral from Angel Court, we obviously need to cross an invisible boundary of respectability. This spatial symbolism is brought to a head in L. T. Meade's evangelical novels which invariably contrast poor London by-ways, usually in the East End, with West End localities (Belgravia, Hyde Park, Trafalgar Square), or 'neutral ground' (Regent's Park, Bloomsbury). The geography of London acquires symbolic significance.

In L. T. Meade's *Scamp and I: A Story of City By-ways* (1877), it is the West End that is first introduced as an exotic place, seen from the point of view of two poor and orphaned

[7] On Kitty's "part-time occupation" cf. Cutt 1979: 174.

children who live in an inner-city cellar. Ten-year-old Dick invites his eight-year-old sister Flo to accompany him on a trip to West-End life:

> "Oh, Dick! *is* it the shops, and the picters, and the fine ladies? *Is* it, Dick?"
> "Yes; queens, and ladies, and lords goin' about in golden carriages, and shops full up to bustin', and we a standin' and a lookin' on. Better'n wittles, eh?"
>
> (Meade [1877] n.d.: 4)

Flo will not be disappointed when she finds herself in "the bright fairy-land of Regent Street," with its "carriages, and grand ladies and gentlemen": "the dresses were so fine, and the feathers so gay, that Flo, when she found herself really in their midst, was speechless, and almost stunned" (6). Dick and Flo then enter into a pretend game, and imagine they are a high-ranking lady and gentleman. While this passage certainly reminds the reader of the scandalous gap between the rich and the poor, this piece of social criticism is set off by the exotic picturesqueness of both the rich and the poor side of London. Just as Dick and Flo wholeheartedly enjoy glimpses at high life, so the reader will enjoy picturing to themself the conditions of life in the siblings' "dark St Giles's cellar" (6) – and learn to respect its inhabitants, and especially Flo, who tries to preserve her brother from embarking upon a criminal career.

In Meade's *Bel-Marjory* (1878), life in poverty, located in the East End, is not only described but also discussed by the novel's main characters who belong to the upper and lower middle classes, but whose work takes them to see the very poor: Marjorie grows up in a run-down house in Bloomsbury, together with her late mother's housekeeper and her housekeeper's son, Peter Desmond. When Peter obtains the post of schoolmaster in Wapping in the East End, the ill-assorted family moves house. Margaret's affections are torn between Peter, her foster-brother, whom she does not love but feels responsible for, and Philip Edgar, a successful and benevolent doctor whom she admires but considers out of her reach.

It is from Philip's point of view that we first get to know the East End, where he goes on a Sunday morning:

> The city was deserted on Sunday; and Edgar was not long in passing its boundary, and finding himself once more in thronged streets, the densely populated streets of the East End. Here buying and selling were going on at a furious rate. The shops were all open, and many of them had turned their contents completely out into the streets.
>
> Unwashed and unshaven men smoked great pipes at many door-sills; women threw refuse out of broken upper windows; dirty children, some of them scarcely a year old, toddled, alone and neglected, across the roadway. The sun poured down its unsheltered rays, and the smell of decayed fruit and vegetables rose high on the air.
>
> (Meade [1878] n.d.: 122)

The contrast between the "deserted" City and the "densely populated streets" renders the "boundary" a border between two civilisations. The furious buying and selling may remind readers of accounts of travels to Mediterranean countries, or India.[8] The sun now "pours down its unsheltered rays," as if the traveller had passed to another continent.

[8] Quoting from Francis Buchanan's descriptions of Gaya and Patna (Bihar, India), written around 1815, John Marriott claims that the streets "are described in terms that would have been familiar to many London residents" (Marriott 2003: 132-3). Given that these descriptions predate the cultural

Philip visits a young woman dying of consumption. He cannot cure her, but in talking to her about Jesus' love for her, he provides comfort and a touch of romance, and the girl dies peacefully, holding Philip's hand. Philip then tells Marjorie about his experience, who, we are told, had never dreamed "of such poverty, such distress, such utter desolation" (127). Her reaction makes him compare her to the dying girl: "'[t]hat child's heart is hungry, starved, neglected,' he said to himself" (128). Philip's East-End story acts as an ice-breaker and brings about that intimacy which societal constraints had so far prevented. Philip's experience could be considered an example of the "certain weird romance" Beatrice Potter (Webb) felt "in and for the slums" (Koven 2004: 183), and significantly it is after discovering Marjorie's sympathy for, and similarity to, the East-End girl whose death he had witnessed, that he begins to feel attracted to Marjorie.

