

CHAPTER 2

Diversity and Co-operation

Dissent traced its origins back to the seventeenth century. During the Commonwealth Presbyterianism had triumphed. The Church of England had been re-organised on Presbyterian lines: bishops had been abolished; all ministers were treated as equal. In 1662, following the restoration of Charles II to the throne and bishops to the church, those ministers who could not accept the new dispensation were ejected from their posts. Many gathered congregations outside the Church of England; and most were Presbyterians. During the eighteenth century their successors, swayed by the influences of the Age of Reason, gradually abandoned Trinitarian orthodoxy. By the early nineteenth century many of these ‘rational Dissenters’ were prepared to call themselves Unitarians.¹ Although their origins were mainly Presbyterian, they differed totally from the Presbyterians of the nineteenth century—essentially Scottish immigrants who brought their orthodox religion to the major cities, together with Northumberland, and who in 1851 possessed 160 places of worship and 0.2% of the population.² The Unitarians were of comparable strength, with 229 chapels and 0.2%, but were spread rather more evenly over the country. Their city centre causes, such as High Pavement in Nottingham or Mill Hill in Leeds, were dominated by prosperous business and professional families with a powerful civic spirit whose Dissent was usually hereditary. Yet a wide social range was to be found amongst them. In Lancashire a rationalist schism from Methodism had brought over a substantial working-class membership.³ There was a steady

¹ R. K. Webb, ‘The Unitarian Background’, in Barbara Smith, ed., *Truth, Liberty, Religion: essays celebrating two hundred years of Manchester College* (Oxford, 1986).

² A. M. Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England* (London, 1889), part 3; S. W. Carruthers, *Fifty Years, 1876–1926* (London, 1926).

³ H[erbert] McLachlan, *The Methodist Unitarian Movement* (Manchester, 1919).

inflow of recruits dissatisfied with the dogmatism of their former denominations. In one Manchester suburban congregation at the end of the period, about 60% of the worshippers were drawn from non-Unitarian backgrounds.⁴ One great attraction was the teaching of James Martineau, professor and then principal of the denomination's Manchester New College, a message at once deeply intellectual and inspiringly spiritual.⁵ Doctrine, however, was too vaguely formulated to operate as a firm ideological anchor, and many Unitarians drifted away either into free thought or into Broad Church Anglicanism.⁶ There was no disguising the decline of the denomination by the opening of the twentieth century.

The Independents were equally part of the Old Dissent. Oliver Cromwell, as many Victorian members of the denomination loved to recall, had been one of their body. Unlike the Unitarians, the Independents had retained their grasp of Calvinist theology during the eighteenth century, though modifying it as the century wore on. Christ, they believed, had died only for an elect group, but, since preachers did not know which of their hearers were predestined for salvation, the gospel must be proclaimed to as many as possible. Fired by the expectation of far more conversions than previous Calvinists had thought possible, the Independents of the early nineteenth century fanned out over the country in vigorous evangelism.⁷ The denomination was transformed from a string of introverted meeting houses huddled away in obscure corners like Lantern Yard in George Eliot's *Silas Marner* into a thriving network of chapels placed prominently on main streets. East Anglia, Wales and parts of the South and Midlands became strongholds. By 1851 there were 3,244 places of worship drawing 4.4% of the population—a body more than twenty times the size of the Unitarians. A new name was coming

⁴ Ian Sellers, 'Spanning Victoria and Edward: two urban ministries around 1900', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* 20 (1991), p. 51.

⁵ Ralph Waller, 'James Martineau: the development of his thought', in Smith, ed., *Truth, Liberty, Religion*.

⁶ E.g., Owen Stinchcombe, 'Elizabeth Malleon (1828–1916) and Unitarianism', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* 20 (1991), pp. 59–60.

