



“I am going to do it”: The Complex Question of Action in Theology and Science in the Life of America's First Woman Minister, Rev. Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825-1921)

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"I am going to do it":

The Complex Question of Action in Theology and Science

in the Life of America's First Woman Minister,

Rev. Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825-1921)

A dissertation presented

By

Nancy Sue Hutton

To

The Faculty of Harvard Divinity School

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Abstract

Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825-1921) became one of the most outspoken and remarkable women of her era: an ordained minister, a published author, a prominent public speaker, and a philosophical thinker whose writings described and explicated her syntheses of theology and science. Her life was punctuated by “firsts” that have significance within women’s history as evidence of female success in what were then male-dominated arenas. In this dissertation I propose that the arguments that Brown Blackwell presented on behalf of women’s rights can be understood as a synthesis of Rev. Charles Grandison Finney’s religious teachings around *doing* with science-based theories that she believed revealed validating evidence about women’s nature and abilities to *do*. After the publication of her book, *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875), her contributions to women’s rights movements and her books were less documented by historians, perhaps because she was less focused on suffrage. I argue that during that time, her contributions to woman’s rights were nevertheless significant as she worked among women who resonated with her religious sensibilities, agendas, and rhetoric: while many actively supported woman’s suffrage, most did not. In advancing woman’s rights, Brown Blackwell used rhetoric that synthesized her Finney-inspired ideals with her

interpretations of science. This dissertation will add to the existing scholarship about women's rights, by recognizing the existence and thoughts of the thousands of religious women who contributed to woman's rights, even if they all did not support suffrage, as an outward expression of their inward piety.

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This acknowledgment is partial and incomplete. While some people have been singled out, another hundred or so could be added to the list as my allies stretch back through the years. While the time frame focuses on the last decade, there were many others from a more distant past that played significant roles. Everyone and everything has played a part in bringing me to this point of time. I'm grateful for all the twists, turns, and upsets, as well as for the many good and lovely circumstances that constitute to my life. I hope that this achievement is not the highlight of my life, but just another step along a very long path that I am traveling with so many beloved companions.

Dedication

Dedicated to my grandmother, Rose Schneeberger Ellerhorst,
who exemplified a passion for learning.

And to Norman Sheidlower,
who means more to me than I can ever say.

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Introduction

“I am going to do it.”

Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825-1921) was born in the small rural village of Henrietta, New York, close to Rochester.¹ She became one of the most outspoken and remarkable women of her era: an ordained minister, a published author, a prominent public speaker, and a philosophical thinker whose writings described and explicated her syntheses of theology and science. Brown Blackwell’s life was punctuated by “firsts” that have significance within women’s history as evidence of female success in what were then male-dominated arenas.² At a time in American history when the “Woman Question” (i.e., women’s nature and roles) was discussed and contested within various public forums, Brown Blackwell consistently argued for women’s authority and ability to *act* and *do* that was grounded in her interpretation of religious as well as scientific evidence: in order to *naturalize* the full range of women’s actions, in much the same ways that other narratives naturalized certain human traits or behaviors. Building on her interpretations of religiously-oriented teachings regarding women’s roles and nature as well as science-based narratives, Brown Blackwell insisted that women were naturally endowed to *do* and *act* in ways that went beyond what was considered “natural” or appropriate for women. She wanted to expand what was considered as the woman’s sphere to bring women’s talents

¹ This part of western New York was still part of the American frontier, an area also known as the “Burned Over District” on account of the ongoing religious revival activities.

² For consistency, I use “Brown Blackwell” to refer to Antoinette Louise Brown throughout the text, even though she did not marry and take the surname Blackwell until 1856 . When she did marry, her husband supported her decision to include her maiden name so that she was referred to as Rev. or Mrs. Brown Blackwell. All of their daughters also had Brown as a middle name.

However, citations and bibliography will reflect her published name, using “Brown” or “Blackwell” as appropriate.

and abilities into more complete expression.³ For example, sometime before Brown Blackwell's 1847 graduation from Oberlin Collegiate Institute (later known as Oberlin College), she decided to become a minister.⁴ The idea was rejected by her closest friends, family, and faculty. At that time, there were no other women ministers. It just wasn't done. Yet, Brown Blackwell recalled a conversation with her closest friend at Oberlin, Lucy Stone. During an evening walk, Brown Blackwell told Stone about her plans to become a minister. As Brown Blackwell recalled the event, Stone said, "You will never be allowed to do this. You will never be allowed to stand in a pulpit, nor to preach in a church, and certainly you can never be ordained."⁵ Brown Blackwell continued, "It was a long talk but we were no nearer to an agreement at the end than at the beginning. My final answer could only be, "I am going to do it."⁶ And she did it.

This dissertation examines how Brown Blackwell contributed to conversations that were defining what it meant to be a scientist during a period when the discipline of science was being defined, as well as what it meant to be a female minister during a period when women's roles in Protestant Christianity were in a state of revision. As we will read in further detail, women's nature, roles, and capabilities (what was referred to as the "Woman Question") were being

³ While I often adopt the common usage of the nineteenth century with the singular "woman" as used in terms including woman question, woman's rights, woman's suffrage, etc., I also use the plural "women."

⁴ Brown Blackwell was an undergraduate from 1845-1847. While her records do not indicate exactly when she began to think about becoming a minister, this desire seems to have crystalized during her undergraduate studies at Oberlin.

During her enrollment, Oberlin Collegiate Institute would become Oberlin College in 1850; I will often refer to either of the college names as "Oberlin."

⁵ This conversation occurred sometime before Brown Blackwell graduated in August 1847 as Brown Blackwell began her graduate theological studies shortly thereafter.

⁶ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 65.

defined in religious and scientific terms. In this regard, I mean “scientific” to cover the constellation of opinions emerging during the nineteenth century about evidence and rationality; and specifically in relation to women, including biology, physiology, psychology, and anatomy. Brown Blackwell was at the heart of intra-relations that circulated around and within science, theology, and the Woman Question. When historians look back on so-called conflicts between science and religion that emerged in America during the 1890s, Brown Blackwell occupies an important place in the historical science/religion/gender nexus.

In the mid-nineteenth-century, women and men from a variety of backgrounds with various credentials were writing and discussing scientific topics that were published in national newspapers, journals, and magazines; and, as in Brown Blackwell’s case, published as books. Many opinions and theories circulated around women’s nature, roles, and capabilities that interplayed with religiously-motivated opinions and interpretations. Brown Blackwell believed that everyone had the responsibility and authority to participate in scientific and religious conversations and debates. As the newly developing field of professional science was dominated by males, Brown Blackwell felt it was particularly important for women to participate in offering their own perspectives and orientations.⁷ Therefore, while science offered tools to reveal more detail about the human condition, Brown Blackwell argued that science’s data needed to be more inclusive (i.e., include female subjects and female experience) and recognize other sources of authority that were rooted in particular or

⁷ For example, see Ruth Barton, "'An Influential Set of Chaps': The X-Club and Royal Society Politics 1864-85," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 23, no. 1 (Mar., 1990): 53-81; Jack Morrell and Arnold Thackray, *Gentlemen of Science: Early years of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press (Oxford); Oxford University Press (NY), 1981).

specialized kinds of perception and/or experience. Her ideas about perception and experience were influenced by her own religious orientation and practices. For Brown Blackwell, her ideas about science, theology, and the nature, roles, and capabilities of women were inextricably intra-woven. As history reveals, Brown Blackwell's ideas about how science should be conducted and interpreted did not prevail; nonetheless, her life exemplifies a group of participants in science that are not often included in modern histories of science. While Brown Blackwell may not be fully recognized as a woman of science beyond, perhaps, her first two books (*Studies in General Science* (1869) and *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875)),⁸ her theology of complementarity, informed by science, would not seem unfamiliar in contemporary terms. As will be described in more detail, Brown Blackwell spent her entire life trying to show that her ideas about science, theology, and women were also complementary and intra-related.

In order to fully understand the complexities of Brown Blackwell's commitments regarding women's natural capacities to do and act, and her ideas about expanded spheres of action, I situate her activism and agendas within particular relevant and influential historical contexts (1830-1915) that influenced her during her lifetime. These contexts include the Protestant revivalism and perfectionism of Rev. Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875)—I argue that his teachings, example, and writings were evident throughout at least 80 years of Brown Blackwell's lifetime. Another context encompasses women's participation in social reforms and benevolence, including women's rights; and public engagement with topics regarding the "Woman Question" such as women's nature, women's access to higher education,

⁸ Antoinette Brown Blackwell, *Studies in General Science* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1869); Blackwell, *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875) (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1976).

contestations around divorce, and issues around women's work. Within these contexts and categories, different factions offered opinions regarding the ways that women should or should not act; or proposed what realms of activity were appropriate for women's participation; or asserted hierarchies of authority to answer the "Woman Question." For example, Biblical texts or religiously-motivated teachings were often interpreted to reinforce women's subordinate, domestic status; reiterations and repetitions of these and similar texts served to naturalize specific women's behaviors and roles such as piety, morality, and submission. Since women were the overwhelming majority in church membership, these values became further identified as Christian values.⁹ Rev. Finney's teachings presented radical revisions to Protestant Christianity's theologies and practices that unsettled ideas about women's roles and nature.

As will be explained in further detail, Rev. Finney played a major role in shaping Brown Blackwell's aspirations and trajectory. He taught, in part, that men and women could *act* to conquer sin (through conversion and consistency of piety thereafter). Conversion was an intensely emotional sequence of steps that believers experienced as a radical transformation (literally, "a new birth") that altered their sense of relationship with God and the world.¹⁰

⁹ I use the word "Christian" to represent the predominately Protestant Christian population, or all denominations that are categorically Christian, but not Catholic.

¹⁰ Historians agree that a defining characteristic of the revivals during the First, Second, and Third Great Awakenings (periodically between early 17th century into the early 20th century) was the use of intentional strategies (sometimes referred to as "methods") to awaken strong emotional responses in congregants. For example, there were changes in the style and methods in delivering sermons. Where there used to be close studies of particular texts or topics, following the successes of revivalists George Whitfield (1714-1770) and Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), sermons and services became instruments to evoke strong emotional responses. These emotional responses were signs of the Holy Spirit working within. The "Great Awakenings" were periods of religious revivals to renew Christian commitments to salvation and increased piety that influenced hundreds of thousands of Americans in all parts of the country. The expansive breadth, variety, and aspects of these periods of revivalism are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but certain specifics will be discussed in further chapters.

Rev. Finney's new measures allowed women to pray in "promiscuous" church services.¹¹ And he emphasized that "religion is something you *do*."¹² To bring Finney's millennial vision to pass, he called on Christian men and women to *do* whatever they could to advance the kingdom of God, such as joining associations that promoted social reform. In response, women joined social reform and benevolence organizations in increasing numbers.

Brown Blackwell's father and older siblings were "converted" by Rev. Finney when she was five.¹³ As one of Brown Blackwell's "firsts," she was one of the first women to enroll in the first coeducational college in America, Oberlin Collegiate Institute, where she finished her

Rev. Finney, considered as "the father of modern revivalism," was one of the most significant figures of the Second Great Awakening. He systemized revival practices: "almost the inventor of the modern high-pressure revivalism which, as it spread, would have important consequences for the religious ethos of the nation..." Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 459, 461. Many books address the Awakenings; also Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992).

¹¹ "Promiscuous" was the word used throughout many of the nineteenth-century texts to describe audiences that included men and women. For a sampling of examples in context, please see: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 1. 1848-1861*, 2nd ed. (Rochester, NY; London; Paris: Susan B. Anthony; Charles Mann; G. Fischbacher; National American Woman Suffrage Association: 1889); *A Narrative of the Late Revivals of Religion, within the Bounds of Geneva Presbytery*. (Geneva, NY: Order of the Presbytery: J.C. Merrell & Co, 1832); Oneida Association, *Pastoral Letter of the Ministers of the Oneida Association, to the Churches Under their Care, on the Subject of Revivals of Religion* (Utica, NY: Printed by Ariel Works, 1827).

¹² I use the expression "religion is something you *do*" (or variations that play off "*do*" or "*act*") as a trope that represents the essential elements of Rev. Finney's theology: including, the necessity of conversion that is psychologically, emotionally, physically, mentally transformative; the burning love of God that fuels desire to *do* anything possible to build the kingdom of God. Rev. Finney's theology will be described in more detail in further sections.

¹³ "Conversion" is an encompassing term that includes multiple meanings: for Rev. Finney, "It [a revival] presupposes that the church is sunk down in a backslidden state, and a revival consists in the return of the church from her backslidings, and in the conversion of sinners." In this context, conversion was public. Conversion then included repentance, followed by "a new beginning of obedience to God...which will renew the love of God in their hearts. This will lead them to labor zealously to bring others to him...for the salvation of the whole world...with a foretaste of heaven." Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co, 1835), 14-15.

undergraduate degree in 1847 and her graduate training for the ministry in 1850. At Oberlin, Finney was a charismatic figurehead, professor of theology, the college president between 1835-1865, as well as pastor at Oberlin's First Congregational Church (1837-1872).¹⁴ Brown Blackwell grew up learning and practicing Finney's teachings. For her, the teaching that religion is something you *do* may well have been as natural as breathing. I argue that Finney's exhortation to Christian women to leave their homes to work on behalf of God's kingdom was very significant within the nascent woman's rights movement. I also argue that the historiography of women's rights movements in America tends to focus on the issue of women's suffrage. My examination of Brown Blackwell's life indicates that woman's rights movements also included many women who had different objectives, such as more access to education or more influence in their benevolence and reform activities. For them, suffrage was not the key issue or objective. I suggest that Rev. Finney's repeated urgings for women to act attracted a large number of women seeking social change within the structure of domesticity and piety without social revolution. He was not the only one who opened the door to greater participation in benevolence and social reform activities outside of the home, but his theological endorsement of women's capacities in millennial contexts was synergistic and complementary with other similar religiously-oriented programs and associations.¹⁵ A few of

¹⁴ According to Oberlin archives, Finney was Professor of Systematic Theology (1835-58), Professor of Pastoral Theology (1835-75), and also taught courses in Didactic and Polemic Theology and Mental and Moral Philosophy. He taught there until he was 83, and died there in 1875. "R/G 2/2 - Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875)." Oberlin College Archives, Accessed Mar. 25, 2015, <http://www.oberlin.edu/archive/holdings/finding/RG2/SG2/biography.html>.

¹⁵ Anthropologist Suzanne Spencer-Wood describes "domestic reformers" who maintained Christian ideals of domesticity but transformed those talents and virtues into "new public professions, organizations and institutions that were considered part of women's domestic sphere and thus acceptable within the patriarchal separate-

these programs that were pertinent to Brown Blackwell will be described in more detail. For many women, including Brown Blackwell, if women found a way to expand their spheres of activity, all women had the potential to *do* more.