Philip's and Marjorie's attitude is contrasted with Peter's who considers that "a poem on the East End would go down with the public" (Meade [1878] n.d.: 135). When the poem is finished, Marjorie is shocked by its "cynical nature," indicative of a poet "at war with all mankind" (173). Peter defends himself by stating: "[w]e poets, if we perform our mission at all, must proclaim the truth. The world *is* very, very evil, Maggie, and there is little hope of its ever being better" (174). Marjorie, however, contends "that even here in the East End, men and women live who can do Christ-like deeds, who can do them without knowing that they are doing anything good, or anything that will please God" (175). Peter later has an argument with Philip Edgar, who also tells him that even in this horrible place "Christlike acts can be found" (192). One of Peter's scholars, John Jukes, serves as a case in point. We learn that "he was not only poor, but among those dull lads he was the dullest" (189) and that "there was no boy Peter so thoroughly disliked as this one" (189). This John Jukes, however, turns out to be a saint. When Philip and Peter seek out his lodgings, they find a disabled little girl:

> Here in this besotted, debased East End was to be found a child made in the image of God. The face was very fair; also, more strange sight, very clean. Blue veins showed on the intelligent forehead. The hair was yellow, in some shades golden. It was short, and curled about the brow. The eyes were large and blue. Even the little hands of the child were white and refined.
>
> (196)

The neglected child turns out to be beautiful. Her beauty is obviously an outside sign that that the girl is "made in the image of God," that she is human and possesses human dignity. She is John's little sister. As they are orphans, John is doing his utmost to care for her, as she herself explains to Philip and Peter: "'Tis Johnnie as does hevery think for me. 'Ee washes hout my bits o' duds, and makes the room tidy, and washes me hevery mornin' wid 'is hown 'ands" (199). John also helps his sister learn to read, in spite of his hatred for school. Peter realises his mistakes and asks Marjorie to burn his poem. He is now certainly on the road of spiritual recovery, triggered, as we have seen, by an East-End experience.

In *A Dweller in Tents* (1880), the East End only features marginally, but when it does it appears as a forceful symbol of sinfulness. The plot centres around poor but talented David Malcombe who is on the point of proposing to Janet Fairleigh, a well-off farmer's daughter when he is informed that an aunt of his has died, and left the care of his nine-year-old half-brother Douglas to him. Douglas's mother had died giving birth to her son, while Douglas's good-for-nothing father had absconded three months before. Burdened by his new task David leaves Janet to resume his tutoring jobs in London. Janet, however, does not wish to give David up and follows him to London where she contrives to bribe Douglas's father to

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construction of the East End as archetypally 'other,' I would rather argue that Meade's description would have been familiar to readers of Indian travel accounts.

abduct his son from David's care, so that he might consider himself free to marry her. Douglas is taken to his father's place which provides an outside parallel to his inner desolation: "[i]n an attic-room in the extreme East End of London, Douglas sat and cried […]" (Meade [1880] n.d.: 159). He is particularly afraid of his father's return. In a certain state of intoxication his father "would be cruel, very cruel to the child. Sometimes on these occasions he beat him. Always he hurled at him bad and evil words, and the words were almost worse to Douglas than the beating [...]" (160). While the violent habits of Douglas's father may correspond to real-life reports of East-End life, no thought is given to any plan of reforming him. Alcoholism and violence are part of a picture of a hell-like place: "it already seemed to Douglas that he had lived a lifetime in Cooper's Alley, that he had always listened to the voice of scolding women, and heard the curses of bad and drunken men" (160-1). His plight is slightly relieved by "a little lame girl who lived in the cellar of the house," who was "the one bright spot in his little life" (161). As in *Bel-Marjorie*, the place is not altogether forsaken by God.

When the wedding-day of Janet and David is finally fixed, Janet is overcome by remorse, and decides to leave David, to confess to him what she has done, and to make Douglas's father give up his son again. David is given the address of the East-End attic and proceeds to retrieve him, but before he can reach him, he has to brave the realities of East-End life: on the staircase leading to the attic David tries to part two drunk men fighting one another. The men then turn on David instead and give him blows which "came with the weight of a sledge hammer on [his] heart" (201). With the help of a little girl who brings him water "in a broken cup" (201) he recovers and finally reaches his half-brother. Like Christ, he has to descend into hell before he can act as a saviour. The East-End staircase functions as a visualisation of human depravity and sinfulness, but also, in the shape of the girl, of potential humanity and loving-kindness. To the reader it is obvious that Douglas and David will leave the East End for good. It remains an exotic place which serves as a visual (and audible) symbol of evil.

