In addition to his work on logic and *Man’s Origin, Destiny, and Duty*, MacColl also published two novels, *Mr Stranger’s Sealed Packet* (1889) and *Ednor Whitlock* (1891), both of which give the impression that MacColl, in spite of his innovative work in logic, had conservative attitudes and opinions when it came to central questions of the day such as faith and doubt, the role of women, etc. In the following the background against which MacColl’s fictional work as well as his defence of Christianity must be understood, is explored, and his fictional works are related to this background. MacColl’s conception of the issues and the arguments of the time as well as his attitudes to these issues will be compared to those of other “eminent Victorians”, in particular those of men of letters and writers of fiction. The value of such an analysis is not only that it fills out our picture of MacColl, but that it gives insight into what attitudes an intelligent and enlightened Victorian intellectual, whose specialization in logic would well equip him for clear thought, could have of attitudes to and opinions on important questions of the day.

I.

Hugh MacColl was born in 1837, the year of Queen Victoria’s accession to the throne of England. He died in 1909, eight years after the Queen’s reign had ended. In that year he published *Man’s Origin, Destiny, and Duty* (Williams and Norgate, London, 1909), a defence of a theistic position on the Christian faith against the onslaught of materialist science and evolutionary biology. It is a work deeply concerned with problems of faith and doubt, religion and science; problems that we recognize as centrally Victorian problems. In addition to *Man’s Origin, Destiny, and Duty* and his work on logic, MacColl also published two novels, *Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1889) and *Ednor Whitlock* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1891).
Though the two novels are different, they share a number of motifs and concerns, and, particularly in *Ednor Whitlock*, MacColl anticipates a number of the arguments he was later to spell out in *Man’s Origin, Destiny, and Duty*.

Neither *Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet* nor *Ednor Whitlock* are great works of literature. Their value lies elsewhere. They are novels not written out of any absorbing literary ambition, but because the author had enthusiasms and concerns he wanted to share with a greater public and, where necessary, he wanted to educate that public. The novels thus provide interesting insight into MacColl’s concerns and opinions outside his special field. Such information is always welcome to the biographer of any eminent specialist. More important is that MacColl’s concerns and opinions were those of an intelligent and enlightened Victorian intellectual. Intellectual history tends to concentrate on those who rebelled or refused to conform, and there is often an assumption that enlightened people of any period would hold views that the 20th century liberal academic could recognise as enlightened. Indeed, much left-wing literature on the role of the “intellectual” tends to include an anti-establishment, critical attitude as part of the definition of an intellectual. That Hugh MacColl should turn out to have typically conservative Victorian attitudes to and hold typically conservative Victorian views on important intellectual questions, may help us to realise how deeply these attitudes and views were entrenched in the outlook of even well informed and intelligent Victorians whom the 20th century liberal academic would expect to hold more “enlightened” views.

II.

Before proceeding to discuss MacColl’s attitude and views in relation to those of his time, a brief look at the more technical aspects of his novels will reveal that in some respects MacColl was surprisingly modern. Both novels are the product of the new way of publishing fiction that spread in the 1880s and 1890s and that gave birth to the one-volume, well-focused novel that became the standard novelistic mode in the 20th century. One of the most profound changes in England towards the end of the last century was the emergence of the generation that had been educated under Forster’s Education Act, which had been passed by Parliament in 1870.¹ The main effect of

¹In 1870 W. E. Forster piloted the Elementary Education Act through parliament. It was a result of the obvious failure of the voluntary schools of the religious organisations to provide elementary education for all. The act did not do away with the voluntary schools, but empowered the government to “fill the gaps.” In
this act was a rapid increase in literacy that created a vast new mass readership.\textsuperscript{2} The emergence of such a numerous readership had two consequences. It represented a large new market for authors and publishers of fiction, and a market that could not be supplied through the circulating libraries. Because of its very size, it was also a readership that offered large economic rewards for those who could capture their attention. Secondly, it was a readership that exercised no discrimination in aesthetic matters, and that was essentially uneducated in the traditional sense. In other words, both the economics and the aesthetics of book publication changed. The cheap, one-volume novel took over from the Victorian three-decker novel, and a new kind of fiction

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the districts where no voluntary schools existed, it set up local School Boards to be responsible for education, with power to provide and maintain elementary education out of public funds. The act did not in itself make school attendance compulsory, but it did empower the School Boards to make attendance compulsory within their districts. At that time it would have been impossible to enforce compulsory attendance everywhere, since there were simply not enough places for all children of the relevant age group. To this day there is no national legal requirement in England that a child should attend school, though there is a requirement, laid down in 1880, that parents and local authorities be responsible for children between stated ages being efficiently educated in accordance with the requirements laid down by law.


Forster’s Education Acts of 1870 provided compulsory primary education for all, and the result, over the years, was an enormous increase in the reading public. But the gap between the best education and the worst was so great that the highbrow–lowbrow dichotomy with which we are now wearisomely familiar was inevitable. (p. 260)


The “Revolt of the Masses” which these cultural celebrities deplored was shaped by different factors in each European country. In England, the educational legislation of the last decades of the nineteenth century, which introduced universal elementary education, was crucial. The difference between the nineteenth-century mob and the twentieth-century mass is literacy. For the first time, a huge literate public had come into being, and consequently every aspect of the production and dissemination of the printed text became subject to revolution. (p. 5)

An alternative view is presented by Patricia Anderson in \textit{The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture 1790–1860} (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991). Anderson argues that the transformation of popular culture into mass culture started in the early 1830s and had been more or less completed by 1860. However, though Anderson’s evidence establishes that there was a considerable literate public in existence before Forster’s Education Act, it does not challenge the conventional view that there was a \textit{dramatic expansion} of this audience in the late 1870s and 1880s.
appeared that had no aesthetic pretensions, but simply aimed at providing undemanding entertainment for the new mass readership. But if the new mass audience held out the promise of economic reward for those who wanted to pander to their simple tastes, it also offered an opportunity to the writer who wanted to educate, inform and persuade the large number of people who would not naturally participate in the discussion of, nor know much about, the great questions of the day. Both MacColl’s novels belong to this new kind of relatively short one volume novel, and both have a strong didactic element, explaining issues of science and religion to those semi-educated people who would have no deeper understanding of them as well as arguing strongly and simply for certain points of view on these matters.

MacColl, at least in *Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet*, is modern also in some of the narrative techniques he employs and in his choice of subjects. In *Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet* there is a development of the device of embedded narration. The novel has a frame-story with a first-person narrator who receives a sealed packet from Mr. Stranger containing a manuscript which he is authorised to publish if Mr. Stranger himself fails to reappear within a period of five years. The main narrative is to be found in this manuscript. This device is not itself new. It goes back to the very beginning of the novel in England in the 18th century when it was common to provide a mock preface by “the editor” of the story which the novel presented. The usual function of these prefaces was to confer credibility to the story by providing it with a genealogy. However, the framing device goes much further in *Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet*, where the reader is presented with a narrator who is a colleague of Mr. Stranger in the school where he works as a science master. The narrator, Percy Jones, is the English master, and in addition to him, the reader is presented with the mathematical master, Richard Johnson, and the classical master, John Greywood. They constitute both an audience for the story of the voyage to Mars when it is finally published, as well as a panel of judges on Mr. Stranger’s character and the credibility of his story. By virtue of their different academic backgrounds they represent different perspectives and thus have different views to offer on the plausibility and possibility of Mr. Stranger’s story. The credibility of Mr. Stranger’s story is thus made a theme of the novel in itself. However, MacColl makes a much more naïve use of the device of embedded narrative than Joseph Conrad would do only a few years later in his Marlow stories, where, in particular in *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Heart of Darkness* (1902), the very possibility of arriving at truth through narrative is put in question through this narrative technique. Indeed, one might argue that MacColl does not even utilise
the potential of the device to the extent that some of his predecessors, like Emily Brontë, did. However, this may be because MacColl had a much simpler goal: to instruct a broadly ignorant audience in the possibilities opened up by science. For this purpose an audience of schoolmasters with different backgrounds would be well suited to offer comments on Stranger’s discoveries and the use to which he put them.

MacColl’s use of a device such as the embedded narrative indicates a certain level of interest in and consciousness of the problems of literary craftsmanship. Such an interest is, perhaps, no more than one should expect from someone who for “twelve or thirteen years . . . devoted [his] leisure hours to general literature.”

III.

In Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet, MacColl was also something of a pioneer in his choice of subject. It was the third novel in English about Mars to be published. In 1880 Percy Gregg published Across the Zodiac, and in 1887 Hudor Genone published yet another novel with Mars as its subject, Bellona’s Bridegroom: A Romance. MacColl’s Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet then followed in 1889, and before the turn of the century, another eleven novels about Mars were published in English. Among these was the most famous novel ever to be published about Mars, H. G. Wells The War of the Worlds (1898). Mars in

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3In Wuthering Heights (1847) the narrator, Lockwood, retells a story, told him by the sceptical and down-to-earth Nelly Dean, which he does not really understand. Lockwood is the sophisticated city man to whom the Yorkshire Moors, where the elements play freely, are unfamiliar, and who therefore finds it difficult to grasp the elemental aspect of the love between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff.