Many women upheld ideals of womanhood that included qualities of piety, purity, and domesticity: if religion was something you *do* and ideas about woman's nature and the domestic sphere could be expanded, then women could work on behalf of women's rights and social reform while maintaining appropriate Godly deportment. Many women, including Brown Blackwell, were activists and reformers as well as pious Christians. In the nineteenth century, tens of thousands of women, influenced by Rev. Finney, or by one of his many followers, or by other religiously-oriented associations or programs, believed that women were to use their divine, natural talents and abilities beyond the walls of her home, for a millennial-like greater good.

Among several "firsts," while still an undergraduate at Oberlin Collegiate Institute, Brown Blackwell's senior essay, "Exegesis of 1 Corinthians, XIV, 34, 35; and 1 Timothy, II, 11, 12" (1847), was published in *The Oberlin Quarterly Review*, making Brown Blackwell among the first women that interpreted Biblical texts from a "feminist" exegetical perspective, predating

sphere gender ideology." Woman's rights were achieved through their greater access to professions. According to Spencer-Wood, in the 20th century, the millions of women in domestic reform movements "created a cultural tipping point when they came out for women's suffrage..." Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood, "How Domestic Reform Movements Transformed Western Patriarchy from the 18th Century into the Early 20th Century," *Atilim Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 1, no. 2 (2012), 141-164, 141, 157. See also: Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood, "Toward an Historical Archaeology of Materialistic Domestic Reform," in *The Archeology of Inequality*, eds. Randall H. McGuire and Robert Paynter (Oxford [England]; Cambridge, MA: B. Blackwell, 1991).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* (1895) by nearly 50 years.¹⁶ She presented her interpretation of St. Paul's "I suffer not a woman to teach" in I Corinthians and "Let women keep silence in the churches" in I Timothy—two texts that were often deployed in religiously-motivated rhetoric to define women's behaviors.¹⁷ During the origins of the women's rights movements in America, Brown Blackwell was a speaker during the first National Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1850, just two years after the pioneering women's rights convention at Seneca Falls. She was the first woman ordained as a minister (in the Orthodox Congregational Church: 1853), she worked as a pastor in South Butler, New York and was the first woman to officiate at a marriage in the United States. She was among the first women to be a professional public speaker – when a woman speaking in public to promiscuous audiences (males and females) was considered unseemly and against Biblical injunctions.

Brown Blackwell was notable for her other accomplishments. In later life, she was active in organizations that sought to expand women's opportunities and rights as well as to advocate on behalf of temperance, purity, and abolition.¹⁸ Brown Blackwell's many published articles included her viewpoints on these same issues and were published in a variety of journals and newspapers, including a commissioned series on life in the New York slums for Horace

¹⁶ The word "feminist" aptly describes Blackwell's arguments even though "feminist" was scarcely used before the 20th century. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, ed., *The Woman's Bible* (New York: European Publishing Co, 1895).

¹⁷ Antoinette L. Brown, "Exegesis of 1 Corinthians, XIV, 34, 35; and 1 Timothy, II, 11, 12," *The Oberlin Quarterly Review* 3, no. 1 (August, 1847), 358-373.

¹⁸ The various groups that were part of the purity movements represented many different goals, but for Brown Blackwell, her focus was lobbying against legislation that protected the men who hired prostitutes.

Greeley's *New York Tribune*.¹⁹ In addition to speaking engagements, other ministers invited her to preach from their pulpits. Her first book, *Studies in General Science* (1869) presented the results of a long examination of contemporary science and her intention to show unity throughout Nature, that mind and matter were indivisible, and that everything one needed to know about God was revealed through Nature. All actions worked in equivalent relations toward harmony or equilibrium.²⁰ These were among the ideas that she used to describe relations between men and women as well as explain equivalencies in their actions.

Brown Blackwell also contributed to the Darwinian debates by writing *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875), in which she addressed arguments that she found pertinent in the context of the "Woman Question."²¹ She discussed the theories of prominent authors, including Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Edward Clarke. After *Sexes* (1875), Brown Blackwell published several more books that continued to work out details of her theological and scientific worldview. These titles included *The Physical Basis of Immortality* (1876), *The Philosophy of Individuality* (1893), *The Making of the Universe* (1914), and *The Social Side of Mind and Action* (1915).²² A book of poetry offered her reflections and interactions with the

¹⁹ Antoinette L. Brown, "Shadows of Our Social System" [9 installments depicting life in the slums—5/3/1855-12/18/55], *New-York Daily Tribune*, 1855. Installment titles included, "The Little Candy Girl," "You all Blame Me," "Fallen Woman," and "His Mother's in There."

²⁰ Antoinette Brown Blackwell, *Studies in General Science* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1869).

²¹ Antoinette Brown Blackwell, *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875) (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1976).

²² Antoinette Brown Blackwell, *The Physical Basis of Immortality* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1876); Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality; Or, the One and the Many* (New York, etc.: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1893); Blackwell, *The Making of the Universe; Evolution the Continuous Process which Derives the Finite from the Infinite* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1914); Blackwell, *The Social Side of Mind and Action* (New York: The Neale Pub. Co, 1915).

sea, a presentation of her ideas in another genre.²³ After *Sexes* (1875), Brown Blackwell's writing became more theoretical and dense with details and reviewers struggled to make sense of her arguments. According to correspondence, her last two books were intended to be easier to read and to say what she really meant to say all along. But she was growing increasingly blind and had less energy. While *The Making of the Universe* (1914) is still dense with theory and her (intentional) repetitive style, her final book is written in a more personal voice and connects her arguments across her books and articles. In this important book, *The Social Side of Mind and Action* (1915), Brown Blackwell summarizes her lifelong message. She wants the readers to *do*, to test her theories for themselves so that they can prove through their individual experience the veracity of her arguments. For Brown Blackwell, experience is evidence that all the facts may well not deliver. I suggest that throughout her books and articles, Brown Blackwell was providing evidence about the equivalence of actions in seeking equilibrium—evidence she used to naturalize women's nature and capabilities: evidence that she wanted the readers to experience in ways that were akin with religious conversion, but were difficult to express in words.

In 1881, Brown Blackwell was one of the first women elected to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. While she may well have hoped her colleagues there would give her feedback and direction with her scientific writings, that did not take place. As her culminating "first," in 1920, with the right to vote secured, Brown Blackwell was the first

²³ Antoinette Louisa Brown Blackwell, *Sea Drift; Or, Tribute to the Ocean [Poems]* (New York: J. T. White & Co, 1902).

and only woman still alive from the origins of the woman's rights movement to vote in the first Presidential election open to them.²⁴

In this dissertation I propose that the arguments that Brown Blackwell presented on behalf of women's rights can be understood as a synthesis of Finney-inspired religious ideals around *doing* with science-based theories that she believed revealed validating evidence about women's nature and abilities to *do*. After the publication of *Sexes*, her contributions to women's rights movements and her books were less documented by historians, perhaps because she was less focused on suffrage. I argue that during that time, her contributions to woman's rights were nevertheless significant as she worked among women who resonated with her religious sensibilities, agendas, and rhetoric: while many actively supported woman's suffrage, most did not. In advancing woman's rights, Brown Blackwell used rhetoric that synthesized her Finney-inspired ideals with her interpretations of science. This dissertation will add to the existing scholarship about women's rights, by recognizing the existence and thoughts of the thousands of religious women who contributed to woman's rights as an outward expression of their inward piety, even though not all of them supported suffrage. For many of these women religion was something that should be expressed by action. Few women, however, were as bold or uniquely active as Antoinette Brown Blackwell: even when she was

²⁴ Brown Blackwell did not attend the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. However, Charlotte Woodward signed the Seneca Falls declaration when she was 18 years old and was identified as the only signatory who was alive to vote in the 1920 election. However, she was ill on election day and never voted. Daniel Carpenter and Colin D. Moore, "When Canvassers Became Activists: Antislavery Petitioning and the Political Mobilization of American Women," *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 03 (2014), 479-498, 493. Judith Wellman, "Charlotte Woodward," National Park Service, accessed Nov. 3, 2014, <http://www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/charlotte-woodward.htm>.

faced with obstacles that made her actions or choices difficult, she took one step further and insisted “I am going to do it.”

Brown Blackwell’s pronouncement, “I am going to do it,” brings into focus complex and complicated issues around the question of action – specifically women’s actions – as defined by theology and science during her lifetime. Such a pronouncement coming from a woman was radical and revolutionary in almost any social, economic, or political context that was outside the boundaries of home or church. For Brown Blackwell, “I am going to do it” may well have been an assertion of what she believed was her moral agency to choose her sphere of activity; although everyone might be against her, she had God-given talents and abilities; and that she was called to *do* everything possible with those talents and abilities to advance the kingdom of God. “I am going to do it.”

In order to illuminate connections between Finney’s methods and teachings; Brown Blackwell’s women’s rights commitments; and her search for scientific evidence to validate her arguments and worldview; I review the sweep of her various writings (including articles, correspondence, journals, and books). I describe the larger contexts that many have influenced her (what I call “national narratives”), such as millennialism, or issues around the “Woman Question”—such as how women’s nature and abilities were being described in scientific as well as religious terms. With slices of narratives from a variety of sources that cut across her events and circumstances and contexts, her commitments and ideals are revealed.

For her, women’s rights meant having a more adequate understanding (encompassing religious and scientific aspects) of women’s capacities to work, to act, and to *do*: she believed

that with greater understanding of underlying principles, everyone would see that it was *natural* to expand opportunities for women. During Brown Blackwell's life, while many of her "firsts" were groundbreaking events for women, they also were markers of great personal sacrifice and struggle. During a period of American history when religious, scientific, and other categorical presentations regarding the "Woman Question" were often biased against particular women's *actions*—Brown Blackwell persisted nonetheless, exemplifying and embodying her commitment to a robust, expansive, *naturalized* understanding of women's action: "I am going to do it."

Chapter 1

1825-1845: Religion is something you *do*.



Figure 1. Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 1847.
Courtesy of Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio.

Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825-1921) became one of the most outspoken and remarkable women of her era: an ordained minister, a published author, a prominent public speaker, and a philosophical thinker whose writings revealed deep theological and scientific reflection. Before Brown Blackwell had grown up to be the young lady in the portrait, before she was among the first American women trailblazing through what was seen as man's domain, she was a girl in a rural family on the western frontier. In her part of the frontier, religious fervor was the norm: her family was converted by Rev. Charles Grandison Finney, among the

most influential revivalists in American religious history.¹ It was during these formative years that Rev. Finney’s teaching—that religion is something you *do*—began to percolate through Brown Blackwell’s thoughts and experiences.

“Religion is something you *do*,” paraphrases and encapsulates Rev. Finney’s teachings, described in more detail in the upcoming sections in this chapter.² It represents a complex of teachings and actions and practices that Rev. Finney taught during his revivals, from the pulpit, and as a professor in Oberlin College’s Theological department during Brown Blackwell’s enrollment there. Briefly, Calvinists required the direct action of the Holy Spirit (or grace of God) to bring about salvation from sin: in this way, man remained passive, waiting for the Spirit to act upon his nature.³ Rev. Finney rejected the idea that sin was constitutional (“original”) in mankind, asserting that sin was voluntary, a choice. Through effort and resolution (rather than

¹ Historian Perry Miller writes regarding Finney: “No religious leader in America since [Jonathan] Edwards had commanded such attention; no one was to do it again until Dwight Moody.” [Dwight Moody represents the revivalism of the Third Awakening, which began in the period following the Civil War.] Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War (3 Vols.)*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), 9.

American history scholar Edmund Morgan writes:

Charles Grandison Finney probably affected the daily lives of more Americans in the nineteenth century than any other single individual. His evangelical preaching of moral perfection reached hundreds of thousands and sparked the movement that led to the abolition of slavery.

Morgan, Edmund S. "Charles Grandison Finney." In *Invisible Giants: Fifty Americans Who Shaped the Nation but Missed the History Books*, edited by Carnes, Mark C. and American Council of Learned Societies, 89-108. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 89.

As historian Garth Rosell details, between 1800 and 1850, Protestant church membership increased from 365,000 to 3,500,000 and that by “conservative estimate,” Rev. Charles Grandison Finney “brought half a million converts into America’s churches.” Garth Rosell, "Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire" (PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1971), 23, see fns. 1 and 25 citing Charles Chester Cole, *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 13.

² Certain italicized words including *do* and *doing* (among others such as *act*), when used in other contexts or sentence constructions refer back to the expression “religion is something you *do*.”

³ My use of gendered language throughout is in keeping with the styles and usage common during that time period.

by God's Grace), man could overcome sin. Effective preaching [in Rev. Finney's revival style] would show the sinner his wickedness and "present the truths to be believed, the duties to be done, and the reasons for those duties....to induce him [the sinner] to *act*. [Emphasis his.]"⁴ Rev. Finney further expanded upon these teachings and in his extremely popular *Lectures on the Revival of Religion* (1835). He said, "*Religion is the work of man*. It is something for man to do. [Emphasis as published.]"⁵ Rev. Finney emphasized that *doing* started with conversion and then included practices of piety and acts of benevolence or social reform to uplift others for the millennial kingdom of God. According to Rev. Finney's extensive accounts of conversion experiences, he used specific methods to bring about transformational changes. As historian Donald Scott explains:

[C]onversion was an experience. It was not simply something that people believed—though belief or faith was essential to it—but something that happened to them, a real, intensely emotional event they went through and experienced as a profound psychological transformation left them with a fundamentally altered sense of self, an identity as a new kind of Christian. As they interpreted it, they had undergone spiritual rebirth, the death of an old self and the birth of a new one that fundamentally transformed their sense of their relationship to the world.

Conversion consisted of a sequence of clearly mapped-out steps, each of which was accompanied by a powerful emotion that led the penitent from the terror of eternal damnation through redemption to the promise of heavenly salvation.⁶

⁴ Charles Grandison Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text*, eds. Richard A. G. Dupuis and Garth Rosell (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1989), 321-2. Hereafter referred to as *Memoirs*.

⁵ Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 9. Commencing in December 1834 or January 1835--details are contradictory--Finney presented a series of doctrinal lectures on revivals. Joshua Leavitt took notes of these lectures, publishing them initially in *The New-York Evangelist* and then as a book in May, 1835.

⁶ Donald Scott, "Evangelicalism, Revivalism, and the Second Great Awakening," accessed Mar. 10, 2015, National Humanities Center, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/nevanrev.htm>.