⁷ D. W. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: itinerancy and the transformation of English Dissent, 1780–1830* (Cambridge, 1988).

into use. The title 'Independents' had drawn attention to their distinguishing belief that each fellowship of believers should be independent of all external control, whether by bishops or presbyteries. Increasingly, as they co-operated in area associations for the spread of the gospel, they began to prefer the word 'Congregationalists'. There was no change of principle, but the emphasis was now on the responsibility of the members of the congregation, gathered in Church Meeting, to govern themselves. A Congregational Union to which churches throughout England and Wales could affiliate was established in 1831.⁸ Manufacturers and shopkeepers dominated most Congregational chapels, often being elected to positions of lay leadership as deacons, but skilled working men and their families were also well represented. Congregationalism, declared Robert Vaughan, chairman of the Union in 1846, 'aims to form intellectual churches'.⁹ As the century wore on, the teaching of its ministers broadened, but rarely went beyond the boundaries of Evangelical belief. Victorian Congregationalists aspired to be thinking Evangelicals.

Baptists were very similar to Congregationalists. The largest section, the Particular Baptists, had retained their Calvinist belief in the redemption of a 'particular' group, the elect. They included manufacturers and shopkeepers in their ranks, perhaps in rather smaller numbers than the Congregationalists, and also drew extensively on the skilled workers. Their local churches were independent, self-governing communities, but they also had regional associations and a national Union, begun in 1812 but reinvigorated in 1832.¹⁰ They differed from the Congregationalists, and from nearly all other Nonconformists, in upholding believer's baptism. The ordinance of baptism should not be administered to uncomprehending infants, they taught, but only to those who were conscious of a personal faith. The majority of Baptists had come to accept that communion should be open to other Christians who had not been baptised as

⁸ Albert Peel, *These Hundred Years: a history of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1831–1931* (London, 1931); R.T. Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662–1962* (London, 1962); Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: studies in English Nonconformity, 1780–1920* (London, 1977).

⁹ Robert Vaughan, *Congregationalism* (London, 1842), in John Briggs and Ian Sellers, eds, *Victorian Nonconformity* (London, 1973), p. 103.

¹⁰ E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: a short history* (London, 1959).

believers, but traditionalists insisted on the strict policy of making believer's baptism a condition for receiving communion. Feeling ran high, with a copy of a book favouring open communion being burned on a village green near Bury St Edmunds.¹¹ Many of the traditionalists gradually separated during the Victorian era into a distinct denomination of 'Strict and Particular Baptists', a withdrawn sect nourished by Puritan piety that was strong in East Anglia and the South-East.¹² The main body of Baptists expanded under the impulse of Evangelicalism, especially in parts of the Midlands and South Wales. In the East Midlands another Evangelical group, the New Connexion of General Baptists, had developed a virile witness.¹³ They were 'General' because they believed in general redemption, the possibility of any man or woman being saved; they were 'New' because they had split off in 1770 from the old General Baptists who had seventeenth-century origins but who in the nineteenth century were moving at varying speeds towards Unitarianism.¹⁴ In 1851 the various branches of Baptists together possessed 2,789 places of worship and 3.3% of the population. In Charles Haddon Spurgeon they boasted the greatest of Victorian preachers. Partly because of his vigorous influence on church planting, the Baptists main-tained their dynamism more than most other Nonconformists up to the end of the century and beyond.¹⁵

Another body with origins in the seventeenth century was the Society of Friends, usually known as the Quakers. But the Quakers had always stood apart from the 'Three Denominations' of the Old Dissent—the Presbyterians/Unitarians, Independents and Baptists—because of their own peculiarities. The supreme authority in religion for Quakers was 'the light within', the personal conviction that illuminated the path of duty. Their worship was normally conducted in silence until members, moved, as they believed, by the Spirit of God, led the meeting in prayer,

¹¹ William Cuff, *Fifty Years' Ministry, 1865–1915: memories and musings* (London, 1915), p. 21.

¹² Kenneth Dix, *Strict and Particular: English Strict and Particular Baptists in the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot, 2001).

¹³ Frank Rinaldi, *'The Tribe of Dan': a study of the New Connexion of General Baptists, 1770–1891* (Milton Keynes, 2008).

¹⁴ Ian Sellers, 'The Old General Baptists, 1811–1915', *Baptist Quarterly* 24 (1971).