5Camille Flammarion, Uranie (1890); Mortimer Leggett, A Dream of a Modest Prophet (1890); Robert Cromie, A Plunge into Space (1891); Alice Jones, Ilgenfritz and Ella Marchant, Unveiling a Parallel: A Romance (1893); Gustavus W. Pope, Romances of the Planets, No. 1: Journey to Mars, the Wonderful World: Its Beauty and Splendor: Its Mighty Races and Kingdoms: Its Final Doom (1894); James Cowan, Daybreak: a Romance of an Old World (1896); George DuMaurier, The Martian (1897); Kurd Lasswitz, Two Planets (1897); H. G. Wells, The War of the Worlds (1898); Ellsworth Douglas, Pharaoh’s Broker: Being the Very Remarkable Experiences in Another World of Isior Werner. Written by Himself (1899). The frequency and number of novels about Mars increases further in the first decades of the 20th Century. The above listed books are to be found on the BookBrowser site on the Internet at http://www.bookbrowser.com/TitleTopic/mars.html This bibliography lists novels about Mars chronologically as well as by author. An even fuller bibliography comprising all fictional stories about Mars has been compiled by Gene Alloway, Senior Associate Librarian, University of Michigan (NSF/NASA/ARPA Digital Library Project), available on the Internet (http://www-personal.engin.umich.edu/~cerebus/mars/index.html#bibs).
those days was a topic made popular by new discoveries about the Red Planet. In 1877, the American astronomer, Asaph Hall (1829–1907), had discovered the two moons of Mars, Deimos and Phobos, and calculated their orbits. More importantly for imaginative literature, in the same year the Italian astronomer and senator Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli (1835–1910) reported to have observed groups of straight lines on Mars. Schiaparelli called the peculiar markings he observed canali. The word, erroneously translated into English as “canals” instead of “channels,” led to widespread speculation whether the “canals” were constructed by intelligent beings, and thus touched off much controversy about the possible existence of life on that planet. Oddly enough MacColl does not mention these discoveries. In his voyage to Mars, Stranger observes the two satellites of Mars and even alights on one of them, but there is no reference to their recent discovery by Hall. And MacColl does not mention and makes no use of the “canal” theory. However, the novel does make full use of known scientific theories and facts to make Stranger’s story as plausible as possible. Stranger himself is an example of a new breed, the professional scientists, who all through the latter half of the 19th century were hard at work establishing their position as a professional class.6 Stranger, when his father dies, withdraws from his public school, Classicton,7 to carry out his father’s wish that he should dedicate himself exclusively to science:

Classics were to be completely thrown aside, and I was to devote myself wholly to science, and especially to mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, electricity, and practical mechanical engineering—a sufficiently wide curriculum. (pp. 22–23)

6The term “scientist” was not coined until the mid 1830s. The Oxford English Dictionary (2nd ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992) quotes an article from the Quarterly Review in 1834, where the problem of what to call men doing science is discussed:

Science . . . loses all traces of unity. A curious illustration of this result may be observed in the want of any name by which we can designate the students of the knowledge of the material world collectively. We are informed that this difficulty was felt very oppressively by the members of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, at their meetings . . . in the last three summers. . . . Philosophers was felt to be too wide and too lofty a term, . . .; savans was rather assuming, . . .; some ingenious gentleman proposed that, by analogy with artist, they might form scientist, and added that there could be no scruple in making free with this termination when we have such words as sciolist, economist, and atheist—but this was not generally palatable. (1834 Q. Rev. LI. 59)

This is to enable him to finish the development of the theories and discoveries that his father has made and to build a machine that can take him into space. MacColl goes into some detail about these theories and discoveries, in the same way as he later gives detailed descriptions of what Earth and Mars look like from space. Stranger’s spaceship can produce artificial gravitation, and this gives MacColl the opportunity to make some effective points about the relative nature of spatial position and of the terms “up” and “down.” In cases like this MacColl’s didactic purpose becomes irritating. He repeats and reinforces the explanations of apparently paradoxical observations that his interplanetary voyagers make, to an extent where it becomes annoying to the reader.

However, when it comes to describing the spaceship itself and, later, the planet Mars and its inhabitants, MacColl falls back on the world he knows. This, as has been observed by Arthur Danto, is a general feature of science fiction. “Nothing so much belongs to its own time,” says Danto,

as an age’s glimpse into the future: Buck Rogers carries the decorative idioms of the 1930s into the twenty-first century, and now looks at home with Rockefeller Center and the Cord automobile; the science fiction novels of the 1950s project the sexual moralities of the Eisenhower era, along with the dry martini, into distant eons, and the technical clothing worn by its spacemen belong to that era’s haberdashery.8

It is certainly true that MacColl’s description of Mr. Stranger’s spaceship and the society he meets on Mars is deeply Victorian. The spaceship has the form of a cigar, the form of the projectiles of the day as well as of the airships that were then being built in Germany and France. It is controlled by handles and wheels, just as a train engine in those days would have been, except that the wheels and handles are made of ivory.9 Mars itself is like Earth, with a few elements

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7This unsubtle reference to the domination of classical languages in the curricula of the Public Schools and their neglect of scientific subjects indicates that MacColl had in mind a readership that needed this sort of blatant hint.


9It is worthwhile continuing Danto’s remarks on visions of the future here: Robida [in Le vingtième siècle (1882)] imagined there would be restaurants in the sky to which customers would come in airborne vehicles. But the boldly anticipated eating places are put together of ornamental ironworks of the sort we associate with Les Halles and the Gare St. Lazare, and look a lot like the steamboats that floated the Mississippi at that time, in proportion and in decorative fretwork. They are patronized by gentlemen in top hats and ladies in bustles, served by waiters wearing long aprons from the Belle Epoque, and they arrive in balloons Montgolfier would recognize. (Ibid. p. 82)
added from recent discoveries of remains of prehistoric animals, so that Mars at times becomes a kind of Jurassic Park which Mr. Stranger describes for the reader’s entertainment. Similarly, the scenery is that of Earth, but with a few changes of colour to explain why Mars is the Red Planet. It is also more majestic and more beautiful than even MacColl’s native Scotland, though one suspects that Switzerland or Norway could probably hold their own with Mars in so far as scenery is concerned:

It was a glorious spectacle. A majestic ocean lay before me, rolling its heavy swell against the rocky bases of a long, sweeping range of precipitous mountains underneath me. This range was broken and indented in many places by deep ravines, down which foaming torrents rushed headlong, forming numberless cascades and waterfalls, the confused noise of which was almost deafening. The sea ran in among the clefts and fissures of the rocky shore in long and narrow streaks—in some places cutting whole portions off and forming them into islands. (p. 51)

The Martians turn out to be human and not merely humanoid, having been transferred to Mars in a prehistoric catastrophe when Mars came so close to the Earth that its gravitational pull transferred a large number of people to its surface. Their only biological difference from Stranger is that their skin colour is bluish, and that they have large hazel eyes. Both features are caused by the food they eat, and are acquired by Stranger when he makes a longer stay on the planet. The Martians dress uniformly in what looks essentially like a Victorian bathing suit:

They all, men, women, and children wore dresses of the same uniform pattern—a single garment, like a bathing dress, which covered the whole body with the upper portions of the arms and legs, exposing the head and neck, the hands and arms to a little above the elbow, and the feet and legs to a little below the knee. Though the sexes were not distinguished by any difference in the pattern of their dresses, they were strongly distinguished by their difference of colour: the dresses of the men and boys were uniformly and without exception red; that of the women and girls uniformly and without exception green. Both sexes had short, black, curly hair. (pp. 71–72)

They have all the normal human reactions, indeed, to a great extent they feel, act, and speak like Victorians. Stranger is taken into a family, having rescued one of the children from certain death, and, of course, falls in love with the daughter of that family, Ree. She turns out to be all you could expect of a Victorian woman. She is docile, obedient to her parents and to her husband, when she becomes Stranger’s wife. She is emotional, her “bosom heaves” on several occasions when she becomes agitated. But she also has that inner emotional strength and
wisdom that made a woman the angel of the house and the guardian of the central values of home and hearth: love, compassion, faithfulness. She thus comes very close to being the ideal woman described by Ruskin in “Of Queens’ Garden.”