Scott describes these steps as the penitent to repent, surrender unconditionally to God's will in order to obey and serve Him completely. It was this act of repentance, surrender, and dedication to serving his will that Rev. Finney meant when he insisted that "sinners [are] bound to change their own hearts."⁷

For women, an important distinction in Rev. Finney's teaching was that he was calling all Christians—men **and** women to be fully converted and committed to work for the establishment of the kingdom of God. By exhorting that good Christians show their piety by participating in good works, women now had an invitation, by an influential man of God, to work for God in associations that were outside of the home. As we will read in more detail in this chapter, virtues of piety and purity were God-given attributes of women according to prevalent ideals of womanhood. Women were already naturally "doing" religion within their home: that was their special role. Now, Rev. Finney and the countless ministers who followed his lead, were asking women to help in the millennial efforts. And while women left their homes in droves to participate, they brought their natural divine talents and attributes with them—extending their moral authority beyond their home into the world.

While Charles Grandison Finney had tremendous influence in Rochester, New York City, Boston, and at Oberlin, he was not the only one fueling millennial hope or social reform.⁸

⁷ Scott, "Evangelicalism, Revivalism, and the Second Great Awakening." Scott references Rev. C. G. Finney, "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts," *Sermons on Various Subjects* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1836), 3-42.

⁸ See, for example, Timothy Lawrence Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

However, since I am arguing specifically about his influence on Antoinette Brown Blackwell, my focus is on him.

The events that shaped Brown Blackwell's religious disposition

The idea that religion is something you *do* was a lifelong commitment for Brown Blackwell: an idea that she learned and began practicing when she was just a child. As we will read in more detail, she lived in a religious, pious home. Some of her earliest memories were at her grandmother's knee, listening to Bible stories or readings from *Pilgrim's Progress*. Her father had wanted to become a minister but didn't receive a call from God. During Rev. Finney's revivals in Rochester, her father and older siblings were converted and the family practiced Rev. Finney's teaching that religion is something you *do*. Blackwell's parents and siblings were prayerful, devout, and abstained from alcohol. The oldest son followed Rev. Finney to Oberlin Seminary to become a minister too. Youthful Brown Blackwell memorized hymns, prayed with her classmates, and spoke during her church meetings. From the very beginning, for Brown Blackwell, religion was something you *do*.

Antoinette Brown [Blackwell] was born on May 20, 1825 in a "double log house of six rooms" in Henrietta, New York, a farming community outside of Rochester in the frontier of western New York. She grew up in Henrietta, part of what was known as the "Burned-over District," a term used to describe the effects of years of religious revival activities that were foundational in Brown Blackwell's religious development.⁹ Her parents were Joseph Brown

⁹ Historian Whitney Cross notes that critics of the habitual revivalism in the area of New York west of the Catskills and Adirondacks called that region the "Burned-over District" or "Burnt" deploying an analogy between

(1784-1877) and Abigail “Abbey” Morse (1793-1873). She was the seventh of ten children with three older brothers, three older sisters, and three younger sisters.

According to Brown Blackwell’s memoirs, when she was about two and a half, she went to spend the night with her older sister at a neighbor’s house. When they returned home the next day, she met her new baby sister who slept with her in her parent’s trundle-bed. A few weeks before her third birthday, Nettie went with an older brother and sister to begin her education at the country school. “I cannot remember when I could not read. I took naturally to study, as did all my brothers and sisters.”¹⁰ Brown Blackwell remembered her first five or six years of school as having new teachers each term, often a young man or woman still in their teenage years, with “school babies” sharing the classroom.¹¹ When Antoinette was five, they moved to a larger stone house on the family property, and she and several of her siblings slept in the large open attic.

forest fires and fires of the spirit. Connecticut Congregationalist minister, Dr. Lyman Beecher wrote that the fires of revival caused “moral desolation and ruin” and his use of the expression “burnt over” or “burned over” in his published letters may have influenced its usage. Revivalist Charles Finney also used the expression “burnt district” to describe the people of that region: over-exposed to revival excesses, he was worried that they had hardened their hearts against religious instruction. (This would not be the case for Rev. Finney, or for other revivalists who continued to work in the area.) Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 3-4; Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text*, eds. Richard A. G. Dupuis and Garth Rosell (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1989), 78, for citations regarding Dr. Beecher, see fn. 24 on that page. [Hereafter referenced as *Memoirs*.]

¹⁰ Blackwell, Blackwell, *The Making of the Universe Minister*, 38.

In the “Foreword,” Gilson wrote: “This book of the life of Antoinette Brown Blackwell has been written from notes made during long talks with her in the library of her home in Elizabeth during the winter of 1909 when she was eighty-four years old” (4).

I found that Gilson’s edited account of Brown Blackwell’s life compares closely with her handwritten manuscripts, including “Childhood,” (n.d.), “Reminiscences of Early Oberlin,” (1918), “Life Work,” (n.d.), “My housekeeping,” (1920), “Memoirs of Childhood,” (1896) as well as other biographical narratives written by her niece, Alice Stone Blackwell. All of these references are in the Blackwell Family Papers.

¹¹ Blackwell, *Memoirs of Childhood*.

A self-sufficient family, they made their own soap and candles and sold or bartered extra fruit, eggs, butter, or cheese “in the city—meaning Rochester, seven miles from our local village.”¹² Brown Blackwell recalled that her mother was very fond of weaving while she preferred spinning. All the girls were involved in knitting and sewing for the family until factories “began to destroy home industries of that class and soon after our clothing was no longer home spun or woven.”¹³

Several of Brown Blackwell’s recollections described her experiences of what it was like to be a girl: her memories revealed some of the values and narratives that influenced her. Brown Blackwell wrote that she was not fond of indoor work and occasionally had opportunities to help in the fields. “My youngest brother was five years my senior. It was convenient to have a little boy around the farm, and I was that little boy.”¹⁴ Despite instances of doing a boy’s work on the farm, her father preferred to limit her activities to those parts of the farm that could not be seen from the road in order to maintain appropriate appearances. In the frontier area of New York that was Brown Blackwell’s home, there was an expectation for girls to focus on household work while men worked in the fields or in other occupations that were outside of the home. Brown Blackwell wrote that there were other inconsistencies in the ways that boys and girls were treated then as she described winter activities:

¹² Blackwell, *Memoirs of Childhood*.

¹³ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 37.

¹⁴ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 36.

The lines of propriety as between girls and boys were very curious in those days. The girls could slide. We all ran and took a long slide in the little pond by the school house, and a boy on skates would push or pull us about the pond while we stood passively on our feet or sat in a chair or a sled, but a girl would no more have thought of putting on skates herself than of putting on the trousers of the boy.¹⁵

Brown Blackwell explained that skates and sleds were the property of boys; for a girl to even consider using either skates or sleds on her own was “preposterous.”¹⁶ Rather, girls made dolls and playhouses. Brown Blackwell remembered the elaborate constructions made in corners of fences. During their play, “we often had established families and paid most interesting visits from [play] house to house, and sometimes we invited the boys especially if there was anything good to eat.”¹⁷ Despite some fluidity in roles that girls and boys might enjoy, Brown Blackwell recalled fairly well-defined roles that reasserted male activity and female passivity and domesticity: she remembered being allowed to do the occasional tasks of boys and for being “praised for being useful and just as good as a boy.”¹⁸

Although Brown Blackwell’s local church was Congregational, according to her recollections, she did not mention going to church until she was about six years old. Until then, much of her religious instruction was at her grandmother’s knee.¹⁹

Our grandmother...was a remarkable woman, a reader and a thinker and for her times she had been well educated. Our mother being much occupied with her

¹⁵ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 36.

¹⁶ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 36.

¹⁷ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 36.

¹⁸ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 36.

¹⁹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 46. Her grandmother was her father’s mother.

younger children and household cares and often in poor health—the grandmother had a great mental and moral influence over her grandchildren. Many of my earliest tastes I can trace directly back to her interest and sympathy. She sat much in her room, often with an immense great Bible on her knees, and was always ready to read or talk to us when we came and sat down at her feet hearing about and wondering over the few pictures in the great book.²⁰

Her grandmother died when Brown Blackwell was eight years old. By then, her father was a deacon in the local Congregational church, having been converted during the Rochester revivals in 1830-31.

He [Brown Blackwell's father] and several of the older children had been converted under the preaching of Prof. Charles G. Finney, an evangelist in Rochester. His meetings were always successful in interest in the number of conversions, and in their great audiences. The influence of my oldest sister originally induced the other members of the family to attend and they all became warm admirers of Prof. Finney and his meetings. The holding of frequent revivals was then and at later dates the approved method of dealing with the unconverted and of renewing the first love of the backsliders.²¹

As Brown Blackwell mentioned, revivals were important. Living on the frontier, there was concern that without being fiercely attentive to one's religious disposition that unsavory, immoral, or unchristian influences could have dangerous consequences that went beyond personal damnation. With millennial hopes and expectations at stake, maintaining high standards for Christian behavior was very important.

Brown Blackwell was eager to *do* more. After Rev. Finney's revival work in Rochester in 1830-31, other revivalists continued to visit the area and her local church for protracted meetings lasting a week or more. Brown Blackwell was too young to attend these revival

²⁰ Blackwell, *Memoirs of Childhood*.

²¹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 46-7. Brown Blackwell used his later title although he had not yet begun his professorship at Oberlin at the time of the Rochester revivals.

meetings. Once while the other family members were at a meeting, her mother gathered the younger children together and prayed with them while they kneeled around her knees.

“Naturally we began at once to beg to attend meetings at the church.”²² Although Brown Blackwell and two of her sisters were still very young, they were allowed to go to evening church services. Brown Blackwell recalled, “I was as deeply religious and truly religious at that time as I have ever been at any age.”²³

From her earliest recollections, Brown Blackwell was practicing aspects of Rev. Finney’s teaching that religion is something you *do*. On May 5, 1834, Brown Blackwell and two of her older siblings joined the local orthodox Congregational church. Her family often had family prayer meetings and Brown Blackwell sometimes spoke during church social meetings. She recalled, “At one of these times I remember under stress of excitement, breaking down into weeping and one of the grave deacons arose and said with pronounced emphasis ‘Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, the Lord has perfected praise.’²⁴ As a nine- or ten-year-old child, Brown Blackwell felt she was neither a babe, nor a suckling, but rather grown up. Despite her embarrassment, Brown Blackwell remembered that it was at her church’s prayer and conference meetings that she began her public speaking. On some other occasions she practiced a form of youthful ministry when some of the girls in her school asked her to pray with them from time to time.

²² Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 46.

²³ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 46.

²⁴ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 46.

Brown Blackwell's family was pious. As a consequence of revivals, Sundays became an all-day affair for Brown Blackwell's family. When Sunday School was established, services and classes went from morning, through a lunch break, until late afternoon. During the summer, Sunday school was held later in the local schoolhouse and Brown Blackwell's family attended these classes as well. She remembered enjoying these Sundays as welcome breaks from the routines of the week. As a teenager, Brown Blackwell and her younger sister memorized the thirty or forty hymns in the Sunday school hymnal, reciting them for the family. Her family was devout, with family prayers morning and evening, as well as blessings over meals. "We also kept the fast days also," Brown Blackwell wrote.²⁵ From her various accounts and remembrances, her family was religious and abstained from the use of alcohol, which was deemed as an outward expression of piety. Her older brother William (1816-1902) became a minister after being one of the earliest graduates from Oberlin Seminary (1841) when Rev. Finney was teaching there to prepare young men for the ministry.

Brown Blackwell thought of God as being beneficent and loving. As her church was among the more liberal orthodox Congregationalist congregation, she wrote that the "terrors of future punishment were not largely dwelt upon either in church or at home."²⁶ When a neighbor—a boy not much older than Brown Blackwell—died shortly after a revival, the boy's mother mourned in great distress because the child had refused to be converted, putting his

²⁵ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 51.

²⁶ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 48.

eternal soul at risk. Witnessing the woman's misery, Brown Blackwell questioned the idea of eternal torture put forth by some Calvinist theologies.²⁷

Brown Blackwell had interactions with other religions and practices during her youth. Although the origins of Mormonism were much earlier than her only recollection, when Brown Blackwell was about thirteen years old, one of her classmates discussed her family's conversion and possible pending departure for Utah.²⁸ Brown Blackwell wrote of her experience with the Millerites (an Adventist millennialist movement that foretold the "end of time" on October 22, 1844).²⁹ She remembered "waking one night in an awful fright at the volume of sound which rolled through the room it seemed with more than the rumble and roar of cannon balls." Brown Blackwell explained:

[It] was early during the Miller excitement when the papers were swelling upon the doleful prophecy that the world was coming to a speedy end. The ground was frozen hard and two or three wagons were rattling along together in the darkness—a rather unusual process in that quiet neighborhood in the night time.

²⁷ Calvinism's doctrine of infant damnation, an extension of their doctrine of original sin, meant that infants inherited the guilt of Adam's sin: they were born damned and unless deemed to be part of the elect, by God's grace, were liable for eternal damnation. This doctrinal point was divisive and a theological point of contention among many denominations and largely denounced by the early nineteenth century. See, for example, Lyman Beecher, *The Government of God Desirable: A Sermon Delivered at Newark, N.J., October 1808*. 7th ed. (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1827), p. 15. In a footnote, Beecher [in 1827] reflects back upon Calvinist doctrine and argues that infant damnation is not believed or taught as a doctrine among Calvinistic theologians or ministers. While examples can be found that repudiate Rev. Beecher's claim—the parameters around "the elect" were contested (among other distinctions)—his denouncement was probably in line with many denominational Calvinists.

Rev. Finney represented one of the more liberal that argued that men were not absolutely sinful as a result of Adam (predestination), but were capable of good as well as evil. Sin was a moral choice. Since infants and young children lacked sufficient maturity to be moral agents, they could not sin, or be damned.

²⁸ Joseph Smith (1805-1844) published *The Book of Mormon* in 1830 after he reported translating "golden plates" that an angel revealed to him to in 1823, in Elmira, New York.

²⁹ Millerism, named after Baptist minister William Miller (1782-1849), credited with founding the Adventist religious movement, had a more complicated and fluid timeline for the end of the world – it was initially suggested that physical destruction of the world, ushering the arrival of Christ, would commence sometime in 1843. This was later amended and made more specific.

The prolonged solemn reverberation in the empty garret woke up all the sleeping doubts and fears of the half credulous childish heart.

The world had certainly come to its destined end. The terrible crack of doom was sounding on, and on, and on! Would it never stop! And what would come next? I waited in awe that was too great for an outcry until the dreadful rumbling passed on and silence fell. The others still slept and I began to understand the situation and was too ashamed to tell them till years afterward why and how I had been so appallingly frightened.³⁰

Brown Blackwell was 18 or 19 during this particular incident. Although in hindsight she may have attributed her fears to her “half credulous childish heart,” the millennial possibility of an apocalypse was not unreasonable to her. For the thousands caught up in Millerism, a millennial apocalypse was a very real expectation.