A final evangelical novel for discussion, which makes narrative use of the geography of London is Meade's *How It All Came Round* (1883). The book opens with the introduction of two women, both of whom are twenty-five years of age and both of whom are named Charlotte, who live in very different neighbourhoods. The "rich Charlotte" lives in Prince's Gate, Kensington, the "poor Charlotte" in a shabby street in Kentish Town.

> There could scarcely be a greater contrast than between the small and very shabby house in Kentish Town and the luxurious mansion in Kensington. The parlour of this house – for the drawing-rooms were let to lodgers – was occupied by one woman. She sat by a small, shabbily covered table, writing. The whole appearance of the room was shabby: the furniture, the carpet, the dingy window panes, the tiny pretence of a fire in the grate. It was not exactly a dirty room, but it lacked all brightness and freshness.
>
> (Meade [1883] 1898: 5)

The narrator then elaborates on the effects of poverty on the young woman. Her eyes are smarting because of the smoke from the chimney which "did not draw well," her face is "very pale"; it could have been beautiful, but its "features were too pinched, too underfed the eyes, in themselves dark and heavily fringed, too often dimmed by tears" (5). The rich Charlotte is described as happy and lively, full of literary ambition, and looking forward to her marriage with an aspiring young lawyer. The other Charlotte is married to a poor clergyman; they have three children and are struggling to make ends meet. The doubling of the two Charlottes obviously serves the purpose of illustrating the effects of class and education. Had the poor Charlotte been brought up like the rich Charlotte her character might have been like hers, and vice versa. When the two Charlottes meet and become friends, they will each adopt the other's

good character traits. The rich Charlotte will profit from the poor Charlotte's sense of responsibility and grasp of real life while the poor Charlotte will benefit from the rich Charlotte's generosity and affability.

When the poor Charlotte answers an advertisement by the rich Charlotte who requires the services of a copyist, they find out that they are near relations. The poor Charlotte is the daughter, by a second marriage, of the rich Charlotte's grandfather. The poor Charlotte envies her niece's wealth and suspects that she and her mother had been tricked out of her inheritance by her two half-brothers. The rich Charlotte's pride makes her break off her engagement to the young lawyer, and the poor Charlotte's envy meets with the opposition of her husband, a model clergyman. Members of the two families interact in various ways. Sometimes they meet on "neutral ground" (122), Regent's Park, which, unlike Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, is visited by people of all ranks of society. All of the characters, the rich and the poor alike, have to undergo processes of repentance and reconciliation, of forgiving and asking for forgiveness, of overcoming their own pride and fears before finally a happy ending is reached.

What is particularly remarkable is that the same localities strike different characters in different ways. When the poor Charlotte visits the rich Charlotte's place, she is envious of its luxuries:

> Mrs. Home [...] drew her comfortable easy-chair to the fire, placed her feet upon the neat brass rail, closed her eyes, and tried to fancy herself alone. Had her father lived, such comforts as these would have been matters of everyday occurrence to her. Common as the air she breathed would this grateful warmth be then to her thin limbs, this delicious easy-chair to her aching back.
>
> (34-5)

When the rich Charlotte has an interview with her uncle in the same room, it is described as follows: "[t]he room abounded in easy-chairs of all sizes and descriptions, but she chose one hard and made of cane, and she sat upright upon it, her hands folded on her lap" (50). This is obviously satirical. We may wonder if the "easy-chairs of all sizes and descriptions" really make up a harmonious whole, and we see that the comfort offered by them is not necessarily helpful when weighty family matters are discussed.

In the course of her struggles to come to terms with her father's disgrace, Charlotte's meeting with an extremely poor couple serves as an emotional trigger: she is approached by Hester Wright, the wife of a former servant of Charlotte's family who had stolen a hundred pounds from his master and was dismissed and sent to prison. Mrs Wright asks Charlotte to see her dying husband. The cellar where the Wrights live "was damp, dirty, and ill-smelling, even to the woman who was accustomed to it; to Charlotte it was horrible beyond words" (229). Mr Wright had been told that, before asking God for forgiveness, he had to forgive his old master for his cruelty in sending him to prison, and this is why Mrs Wright asked Charlotte to see them. In the context of the whole book this episode indicates that both rich and poor stand in need of forgiveness, and have the power to forgive. It also reminds readers of the fact that the Kentish Town suburb is not really a poor place as there were many Londoners whose circumstances were much poorer. Readers whose own circumstances may have been closer to those of the poor Charlotte than to those of the rich Charlotte may realise that they are not so badly off after all.