The adventure story involving travel and exploration was a traditional genre often employed to present the reader to a Utopian society that could be used as a point of reference for criticism of one’s own contemporary society. There is a clear Utopian character to the Martian society that MacColl describes. It is a rational society and rationality produces uniformity. There is no foolish vanity of dress. Everyone dresses alike. Le Corbusier would have felt at home in the architectural environment. The buildings are functional and uniform in design as well as in the building-material, a marble-like substance that is neither “wood, stone, nor metal.” The interiors are unadorned. The food is simple but healthy and produced by a chemical process from substances extracted from the air. There is no illness on Mars. And when Stranger brings his fiancée back to Earth simply for a sightseeing trip, she dies because she has no resistance to the bacteria there.

The absence of illness is paralleled by an absence of conflict in the society of the Grensum, which is the name of the people Stranger is first introduced to. A council of elders settles all controversial issues. There seems to be an influence of MacColl’s Scottish background here: the society is a Presbyterian one with a strong puritan element.

Though the society is technologically advanced in that it has self-propelling carriages, electric light and phonographic machines that can

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10[Woman] must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side: wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service—the true changefulness of woman. (John Ruskin, Sesame and Lilies, II, “Of Queens’ Garden”, 1871 (World’s Classics, London, 1916), pp. 99–100)

11MacColl is apparently not the first to make use of the death of a Martian through Terran bacterial exposure. In Percy Gregg’s two-volume Across the Zodiac (1880), “Gregg’s hero travels to Mars in a vehicle powered by an antigravity device . . . and encounters Martians so completely human that he takes several of them as wives. One of them, alas, dies of an Earthy disease against which she has no resistance” (Arthur C. Clarke, “Introduction” to the Everyman edition (J. M. Dent, London, 1993) of H. G. Wells, The War of the Worlds, italics in the text). H. G. Wells, of course made very effective use of this device in The War of the Worlds.

12The MacColls were not Presbyterians, but members of the Episcopal Church of Scotland. Hugh MacColl’s mother, however, was a Gaelic-speaking Presbyterian who joined the Episcopal Church on her marriage. (See Michael Aston, Ivor Grattan-Guinness, and Stephen Read, “A Biographical Note on Hugh MacColl,” History and Philosophy of Logic (forthcoming).)
register speech as writing, it lacks totally the technology of war. There are no guns and only some very simple defensive weapons. This is a disadvantage as there is an external enemy, a barbarian people called the Dergdunin. The war with the barbarians gives Stranger the opportunity to play the hero, as the spaceship is also equipped for defence and attack. MacColl characterises this conflict in very simple, not to say simplistic, moral terms. The barbarian-civilised distinction is absolute. There is no moral nuance. The barbarians are bad and deserve everything they get.

The same simplistic moralism and moral self-righteousness manifest themselves in the attitude Stranger displays to animals. Without a tinge of irony MacColl describes how Stranger becomes morally enraged by the aggressive animals he meets on his travels. The animals, like the barbarians, are brutes not only in the naturalistic sense, but in the moral sense. On one occasion he shoots and kills a tiger-like animal that is pursuing a small rabbit. As Stranger sees it, this is protecting the weak from the strong. Neither he, nor his companions, his fiancée, her brother and her mother, are able to adopt the wider perspective in which killing the tiger is essentially no different from the tiger killing the rabbit. Both in the attitude to animals and in the attitude to the barbarians it is possible to see Victorian moral smugness and an attitude of moral self-righteousness, an unquestioning belief in the superiority of one’s own values that was a necessary precondition for the imperial venture: Stranger goes to Mars to colonise.

Though MacColl to a certain extent presents the Martian society as a Utopian one where Stranger decides he wants to spend the rest of his life, MacColl makes little of use of this Utopia to comment on contemporary British society. As I have tried to indicate in the above discussion, MacColl was too deeply committed to the moral and social values of his own society to criticise it effectively. This certainly says something about MacColl’s conservatism, in particular if we remind ourselves that 19th century Britain was excruciatingly self-critical. By the time MacColl wrote *Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet*, he had available to him the whole crop of social and cultural criticism that had been steadily and vociferously produced throughout the century by Carlyle, Arnold, Mill, Ruskin, and Morris (who, in the year after the publication of *Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet*, himself published his utopian novel, *News from Nowhere*).
IV.

Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet gives a clear impression that MacColl was knowledgeable about science and scientific debates as well as an enthusiast for science. The novel has a scientific ethos. The characters move in a world governed by scientific laws which man and the Martians utilise for their benefit. Where possible, MacColl explains the scientific laws at work, and, as noted above, he repeatedly comes back to certain concepts like relative movement and explores the apparent paradoxical phenomena that arise because man tends to experience movement and position as absolute. There is, furthermore, no disapproval in his treatment of Stranger as the modern, professional scientist who must give up all humanistic studies to dedicate his life to science. The endorsement of science is not, however, unproblematic for MacColl. For the Victorian Period saw science develop to a stage where it came into conflict, or, as some saw it, apparent conflict, with the revealed truths of the Christian religion.

It is this conflict between science and religion and the related problems of faith, doubt, and unbelief that MacColl seeks to tackle in his second novel, Ednor Whitlock. Ednor Whitlock, the son of a clergyman, is a young lad of nineteen who, when he one day seeks shelter from the rain in the local library, by chance picks up an issue of the Westminster Review. His eyes fall accidentally on an article arguing the untenability of the Christian belief in the resurrection of Christ. He becomes absorbed in the argument, and his faith is shaken to the extent that he decides against taking Holy Orders, something that he up to that moment had been planning on doing after completing his degree at Cambridge. Shortly after this, Ednor’s father and mother die of typhus and Ednor and his sister, Ethel, two years his senior, are left to face the world alone in a struggle for existence.

Ednor obtains a position as a teacher in the family of the Reverend George Milford who succeeds Ednor’s father as Rector in the parish of Wishport. Ethel also takes up teaching, accepting a post as an

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13In 1851 John Chapman became the editor and proprietor of the Westminster Review. He was also a publisher, “mainly of books which were theologically heretical, and, I am sorry to say, did not pay” (William Hale White, The Early Life of Mark Rutherford (London, 1913), p. 82). Alvar Ellegård classifies the Westminster Review as politically radical, highbrow, and neutral in religious questions. He also gives it a full score on all occasions when it discussed Darwin’s theories, for support both of the Theory of Evolution in its general application and for the theory as applied to man. See Alvar Ellegård, Darwin and the General Reader. The Reception of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution in the British Periodical Press, 1859–1872 (Almqvist & Wiksell, Gothenburg, 1958) p. 384.
English teacher in a private school run by a Mademoiselle Lacour in the French town of Blouville. When the Reverend Milford’s son wins a scholarship to a public school, Ednor too seeks and gets a position at a school in Blouville as a mathematics tutor, maths being his special subject. The school is run by an Englishman, Charles Hubert Kent, M.A., of Trinity College, Cambridge (p. 90). Mr. Kent is known as the “Blouville crammer”:

He prepared young men for the English competitive examinations, especially the examinations for the Army and Indian Civil Service. He had selected Blouville for his scholastic establishment in order to give his pupils greater facilities for learning the French language, for which a good many marks were allotted in the said examinations. (p. 52)

In Mr. Kent’s house Ednor meets and falls in love with Laura Kent, Mr. and Mrs. Kent’s only child, who is also a day pupil at Mademoiselle Lacour’s establishment. In spite of a fleeting attraction to Amy Milford, the Reverend Milford’s beautiful daughter, who also enters Mademoiselle Lacour’s school, Laura Kent becomes the object of his mature love. He does well in Mr. Kent’s school and is accepted as a suitor for Laura by her parents, provided he shows that he can support her in a decent manner. In order to do this, he enters, at the end of the book, for an external degree at University College, London and achieves an honours degree there:

As soon as Ednor had taken his degree, Mr. and Mrs. Kent allowed his probationary engagement with their daughter to terminate in the way which all had hoped, namely, in the intimate, lifelong union of marriage. (p. 340)

Part of the narrative focuses on Ethel’s life and work in Mademoiselle Lacour’s school. Ethel is contrasted with both Mademoiselle Lacour herself and the German teacher, Fräulein Hartmann. The contrast between the English Ethel and the very French Mademoiselle Lacour is a source of amusement and light comedy, but MacColl gives an unflattering portrait of Fräulein Hartmann. It is clear that the many years that he had already taught in a Boulogne school when he wrote the novel, had led him to share French prejudices against the Germans. However, Fräulein Hartmann is half-English as well as half-German, though for most of the novel she hides her English ancestry. She is, as are most of the other characters, a foil to Ednor and Ethel, but she is developed much further. She is the only character in the book in addition to Ednor who is described relatively fully and who is given a role to play in a subplot that is used to define her. She has a doubtful past, she is an evil force in the present, but then she is reformed through love and reaches a new faith by feeling rather than, like Ednor, by reason.
V.