¹⁵ J. H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot, 1994).

reflection or Bible reading. Women could participate alongside men and some, such as Elizabeth Fry, the prison reformer, were among the most respected travelling ministers. Friends held that dress, language and manners should be 'plain', a principle that dictated the wearing of clothes cut to seventeenth-century styles, the archaic use in speech of 'Thou' rather than 'You' and the replacement of the standard names of the months, pagan by origin, with 'First month', 'Second month' and so on. Such practices, reinforced by a tight-knit and centralised structure of business meetings, ensured a powerful sense of solidarity. Any member marrying outside the sect was automatically expelled. Not surprisingly, numbers were declining when, in 1851, it was reported that there were 371 meeting houses attracting only 0.1% of the population. It was recognised in the 1850s that the Society was doomed to extinction unless it changed its ways. From 1860 the distinctive forms of outward witness became optional and the marrying of non-Quakers no longer entailed exclusion. Partly for this reason, numbers recovered from the mid-1860s. The improvement was also because Evangelicalism had permeated the Society so that it organised outreach meetings, Sunday schools and (a Quaker speciality) adult schools. Victorian Quakers were predominantly urban and heavily involved in commerce, banking and manufacturing. The Society of Friends possessed a higher social profile and greater per capita wealth than any other denomination. The influence of the Quakers, like that of the Unitarians, was out of all proportion to their small numbers.¹⁶

The New Dissent, which dated back only to the eighteenth century, consisted of the various branches of Methodism.¹⁷ It was the largest sector of Nonconformity. In 1851 the Methodist bodies together occupied 11,007 places of worship and served 7.7% of the population. The genius of John Wesley had created in Methodism an efficient harvester of souls and the pen of his

¹⁶ Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford, 1970). T. C. Kennedy, *British Quakerism, 1860-1920: the transformation of a religious community* (Oxford, 2001).

¹⁷ It is best to adhere to this, the established usage. A. D. Gilbert applies the term 'New Dissent' to the Congregationalists and Baptists who had been revitalised by the Evangelical Revival (in *Religion and Society in Industrial England* [London, 1976], pp. 36-39), but this practice is confusing. The term 'Evangelical' can be used to distinguish the sections of the Old Dissent that felt an imperative to mission from their predecessors and contemporaries that did not.

brother Charles had provided converts with exuberant hymns to sing. Even at the end of the Victorian period the Methodists were noted among Nonconformists for their enthusiasm. ‘The joyful assurance of the favour of God’, it was said in 1903, ‘is one of the chief marks of a Methodist’.¹⁸ Wesleyan doctrine differed from Calvinism in holding that salvation, though once accepted, could subsequently be lost through lapsing into sin; and that a state of entire holiness could be attained by the believer before death. Both beliefs encouraged Methodists to pay special attention to their religious experience. Week by week they would assemble in classes of eight to a dozen to report on their spiritual progress. It was a sign of the cooling of zeal when, in the last decades of Victoria’s reign, it became impossible to induce chapel-goers to attend a class.¹⁹ Laypeople supervised the classes and undertook most of the preaching, but in the organisation founded by Wesley final authority lay with the ministers who attended the annual Conference. The manipulation of power by a small coterie surrounding Jabez Bunting, ‘the Methodist pope’, aroused huge resentment in the 1840s and led to one of a series of secessions from the Wesleyan Methodist connexion. Yet the great majority of Methodists remained loyal to the original denomination, which in 1851 attracted as many as 5.1% of the population. It was particularly numerous in Cornwall, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, and was powerful in most industrial areas. The Wesleyan Methodists drew on all social grades, but had more of the well-to-do than most other Nonconformists. As early as 1861 they set up a Fund for Watering Places to cater for the prosperous Wesleyans who sought relaxation in coastal resorts.²⁰ Wesleyan Methodism was the strongest denomination in Nonconformity.²¹

The seceding bodies nevertheless each contributed something distinctive to the Nonconformist mosaic. The first dissentient body, the Methodist New Connexion, had arisen during the 1790s

¹⁸ George Jackson, *The Old Methodism and the New* (London, 1903), p. 43.

¹⁹ H. D. Rack, ‘The Decline of the Class-Meeting and the Problem of Church Membership in Nineteenth-Century Wesleyanism’, *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 39 (1973).

²⁰ H. D. Rack, ‘Wesleyan Methodism 1849–1902’, in Rupert Davies *et al.*, ed., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 3 (London, 1983), p. 129.