While in these narratives the map of London constitutes a social mapping on the lines of poverty and prosperity, illness and health, this map is by no means congruent with a moral mapping: the demarcations of heaven and hell clearly follow other lines than those which can be marked on a map of London.

Stretton's and Meade's descriptions of poverty obviously constituted a major attraction of their stories for middle-class readers.[9] The East End becomes an exotic and picturesque site, displaying possibilities of life which the West End cannot offer – but which were better experienced vicariously: the stories offer access to places which most readers (who, as Rodgers [2019] suggests, were predominately young and female) would consider no-go areas in real life. Stretton's and Meade's early works can thus be compared to travellers' accounts of remote places of the British Empire or the rest of the world. Like the colonies, and like unexplored tropical regions, the East End localities function as territories of the mind. Stretton's and Meade's East End settings serve as sites of human endeavour, failure and success as well as of moral strength and moral weakness, as symbolic representations of hatred and evil-mindedness but also hidden goodness and love.

By the mid-1880s Meade's evangelical writing came to an end. Henceforth Meade's novels would follow the conventions of social realism in the tradition of Dickens. In *A Princess of the Gutter* (1895) a young heiress, Joan Prinsep, discovers that the wealth she has inherited is based on the rent paid by inhabitants of run-down East-End slum properties, and makes it her life's work to improve the condition of those who had been shamelessly exploited by her late uncle and his employees. With the protagonist taking up "a full life of honest endeavour" (307),[10] *The Princess of the Gutter* aligns itself with the novels about female careers Meade was to write from the 1890s onwards, including *A Sweet Girl Graduate* (1891), *The Medicine Lady* (1892), *A Girl in Ten Thousand* (1896), *Catalina, Art Student* (1896) and *Mary Gifford, M.B.* (1898).[11] While *The Princess of the Gutter* still presents the East End as an abhorrent place, this place has now lost its otherworldly and allegorical quality and become a field of human ambition and even a career option.

Apparently, later in the century, both the evangelical and the picturesque mode have come under suspicion as favouring a preservation of the social *status quo* and easing the consciences of the better-off. George R. Sims, in *How the Poor Live* (1883), comments on the ambivalence of the picturesque mode as a way to engage the reader's interest in the plight of the poor: "[t]he difficulty of getting that element of picturesqueness into these chapters which is so essential to success with a large class of English readers becomes more and more apparent as I and my travelling companion explore region after region where the poor are hidden away to live as best they can" (Sims [1883] 1889: 45). While the picturesque mode may serve to engage his readers' interest, Sims obviously considers it inadequate to what he intends to say.

The critical interest accorded to the slum fiction of the 1880s and 1890s may have obscured other literary trends concerned with the life of the poor in the East End of London.

[9] On Meade's "cross-class appeal" cf. Rodgers 2019: 267.

[10] She receives guidance and help from the Rev. Ranald Moore, who may be compared to the historical Rev. Arthur Barnett who became Vicar of St. Jude's, Whitechapel, in 1873 (Bermant 1975: 89) and "who, with the possible exception of Dr Barnardo, did more to change the East End than any man before or since" (Bermant 1975: 88, cf. Ackroyd [2000] 2001: 679). As Chaim Bermant points out, Barnett "could, it seemed, make his parishioners do almost anything, except come to church [...]. It was, perhaps, the very recognition that he would never bring about a religious revival in Whitechapel that made him and his wife devote more and more of their energies to social and educational work" (90).

[11] As Helen Bittel notices, these novels contain "an affirmation of women's pursuits of middle-class professions" and like Meade's other works "consistently engage with and appear to support social issues associated with New Womanhood: professional and educational opportunities for women and girls; advocacy for single women, and marriage reform" (2006: 10 and 2). As Beth Rodgers suggests, "career novels" reflected "increased working opportunities" or provided "imaginative and aspirational dreams of independence for those who could only read about such exploits" (2016: 183).

As we have seen, evangelical novels by Hesba Stretton and L. T. Meade, written in the 1860s and 1870s, constitute a tradition of writing fiction for children and adults which is highly significant from both the cultural and the literary points of view. By drawing on the tradition of picturesque writing, these novels alerted their readers to a 'foreign' world close to their own doorsteps, that of East End poverty. Within the framework of the evangelical movement, these novels provide intricate character sketches and complex discussions of ethical issues.

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