Brown Blackwell also recalled the advent of spiritualism: “At a later day,” Brown Blackwell wrote, “the Fox sisters began their spirit rappings and really the beginning of modern spiritualism in Rochester, so that the region has been rather noted for originating peculiar doctrines and practices.”³¹ Although Brown Blackwell didn’t mention all of the religious doctrines and practices that may have made the region noteworthy, it is likely that she was aware of more than she mentioned.³²

³⁰ Blackwell, *Memoirs of Childhood*.

³¹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 50-51. The Fox sisters began their séances in Rochester in 1850 after experiencing initial “spirit” rappings in their Hydesville, New York home in 1848.

³² Other notable religious groups that were in Blackwell’s vicinity during her childhood years included The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing (more commonly known as the Shakers) whose largest community was in New Lebanon, New York; and the Oneida Community founded in 1848 by John Humphrey Noyes (1811-1886). Noyes was a Yale-trained minister who developed theories of perfectionism that included ideas around his idea of free love. Although the Oneida community was founded in 1848, his ideas were in circulation more broadly in the previous decade. Noyes credited Finney’s revival in Gouverneur, NY in 1825 as the impetus behind Noyes’ conversion: “Those interested in tracing the connection of events might find a chain of special providences leading from the Gouverneur [sic] revival to the establishment of the Oneida Community.” Noyes conclude that “the Lord sent Mr. Finney to Gouverneur [sic]....to assure my conversion.” John Humphrey Noyes,

Although her father had initially believed in the Calvinistic idea that God must bring about a conversion moment in one's life – and had waited for years for that to happen – Brown Blackwell wrote that Rev. Finney emphasized that it was the duty of sinners to work actively to bring about their own conversion. Additionally, Brown Blackwell recalled that “men and women of the church were expected to become active in influencing those as yet outside the fold.”³³ These recollections were her first impressions of Rev. Finney's teaching that religion is something you *do*. That meant that Christians could and should take action: confess sin and repent, choose to live a sanctified or holy life, rather than hoping for salvation through faith. Men and women should act on behalf of the good of others and for the kingdom of God. Do it now. From childhood, Brown Blackwell experienced how this emphasis on *doing* was important to her family. For Brown Blackwell, the idea of *doing* rather than waiting for something to happen; of *doing* as a moral ethical obligation for women (and men); *doing* as a capability that everyone is born with; these were some of the aspects of *doing* or action that would be emphasized in and through her life's work.

National narratives woven through the fabric of Brown Blackwell's life

Brown Blackwell's and her family's religious commitments were influenced, in part, by larger national narratives that described and enacted aspects of millennialism, revivalism,

"Home Talk," *Oneida Circular: A Weekly Journal of Home, Science and General Intelligence* X, no. 1 (February 10, 1873), 51-52.

³³ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 47.

benevolence, and moral and social reforms.³⁴ For Brown Blackwell and her family, these larger narratives were rich with religious meaning and significance. As Brown Blackwell grew out of childhood she became more aware of what was known as the “Woman Question,” a complex of conversations in the public sphere that sought to define woman’s nature and roles. Ideals of womanhood were another aspect of the “Woman Question.” Steeped in the influences of her religiously-oriented home life, Brown Blackwell began to have her own ideas about what it meant to be a woman.

With this overview of Brown Blackwell’s early life in mind, a closer look at some of the national narratives will help nuance and give shape to her life’s commitments and trajectory. American millennialism, revivalism, and the rise of benevolence and reform agendas, were not discrete events: their narratives and timelines overlapped with each other as well as influencing and being influenced by the “Woman Question.”

After some of the contours and context of these national narratives are traced and described, I’ll return to the trajectory of Brown Blackwell’s life by further describing her New England parents’ emigration to the western frontier. I’ll introduce Rev. Charles Grandison

³⁴ The larger narratives that I’ve selected are not all inclusive nor do they represent all of the various movements, ideas, or influences that were active during Brown Blackwell’s lifetime. I chose my national narratives as pertinent to Brown Blackwell’s experiences as revealed by her writings, biographers, and other records. For example, Transcendentalism was a significant movement beginning in the 1820s. Brown Blackwell had relationships with a few notable Transcendentalists in the 1850’s who were also active in the nascent woman’s rights movement such as William Henry Channing (1810-1884) and Theodore Parker (1810-1860). It may well be that Brown Blackwell first encountered Transcendentalism at Oberlin through Lucy Stone. The influence of Transcendentalism on Brown Blackwell may well be present, but it is not explicit. There is no mention that this movement had penetrated into the Burned-Over District while Brown Blackwell lived there, nor is it (nor any prominent members) mentioned in the history of Oberlin College. Transcendentalism is an example of a significant movement that was influential during Brown Blackwell’s lifetime, but seemingly not influential with her (perhaps tangentially)—therefore, I did not include this movement among other “national narratives.” Cross, *The Burned-Over District*; Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College from its Foundation through the Civil War*, 2 vols. (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1943).

Finney, who would have a lifelong influence on Brown Blackwell and her family. This complex tapestry of intersecting narratives will better illuminate how Brown Blackwell became the woman who would become such a trailblazer.

What was the “Woman Question”?

The heart of the “Woman Question” was “What are the nature, roles, and capabilities of a woman?” The more hidden part of the “Woman Question” was “Who gets to decide?”

Scholars describe several models of womanhood among white middle-class nineteenth-century Americans.³⁵ All recognize and identify these categories or models as drawing upon religiously-inspired ideals, virtues, commitments, and motivations: they described hierarchies of gender in which the female was subordinate to the male. Theologians and ministers offered interpretations of woman’s nature that were not only Biblical, but part of a larger religious discourse about home and family that had roots in the Reformation and developed particular characteristics within the American religious landscape. American religious historian Colleen McDannell writes that the Protestant Reformation brought about major shifts in relations between family and religion that evolved into a “domestic rhetoric” in which the home was defined as a “school of faith and the family as a divine vocation.” Home religion developed

³⁵ Historians have described these models of womanhood in different ways. Barbara Welter described these models as “the cult of true womanhood”; Aileen Kraditor coined the concept “cult of domesticity”; and Nancy Cott problematized the idea of “the woman’s sphere.” Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1966), 151-174; Aileen S. Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968); Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. with a new preface ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997 (1977)).

further under the English Puritans and Protestants turned “not to the social world of the parish but to the intimacy of the nuclear family.” While some of the structures of family-based religious practices waned in England, they were institutionalized in colonial America and remained central within Victorian evangelical Protestant practices.³⁶ These circumstances further valorized the roles of women as particularly [Protestant] Christian: the moral and religious exemplars of the domestic sphere. For frontier families such as the Blackwells, their home and family was central to their religious practices, and we’ve read of young Brown Blackwell’s earliest recollections of religious training at her grandmother’s and mother’s knees. For young Brown Blackwell building playhouses along the fence, or doing inside chores, she understood and practiced the ideals of womanhood, part of a domestic rhetoric, that girls were to grow up to be good Christian wives and mothers.

Within these models, the foundational assumption was that women were subordinate to men. However, even in their subordination, they were seen as morally superior. Monogamy, matrimony, and maternity were “natural” roles and duties of women. These categories had religious dimensions to them that invested women’s roles and duties with meaning and value—individually, socially, and culturally. Women’s subordination was coupled with what was deemed as their “special” nature which defined them as naturally religious and possessing moral superiority. Woman’s intuition was another “natural” ability that was valuable in the

³⁶ Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, 1st ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). See also Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds., *Women and Religion in America: Vol. 1: The Nineteenth Century*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); David F. Noble, *A World without Women: The Christian Clerical Culture of Western Science* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Nancy F. Cott and Ann Braude, eds., *Root of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996).

context of their domestic roles, but was dismissed as less credible and lacking authority in male-dominated spheres of activity. As historian Nancy Cott notes, “by the mid-nineteenth century, ‘Christian’ values and virtues and ‘female’ values and virtues were almost identical.”³⁷ Given that women then had no suffrage, very little political power, limited economic independence, with constraints and social pressures that limited opportunities for change, women’s religious identity gave them status and cultural valence.

Women’s literature and magazines were rich with examples of these models which were further advanced in sermons and within women’s church and benevolence groups. More than one hundred women’s magazines were published before the outbreak of the Civil War and *Godey’s Lady Book* was the most prominent with a circulation of 150,000 and an estimated readership of one million. As historian Gerda Lerner writes,

Mass circulation newspapers and magazines made it possible to teach every woman how to elevate the status of her family...*Godey’s Lady Book* and innumerable gift books and tracts of the period all preach the same gospel of “true womanhood”—piety, purity, domesticity.³⁸

In addition to idioms around piety, purity, and domesticity, there were a variety of idioms of suffering recognized by nineteenth-century, white, middle-class Americans within their models of womanhood.

³⁷ Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs* 4, No. 2 (Winter, 1978), 221.

³⁸ Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson, 1800-1840," in *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women*, eds. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 190.

These idioms of suffering included aspects of ideas about subservience, illness, victimhood, and submission and were connected with the predominate myth of suffering, the story of Christ's death. Idioms of suffering were also associated with Eve's guilt and punishment in the creation story of the Old Testament. "Good" Christians imitated Jesus' suffering to prove their faithfulness and piety.³⁹ Americanist Jane Tompkins argues that these idioms seemed faithful to women's conceptions about the nature of reality. "They used their vision of the Christian home as the fulfillment of the Gospel, 'the end . . . which Jesus Christ came into this world to secure . . .'"⁴⁰ Tompkins writes about the proliferation of idioms of suffering in religious tracts, magazines, McGuffey readers, and in social instructional manuals. And, pulpit oratory shifted from "expository and abstract mode of explicating religious doctrine, to a mode in which sensational narratives carried the burden of theological precept" particularly among American religious tract publishers.⁴¹ Women (and some men) used a particular style of rhetorical discourse to present narratives of ideal womanhood that were

³⁹ Religious historian Kristine Rankka asserts that in orthodox Christian theology, Jesus' redemptive suffering and death "pay the price" for the sin of the entire human race. "The Christian is to be like Jesus, and this imitation of Christ finds its foremost expression in the obedient willingness to endure suffering. One's suffering can take the form of personal sacrifice or selfless service to others, which, it is believed, can lead to some greater good." Kristine M. Rankka, *Women and the Value of Suffering: An Aw(E)Ful Rowing Toward God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 40.

⁴⁰ Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), fn.31, p. 220 with references to Mary Kelley, "The Sentimentalists: Promise and Betrayal in the Home," *Signs* 4, No. 3 (1979), 434-446; Helen Waite Papashvily, *All the Happy Endings*, [1st] ed. (New York: Harper, 1956).

⁴¹ Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 153, with a reference to David S. Reynolds, "From Doctrine to Narrative: The Rise of Pulpit Storytelling in America," *American Quarterly* 32, No. 5 (1980), 479-498.

Scholars have various interpretations of the deployment of idioms of suffering in nineteenth-century literature: see Sally Mitchell, "Sentiment and Suffering: Women's Recreational Reading in the 1860s," *Victorian Studies* 21, No. 1, Victorian Leisure (Autumn, 1977), 29-45; Tamar Frankiel, ed., *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Revivalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978).

persuasive because they were evocative of feelings (sentiments) that included idioms of suffering. For example, the terminally-ill Evangeline “Eva” St. Clare, in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), was seen as an angelic loving character while suffering unto death.

Women understood and performed these idioms as expressions of religious piety and as part of their moral obligation to promote the kingdom of heaven on earth. In effect, it was how women *did* religion. While scholars have various interpretations regarding idioms of suffering in nineteenth-century literature, Tompkins asserts that “positing the kingdom of heaven on earth as a world over which women exercise ultimate control” was an important aspect of the theology and politics of ideal womanhood.⁴² The Christian home under the leadership of Christian women was the antidote to idioms of suffering. Through the leadership of righteous women, the kingdom of heaven could be realized now. In the chapters ahead, examples will show that Brown Blackwell saw herself as one of these righteous women.

In antebellum America, while Protestant Christianity has been seen as limiting women’s roles within a domestic sphere, I argue that the revivalism and theology of Charles Grandison Finney played a significant role in expanding women’s roles and participation in public arenas. Rev. Finney’s theology of doing within the millennial context of antebellum America, fueled religiously-motivated women to take their special domestic talents and gifts and leave their home to join their local benevolence and social reform associations. Of course, women did not “leave” their home: rather it was as if women expanded the boundaries of their domestic sphere to encompass other more public roles and activities, as if they were tempering the sins

⁴² Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 141.

of the world with their Godly presence. In preparing for the kingdom of God on earth, Rev. Finney called upon all Christians, men and women, to work to convert the unconverted and to further the uplifting of all humans through one's personal commitment to a sanctified life and one's participation in benevolent activities.

Rev. Finney insisted that women and men were equally called to participate in conversion, personal sanctification, and doing God's work. His inclusion of women in the great work of advancing God's kingdom brought countless women into the social reform movements of his time, particularly those involved with temperance, purity (anti-prostitution), and abolition. With growing experience in working together in association on behalf of the greater good, many women in these movements went on to join other movements and agendas including suffrage and reforms around legal, educational, and labor issues regarding women. Women's participation in all these various movements expanded and redefined ideas about woman's nature, roles, and capabilities.

Discussions about the "woman question" and women's nature were not new in the nineteenth century. However, changes in the American landscape—including developments in industrialization, immigration and emigration, urbanization, the expanding frontier, and moral and ethical questions about slavery—precipitated changes in social relations and dynamics between men and women that revealed underlying tensions and fears around changing roles, opportunities, and authority: there were no neat boundaries or categories that made answers obvious, universal, or uncontested. For the majority of Americans who saw themselves as

members of a Christian nation, their church offered a primary site or context for addressing changes and tensions in the social fabric.

From Brown Blackwell's earliest childhood recollections of Rev. Finney's influence, during her time at Oberlin as a student of Prof. Finney, until the end of her life, Brown Blackwell maintained her commitment to ideas that his teaching evoked. Brown Blackwell may have adopted, modified, and reinterpreted some of Rev. Finney's teachings, but she believed that she, and all women (and men), were endowed with natural capacities to do and act. Examples throughout Blackwell Brown's life—from her earliest recollections to the end of her days—reveal how she worked to expand ideas about what women could do, arising from her core belief that religion is something you *do*.