As a novel of faith and doubt Ednor Whitlock joins a number of other novels that were written in the latter part of the century such as Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh* (written 1873–1884, published 1903); William Hale White’s Mark Rutherford trilogy, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881), *Mark Rutherford’s Deliverance* (1885), and *The Revolution in Tanner’s Lane* (1887); Mrs. Humphrey Ward’s *Robert Elsmere* (1888); and Edmund Gosse’s autobiographical *Father and Son* (1907). These novels are either spiritual autobiographies or stories about conflict between two generations. In the first category the conflict between faith and doubt takes place within the individual conscience and the reader is presented with the spiritual struggle and the suffering connected with this struggle. It is a testimony to the religious vigour of the age that both the struggle and suffering are intense and of long duration, and that considerable imaginative effort is expended on portraying the conflict. The outcome is neither predetermined nor uniform. In literature, as in life, some succeeded in reaffirming an (often modified) Christian faith, while others became agnostics (a term invented by Thomas Huxley)\(^{14}\) or even atheists.

The conflict appears not only in late Victorian novels. The best known literary example of this struggle is Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A. H. H.* written in the period from 1833 to 1850, long before the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*.\(^{15}\) Tennyson is also the standard literary example of one who won through to a reaffirmation of his belief in

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\text{That God, which ever lives and loves,}
\text{One God, one law, one element,}
\text{And one far-off divine event,}
\text{To which the whole creation moves.}
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*In Memoriam A. H. H.*, Epilogue, pp. 141–44

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\(^{14}\)“Suggested by Prof. Huxley at a party held prior to the formation of the now defunct Metaphysical Society, at Mr. James Knowles’s house on Clapham Common, one evening in 1869, in my hearing. He took it from St. Paul’s mention of the altar to ‘the Unknown God’. R. H. Hutton, in a letter of 13 March 1881.” (Excerpted from the *O.E.D.*, entry A under Agnostic.)

\(^{15}\)The state of public knowledge of and interest in theories of evolution prior to the publication of *The Origin* is perhaps best illustrated by the popular and anonymously published *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844):

Its message was that the transformation of species was not merely a fact but a law. Chambers drew on developments in astronomy, evidence from fossils and comparative embryology, the popular science of phrenology (which promised character
And if Tennyson is the standard literary example of one who was able to reaffirm his faith, Matthew Arnold in “Dover Beach” (1867) is the standard literary example of one who came to see the world as emptied of divine purpose:

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

The outcome of the struggle between faith and doubt was also socially important, though much more so early in the century than towards the end. A rejection of Christian faith involved the rejection not only of a world view but of the world in which the protagonist had grown up: of parents, brothers and sisters, friends, neighbours etc. Thus it also involved the loss of place, of what had been one’s home on this earth. Mark Rutherford not only rejects the doctrines of a narrow Calvinistic dissent, but also the world that goes with it, a world that is portrayed in some detail in the first chapter of The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford. This is the world of what Matthew Arnold called the “Dissidence of Dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant Religion”, “a life of jealousy of the Establishment, disputes, tea-meetings, openings of chapels, sermons . . . .”16 However, as “unlovely”,

determination from the topography of bumps on the head), even experiments purporting to show the in vitro production of microorganisms—all to make the point that the scientific elite who were denying organic evolution were missing the wood for the trees. All that was required for the emergence of new species was an abnormally long period of gestation in the development of an embryo. Widely considered a recipe for disaster, his book sold like hotcakes. (John Hedley Brooke, Science and Religion. Some Historical Perspectives (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), p. 222)

The book was written by the Edinburgh publisher Robert Chambers and went through eleven editions of about 24,000 copies up to 1860. See Alvar Ellegård, op. cit., p. 11. Ellegård also has an interesting comparison between the impact on the wider public made by Chambers’ Vestiges and Darwin’s The Origin (ibid., p. 333). A twelfth edition of Vestiges was published in 1884. See also David Knight, The Age of Science, pp. 50–51.

“unattractive”, “incomplete”, and “narrow” as life in this world may have been, it is the world to which Rutherford had belonged from childhood. Rejecting it, he experiences a loss of community. Resigning his post as a Dissenting minister, he loses his career and his direction and becomes a wanderer physically as well as spiritually. Rutherford’s loss of career is representative. Until late in the century loss of faith also had implications for careers and career prospects. Intellectuals who were atheists or agnostics could not be employed by the ancient universities, nor by the major employer of intellectuals in 19th-century England, the Church of England.

In the other type of novel about faith and doubt the struggle is externalised. It becomes a struggle between the religious orthodoxy of the older generation and the rejection of that orthodoxy by the younger generation. This struggle is against both parental and, in particular, patriarchal authority, as well as a revolt against the unthinking way in which the orthodoxy is practised and imposed on the younger generation by authoritarian means. The struggle is as intense as is the internal struggle, and at times tragic since it divides the new generation from its roots. However, when the conflict is a generational one, the loss of faith does not necessarily lead to the dark mood of despair hinted at in Arnold’s poem and exemplified above all by Mark Rutherford’s mood towards the end of The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford. Nor does the loss of faith lead, as it does with the protagonist of Robert Elsmere, to a desperate search for a new faith to replace the old. On the contrary, the rejection of orthodoxy is often felt as a liberation that goes together with the liberation from parental tyranny. Ernest Pontifex (in The Way of All Flesh) and Edmund Gosse (in Father and Son) represent a new secularised man for whom religious orthodoxy has ceased to be important. When Ernest Pontifex publishes his first book, its aim is to demonstrate an openness of mind that is precluded by any form of orthodoxy:

The writer urged that we become persecutors as a matter of course as soon as we begin to feel very strongly upon any subject; we ought not therefore to do this; we ought not to feel very strongly even upon that institution which was dearer to the writer than any other—the Church of England. We should be churchmen, but somewhat lukewarm churchmen, inasmuch as those who care very much about either religion or irreligion are seldom observed to be very well bred or agreeable people.  

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17 Ibid., p. 103.


... a series of semi-theological, semi-social essays, purporting to have been written
And when Edmund Gosse sums up his experience of being brought up by orthodox parents, the emphasis is on the narrowness of mind, the joylessness, and the “spirit of condemnation” of orthodox religion:

Let me speak plainly. After my long experience, after my patience and forbearance, I have surely the right to protest against the untruth (would that I could apply to it any other word!) that evangelical religion, or any religion in a violent form, is a wholesome or valuable or desirable adjunct to human life. It divides heart from heart. It sets up a vain, chimerical ideal, in the barren pursuit of which all the tender, indulgent affections, all the genial play of life, all the exquisite pleasures and soft resignations of the body, all that enlarges and calms the soul are exchanged for what is harsh and void and negative. It encourages a stern and ignorant spirit of condemnation; it throws altogether out of gear the healthy movement of the conscience; it invents virtues which are sterile and cruel; it invents sins which are no sins at all, but which darken the heaven of innocent joy with futile clouds of remorse. There is something horrible, if we will bring ourselves to face it, in the fanaticism that can do nothing with this pathetic and fugitive existence of ours but treat it as if it were the uncomfortable antechamber to a palace which no one has explored and of the plan of which we know absolutely nothing.\textsuperscript{19}

VI.

\textit{Ednor Whitlock} has elements of both spiritual biography and the novel of generational struggle. The protagonist is a young man whose faith is undermined by exposure to new scientific ideas and to the historical criticism of the \textit{Bible}, and the novel chronicles his spiritual crisis and the journey towards a reaffirmed but modified Christian faith. The spiritual crisis is compounded by Ednor’s realisation of the devastating effect his apostasy will have on his parents and his sister, and by the practical consequence that he cannot now take orders in the Church of England as planned. Like Mark Rutherford, whose loss of faith leaves “a God shaped hole in [his] heart,”\textsuperscript{20} Ednor considers his loss of faith a

\textsuperscript{19}Edmund Gosse, \textit{Father and Son} (1907) (Alan Sutton, Gloucester, 1984), p. 197.

\textsuperscript{20}The expression is used by William S. Peterson in his introduction to the \textit{World’s Classics} edition of the book, p. ix.
personal catastrophe and not a release from tyranny; and like Robert Elsmere, “the religious man,” he struggles to regain his faith. Like the protagonists of both types of novels, he must leave his parental home and the traditional and familiar surroundings in which he has grown up, though the reason is the death of his parents rather than his loss of faith.

Ednor, like Ernest Pontifex and Edmund Gosse, is the son of orthodox parents:

From his childhood he had breathed a religious atmosphere. His father was a clergyman of the strictest orthodoxy, as well as zealous, energetic, and sincerely pious; his mother shared her husband’s views and feelings; and he himself, with the full approval of both parents, intended to take Holy Orders.

And, like them, he is of the young generation that grew to maturity in the years after the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin*, and of *Essays and Reviews* (1860) which brought to the attention of a wider English public the conclusions and implications of the so-called “German Higher Criticism.”