²¹ David Hempton, *Methodism: empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, 2005).

in the wake of Wesley's death and the French Revolution, when levelling ideas were abroad and the pretensions of the Methodist Conference had become in-tolerable.²² The New Connexion asserted the rights of laypeople to participate in church government and created a more rational, less emotional ethos than the Wesleyans. The New Connexion did not become large, in 1851 serving only 0.3% of the population, but in particular localities, such as Rochdale, it put down deep roots. A tiny body of Independent Methodists with self-governing churches also sprang up in and around Lancashire from the early years of the century; a small group of Tent Methodists specialising in evangelism under canvas arose in the Bristol area.²³ Much stronger, with 1.5% of the population in 1851, was the Primitive Methodist Connexion. It originated around 1810 as a group of revivalists who wanted to use techniques such as all-night camp meetings that were frowned on by the Wesleyan authorities.²⁴ There were frequent pulses of enormous growth, especially among agricultural labourers, fishermen and miners, and particularly in Yorkshire and the North Midlands.²⁵ Of all the Non-conformist denominations, the Primitives with their emotional intensity had most appeal to the poor. As late as the 1870s a woman would fall as if dead in one of their meetings or a minister would stride into a railway compartment to demand of the passengers whether they were converted.²⁶ A similar but smaller body, the Bible Christians, which in 1851 catered for only 0.2% of the population, was confined almost entirely to Devon and Cornwall and to groups of migrants from those counties.²⁷ In the north of England and especially round Leeds, there were two secessions from the Wesleyans in protest against Conference

²² D. N. Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750–1850* (London, 1984), ch. 3.

²³ John Dolan, *The Independent Methodists: a history* (Cambridge, 2005).

²⁴ J. S. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: its background and early history* (Madison, WI, 1984).

²⁵ E.g. R. W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and rural society: South Lincolnshire, 1817–1875* (Hull, 1989).

²⁶ J. Stephenson, *The Man of Faith and Fire, or, the life and work of the Rev. G. Warner* (London, 1902), pp. 144, 151.

²⁷ M. J. L. Wickes, *The Westcountry Preachers: a new history of the Bible Christian Church (1815–1907)* (Hartland, Devon, 1987).

authoritarianism, the Protestant Methodists (1828) and the Wesleyan Methodist Association (1835).²⁸ Both merged with the bulk of those who left the Wesleyans in a great convulsion during the years 1847–51 to form the United Methodist Free Churches. A small remnant of seceders, chiefly around Sheffield, established the Wesleyan Reform Union (1859),²⁹ but it was the UMFC that became the third largest branch of Victorian Methodism. In 1851 its constituent groups attracted 0.6% of the population. Ecclesiastically the UMFC stressed the privileges of local churches; politically they had few of the inhibitions of the older bodies about avowing their Liberalism.³⁰ Their existence was testimony to the staunch opinions that were a symptom of growth in early Victorian Methodism.³¹

Not all who were called Methodists were followers of John Wesley. The Calvinistic Methodists, like the Wesleyans, had sprung up in the eighteenth century, but they did not accept Wesley's theology. They upheld the same Calvinistic teaching as the Old Dissent and so were organised separately from the Wesleyans. In England most of them had disappeared, although a rump survived in Lady Huntingdon's Connexion, drawing 0.2% of the population to worship in 1851 and associating closely with the Independents.³² In Wales, however, the Calvinistic Methodists flourished and became the largest denomination.³³ As a proportion of the population in England and Wales in 1851 Welsh Calvinistic Methodist attendants were 0.8% but in the principality alone the proportion was as high as 15%. Their evangelistic zeal and their efficient organisation helped their growth, and another key to

²⁸ D. A. Gowland, *Methodist Secessions: the origins of Free Methodism in three Lancashire towns: Manchester, Rochdale, Liverpool* (Manchester, 1979).

²⁹ *Origin and History of the Wesleyan Reform Union* (Sheffield, 1896).

³⁰ O. A. Beckerlegge, *The United Methodist Free Churches: a study in freedom* (London, 1957).

³¹ Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: a study in the sociology of ecumenicalism* (London, 1968), ch. 2.

³² There is no adequate history of the Connexion for after the eighteenth century, but its Victorian ethos is described in John Westbury-Jones, *Figgis of Brighton* (London, 1917), especially pp. 133–39.