American millennialism

Protestant Christianity advanced millennial expectations regarding American's roles in preparing the world for the kingdom of God. A popular ideal since the founding of the American colonies, millennial-oriented denominations (i.e., Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists) avidly supported Revolutionary War ideals that they saw as linked with millennialism. As historian Ruth Bloch points out, "printed millennial literature suggests that a broad spectrum of American society entertained millennial ideas."⁴³ She adds that millennialism, even at the time, was not a precise term. Millennialism could refer specifically to literal belief in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation, or it could be more broadly understood as referring to any

⁴³ Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought 1756-1800* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xiv.

vision of a pending golden age. Despite this slippage in meaning, Bloch concludes that visionary ideals before 1800 were still predominately Biblical. Most of the pioneers settling around Rochester, New York, shared millennial beliefs.

This ideology was so pervasive that historian Nathan Hatch writes that “the kingdom of God and the virtuous republic became for Americans one and the same empire.”⁴⁴ Hatch argues that after the end of the Revolutionary War, New England ministers brought new religious significance to the role of man as a citizen, and the role of nations in bringing on the millennium. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, religious revivals were interpreted as a certain sign that “the Spirit of the Lord was mightily at work, ushering in the millennium through the hallowing of America” and fueled the many benevolent and social reform movements.⁴⁵ The ideas of millennialism, however narrowly or broadly construed, with or without explicit Biblical overtones, were essentially expressing a sacred narrative. And it was a sacred narrative that invited religiously-motivated men and women to become an active part of making the vision manifest on earth now.

Historian Timothy Smith explains that revivalism of the early decades of the nineteenth century expressed the role of the individual in bringing about the moral and social renewal necessary to bring about millennial visions. Their revivalism was not only about religious conversion, but had a broader vision in which the nature of reform itself was religious, an

⁴⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 141. See his footnotes on pp. 139-141 for his (partial) literature review and pages 176-192 for his bibliography and commentary regarding Massachusetts and Connecticut printed sermons, 1740-1800.

⁴⁵ Timothy L. Smith, "Righteousness and Hope: Christian Holiness and the Millennial Vision in America, 1800-1900," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Spring, 1979), 21-45, 21.

expression of piety within an overarching sacred structure of meaning. As we will read in greater detail later, the revivalism of Rev. Finney was in this category. Brown Blackwell's involvement with the Association for the Advancement of Women in the 1880's, described in Chapter 3, is one example from her life that explicitly mirrors these ideals.

During Brown Blackwell's childhood, there were many examples of millennial outlooks. For example, William Cogswell (1787-1850), pastor, Director of the American Education Society, and Dartmouth professor of history and national education, wrote:

This blessed season, technically called the Millennium, the Lord will hasten in his time. Those individuals who desire, pray, and labor for the advancement of this blessed day, are co-workers with him in bringing it forward, and all those Christian enterprises[sic] which serve to introduce it, may be considered as harbingers of its approach. Such are the various benevolent Societies, whose object is to diffuse religious knowledge and instruction. They are combined instruments in promoting the conversion of the world and the salvation of men.⁴⁶

These benevolent and reform societies that Cogswell referenced were religious in origin and broadly millennial: "The kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is sustained and carried forward by the instrumentality of means....the purposes of God are every day fulfilling in the benevolent efforts of Christians for the salvation of men."⁴⁷ Reform activities were framed in terms that expressed ideals of Christian benevolence or moral reform. Similarly, benevolence societies addressed social situations, needs, or goals that were intended to "re-form" them according to

⁴⁶ William Cogswell, *The Harbinger of the Millennium; with an Appendix* (Boston: Pierce and Parker, 1833), iv. The appendix describes all known benevolent societies, their history, officers, and effects with additional sections devoted to commentary. Note: The American Education Society was the leading benevolent organization in America, based on income (fiscal year 1826-27).

⁴⁷ Cogswell, *The Harbinger of the Millennium*, 249.

Christian ideals. Particularly in the period before the Civil War, these reform/benevolence activities were also millennial in scope.

Their financial contributions bear mentioning as a reflection of the influence that these religiously-motivated millennially-oriented benevolence and reform associations were actively present throughout American culture. These associations spent nearly as much on improvements as the federal government.⁴⁸ Benevolent societies had pervasive influence. These benevolent societies included (in order of their income between 1826-27) the American Education Society (funding education for ministry)(Boston), American Board of Foreign Missions (Bradford, Massachusetts), American Bible Society (New York), American Sunday-School Union (Philadelphia), American Tract Society (New York), and the American Home Missionary Society (New York). The other societies, not detailed above, were for the most part regional or denominational versions of these noted national societies. None of the listed societies were under denominational control, but were a collaborative and united effort supported by American Protestant Christians to “achieve ends far beyond the powers of their separate denominations” that included millennial ideals of conversion and reform.⁴⁹ The societies were founded and supported by leading businessmen and clergymen, as well as from countless members who joined in support of the objectives. Among the businessmen who financially sustained and acted as officers within these organizations, Lewis (1788-1873) and Arthur (1786-

⁴⁸ According to records compiled by historian Charles Foster, from the inception of the American republic to October 1, 1828, “the republic had spent “\$3,585,534.67 for internal improvements; over the same period the revenue of the thirteen leading benevolent societies came to \$2,813,550.02.” Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 121.

⁴⁹ Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, 123.

1865) Tappan were most prominent. While their contributions were extraordinary, their lives represent some of the religious attitudes and dispositions of many Americans. Many of associations, people, and schools that the Tappans supported were part of Brown Blackwell's experiences. The Tappans were successful in their endeavors because their sacred ambitions resonated and were not unfamiliar with their public. They were, as it might be said, preaching to the choir.

Arthur and Lewis Tappan: Underwriting millennialism and benevolence

Brown Blackwell may not have ever come into contact with the Tappan brothers, but her life was influenced by their financial support of Rev. Finney and his ministry, of Oberlin College, and of some of the social reform organizations that she was affiliated with. Their influence and support had far-reaching effects. The Tappan brothers embodied their personal commitments by living their religious beliefs through their investments in the righteous role of social institutions. As historian Robert Abzug writes regarding Lewis Tappan, "It was the vision of a lay religious virtuoso, whose everyday life was set in the commercial lifeblood of secular society and whose mission was to reconceive that everyday existence in sacred terms."⁵⁰ In accord with Rev. Finney's teaching that religion is something you *do*, their *doing* supported causes that reached out to sinners and the downtrodden to uplift or re-form them. The Tappans were practicing their own piety and working on behalf of the kingdom of God.

⁵⁰ Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 110.

The Tappan brothers—Arthur and Lewis—were Connecticut-born New York merchants who dedicated much of their time and wealth to the goals of evangelical religion, revival, millennialism, and social reform. For the Tappan brothers, not only was a religious lifestyle deemed as socially appropriate, it was believed to be part of a practice of holiness, perfectionism, or sanctification that was necessary for the advancement of the coming kingdom of God. Their commitments to funding benevolent and social reform activities, in support of the advancement of Finney’s theology and vision, were instrumental in providing opportunities for women to participate in the public sphere. Although the Tappans did not personally support most women’s rights agendas, they provided essential, foundational inspiration and support to the culture of millennialist social reform and benevolence.

Arthur Tappan’s silk business was cash-based (no credit) with a uniform pricing policy. He was very successful and in the late 1820’s sales exceeded one million dollars a year. Lewis Tappan, in addition to his benevolent activities, was the founder of what is now known as Dun and Bradstreet. Both brothers lived modestly, preferring to use their wealth to advance their millennial vision. While the brothers were instrumental in establishing the American Anti-Slavery Society in the 1833, in the 1820’s Arthur helped found the American Tract Society (1825), the American Missionary Association (1846), The American Anti-Slave Society (1833), Lane Theological Seminary (1829), and Oberlin Collegiate Institute (1833), among other endeavors. As the benevolence societies were consolidating in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, in the early nineteenth century, the Tappan brothers were establishing a group of Free Churches (that did not charge pew fees) in the worst parts of New York City to serve the

spiritual and material needs of the poor. Based on their admiration for Charles Finney's revival work in western New York over the years, the Tappans invited him to pastor the Chatham Street Chapel, a large auditorium in the heart of one of New York City's most impoverished neighborhoods. Despite the location and facility, Rev. Finney consistently attracted crowds who were responsive to his teachings. The chapel was used for benevolence association meetings as well as for church services. To further support Rev. Finney's ministry, the Tappan brothers founded *The New York Evangelist* weekly newspaper to publish Rev. Finney's sermons and extend his influence nationwide.⁵¹ The Tappan brothers deployed interlocking strategies and programs to reinforce and expand their Protestant millennial and reform agendas.

Although the largest and most influential benevolent societies' headquarters were centered in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, the societies had auxiliaries throughout the nation, frontier, and the world. In part, the effects of such religiously-oriented efforts raised the prestige of "religion" in a general sense.⁵²

Right and left the united front fought for Bible-reading, prayer, sobriety, Sabbath observance, and church attendance as the only respectable American ways of life....belief or at least the pretense of belief was the norm of American behavior.⁵³

⁵¹ Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 107-111; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), 41-59.

See also Phyllis Mary Bannan, *Arthur and Lewis Tappan: A Study in New York Religious and Reform Movements* (New York: Columbia University, 1983 (1950)); Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964); Lewis Tappan, *The Life of Arthur Tappan* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870).

⁵² The phrase "'religion" in a general sense' points to the many and various affiliations and interactions between specific churches and/or denominations and/or associations and/or theologies or and/or practices that are deemed as pertaining to relations between self/family/community and Divine Being.

⁵³ Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, 130.

The Tappan brothers personally exemplified the effects of conversion: they were pious and did everything they could to advance the kingdom of God. They did this by advancing the ministry and teachings of Rev. Finney as well as supporting many organizations that provided Christian education, reform, and benevolence. While it was not their intention, their organizational support also provided outlets for women's participation and leadership.

Women's contributions to millennial and benevolent activities

According to the ideals of womanhood, religion was something that women *did*: did in their homes for the benefit of their husbands and children. Although most of the benevolent and social reform societies were organized and run by men, after Rev. Finney's call to all Christians—men and women—to work for the greater good of God's kingdom, many women found new and expanded opportunities for participation in these organizations.

Women were forming their own societies and auxiliaries as well, raising money by collecting pennies and selling their home goods and produce to each other. The first permanent women's societies were founded in 1800 (i.e., Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children in New York, and the Boston Female Asylum in Boston), as well as missionary societies. These initial women's societies were all religiously-affiliated in various ways; including, institutional affiliations, shared faith or beliefs, and religiously-motivated desires to serve for the good of the kingdom of God. For example, Mrs. Isabella Graham (1742-1814) was instrumental in not only founding and directing the New York Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, but also founding and administering the first Sunday School Society in New York in 1803—among the first Sunday Schools in the nation. According to *The*

Power of Faith, Mrs. Graham's religious commitments, practices, and actions were a testimony of her piety and humility. As her daughter and biographer noted: "So, whilst the external conduct of individuals is made the subject of much critical remark, the religion of the heart, the secret source of action, too frequently escapes unnoticed and unexplored."⁵⁴ *The Power of Faith* described Mrs. Graham's theological assumptions and her religious motivations in the context of her benevolent actions. Her text was not only descriptive, but for women who were in harmony with Mrs. Graham's religious sensibilities, her text was prescriptive as well. Her example showed that a Christian woman could maintain all of the Godly attributes associated with ideal womanhood while extending that authority beyond the domestic sphere. *The Power of Faith* was part of a growing circulation of women's fiction and non-fiction in new ladies' magazines and in benevolent and social reform newsletters and newspapers.⁵⁵

Using different evidence from the diaries of middle-class New England women and from sermons, historian Nancy Cott describes the New England attitude toward women and religion:

By the early nineteenth century New England ministers took for granted that women were the majority among Christians..."happily formed for religion" by means of the "natural endowments of sensibility, delicacy, imagination, and sympathy." It testified how far New England Protestantism had become a matter of "the heart" rather than "the head" between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century—just as it had become a religion chiefly of women.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Isabella Graham, *The Power of Faith Exemplified in the Life and Writings of the Late Mrs. Isabella Graham*, eds. Joanna Bethune and Divie Bethune (New York: J. Seymour, 1816), 9, 46-50. See Cogswell, *The Harbinger of the Millennium*, 333.

⁵⁵ Holiness, perfectionism, and sanctification were some of the terms used to describe specific religious dispositions or practices: ongoing performances of religious commitments that followed one's religious revival or conversion.

⁵⁶ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 128.

This reflects, in part, the emphasis on “feeling” that was central to conversion experiences: typically religious testimonies that affirmed one’s conversion or love for God or other religious experience referenced the heart as the bodily organ of significance; not the brain or the intellect.

Historians Barbara Welter, Nancy Cott, and other scholars generally agree that the motivations inspiring women’s participation in benevolence and social reform activities were decidedly religious. For example, in an address to the Ladies’ Benevolent Society at East Cambridge (Massachusetts) in 1835, Rev. C. Gayton Pickman (1791-1860) stated, “It is to female influence and exertion that many of our best schemes of charity are due.”⁵⁷ Historian Lori Ginzberg, commenting on Pickman’s statement, added: “...women of the antebellum era shared a language that described their benevolent work as Christian, their means as fundamentally moral, and their mandate as uniquely female.”⁵⁸

While Brown Blackwell was growing up, it is likely that she had some exposure to women’s growing involvements in some of these movements. The Rochester newspaper that arrived at home included news and announcements regarding various benevolent, missionary, and reform associations. Her family had subscriptions to a variety of political, reform, and

⁵⁷ Clarke Gayton Pickman, “An Address Delivered before the Ladies’ Benevolent Society, at East Cambridge (1836),” in *An Address before the East Cambridge Temperance Society* (Boston: C.C. Little and J. Brown, 1845), 30, as cited by Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 1.

⁵⁸ Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*. Although Ginzberg qualifies her statement to refer to “middle- and upper-middle-class women of the antebellum era...,” she follows that with further descriptions about “other women.” While scholars have more complete records documenting participation in organizations that had been institutionalized (whose membership can be documented as within particular economic and social classes), women’s participation in benevolence, broadly construed, extended beyond formal organizations and has not been fully represented within scholarship due, in part, to lack of records.

religious newspaper subscriptions that included articles about women or perhaps even written by women. Conversations around the table may well have included references to other examples gleaned from experience or from correspondence. For Brown Blackwell, the millennial and theological context of *action* and *doing* that was taught and practiced by Rev. Finney and his followers remained central throughout her long life. As we will read in further chapters, Brown Blackwell and other women found many opportunities to express and practice their religious commitments in many women's organizations throughout the nineteenth century. Millennial expectations fueled social reformers, including Antoinette Brown Blackwell and other women of her generation.