However, the interest of *Ednor Whitlock* is in the ways in which it differs from the better known novels of faith and doubt. Though Ednor is brought up by orthodox parents, he does not rebel. He is not oppressed by orthodox religion like the protagonists of the novels of generational conflict. Indeed, MacColl removes the whole problem of generational conflict by letting Ednor’s parents die at the very beginning of the book. And though Ednor comes to doubt the basic doctrines of Christianity, he retains, in his ways of thinking, his morals, and his behaviour the characteristics of the Puritan believer. It is not merely, as he assures his sister, that

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21Elsmere is contrasted with the atheist Squire Roger Wendover, steeped in the latest German textual scholarship and theories, who presents to Elsmere the arguments against miracles in general and in particular the arguments against the resurrection of Christ. Wendover, however, is “constitutionally” different from Elsmere in not having a religious nature:

Had he ever yet grasped the meaning of religion to the religious man! God and faith—what have these venerable ideas ever mattered to him personally, except as the subjects of the most ingenious analysis, the most delicate historical inductions? Not only sceptical to the core, but constitutionally indifferent, the squire had always found enough to make life amply worth living in the mere dissection of other men’s beliefs. (Mrs. Humphrey Ward, *Robert Elsmere* (1888) ([World’s Classics, Oxford, 1987](https://www.worldscapes.com/)), p. 373)

22David Friedrich Strauss’ *Das Leben Jesu* ([The Life of Jesus Critically Examined](https://www.americanbookcompany.com/)) had been translated from the German by George Eliot in 1846.
whatever might be his uncertainties with reference to some articles of faith, his moral sense was not affected thereby. The path of duty, he said, was still clear and distinct, and he would always endeavour to tread in it. (p. 49)

In this respect Ednor resembles a large group of distinguished Victorians who all had ceased to believe in the metaphysical claims made by the *Bible*, but who retained the conviction of the truth of Christian morality. It is rather that Ednor is modest and sober to an extent that would please the most committed Puritan:

“You are not a teetotaler, I suppose?”
“No; but I seldom touch spirits.”
“Quite right; I am glad to hear it. Your predecessor, though an excellent teacher, gave me some trouble in that way.” (p. 91)

He blushes when he must encounter the other sex, displaying the sort of modesty that would win him favour with anxious parents of good-looking daughters:

The lad blushed as he walked up in answer to the summons, partly from pleasure at the thought of being near Miss Kent, partly also from his natural timidity in the presence of the other sex. (p. 141)

Not only is Ednor naturally timid, but, MacColl seems to imply, his timidity is natural in the sense of being right. He is contrasted with Reginald Pulting, the blackguard of the novel, whose lack of modesty indicates a morally corrupt nature. Ednor, of course, meets with the approval of the parent generation, whereas Pulting meets with disapproval. Rather than rebelling against the orthodox, older generation, Ednor conforms to their attitudes, to their patterns of behaviour, and ways of thinking.

Conforming in the way he does, Ednor comes across to the reader as judgmental and self-righteous in his attitude to other people. When he observes Reginald Pulting dancing with Laura Kent at the end-of-term party at Mademoiselle Lacour’s *pensionnat*, he reacts with concern, a concern that is expressed in the most conventional terms:

Short as had been his time at Trinity House, it had been long enough to convince him that Reginald Pulting was not a desirable acquaintance for any girl. (p. 140)

His reaction is identical with that of the proper and pious older generation:

But other eyes besides those of Ednor’s were on the pair, and thoughts not very dissimilar were passing at the same time through the minds of Mr. Kent, Mrs. Kent, and Mademoiselle Lacour. (p. 140)
This judgmental attitude also manifests itself on occasions when Ednor considers other people’s opinions on questions of religious faith:

“You still admit the force of the argument which I employed at our last discussion?”

“Fully, sir; and what is more, I have had recourse to it myself in a discussion which I had, not very long ago, with some of Mr. Kent’s pupils.”

“Who were upholding atheism?”

“Yes.”

“Alas! And are those mischievous errors so widely disseminated even among the young?”

“I am afraid so—at least, among young men. Those were not exactly boys; they are about my own age.”

“And how did you put the argument, Whitlock? And how did they take it?”

“I laid it before them in the way in which I heard it from you, sir, as nearly as I could. In fact, I related to them the circumstances of that evening’s debate. Two of the fellows seemed struck and acknowledged the force of the reasoning. The other two evidently did not wish to be convinced, and as they could not deny the significance and relevancy of the randomly-evolved figures, they denied their possibility.”

“Their acquaintance with mathematics must have been rather elementary.”

“It was, and not very accurate even within the limits attained. Yet they had all the stock arguments of the atheist by heart.” (p. 201)

Ednor, communicating the experience of a discussion with Reginald Pulting and his three friends to the Reverend Milford, casts doubts on the honesty and questions the intellectual ability of those who cannot be brought to agree with the points he is making. As one reads MacColl’s presentation of Ednor, one is reminded of Edmund Gosse’s words about orthodox religion encouraging a stern and ignorant spirit of condemnation; it throws altogether out of gear the healthy movement of the conscience; it invents virtues which are sterile and cruel; it invents sins which are no sins at all, but which darken the heaven of innocent joy with futile clouds of remorse.23

Technically, Ednor Whitlock is simpler than Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet. There is no ironic distance in the former. MacColl uses a third person, omniscient narrator who does nothing to put Ednor’s attitudes and behaviour in perspective. On the contrary, Ednor is being presented as an ideal young man: intelligent, principled, modest, sober, honest, handsome, “plucky,” compassionate, kind, a good brother, and generally a loving and loveable man. His foil, Reginald Pulting, is

23Loc. cit., p. 212.
dishonest, deceitful, bad-tempered, brutal (he threatens to beat his own sister), vain, proud, a womaniser, and generally a cad. The contrast is stark and it is meant to be. The different moral qualities of the two MacColl explains with reference to their different religious upbringing:

The two had some points in common; both were well endowed physically—well-built, healthy, and good-looking; and both were fond of cricket and athletics generally; but in the more important elements of character they were as wide apart as the poles. Their previous education as well as nature had something to do with this. Ednor’s past history and training we have already described. He had been, as we have said, brought up in a pure, religious atmosphere, and by parents who sincerely strove to make their daily practice conform to their convictions. Pulting, on the contrary, had been brought up in an atmosphere of hypocrisy. His father was one of those clergymen—few, let us hope—who do not believe themselves in the Gospel which they preach to others. His son was not slow to discover this, and became at an early age a scoffing atheist and cynic. (p. 166)

It comes as no surprise when his sister, Ada Pulting, in conversation with her brother reveals that her father is “often unkind to mother and does other things which are not right” (p. 248). The absence of Christian faith leads, in the Pultings, to immorality. As one of Pulting’s friends puts it:

“Now, thanks to modern science, that frightful inquisitive spectre [i.e. God] has been laid, and I can munch the forbidden fruit in comfort and security.” (p. 172)

The Pultings and Reginald Pulting’s friends are used by MacColl to make two related points about the connection between Christianity and morality. The first is that Christian moral values cannot be justified if their metaphysical foundations are removed, and that therefore moral standards will dissolve. The argument is explicitly made by Pulting who welcomes the outcome:

“In the pre-scientific age, when people believed in the Bible, the matter was very simple: to do right was to do God’s will; to do wrong was to disobey Him. No definition could be clearer or neater. But to us enlightened moderns, to whom the God of Christianity is as mythical as the Jupiter of ancient paganism, the term God’s will conveys no meaning. It seems to me that right should for the future, denote mere obedience to the laws of one’s country, and wrong any violation of those laws.” (p. 170)

Moral standards, however, are not identical with laws, laws being a codification of public opinion which is the ultimate authority on what is right and wrong:

“There is no such thing, then, as moral right and wrong as distinguished from legal right and wrong?”
“I don’t say that; but I do say that the morality or immorality of any action is decided by the vague unwritten code of public opinion, which is still more shifting than the written law.” (p. 171)

Public opinion can impose no moral obligation on anyone, nor can it be a substitute for an all-seeing and all-directing God when it comes to instilling conscience in men:

“But there is this vast difference, Pulting, that, in the former case [when morality was assumed to be God’s law], the conscience was rendered much more sensitive by the belief that God saw him; whereas, in the latter [when morality is considered to be merely what public opinion holds to be right], its sensibility may be completely destroyed by the belief that his actions are known to himself alone.”

“Well, and what if it be so? Does not all that tell in favour of the new morality—at any rate, as regards the happiness of the individual?” (pp. 171–72)

As well as using them to present the argument that Christian moral values cannot be justified if their metaphysical foundations are removed, and that therefore moral standards need not be respected, MacColl uses Pulting, his family, and friends to illustrate the point which the argument makes. Their immoral behaviour is the result of their loss of faith in the metaphysical foundations of Christianity. They find no reason to conform to moral standards other than fear of being exposed should they be discovered.