³³ John Roberts, *The Calvinistic Methodism of Wales* (Caernarfon, 1934).

success was their use of the Welsh language. The Oxford Movement's Tract 36 claimed in 1834, after cataloguing the heterogeneous range of Dissenting sects, that there existed, 'especially in Wales, Jumpers and Shakers'.³⁴ The idea was probably pure imagination. Yet the charge does illustrate the truth that on the fringe of Nonconformity there was a range of small groups, orthodox but sectarian, that almost defy listing. In 1851 both the Moravians³⁵ and the Brethren³⁶ served 0.1% of the population. Even smaller were the Inghamites,³⁷ the Sandemanians,³⁸ the Scotch Baptists,³⁹ the Catholic Apostolic Church,⁴⁰ the Churches of Christ,⁴¹ the Evangelical Union,⁴² the Free Church of England,⁴³ the Peculiar People⁴⁴ and the Cokelers.⁴⁵ Later in the century there were to arise a number of Holiness denominations of which by far the best known is the Salvation Army.⁴⁶ All held the substance of Christian orthodoxy

³⁴ *An Account of Religious Sects at Present existing in England* (1834), no pagination, quoted by G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832 to 1868* (Oxford, 1977), p. 83.

³⁵ J. E. Hutton, *A History of the Moravian Church* (London, 1909).

³⁶ H. H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren, 1825–1850* (London, 1967); Tim Grass, *Gathering to his Name: the story of the Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Milton Keynes, 2006).

³⁷ R. W. Thompson, *Benjamin Ingham and the Inghamites* (Kendal, 1958).

³⁸ J. T. Hornsby, 'John Glas and his Movement', Edinburgh PhD dissertation (1936).

³⁹ D. B. Murray, 'The Scotch Baptist Tradition in Great Britain', *Baptist Quarterly* 33 (1989).

⁴⁰ P. E. Shaw, *The Catholic Apostolic Church sometimes called Irvingite: a historical study* (Morningside Heights, New York, 1946).

⁴¹ D. M. Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall: a short history of the Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland* (Birmingham, 1980).

⁴² Harry Escott, *A History of Scottish Congregationalism* (Glasgow, 1960), ch. 11.

⁴³ Frank Vaughan, *A History of the Free Church of England otherwise called the Reformed Episcopal Church* (London, 1938).

⁴⁴ Mark Sorrell, *The Peculiar People* (Exeter, 1979).

⁴⁵ Peter Jerrome, *John Sirgood's Way: the story of the Loxwood Dependants* (Petworth, 1998).

⁴⁶ Jack Ford, *In the Steps of John Wesley: the Church of the Nazarene in Britain* (Kansas City, Missouri, 1968); Tom Noble, *Called to be Saints: a centenary history of the Church of the Nazarene in the British Isles, 1906–2006* (Manchester, 2006). Robert Sandall and A. R.

and some—notably the Brethren and the Salvation Army—expanded rapidly in the later Victorian period. Each might be classed as Nonconformist, but only the Moravians and Inghamites, both products of the Evangelical Revival, together with the Scotch Baptists, the Churches of Christ and the Evangelical Union, were generally seen as part of Nonconformity at the time. Despite the immense diversity of Dissent, when Victorians spoke of Nonconformists they normally thought of Unitarians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers and Methodists.

The great variety of Nonconformity made for fierce interdenominational rivalries. Each body knew that it was in a competitive market for souls and acted accordingly. Denominations would try to outdo each other in the interminable quest for recruits, money and eligible chapel sites. There could even be wrangles within the same denomination as when, in 1882, the First Cambridge Primitive Methodist Circuit fell out with the Second Cambridge Primitive Methodist Circuit over ten shillings collected in the village of Waterbeach.⁴⁷ Members of the Old Dissent, with its traditions of order and learning, generally looked down on Methodists for their crude zeal. The standard history of the Dissenters that circulated in the early Victorian years assured its readers that the lack of education among Wesleyan preachers ‘too fully justified the heavy censure which has been passed upon this communion, as containing a greater sum of ignorance of the Scriptures than was ever found in any body of protestants since the reformation’.⁴⁸ On occasion Methodists were quite willing to return insults, resting their case on the dryness and formality of the Congregationalists and Baptists. The obituarist of a female member, writing in the *Methodist New Connexion Magazine* for 1850, could not resist the opportunity for polemic against a rival body. ‘Her parents’, it recorded, ‘attended the Baptist chapel, but, like too many, they rested in outward ceremonies; for while honesty and integrity were in their moral character, there were no evidences of scriptural and saving piety.’⁴⁹ The Baptists, that is to

Wiggins, *The History of the Salvation Army*, vols 1–4 (London, 1947–64); Patricia J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down: the Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, CA, 2001).