Brown Blackwell's parents and the western frontier

By all accounts, Brown Blackwell's father, Joseph Brown was a devout man. As Brown Blackwell stated in her memoirs, her father and his father, Joseph, Sr. were born in Thompson, a small town in the northeastern corner of Connecticut, just a few miles from the Massachusetts and Rhode Island borders. Joseph Sr. and his brother William both served in the Revolutionary War from the very beginning until the end. Brown Blackwell's father hoped to become a minister, but despite his studies with a neighboring minister, he did not experience "the moving of the spirit in true conversion."⁵⁹ When Joseph Sr.'s war injuries led to paralysis and invalidism, Joseph chose to return home to manage the family farm and help care for his mother and younger siblings. Soon after his return home in 1810, he married 17-year-old

⁵⁹ Theologically, Joseph Brown was acting in accord with prominent ideas about human will by waiting for divine spirit to give him a testimony of his calling. Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 15.

Abigail “Abbey” Morse who lived nearby in Massachusetts. Brown Blackwell described her mother’s lineage as descending from a “substantial old Connecticut family, the seventh generation from Samuel Morse, Puritan (who arrived in America in 1635).”⁶⁰ Joseph left his wife and three children on the farm in order to serve in the War of 1812. A few years after his return, he sold the Connecticut family farm. His older brother William had moved to Pembroke, near Rochester, New York, and on his advice, Joseph purchased about 100 acres with the log house in Henrietta. Travelling by prairie schooner, Joseph moved his wife, four children, his mother, and sister Eliza to their new home in 1819.

Joseph and his brother William were part of the New England emigration to western New York that began around 1783, peaking in 1820.⁶¹ According Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), Congregational minister, theologian, and eighth president of Yale College, emigrants such as the Browns made the newly settled areas of western New York seem like “a colony from New England,” meaning that the inhabitants were more middle-class, educated, and established

⁶⁰ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 15.

Note: Records indicate that Abby’s family lived in Massachusetts. According to family records, Blackwell’s mother was a descendant of Puritan Samuel Morse but none of Blackwell’s mother’s ancestors lived in Connecticut, nor were any of Samuel Morse’s descendants prominent in Connecticut by 1850, so Blackwell’s reference to her mother’s substantial Connecticut origins is unclear. Abner Morse, *Memorial of the Morses: Containing the History of Seven Persons of the Name, Who Settled in America in the Seventeenth Century. with a Catalogue of Ten Thousand of their Descendants, so Arranged that Members of each Race may Trace their Descent from their Common Ancestor and Discover the Degrees of their Relationship, to which was Added Biographical Sketches of Many of their Number*. (Boston: W. Veazie, 1850), 54.

⁶¹ Studies of migrations from Connecticut, and Litchfield County in particular, confirm that thousands, most under the age of 25, moved to Vermont, New York, and the Western Reserve (Ohio). “A few areas, like Oneida County in New York, were settled largely by Litchfield families...” These emigrants also included Rev. Finney’s parents, who moved from Litchfield County to settle in Oneida County in 1794. Rosell, *Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire*, 7, (also see fn 1, same page); Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 5-7.

than settlers in other frontier settlements.⁶² Brown Blackwell may have been raised in western New York, but many of her family's sensibilities reflected their New England roots: like many of their neighbors in the surrounding areas, they were New Englanders who now lived in New York.

With so many of Connecticut sons immigrating to the New York territories before 1820, Connecticut Congregationalists were concerned about the religious stability of the new settlements. Unlike Connecticut and Massachusetts, where Congregationalism was the primary religion, with the disestablishment of churches, there were many religious options in the western frontier. Baptists and Methodists predominated with several other active religious denominations. Due to the lack of available ministers to serve the frontier population, the Presbyterians and Congregationalists of Connecticut—largely sharing doctrinal commitments—agreed to combine their efforts in central and western New York, with a “presbygational” arrangement (1808 Plan of Accommodation) by which Presbyterian and Congregationalist settlers in the same community could combine in a single congregation that could then align with either denomination and regardless of their polity, could have a minister of either denomination.⁶³ This seemed like an effective means of providing religious stability in newly-

⁶² James E. Johnson, "The Life of Charles Grandison Finney" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1959), 5, citing Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New-England and New-York*, Vol. III (London: William Baynes and Son, 1823), 179.

⁶³ The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, together with the Bill of Rights was submitted to the states for ratification in September 1789 and adopted in 1791. However, the First Amendment applied only at the federal level as several states had established churches. The severance of ties between church and state continued until the early nineteenth century. Massachusetts was the last state to disestablish the Congregational church in 1833 (following Connecticut's disestablishment of the Congregational church in 1818). Other aspects of Christian religion continued to persist in laws across America until the end of the nineteenth century, such as Sabbath laws, court rules establishing eligibility to take an oath or serve on a jury. As historian Steven Green writes, "Acting as a backdrop for such laws was the historical maxim that 'Christianity was part of the

settled areas. For many of the Christian settlers and their supporters, they saw millennial significance in their frontier circumstances and sought to thoroughly Christianize and reform what they perceived as dangers or evils in the western frontier. Many social reform and benevolence societies devoted to ideals of Christian perfection, holiness, and sanctification were funded by men such as brothers Lewis and Arthur Tappan of New York City in order to serve the needs of frontier communities, including those around Rochester. Despite the proliferation of denominational options that were in keeping with traditional orthodox theologies, the people of the Burned-Over District, including Brown Blackwell's family, would ignite their religious enthusiasms during the Finney revivals. The conversion experience was a powerful, public performance of repentance, Godly love, and holy commitment. Rev. Finney linked revival conversion with an insistence on *doing* that swelled the ranks of benevolent societies. The success and expansion of these reform activities led to the founding of schools, such as Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio and Oberlin Collegiate Institute (about 35 southwest of Cleveland, Ohio) for the purpose of training Christian workers and a learned ministry that would help lead and organize congregations as well as social reform and benevolence activities.

Revivalism

Revivalism is a type of religious worship or practice, stimulated by intensive preaching and prayer, to increase religious commitment. With origins in Northampton, Massachusetts in

common law.” Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

the early 1700's, "it was an apocalyptic outburst within the standing order."⁶⁴ According to historian Sidney Ahlstrom, revivalism became an institution unto itself. Within the various Awakenings (periods of revivalism throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), people became aware of their common spiritual heritage and existence as an American nation. At the same time, the Age of Reason, or the Enlightenment, that brought other philosophical issues to bear upon theology. However, in the context of Brown Blackwell's life in the frontier and at Oberlin, the implications of the Enlightenment are noted, but not parsed.

Prior to Finney, scholars agree that revivalism focused on hopes that the spirit of God would act upon the participants; with Finney, the emphasis shifts to man's agency to act in accord with God for God's kingdom. During Finney's lifetime, revivalism flourished. According to historian Timothy L. Smith,

[R]evival measures and perfectionist aspiration flourished increasingly between 1840 and 1865 in all the major denominations—particularly in the cities...The quest of personal holiness...geared ancient creeds to the drive shaft of social reform."⁶⁵

But the revivalism of Rev. Finney in and around Rochester, in New York City, and in Oberlin (where he was a Professor of Theology) had distinctive features. These features (or "measures") were strategic rather than dogmatic, and Rev. Finney used different measures in different circumstances. These revival techniques or measures were not unique to Finney, nor did he invent them. According to historian Garth Rosell,

⁶⁴ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 263.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 8.

Though as many as twenty-nine such practices can be listed, only five gained special notoriety...protracted series of meetings, public praying by women in mixed assemblies, immediate church membership for converts, colloquial language used in the pulpit and the anxious seat.⁶⁶

“Public praying by women in mixed assemblies” gave women authority to be heard during assemblies of congregants. “Let women keep silence in the churches” (in I Timothy 2:11-12) no longer applied to the women who were in accord with Rev. Finney’s teachings. As we read, this Biblical injunction was part of her subject in her published exegetical analysis in 1847.⁶⁷ It may well have been significant in Brown Blackwell’s decision to be a minister.

Although Rev. Finney’s revival measures were controversial among some of his colleagues and peers, the numbers of conversions he achieved seemed evidence that God sanctioned his revival measures.⁶⁸ Rev. Finney successfully launched revivals in New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, as well as throughout the western frontier. During his revival in Rochester, New York, (1830), “No more impressive revival has occurred in American history.”⁶⁹ According to Smith, the effects of revivalism, such as practiced by Rev. Finney, were substantial.

Finally, on the practical level revivals meant many things to many people. Those blessed with a wide social vision thought of them as a chief means of converting human institutions to Christian principles....Pastors saw church problems melt away and financial surpluses appear. Treasurers of benevolent associations happily tallied increasing returns from recently awakened communities.

⁶⁶ Rosell, "Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire," 50 citing H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy and Lefferts Augustine Loetscher, *American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents*, Vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 12.

⁶⁷ Brown, "Exegesis of 1 Corinthians."

⁶⁸ Finney, *Memoirs*, 179.

⁶⁹ Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 124.

Denominational leaders were as gratified by the growth in members and editors and publishers were pleased with new subscriptions to religious journals.⁷⁰

For Rev. Finney and his followers, revivalism was decidedly Christian, but it was not necessarily denominational. The commitment for Finney's converts was to Christianity (writ large)—with an emphasis on personal sanctification and benevolent action: the denomination that one chose to align with was secondary. In fact, Rev. Finney would lead a revival, but it was up to the local pastor to prevent backsliding among the converts after Finney left. The essential components of Rev. Finney's revivalism were ["authentic" bodily/emotional heart-based] conversion and continuity [i.e., unto perfection and sanctification; on fire with love for God, willing to *do* anything to establish the kingdom of God]. Although "conversion" and "continuity" adequately point to the essential components of a Finney [or Finney-styled] revival, the words alone may not fully convey the way these words were supposed to feel.⁷¹ His inner-based, heart-oriented methods (or series of practices) were meant to be felt in the body. The Christian life, one that started with conversion, was an experience that had to be felt. An emphasis on feeling was a part of rhetoric defining Christian domestic ideal womanhood. Finney's new measures and teachings can be found in the backbone of Brown Blackwell's writings and

⁷⁰ Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform*, 61.

⁷¹ Outside of revival circumstances, the word "conversion" included multiple meanings: it could mean the "confession" or "testimony" of faith or religious conviction for a non-believer, or, it might describe a new commitment (a revival) in Christian faith, practices, and principles for church members. For Rev. Finney, conversion was only the first step. He stated the Christian must give "heart, time, energies, property, possessions, sympathies and prayers...[to make] common cause with God in the advancement of the interest of his kingdom." Charles G. Finney, "The Kingdom of God Upon Earth. A Sermon delivered on Sunday Morning, May 12, 1850, by the Rev. C.G. Finney, of America, at the Tabernacle Moorfields," from the London Penny Pulpit as reprinted in *The Oberlin Evangelist*, 8, no. 18 (Aug. 27, 1851), 1-2.

activism. Rev. Finney's measures and teachings opened up new arenas of activity within women's public church life, as well as extending their Godly domestic domain beyond their household walls to encompass the whole world. Within the conversion experience, "feeling" was valorized as essential and authentic; within ideal womanhood, [Christian] feeling was more developed (i.e., empathy, sympathy, love, religious)—these were God-given and innate. In what was keenly motivating to many; women were invited to establish the kingdom of God.

Rev. Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875)

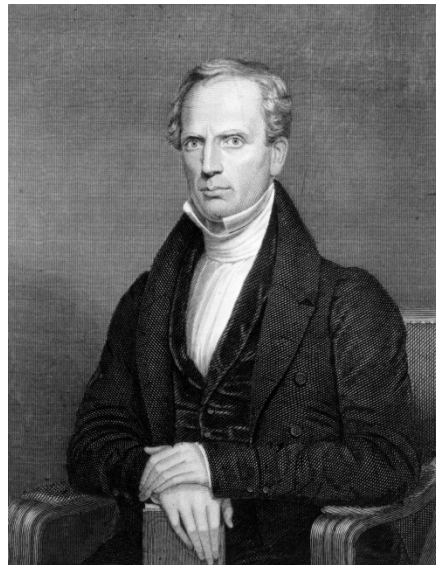


Figure 2: Rev. Finney, 1835.
Courtesy of *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*.⁷²

Charles Grandison Finney was born to Sylvester and Rebecca Finney in 1792. In 1794, Connecticut-born Sylvester, his wife, and seven children joined the emigration into Oneida County in central New York State. Although Charles was trained to be a farmer, like his father,

⁷² Finney, Charles Grandison, Photograph, from *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, accessed April 06, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/media/60735/Reverend-Charles-G-Finney-1835-engraving>.

his interests were elsewhere. He graduated from the Hamilton Oneida Institute in Clinton, New York in 1808 and returned home to teach school. Convinced that he needed more education to secure better teaching positions, in 1812 he returned to Litchfield County, Connecticut to live with his father's brother Cyrus while attending Warren Academy. Four years at the Academy did prepare Finney for a two-year teaching post in Hackensack, New Jersey, but also sparked his interest in the practice of law. In 1818, Finney turned to the study of law and apprenticed himself to Judge Benjamin Wright's office. According to his *Memoirs*, during the course of his law studies, he found many references to the Mosaic Code of the Old Testament Bible: it seemed to be foundational. As a result, Finney began studying the Bible. While working as an apprentice, Finney also found employment as the choir director of the Adams Presbyterian Church. Finney became friends with new pastor there, George Gale, freshly graduated from Princeton Seminary and only a few years older than Finney. They disagreed on doctrinal points: for example, Gale preached that humans could not do anything to ensure redemption. Finney's study of the Bible led him to different conclusions and his confusion over doctrinal and scriptural points continued for several months. Finney struggled with Gale and with his own studies to determine what was true. He decided to retreat into the woods and remain there until he could reach some inner peace. Finney described his religious awakening at great length. He believed that he heard God's voice in his heart:

I never can, in words, make any human being understand how precious and true those promises [from God] appeared to me....They did not seem so much to fall into my *intellect* as into my *heart*, to be put within the grasp of the voluntary

powers of my mind; and I seized hold of them, appropriated them, and fastened upon them with the grasp of a drowning man. [His emphasis.]⁷³

Finney's own account described the inner bodily experience that conferred confirmation and authority in his narrative. Upon leaving the woods, he returned to Esq. Wright's office and continued to pray with such fervor that "it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ *face to face*." [His emphasis.]⁷⁴ After remaining in this state of mind for some time:

I received *a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost*. Without expecting it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, **at a moment entirely unexpected by me**, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed *to go through me*, body and soul. I could feel the impression, *like a wave of electricity*, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in *waves*, and *waves of liquid love*; —for I could not express it in any other way. {Emphasis his.}⁷⁵

Again, his conversion narrative describes his bodily event. His relationship with God is mediated through his body, not through his intellect. He struggled to find words. According to Finney's account, during the several hours of his experience, the truth of certain theological principles was impressed upon him and Finney felt new convictions about his relationship with God.

Finney's conversion narrative, and others like it, were not uncommon. During revival meetings, there might be displays of emotion that showed congregants having spirit-infused experiences. Sometimes in prayer meetings or other venues, congregants would share their testimony, telling their story about their conversion and their newfound relationship with God.