In his portrayal of Pulting, his family and friends, MacColl gives expression to the majority view, widespread even in the late Victorian period, that unbelief causes immorality, and is therefore damaging to the social fabric. Religious evil was linked to moral and, consequently, to social evil:

The connection was a natural one. If religious belief was affected, the social fabric itself would disintegrate. A writer in the low-brow and somewhat goody Family Herald made this point quite bluntly: “Only let our scientific friends show the people, who are quick to learn, that there was no Adam . . . that nothing certain is known, and then that chaos which set in during the lower Empire of Rome will set in here; we shall have no laws, no worship, and no property, since our human laws are based upon the Divine.” That was written in 1861; ten years later the journal was still of the same opinion: “Society must fall to pieces if Darwinism be true.” That the Times, in its review of Descent, gave prominence to this sort of argument only confirms how widespread was the attitude which gave rise to it. “A man incurs grave responsibility who, with the authority of a well-earned reputation, advances at such a time the disintegrating speculations of this book. He ought to be capable of supporting them by the most conclusive evidence of facts. To put them forward on such
incomplete evidence, such cursory investigation, such hypothetical arguments as we have exposed, is more than unscientific—it is reckless.”

However, setting up Pulting as the target for condemnation, MacColl vulgarises and simplifies this view. Pulting’s argument is crude: in the absence of reasons for believing in an all-seeing, all-directing, and vengeful God, there are no reasons for acting morally. With Pulting and his friends it is the absence of belief in certain punishment that opens the way for acting without reference to moral standards. Other and more thoughtful versions of the view placed much greater emphasis on the weakening of the ideal of Christ as an example, which it feared would be the consequence of a weakening of the belief in Christ as God. The argument was that if men came to see themselves as of the order of beasts rather than as made in God’s image, they would no longer be able to adopt the noble motives which were so necessary for living “noble and virtuous lives”:

It is impossible to over-estimate the magnitude of the issue. If our humanity be merely the natural product of the modified faculties of the brutes, most earnest-minded men will be compelled to give up those motives by which they have attempted to live noble and virtuous lives, as founded on a mistake . . . our moral sense will turn out to be a mere developed instinct . . . and the revelation of God to us, and the hope of a future life, pleasurable daydreams invented for the good of society. If these views be true, a revolution in thought is imminent, which will shake society to its very foundations by destroying the sanctity of the conscience and the religious sense.

In aligning himself with the majority view of the relationship between religion and morality, and a particularly crude version of it at that, MacColl is far from those many liberal Victorian intellectuals who for Christianity substituted a Religion of Humanity which would strengthen the moral bond between man and man rather than weaken it. In this Ednor Whitlock differs from Robert Elsmere, which tells

The story of how an ex-vicar, who ceased to call himself Christian, and a devout wife whose faith was unshaken, suffered in their marriage for a time but at last came through to trust in each other again, by divorcing their moral unity from their religious opinions. The wife, wrote Mrs. Ward when the conflict was over (iii, 322), had “undergone that dissociation of the moral judgment from a special series of religious formulae which is the crucial, the epoch-making fact of our day.”

MacColl is far from recognising this “crucial” and “epoch-making fact.” He does nothing to indicate that one needs to question Pulting’s crude argument on grounds other than that it has the false premise that one can no longer assume the existence of “an all-seeing, all-directing God” (pp. 173–74). Ednor is really answering an argument that not many Victorian agnostics and atheists would subscribe to. Of course, Ednor addresses himself to the basic premise concerning the proof for God’s existence, but even should he succeed in establishing this premise, the argument would remain as crude as ever: that the only reason for acting morally is fear of punishment after death. There is nothing here about noble motives or the example of Christ.

The second point about the connection between Christianity and morality that MacColl makes through the contrast between Ednor and Reginald Pulting, is that right moral sense is dependent upon an orthodox Christian upbringing. Pulting’s moral character is destroyed because he “had been brought up in an atmosphere of hypocrisy.” Ednor retains his moral sense even when he comes to question “some articles of faith,” because he had been “brought up in a pure, religious atmosphere and by parents who sincerely strove to make their daily practice conform to their convictions.” In addition, MacColl adds an interesting detail to Pulting’s education:

We said that Reginald Pulting at an early age had become an atheist and a scoffer at all religion. His two years’ residence in Germany, where he met with many congenial spirits, both older and younger, did not alter his views in this respect, nor teach him more modesty in expressing them. (p. 167)

The German background is significant because among orthodox and less enlightened representatives of various British denominations, Germany and German universities, being the source of the “German Higher Criticism,” were seen as the source of what they considered the anti-Christian attacks on the basic doctrines of the faith. When Mark Rutherford describes his education at the Dissenting College to which he is sent to be educated for the ministry, he remarks that “the word ‘German’ was a term of reproach signifying something very awful, although nobody knew exactly what it was” (p. 16). For MacColl, as for the dissenters at Rutherford’s college, the German connection has clear, negative connotations. In MacColl’s case these negative connotations would also have been due to his strong distaste for the scientific rationalism that became so popular in Germany as a result of Ernst Haeckel’s (1834–1919) efforts.27 Haeckel appears as the main target of attack in Man’s Origin, Destiny, and Duty, where MacColl develops

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27 Chapter 10 of Man’s Origin, Destiny, and Duty has the title “The Fallacies
more fully the arguments for theism and a future life that are presented in *Ednor Whitlock* by the Reverend Milford.

The German motif reappears in connection with the other depraved character in the novel, Fräulein Hartman. Fräulein Hartman is half-English and half-German, and though her German parentage is not used to explain her lack of moral sense, MacColl equips her with some unattractive qualities that are clearly connected with her German ancestry. She is a strict disciplinarian, has an inordinate degree of national pride, and is uncompromising and unyielding. Because she is German, she is the object of some animosity on the part of the French characters in the novel, an animosity that is shared by the narrator of the story. The rhetorical effect is to bring about an association between being German and being an immoral atheist, by combining the two qualities in one and the same character.

In attaching strongly negative connotations to the German background of both Pulting and Fräulein Hartman, *Ednor Whitlock* differs radically from the better known novels of faith and doubt where Germany and German scholarship is seen as the source of new knowledge and new insights. When Mark Rutherford remarks about the President of the Dissenting College to which he belongs that he “knew nothing at all of German literature” (p. 16), this disqualifies him in Rutherford’s eyes from dealing meaningfully with “unbelief.” In *Robert Elsmere* the atheist Wendover may be an unpleasant and unhappy char-

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It was [in Germany] that Haeckel had turned Darwin’s science into a popular movement with its own world view—a substitute religion with its own catechism of nature worship. Of the major European countries, Germany had seen the greatest surge in mass literacy, creating the conditions for Darwinism to engage a wider public. An expanding market for popular science created opportunities that the churches seemingly overlooked but which were seized by the advocates of scientific rationalism. Prominent among them were Friedrich Ratzel, Carl Vogt, Ludwig Büchner, Arnold Dodel, Edward Aveling, and Wilhelm Bölsche—each of whom added their volumes to those of Haeckel and, in their different ways, peddled the notion that Christianity was defunct, evolution the victor. Scientific progress had not only rendered special creation obsolete. It had made it inconceivable.

For further comments on Haeckel by Brooke, see pp. 288–89.

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*In two letters to Betrand Russell, MacColl expresses regret that German research is inaccessible to him because he does not know any German: “I understand that Schroeder has written a big work on the subject [the Logic of Relations], but it is in German, a language of which I know nothing” (June 28, 1901); “... unfortunately all German works are debarred to me because I do not know the language, so that I know nothing of Cantor’s and Dedekind’s views on infinity.” (December 18, 1909).*
acter, but the German scholarship that he represents is recognised as having the most advanced thoughts of the day in questions relating to the understanding of the Bible. It must be taken on board and assimilated. It cannot be dismissed or ignored.

In Fräulein Hartman MacColl creates a far more interesting character than Reginald Pulting, who is merely a cardboard villain. Fräulein Hartman, too, is used to illustrate the influence of upbringing on moral attitudes, and her moral character is essentially similar to that of Pulting:

Gertrude Hartman was also spoilt by her parents in another sense, and a worse sense. Her moral instincts were perverted from her very infancy. It is questionable whether she ever really understood the difference between right and wrong. She heard those words often enough, and occasionally employed them herself, but from the example, if not from the precept, of her parents she attached a rather heterodox meaning to them. To do wrong was to offend the prejudices of Mrs. Grundy; to do right was to keep in Mrs. Grundy’s good graces. The path of duty seemed thus a very simple one, and not unreasonably hard to follow. Nothing was ever wrong so long as it could be kept concealed; but if ever it got to the ears of Mrs. Grundy and happened to be on that lady’s black list, it became wrong directly. (p. 106–107)

However, in the case of Fräulein Hartman, MacColl gives a much more substantial presentation of her background, her parents, their fate, and the influence this has on her moral character than he does in the case of Pulting. Fräulein Hartman is as immoral as Pulting, but her lack of moral fibre is better motivated in the novel. MacColl also gives a full account of her early years and provides her with some redeeming features that are finally instrumental in saving her for faith. MacColl, however, cannot resist the temptation to endow her too richly with negative qualities, making her deceitful, hypocritical, resentful, unforgiving, and bad-tempered. Because she is not Christian, either by conviction or upbringing, she is not allowed to possess Christian virtues.