⁴⁷ Frank Tice, *The History of Methodism in Cambridge* (London, 1966), p. 75.

⁴⁸ David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of the Dissenters*, 4 (London, 1812), p. 392.

⁴⁹ *Methodist New Connexion Magazine*, December 1850, p. 614.

say, were probably not Christians at all. Rivalry often reached a high pitch of intensity in Wales, where Baptists claimed to be unlike other denominations in having been founded by Christ on the banks of the river Jordan, and distributed tracts offering £100 prizes to anyone producing a Bible verse that vindicated infant baptism.⁵⁰ Loyalty to a particular chapel fostered in turn a denominational allegiance that gave many Victorians their primary sense of identity. A man felt himself to be Primitive Methodist rather than working-class, a Congregationalist rather than a small shopkeeper. It is no wonder that the denominations often fell about each other's ears.

Yet sectarian disputes within Nonconformity were moderated by the existence of an established church from which they all alike dissented. Generally the Church of England, with all its appearance of grand pretensions and sinister sacerdotalism, was the preferred target for their criticisms. A small number of the more urbane ministers took joint action with likeminded clergy from the Church of England under the auspices of the Evangelical Alliance, founded in 1846, but by that date the co-operation that had been normal in the early years of the century was already ailing. It was dealt a mortal blow by the denunciation of all things Anglican in 1862, the bicentenary of the Great Ejection of ministers from the Church of England in the aftermath of Charles II's restoration.⁵¹ Thereafter suspicions of Anglicanism as a whole powerfully reinforced the growing sense of Nonconformist solidarity. Ministers were already laying aside the old disputes between Calvinism and Arminianism in order, for example, to hold regular meetings for fellowship or (as at Grantham in Lincolnshire in 1856) to establish a joint Religious Reading Room.⁵² There was even co-operation in training for the ministry at Carmarthen Academy between orthodox Welsh Independents and Unitarian opponents of orthodoxy.⁵³ Personal connections between chapel folk of different communions were multiplying, whether in the form of the translocal family networks that tied together the elite of Nonconformity or the bonds of friendship between man and man who worked together in the same trade. Interdenominational transfer became a commonplace. A couple

⁵⁰ T. M. Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists* (Swansea, 1977), pp. 226, 228.

⁵¹ Peel, *These Hundred Years*, p. 240.

⁵² Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, p. 77.

⁵³ J. L. Morgan, *Life of Rev. William Morgan* (London, 1886), pp. 109-10.

moved in 1848 from Witham Congregational Church in Essex to the local Primitive Methodists because no denomination seemed 'so plain and quite so willing to stoop so low, as to go out into highways and hedges and compel the poor and needy and outcasts of Society to come into the field of Christ'.⁵⁴ But many shifted their allegiance for less exalted reasons. Marriage between members of different congregations compelled a choice of Sunday destination, and employment moves—increasingly frequent happenings—often meant joining a fresh denomination. Transfer was especially likely if there was no nearby chapel of a person's old allegiance. Thus when, in 1870, H. J. Stokes moved from Monmouth to Aberavon and found no English-speaking Congregational church there, he joined the Bible Christians and became a leading light among them.⁵⁵ Chapel was chapel, whatever its formal label. As linkages grew, so Nonconformists became increasingly conscious of a shared self-image, and by the 1890s the majority of them were glad to co-operate through newly founded Free Church Councils. During the Victorian era the Free Churches of England and Wales forged a common identity out of enormous diversity.

⁵⁴ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780–1850* (London, 1987), p. 105.

⁵⁵ W. J. Mitchell, *Brief Biographical Sketches of Bible Christian Ministers and Laymen*, 1 (Jersey, 1906), p. 236.