⁷³ Finney, *Memoirs*, 21. For a similar account, see George Frederick Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney*, Vol. 5 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1891).

⁷⁴ Finney, *Memoirs*, 23.

⁷⁵ Finney, *Memoirs*, 23.

In Finney's *Memoirs*, he has page after page of accounts of people in various stages of conversion. There is always some mention of how their religious affliction or resolution was expressed in bodily terms: such as excess of weeping, a feeling of profound stifling heaviness, or inexpressible joy. In all of these cases, people were publically affirming their personal relationship with God. Finney's narrative and teachings gave his listeners confidence that they too could *act* and *do* and could have a personal relationship with God. They didn't have to wait for the Holy Spirit to come to them. For those who were influenced by Finney's teachings, their ongoing public testimony of their religious conversion should then show actions that revealed their piety and actions on behalf of the greater good.

After telling of his conversion experience to several others, Finney left his study of law and began working full-time for God. According to historian James Johnson,

There is unfortunately not much information dealing with Finney's life in the months after his conversion. He does not deal with this period in his Memoirs. Wright says that "about as much mystery hangs over the first year and a half of Finney's life subsequent to his conversion as that which shrouds the corresponding period of the apostle Paul's renewed life."⁷⁶

In 1823, the St. Lawrence Presbytery granted George Gale permission to give Finney private theological instruction leading to his Licensure and Ordination. Later that year, the Presbytery met and granted Finney his license to preach.⁷⁷ When Finney took over Gale's pastoral duties due to Gale's ill health—Finney's unique style was not successful with the congregation.

⁷⁶ Johnson, "The Life of Charles Grandison Finney," 28-29 citing Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney*, 19. Finney's comparison to Paul the apostle is based on the complete transformation of their respective lives following their conversions.

⁷⁷ The St. Lawrence Presbytery met again in July 1824 and ordained Finney as a minister.

Nonetheless, Gale persisted on Finney's behalf and in 1824 the Female Missionary Society of the Western District of New York commissioned Finney as a missionary [itinerant preacher]. Preaching in a make-shift church in a barn in Evans' Mill, New York, Finney experienced his first congregational success, bringing about a revival of faith among the townspeople. According to his *Memoirs*, Finney called upon the congregation:

You admit that what I preach is the Gospel....you acknowledge your obligation at once to become Christians. This obligation you do not deny. But will you *meet* the obligation? . . . Will you *do* what you admit that you ought to do? [Emphasis his.]⁷⁸

Finney's admonishment to *do* would expand in scope and develop more depth in the years ahead. His emphasis on the idea that religion is something you do would become especially evident during the Rochester [New York] revivals of 1830-31.

Before Finney began preaching in Rochester, he was leading successful revivals in towns in western New York as well as the cities Wilmington, Delaware, Philadelphia, and New York City. Attracting overflowing congregations, Finney's preaching inspired wide-spread religious revival and conversion among his audiences. He had more invitations to preach than he could possible accept including Philadelphia and New York. Although Finney wrote that "Rochester seemed to be the least inviting of them all," he felt "strongly impressed...that Rochester was the place to which the Lord would have me go."⁷⁹

Finney's successes during the Rochester revivals were unprecedented and historically significant, as this correspondent wrote to the *New York Evangelist*:

⁷⁸ Finney, *Memoirs*, 66.

⁷⁹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 301.

We have an impression, from all that can be learned by private letters, and by oral testimony, that almost every town within forty or fifty miles of Rochester is favored more or less with the special presence of the Lord. The *Rochester Observer* says as much as this, in a number which has this moment come to hand.⁸⁰

During the Rochester revivals, there was an ecumenical harmony among denominational ministers and congregations: within weeks of Finney's arrival, collective revival meetings across the city in every church and hall were filled to capacity and beyond. Finney preached up to three times a day on Sundays and usually once on most every other day. Although local ministers also enjoyed large audiences, throngs gathered around Finney. Nonetheless, the meetings were described as dignified and orderly.

Mr. Finney is preaching to overflowing houses. Multitudes assemble who cannot get within reach of the preacher's voice. Conversions are daily occurring. The Spirit of God is subduing all orders and ranks of society....So large a proportion of men of wealth, talents, and influence have rarely, if ever been known to be the subjects of revival in that vicinity.⁸¹

Finney introduced certain innovations during the Rochester revivals that inspired not only religious conversion but conversion that was combined with a commitment to action. He described the current doctrine that emphasized a passive sinner:

The doctrine that sin was constitutional and belonged to the very nature, that the very nature itself must be changed by direct physical influence exerted by the Holy Spirit, compelled ministers who believed it to remind sinners of their inability to do...to see whether any divine influence was going to change his nature, and let the Spirit of God act upon his nature like an electric shock while he remained passive.⁸²

⁸⁰ "Revivals: In the Western Part of New York State." *New York Evangelist* 1, no. 48, Feb. 26, 1831, 191.

⁸¹ Johnson, *The Life of Charles Grandison Finney*, 169, citing *New York Evangelist*, Nov. 20, 1830.

⁸² Finney, *Memoirs*, 321.

For Finney, it was no mystery that under the conditions of this kind of preaching, few conversions occurred. Finney continued, “The Lord convinced me that this was no way to deal with souls.” Finney believed that God showed him that sin was voluntary and that effective preaching would show the sinner his wickedness and “present the truths to be believed, the duties to be done, and the reasons for those duties....to induce him [the sinner] to *act*. [Emphasis his.]”⁸³ Finney continued to describe the necessity of his kind of teaching: “And I never feel as if I had done my duty till I have pressed every consideration upon the sinner’s mind that seems to me at the time to be essential to his rightly understanding his duty and doing it.”⁸⁴ A few years later, Finney would make his Rochester innovation more succinct: “*Religion is the work of man*. It is something for man to do. [Emphasis his.]”⁸⁵

In Rochester, Finney’s emphasis on religion as action found expression through participation in social reform activities. According to scholars such as Garth Rosell, “Beyond its sheer magnitude and orderliness, the Rochester meetings stand as the first occasion in which the new revivalism [Finney’s innovation] was directly linked with structured efforts for social reform.”⁸⁶ Many benevolence and reform organizations operated in Rochester including missionary societies, tract societies, the Rochester Society for Sabbath Observance, Bible societies, several temperance societies, societies for moral reform, prevention of prostitution,

⁸³ Finney, *Memoirs*, 321-2.

⁸⁴ Finney, *Memoirs*, 323.

⁸⁵ Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 9.

⁸⁶ Rosell, *Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire*, 136. See Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney*; Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, xii, 383; Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform*.

women's rights, as well as others. As a result of Finney's exhortation to do and act, the membership in these organizations swelled and the editor of *The Rochester Observer* wrote that "The time must arrive when the full blaze of Millennial glory shall burst upon the world."⁸⁷

With his call to all Christians to act and to do, women as well as men answered his call. Women participated in various benevolence and reform organizations in increasing numbers. By the time that Finney preached in Rochester, women had begun to speak and pray during his revival meetings (commencing during a Utica revival in 1824), a development that was not new, but was protested by those who were more religiously conservative. In his *Memoirs*, Finney wrote, "No opposition that I know of was manifest to this [women's praying or speaking in public] either at Utica or at Rome [New York]; nor was it a thing that I had myself introduced...."⁸⁸ Rather, the invitation to women to speak was issued by a new convert, Theodore Dwight Weld (1803-1895). He wrote to Angelina Grimké (1805-1879), his future wife and prominent pioneer of women's rights:

[T]he very week that I was converted to Christ in the city of Utica during a powerful revival of religion under brother Finney—and the first time I ever spoke in a religious meeting—I urged females to both to pray and speak if they felt deeply enough to do it, and not to be restrained from it by the fact that they were *females*....The result was that seven females, a number of them the most influential female christians [sic] in the city, confessed their sin in being restrained by their sex, and prayed publicly in succession at that very meeting. It made a great deal of talk and discussion, and the subject of female praying and female speaking in public was discussed throughout western New York.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *The Rochester Observer*, December 17, 1830, as cited by Rosell, *Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire*, 142, fn. 1.

⁸⁸ Finney, *Memoirs*, 176.

⁸⁹ Letter dated 26 August 1837 in Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Emily Grimké and Sarah Moore Grimké, *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844, Vol. 1*, eds. Gilbert Hobbs Barnes and Dwight Lowell Dumond (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1934), 432-3.

In the same letter, Weld added,

I did not find one in ten who *believed* it was unscriptural, fully. They grieved and said perhaps, and they didnt [sic] know, and they *were opposed to it*, and that it [was] not best; but yet the practice of female praying in promiscuous meetings [male and female mixed audiences] grew every day and now all over that region nothing is more common in revivals of religion.

Although Finney may not have initiated the practice of women praying and speaking in religious meetings, he did not oppose it, and women became more vocal participants over time.

Subsequently, Finney was attacked by certain ministers and consequently, ministerial delegates from Congregational and Presbyterian factions from New England and New York convened the New Lebanon [New York] Conference in 1827 to try to establish harmony between the “new measures” that Finney introduced into revivals, including the question of women praying in public, and the more orthodox procedures.⁹⁰ Eighteen delegates met over four days. As Rosell explains:

Yet, a total of twenty-seven resolutions considered during those four days, only one issue of substance permanently divided the delegates, and that was the very issue that was so disturbing to Nettleton [who had initiated attacks against Finney]—the practice of allowing women to pray in public meetings....Much of the final three days of the conference was absorbed in debating the point.⁹¹

Finney wrote about this in his *Memoirs*: “[I]t is true that in a few instances ladies, and some very prominent ladies, who were strongly pressed in spirit, would lead in prayer in their social meetings which we held daily from house to house” (176).

⁹⁰ Rosell notes that Finney did not invent the “new measures.” Rather, it was his use of them that made them controversial. Rosell, *Charles Grandison Finney*, 50. For extensive primary sources regarding “new measures,” refer to fn 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 88.

A more thorough description of the New Lebanon Convention is beyond the scope of this paper. See Finney, *Memoirs*, 216-225. The editors have included extensive notes regarding contemporary reports and commentaries. See also Rosell, *Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire*, 70-91; Johnson, *The Life of Charles Grandison Finney*, 138-155.

Several of the delegates, including Lyman Beecher, argued that there were no circumstances that were appropriate for women to pray during religious worship. The other delegates, including Finney, argued that women should be allowed to pray, within limits. Their division on this topic was never resolved in the context of this conference. Nonetheless, Finney and his “new measures” were not quashed, as some of his opponents hoped. Rather, the subject of Finney and his “new measures” were published in a variety of newspapers, journals, and newsletters bringing him even more attention. The attacks against Finney were dropped and within two years, even his New Lebanon opponent, Lyman Beecher, invited Finney to preach in Boston: “and he came and did very well.”⁹²

As the Rochester meetings continued through 1830-31, Finney’s fame became widespread and he received many invitations to preach throughout New York and beyond. As historian Johnson summarized, from the beginning of the Rochester revival in September 1830 until the closing sermon in March 1831, in addition to participating in countless prayer meetings, Finney preached ninety-eight sermons (plus many more in surrounding villages). As a result of Finney’s preaching, the character of Rochester changed because so many of the converts were community leaders and many of the young men became leaders in the reform movements. Church membership swelled across denominations. Johnson concluded, “[Finney] seemed to come into his full powers at about that time, so that the Rochester campaign can be viewed as the high point of his evangelistic career.”⁹³

⁹² Johnson, *The Life of Charles Grandison Finney*, 155.

⁹³ Johnson, *The Life of Charles Grandison Finney*, 181.

Rev. Finney's influence extended far beyond Rochester or the towns and cities he preached in. As described in more detail later, when he began teaching at Oberlin, scores of young men (and women) were trained as ministers and leaders: they expanded Finney's influence throughout the world. Others read and studied his sermons and books. Many other ministers that he encountered during his work shifted some of their theological positions or preaching practices to be more like Rev. Finney. It is beyond the scope of this paper to suggest which of his teachings had the most influence. But I argue that his call to Christian women to bring their God-given talents to help create the kingdom of God was part of his profound significance. For women, the other significant aspect was that to help create the kingdom of God, they had to leave the boundaries of their home, to work in world, to participate. Their activities extended woman's authority in her domestic realm to encompass the public arena. His allowing women to pray in mixed assembly gave women new authority as [religious] actors in their churches. These were three of Rev. Finney's greatest (if unintentional) innovations that changed the course of women's history in nineteenth-century America.

Rev. Finney as part of the Brown Blackwell household

Rev. Finney's revivals in Rochester converted several of Brown Blackwell's family members, including her father. While the extent of Rev. Finney's influence in her father's life is not explicitly described in Brown Blackwell's memoirs, they seemed to similar values. Brown Blackwell wrote about her father's commitment to abstinence from alcohol and Rev. Finney's advocated for abstinence by example and in his sermons. Her father lent his support to several of his children who studied with Rev. Finney at Oberlin. Subscriptions to several religious and

benevolence journals were part of the household, and most of the ones that Brown Blackwell recalled had direct links to Rev. Finney. And Rev. Finney and Joseph Brown seemed to have shared anti-Masonic perspectives. For example, following the excitement and controversy regarding the 1826 disappearance and subsequent murder of William Morgan of Batavia, Genessee County, New York, Brown Blackwell's father was a fervent and frequent writer from the anti-Masonic perspective and she remembered "Piles of papers containing his articles were stored away in the garret."⁹⁴ By 1830, during Rev. Finney's revivals, anti-Masonic sentiments were being played out in New York political party conventions seeking to displace all politicians with Masonic affiliations and Rev. Finney was vocal against Freemasonry.⁹⁵ Despite seemingly similar anti-Masonic positions, it is unknown whether Rev. Finney influenced Brown Blackwell's father on this particular topic.

However, Rev. Finney's influence was clear in the subscriptions that came to Brown Blackwell's home. By her own account, Brown Blackwell was a precocious and curious reader.

She wrote:

My father took a weekly political paper "The Rochester Democrat," a religious paper "The Evangelist," and every reform paper that he knew of, among others "The Moral Reform Journal" edited by women in New York. We had "The National Era" from its earliest beginning. This was the anti-slavery paper, in which Mrs. Stowe afterward published "Uncle Tom's Cabin."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 22.

⁹⁵ Anti-Masonic arguments weren't merely about their political influence, but also perceived religious loyalties that undermined Christianity and national integrity more broadly. For those who were seeking the establishment of a pious nation under God, Freemasonry was one of many targets that many believed threatened stability.

⁹⁶ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 22.

Rev. Finney's teachings were at the core of *The Moral Reform Journal* and *The Evangelist*.