In Ednor Whitlock, as in Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet, MacColl works with a simplistic and rigid moral scheme. There is a moral outrage that comes out in his portrayal of the unchristian characters of the novel that is lacking in charity, understanding of or insight into other points of view. Moreover, the moral values that he propagates are those that to enlightened Victorians came to seem particularly oppressive. Ednor may condemn Pulting and MacColl may condemn Fräulein Hartman, but in the eyes of a liberal reader they themselves stand condemned by their condemnations.
VII.

In *Ednor Whitlock* the question at issue in the conflict between faith and doubt is whether evidence can be found for the existence of an all-seeing, all-directing God, for the belief in a future life, and for belief in Christ as man’s saviour through his suffering and resurrection. The atheism of Pulting and Fräulein Hartman results from the failure of the revealed truths of religion to stand up to scientific examination. “Abler persons than I, and than you also,” says Pulting to Ednor, “have shown irrefutably that atheism is a necessary consequence of Darwin’s theory” (p. 174). Even after Fräulein Hartman becomes Madame Delanoy and a reformed character she cannot accept the truths of religion: “She yearned for the simple, unquestioning faith of her girlhood; but it would not come back; while her reason remained unconvinced, her will was powerless to recover it” (p. 324). Ednor, in his struggle to regain his faith, tries to find reasons for believing in a future life and the continued existence of the soul after death, in the miracles and in particular the resurrection of Christ. There is no question of making a leap of faith. A substantial part of the book is taken up by providing such reasons as Ednor is looking for. The role of providing these reasons is given to the Reverend George Milford. He aims to take Ednor through a three-stage argument:

We must proceed slowly, step by step. First, theism; then, the doctrine of a future life; and finally, Christianity. The establishment of the first is a great step towards a proof of the second; the establishment of the second a great step towards a proof of the third. (p. 202)

What he has to offer is “a strong argument from purely scientific principles.” He takes up again Paley’s “argument from design” (see below), but with a particular twist. Through a mathematical example (all the good and honest characters of the book, Ednor included, are expert mathematicians) Milford purports to show that chance can be given a role to play within the limits of design:

“We have a great number of points falling hap-hazard on the paper [with a two-axis co-ordinate system], but under the restrictions of certain pre-assigned laws and limits, which would make them fall more thickly in certain places, more scantily in others, and exclude them entirely from others. The result might be a very pretty geometrical figure, the boundary of which might be the curve $\psi(x, y) = 0$, and the distribution of whose shading would be determined by the functions $f$ and $\phi$, since by supposition $x = f(u)$ and $y = \phi(v)$.”

“Then you admit that the exact shape of the resulting geometrical figure could be accurately determined beforehand?”

“I do.”
“And the distribution of its shading—the exact spots where it would be shaded darkly through the superabundance of the randomly falling points, and the exact spots where it would be shaded lightly from their comparative scarcity—could these also be accurately foretold beforehand?”

“They could in simple cases; but in others, to forecast the exact points or curves of maximum and minimum shading might baffle the skill of the best mathematicians.”

“But with sufficient mathematical knowledge and skill, it would be perfectly possible?”

“It would. But what on earth has all this to do with evolution or theism?”

(pp. 70–71)

The point of the example is that though the points that fall on the paper fall randomly, they fall within a design that is totally predictable once one knows the laws that limit the distribution of the points. In this way evolution can appear to take place by chance, but the occurrence of chance events may be so limited by laws as to make the outcome of evolution totally predictable for a sufficiently sophisticated intelligence. This argument is presented to Ednor both verbally, as when he is permitted to listen to a debate between Rev. Milford, Mr. Morley, who is an agnostic, and Mr. Manning, who is an atheist, and in written form, as when he is given a manuscript by Rev. Milford dealing with these issues. MacColl spends a substantial part of the book on these arguments, and it is here that MacColl’s strong didactic intention emerges. The arguments are addressed as much to the reader as to Ednor.

MacColl also tries to thematise the design that is formed by apparently chance occurrences in the fate of Ednor and, to a certain extent, the fate of Fräulein Hartman. Already in the first few pages of the book the two motifs of chance and struggle for existence are introduced: “It is a trite remark,” the book opens, “that important crises in men’s lives sometimes turn upon circumstances apparently trivial” (p. 1). Then the story begins with a number of such “trite,” chance incidents. A sudden, heavy shower of rain forces Ednor to look for shelter. As he happens to be passing the Wishport reading room, he enters (for the first time):

More as an excuse for this intrusion (as he almost considered it) than from any real desire to read, he took possession of the nearest empty chair and the nearest disengaged volume. This happened to be the Westminster Review, a magazine of whose very existence he had been till then ignorant. Opening it at random, his eye rested on an article entitled, “The Evidences of Christ’s Resurrection.” (p. 2)

Before Ednor can bring himself to reveal to his parents his personal religious crisis and the consequent decision not to take orders, another
chance event intervenes: a “typhus fever” strikes them down. Such
event continues to influence Ednor’s life, and lead him back
towards a modified Christian faith. However, these incidents are too
few and have too little effect on the fate of the characters to create a
distinct impression of chance as a force in their lives. A useful contrast
here is the use which Thomas Hardy makes of chance in Tess of the
D’Urbervilles, written in the same year as Ednor Whitlock. In Tess,
chance dominates Tess’s life like an evil fate; chance always decides the
direction which the next phase of her life is going to take. The accidents
that decide Tess’s life are never obtrusive, yet there is no denying that
they form a pattern.

The argument that is offered by Milford is a late version of natural
theology: science and the Bible are in mutual support and not in mutu-
al opposition. For various political, social, and geographical reasons
the marriage of science and religion in natural theology lasted longer
in Britain than in other European countries. In 1802 William Paley,
an Anglican minister, published what was to become one of the most
popular works of philosophical theology in 19th century Britain, Nat-
ural Theology. In this work Paley set out in detail “the argument from
design” as it had developed in the two previous centuries, when the
complexity and order that science had progressively revealed in both
the micro- and macro-cosmos was taken as a confirmation—indeed, as
a positive proof—of the existence of God. The design argument had of
course preceded the development of modern science, but the discoveries
made by science in the 17th and 18th centuries seemed immeasurably
to strengthen this argument.

The attractiveness of the argument from design for the Enlight-
enment mind was that it reduced the role of revelation as a basis
for belief. Belief in God could be rationally founded, and this gave
Christian apologists an important weapon in their argument against
non-believers who might reject the validity of revealed religious truth.
However, increasing the reliance on reason and evidence in questions
of faith also carried the new risk that faith could be disproved by de-
velopments in science. This risk was particularly great if too heavy a
burden was placed on the sciences, e.g. if they were asked to prove
not only that God was an intelligent artificer, but also his omnipotence
and omnibenevolence.

In Britain it was the “new geology” as developed by Sir Charles
Lyell in The Principles of Geology (1830–1833) that first put pressure
on natural theology. Assuming that only those forces which science

29 See Brooke, op. cit., pp. 198–203, for a summary of these reasons.
could observe in operation today had also operated in the past, he found a way to calibrate the past. His estimates of the age of the various strata of fossils, and consequently of the age of the earth, ran into hundreds of millions of years, thus challenging the literalist interpretation of *Genesis* which was still widely accepted in the 1830s.  

More important than this was the change in the way of thinking about geological change that Lyell introduced. According to Lyell, geological change was slow but perennial: it was always going on and it affected even what appeared to be the most permanent features of the geological environment. The stability of the world was being undermined; the earth had developed throughout these hundreds of millions of years and was still developing. And the geological development was not necessarily a result of tidy design, but could plausibly be seen as a result of an indifferent process of cause and effect. Sensitive minds picked up this implication of Lyell’s way of thinking about geological change.

The hills are shadows, and they flow
From form to form, and nothing stands;
They melt like mist, the solid lands,
Like clouds they shape themselves and go.

wrote Tennyson towards the end (stanza CXXIII) of *In Memoriam* (1850), recognising not only perennial change, but also adopting the language of causal process: the hills “shape themselves and go.” The adoption of the language of causal process is important here because it involves the adoption of a different perspective, a different discourse, than the argument from design. The pressure on natural theology culminated with Darwin’s *Origin*, not because it disproved the argument from design, but because it provided a non-teleological vocabulary that was rich enough to explain in causal terms what had up to then only been explicable in a teleological vocabulary. It did not provide an alternative competing explanation to that of the argument from design. It

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30By the mid-1840s, says Owen Chadwick, “Educated divines had already abandoned the more vulnerable places of the Mosaic story. By the fifties they were saying that for many years no man of sense had believed in a creation of the world during six days of twenty-four hours.” (*The Victorian Church. Part One. 1829–1859* (3rd ed., SCM Press, London, 1987), p. 563.) However, if one is to believe the literary portraits of clergy and important lay members of various Christian denominations (in, e.g., Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh*, Gosse’s *Father and Son* and William Hale White’s *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*), literalism remained important among the less sophisticated (though “educated”) Christians well into the second part of the century.
adopted a different perspective that legitimised a different type of discourse. One may say that *The Origin* exposed the logic of the argument from design. “Design” is an intentional term and its very use embodies intentionalist assumptions. There is, strictly speaking, nothing in the physical shape and construction of objects that in itself marks them out as designed. Seeing an object as a design-product involves a choice of perspective and cannot be a deduction from observation. To use the argument from design to prove the existence of God is therefore to misunderstand the possibilities of the argument. There is no inferential route from an object to its designer. However, once God’s existence is assumed, the natural world can reveal God’s nature and purpose to us.

Even before the publication of Darwin’s *Origin* natural theology was losing ground. “Paley’s argument from design,” says Owen Chadwick,

became irrelevant to any late Victorian theology that mattered. The first shadow of the knowledge of God seemed to lie in the heart or the conscience, not in nature; and only after God was apprehended through feeling or through moral judgment did nature become evidently sacramental of his being.

On this matter the great divide came after the Bampton lectures (1865) of J. B. Mozley entitled *On Miracles*. The book is the last statement, by a great English Protestant theologian, of a world of divinity which henceforth vanished except in the scholastic manuals. Mozley’s fundamental axiom was the need to “prove” Christianity, as Paley once proved it; and the internal evidence of heart and conscience can supply no “proof” to the reason.31

By the time Frederick Temple, as Bishop of Exeter, came to give his Bampton Lectures in 1884, he was able to open his fourth lecture without much danger of being opposed by saying,

Religion is rooted in our spiritual nature and its fundamental truths are as independent of experience for their hold on our consciences as the truths of mathematics for their hold on our reason.32

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32 Fredrick Temple, *The Relations between Religion and Science. The Bampton Lectures 1884*; Lecture VI, “Apparent Collision between Religion and the Doctrine of Evolution”; reprinted in Tess Cosslett (ed.), *Science and Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984), p. 192. Page references are to this collection. Frederick Temple was one of the contributors to *Essays and Reviews*. He was consecrated Bishop of Exeter in 1869 against considerable opposition. However, there was no similar opposition when he became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1896. Chadwick sees Temple’s “elevation to the most senior see” without significant protest as marking “the final acceptance of the doctrine of evolution among the divines, clergy and leading laity of the established church, at least as a doctrine permissible and respectable in an eminent clergyman.” (*The Victorian Church*, p. 23.)
For Temple the argument from design could only compel assent from those who had already responded to the inner voice. But if the argument from design could not prove God’s existence, neither could the negative version of it prove that there is no God:

The argument is not strong enough to compel assent from those who have no ears for the inward spiritual voice, but it is abundantly sufficient to answer those who argue that there cannot be a Creator because they cannot trace His action.33

If one assumes the designer, then it is easy to identify the design in creation. Even the Theory of Evolution can then be seen as a partial explanation of what God’s design is, and thus gives us a deeper insight into God’s ways:

And the scientific doctrine of Evolution, which at first seemed to take away the force of this argument [the argument from design], is found on examination to confirm it and expand it. The doctrine of Evolution shows that with whatever design the world was formed, that design was entertained at the very beginning and impressed on every particle of created matter, and that the appearances of failure are not only to be accounted for by the limitation of our knowledge, but also by the fact that we are contemplating the work before it has been completed.34

In 1891, when Ednor Whitlock was published, the theological function of the argument from design had long since changed from a demonstrative to a non-demonstrative one. What was required for the truly Christian was a leap of faith. Once that was taken, problems of doubt did not arise, only problems of interpretation of the word of God. “A strong argument from purely scientific principles” for the existence of God and the future life of the soul had no theological support any more. It may still have had appeal to a relatively numerous audience who would have liked to see the continued marriage between science and religion rather than their separation. However MacColl’s argument also shows a high degree of idiosyncrasy.35 Just how idiosyncratic it

33Temple, op. cit., p. 208.
34Ibid., p. 208.
35Some parts of MacColl’s argument would seem more farfetched and idiosyncratic today than they would have done at the time. For example, MacColl argues for the separate existence of the soul and for the influence of “higher” spiritual beings on man by invoking the established fact of telepathy (Ednor Whitlock, p. 236; Man’s Origin, Destiny, and Duty, pp. 13–14; pp. 28–29; pp. 32–33). Telepathic and other psychic phenomena were the objects of scientific investigation in the last two decades of the 19th century. The Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882 and had as members and officers many well-reputed scientists and clergy. See David Knight, op. cit., pp. 195–97.
was can be seen from the summary of his argument that he presents in the preface to *Man’s Origin, Destiny, and Duty*, which he published eighteen years after *Ednor Whitlock*:

Basing my arguments upon facts admitted by nearly all scientists, I have striven in this little volume to establish the following propositions:—

(1) That, as regards man and all sentient animals, the soul (which I simply define as *that which feels*) and the body are different entities.

(2) That the soul will survive the body and, by successive transformations, will continually develop upwards.

(3) That a psychic universe exists containing numberless ascending orders of intelligent beings above the human; though these are imperceptible to man’s senses in the present stage of his development.

(4) That the whole physical and psychic universe is maintained and directed by one infinitely powerful (according to a clear and rigorous definition of the word *infinite*) and infinitely intelligent Being, whose will, as shown in the so-called “laws of nature,” it is man’s duty to study, and, within the limits of his faculties and knowledge, to obey.

The question so often discussed whether the Supreme Being is a “personal,” an “impersonal,” or an “immanent” God, I leave un-touched: firstly, because I consider it irrelevant to my argument; and, secondly, because it is scarcely possible to enter upon such a discussion without losing oneself hopelessly in a maze of verbal and metaphysical ambiguities. (pp. v–vi)

VIII.

MacColl was an educated man, though he did not have the benefit of the best education. He was a schoolteacher with a passion for logic and mathematics that required considerable intelligence and intellectual investment. Yet outside these areas his attitudes and views were both conservative and simplistic. Particularly striking is the simplistic moral scheme that he uses in the construction of both his novels as well as the lack of tolerance and understanding of other points of view. MacColl’s conservatism in these areas may be due to the fact that he moved to France early in his life and spent a large part of it there in isolation from the developments that took place on the intellectual scene in Britain. However, it is quite clear that he kept himself informed about developments in science and in the struggle between science and religion. Moreover, for “twelve or thirteen years” he “devoted [his] leisure hours to general literature,” and, if one is to judge from the topics and techniques of the two novels, was well enough informed about at least certain kinds of developments in imaginative literature.
In his moral, social and religious attitudes it is plausible to see MacColl as representative of a broad Victorian public that continued to exist and exercise considerable influence well into the 20th century. This public was to be found partly within the Church of England and partly among the Nonconformists. Indeed, there are strongly Puritan elements in the moral schemes of the novels that one associates in particular with the Nonconformists. “Along with improper sex,” says Richard J. Helmstadter in an article on “The Nonconformist Conscience,”

gambling and drink made up a trio of sins that the Nonconformist conscience found particularly irritating—a trio that Nonconformist leaders tried, sometimes successfully, to raise to the level of important public issues. “The three deadly enemies of England” were identified by Hugh Price Hughes in the *Methodist Times* (6 June 1895) as “drink, impurity and gambling.”

Pulting, of course, is a womaniser who also gambles and drinks. Drink had been the problem of Ednor’s predecessor at Mr. Kent’s school. And the attitude to women that manifests itself in both the novels (Laura Kent and Amy Milford are as docile, obedient, and compassionate as Ree) is also characteristic of a broad, educated public that was not particularly progressive in its view.

In his enthusiasm for science MacColl is more distinctly modern. The fact that he writes one of the first novels in English about Mars places him among those who were abreast of the developments of the time rather than in the dark. He is also eager to inform about science and to preach his own version of natural theology. With regard to the latter he is clearly out of touch with late Victorian theological thought, and he remains a diehard rationalist in his view of the relationship between science and religion. Above all, he is idiosyncratic in the length to which he is willing to take this argument. But then it is his enthusiasm for and belief in science that give some charm to what otherwise are two rather dry novels.

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