The Evangelist

The *New-York Evangelist* (often referred to as *The Evangelist*) was part of a two-pronged effort by the Tappan brothers' Association of Gentlemen to increase and revitalize church members as well as help their fledgling benevolent societies thrive.⁹⁷ *The Evangelist* was a four-page weekly with the full title *The New-York Evangelist: Devoted to Revivals, Doctrinal Discussions, and Religious Intelligence Generally*. The front page declared:

A Religion Paper of the above title is to be issued weekly in this city, by an Association of Gentleman. Its design, as intimated in the title is, especially to promote Revivals of Religion, and to disseminate those essential doctrines of the Bible embraced generally by those who are denominated Calvinists....It will advocate fearlessly, the Bible, Tract, Missionary, Education, Temperance, Sabbath, and Sabbath School Institutions....without intending to interfere with other Religious Journals, most devoutly hope, that their efforts will be conducive to the enlargement of Christ's Kingdom; and be greatly instrumental of ushering in that glorious era of Revivals, when "a nation shall be born in a day."

The reference to "ushering in" may have obliquely referenced the Tappans' ongoing millennial aspirations that inspired most of their benevolence. The first issue was published on March 6, 1830 and the first editor was Noah Saxton (1798-1834), a successful New England evangelist, but his health rapidly deteriorated. A few others stepped in to assist Saxton, and Joshua Leavitt (1794-1873) who had helped edit about half of the 1830 issues, took over as editor and part owner in July 1831. General Agent in another one of Tappan's benevolent societies, The

⁹⁷ The Association of Gentlemen (a designation used rarely), founded by Arthur Tappan, was a select group of wealthy Congregational businessmen who collaborated on religious and benevolent endeavors. It was on the masthead of *The Evangelist*. See Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 61, as well as the fn. 2 on pg. 73.

American Seaman's Friend Society, Joshua Leavitt was a Yale-educated Congregational minister and former lawyer. Leavitt served on the Executive Committee of the American Temperance Society and was a founder and officer in the New York and American Anti-Slavery Society, working with Theodore Weld and Henry Stanton, among others.⁹⁸ His editorial stance was decidedly activist and anti-slavery and he supported Rev. Finney's theological commitments to social action as a component of the conversion experience.

In addition to supporting *The Evangelist* to promote revivals and benevolent activities, Tappan brothers and their Association of Gentlemen hoped to bring Rev. Finney to New York City to lead revivals there. *The Evangelist* would provide a vehicle for making Finney's revivalism available to larger audiences, extending his influence. In 1832, Rev. Finney accepted the pastorship of the Second Free Presbyterian Church at Chatham Street Chapel in the notorious Five Points—an old theater-converted-into-a-church, in one of the meanest, poorest parts of New York City. The name implied a loftier building than reality: it was like a barn in an area of squatters, prostitutes, and garbage. Nonetheless, *The Evangelist* reported that over 2,000 people attended the opening services and his success in New York continued as long as he remained there.⁹⁹ According to historian Garth Rosell,

⁹⁸ "Leavitt, Joshua." *The American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge*, eds. George Ripley and Charles A. Dana, 2nd, revised ed., Vol. 10 (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1879), 279-280; Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844*; Finney, *Memoirs*, 368-71.

⁹⁹ *The Evangelist*, May 12, 1832 as quoted by Johnson, *The Life of Charles Grandison Finney*, 191 (fn 38). The "Free" in the title of his Church meant that pew fees were not collected—a major source of church revenue—and was part of a movement to protest the control of churches by those who could afford to pay the pew fees. The Free Church movement was meant to serve underprivileged populations and was largely supported by the Tappans and others who contributed to missions, temperance, and other benevolence or reform activities. Free churches grew rapidly, expanding to eleven congregations in New York City area by 1840.

Yet it was this building, between 1832 and 1836, which became a kind of national headquarters for evangelical efforts in revival and reform. It became, as Robert Hastings Nichols has suggested, the “cathedral church” of the emerging benevolence empire, symbolizing for many a growing unity among evangelical forces.¹⁰⁰

Despite the success of Rev. Finney’s revival activities in New York, he became ill with cholera (they were in the midst of a cholera epidemic in New York) and his recovery was slow.

According to his *Memoirs*, still in poor health, Finney left his wife and family behind at her parents’ farm and embarked on an extended visit to the Mediterranean. Before his sea voyage, “I admonished Brother Leavitt to be careful and not go too fast in the discussion of the Anti-slavery question, lest he should destroy his paper.”¹⁰¹ Despite a six month rest, on the return voyage, Rev. Finney felt that his health was broken and he agonized in prayer over how he would continue his work.

The Spirit led me to believe that all would come out right, and that God had yet a work for *me* to do....But I had not the least idea of what the course of providence would be....[Shortly after my return], Brother Leavitt came to me and said: “Brother Finney, I have ruined the Evangelist. I have not been as prudent as you cautioned me to be, and I have gone so far ahead of public intelligence and feeling on the subject [of slavery], that my subscriptions list is rapidly failing and we shall not be able to continue its publication beyond the first of January [1835], unless *you* can do something to bring the paper back to public favor again.”¹⁰²

After further conversation with Leavitt, Rev. Finney agreed to preach a course of lectures on revivals of religion and that Leavitt might report them for his paper. Leavitt was enthusiastic

¹⁰⁰ Rosell, *Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire*, 144-5, citing Robert Hastings Nichols, *Presbyterianism in New York State: A History of the Synod and its Predecessors*, ed. James Hastings Nichols (Philadelphia: Published for the Presbyterian Historical Society by Westminster Press, 1963), 109.

¹⁰¹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 371.

¹⁰² Finney, *Memoirs*, 372.

and immediately advertised them and the subscription list increased in leaps and bounds. Rev. Finney began the course of lectures at a rate of one per week and Leavitt took notes of them. Then Leavitt would fill out his notes and send them to press. Rev. Finney spoke extemporaneously, so he never saw his lectures in printed form until they were published. He noted that while he spoke for longer than an hour and three quarters, Leavitt's reports could be read in about thirty minutes. The lectures, published in *The Evangelist*, were a huge success, such that they were then published as a book with distribution in America, England, France, and throughout Europe.¹⁰³ This success revitalized Rev. Finney and his activities and he believed the outcome was the answer to his shipboard prayers. It also saved *The Evangelist* from financial ruin. Before Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became a sensation in England, it was estimated that Rev. Finney's *Lectures on Revivals* "have had a more extensive circulation than any other American publication on this side of the Atlantic."¹⁰⁴

Following the *Lectures on Revivals*, Rev. Finney began his work at Oberlin in spring 1835, and returned to New York to be installed as pastor in the Broadway Tabernacle in May 1836. As part of his negotiations with the Oberlin Trustees, Rev. Finney agreed to be a professor if he could return to New York to preach during the winter months. His New York revivals were successful as long as he continued to preach in New York. Rev. Finney supported the Free Church movement, but found himself in contention with other aspects of Presbyterian polity

¹⁰³ Finney, *Memoirs*, 374-377. Please see footnotes for extensive publication documentation and records of revivals, conversions, and testimonies as effects of these lectures.

¹⁰⁴ Finney, *Memoirs*, 377, fn. 57 quoting Rev. John Campbell, the leading Congregational editor in London in *The Christian Witness* [London], March 9 1852, 129.

and assumed his leadership of the Broadway Tabernacle under Congregational rules.

Throughout this period, *The Evangelist* reported Rev. Finney's sermons and reported on his activities with positive affirmation. While Rev. Finney may have made *The Evangelist* successful by publishing his very successful *Lectures on Revivals—The Evangelist* in turn was effective in promoting and building Rev. Finney's national reputation.

In 1837, Leavitt left *The Evangelist* and became the editor of *The Emancipator*, the anti-slavery newspaper of William Lloyd Garrison. Rev. Nathaniel E. Johnson took over as editor and *The Evangelical* became more a publication serving New School Presbyterianism rather than revivals and benevolence. By then, Rev. Finney was spending more time at Oberlin and *The Oberlin Evangelist* and other publishing venues augmented what coverage he still had in *The Evangelist*.

Although Brown Blackwell described herself as a precocious reader and student, she was only twelve years old by the time that Leavitt left *The Evangelist* and the earlier issues, including *Lectures on Revival*, may well have escaped her attention until she was a student at Oberlin. However, in addition to publishing the sermons of Rev. Finney, *The Evangelist* included many articles such as news for farmers, on science, regarding Congress, foreign religious news, articles about women, as well as news about revivals or progress of the gospel. *The Evangelist*, at least during Leavitt's editorship, would seem to have been particularly pertinent for the family members converted by Rev. Finney, including Brown Blackwell's father, a church deacon, and her older brother William who was one of the earliest ministerial graduates from Oberlin (1841). With such explicit familial connections to Rev. Finney, it was likely that over the years,

Brown Blackwell became increasingly aware of Rev. Finney's teachings through her own reading or by means of her older siblings and parents.

The Moral Reform Journal

For Brown Blackwell, who barely mentioned this publication in her memoirs, the issues and ideals represented by the New York Female Moral Reform Society (N.Y.F.M.R.S.) and the *Advocate* were part of her political agenda for decades. What Brown Blackwell referred to as "The Moral Reform Journal," edited by ladies in New York, was most likely the *Advocate of Moral Reform*, first published in New York City in 1835 as the journal for members of the Female Moral Reform Society of the City of New York (founded in 1834), later to be called the New York Female Moral Reform Society (N.Y.F.M.R.S.). Directed by Lydia Finney, Charles G. Finney's wife, members sought to criminalize solicitation of prostitution. By 1837, their journal claimed a paid circulation of nearly 17,000 and by 1839, nearly 445 auxiliaries were active (mainly in New York and New England) representing over 15,000 active members. On moving to Oberlin, Mrs. Finney founded and directed the Oberlin Female Moral Reform Society in 1835 as an auxiliary to the New York Society. Brown Blackwell served on the executive committee of the Oberlin Society while she was a student, as did Lucy Stone. The Oberlin Chapter was the fourth largest group in the organization.

N.Y.F.M.R.S was initially founded as The New York Magdalen Society in September 1830, funded by Arthur and Lewis Tappan to provide support services for prostitutes in the Five Points area of New York City—the slum where Rev. Finney's Chatham Street Chapel was located. Under the direction of Rev. John McDowall (1801-36), a Princeton Divinity School

graduate, in June, 1831 the Magdalen Society issued its first and only annual report. The report claimed that the city was home to more than 10,000 prostitutes and that many of the city's most respectable gentlemen were clients. The public was scandalized and shocked by the details (and threats to expose the names of men who frequented brothels)—and with public pressure the Magdalen Society and all associated benevolent activities were suspended shortly thereafter. *McDowall's Journal*, established in 1833, was primarily the source of public distress and a grand jury pronounced it as a public nuisance. McDowall's reputation and health was ruined by the effects of the controversies and his minister's license was suspended. Although the Presbyterians reinstated him, he died a pauper a few months later of tuberculosis in 1835. Another organization, The New-York Female Benevolent Society, worked in tandem with the New York Female Moral Reform Society: the former offered asylum and other necessary support to prostitutes while the latter stressed criminalizing the solicitation of prostitutes as well as emphasizing virtue.¹⁰⁵ In 1833, the Society for Moral Reform was founded which later that year became the American Society for Promoting the Observance of the Seventh Covenant. Its officers included several Finneyite reformers: Horace Bushnell and Theodore Weld (both from Lane Seminary), Joshua Leavitt of *The Evangelist*, and Lewis Tappan. The following year, the American Society for Promoting the Observance of the Seventh Covenant formed the N.Y.F.M.R.S. as an auxiliary. When the Seventh Covenant organization "sank into a

¹⁰⁵ Steven Mintz. *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 69. See also, Larry Whiteaker. *Seduction, Prostitution and Moral Reform in New York, 1830-1860* (New York: Garland Pub, 1997). Also see John Wheelwright [Chairman of the Auditing Committee], "History of the Whole Matter." *Charges Preferred Against the New-York Female Benevolence Society, and the Auditing Committee, in 1835 and 1836, by J.R. McDowall, in the Sun and Transcript, Answered and Refuted by Himself!! In His Own Journal!!! In the Year 1833.* (New York: Osborn & Buckingham, 1836), 50-73.

coma,” in Robert Fletcher’s words, the women’s auxiliary became the active national organization and Mrs. Charles G. (Lydia Andrews) Finney was appointed “First Directress.”¹⁰⁶ Despite the infamy associated with it, the N.Y.F.M.R.S. purchased *McDowall’s Journal* and continued its publication, changing its name in 1835 to the *Advocate of Moral Reform*.

Women were inspired to participate, motivated in part by Rev. Finney’s emphasis on doing good as an aspect of one’s conversion. When Rev. Finney was invited to speak to one of the early meetings of the N.Y.F.M.R.S., *The Emancipator* described Rev. Finney’s address:

[According to Samuel Beeman] Suffice it to say that the *preaching of the gospel* above all other means of reclaiming and converting was urged upon all Christians...fill them [houses of prostitution] with Bibles and Tracts and make them places of religious conversation and of prayer, and convert their wretched inmates *on the spot*. [emphasis is in the original].¹⁰⁷

This pronouncement was addressed to the women, and as membership numbers indicated, thousands of women participated for “the *formation of a public conscience* in relation to the sin of licentiousness,” and “to afford a channel of communication, in which the thoughts and feelings of females throughout the country may more freely mingle.”¹⁰⁸ In the 1840’s, now

¹⁰⁶ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1, 297.

¹⁰⁷ Samuel Beeman. “New York Female Moral Reform Society.” *Emancipator*, Dec. 2, 1834, pg. 4 as cited by Fletcher. *A History of Oberlin College*, 298.

In the same footnote, Fletcher wrote: “The experiences of Mrs. Margaret Prior, an agent of the society who carried out Finney’s injunction literally, are narrated in Sarah H. Ingraham, *Walks of Usefulness, or, Reminiscences of Mrs. Margaret Prior* (New York—1844).

¹⁰⁸ *Advocate of Moral Reform*, III, (June 1, 1837), 265-267, and (Aug. 15, 1837), 311 as cited by Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 298-9. For more details, see also Lisa Shaver, ““Serpents,” “Fiends,” and “Libertines”: Inscripting an Evangelical Rhetoric of Rage in the *Advocate of Moral Reform*,” *Rhetoric Review* 30, no. 1 (2010), 1-18.

reorganized to recognize the national scope of their membership, the American Female Moral Reform Society expanded their issues to include temperance and abolition.

The National Era

In 1846, Lewis Tappan founded the Washington *National Era* as an anti-slavery journal as well as representing the views of the political Liberty party. Although the *National Era* appeared in Brown Blackwell's home much later than the previous two publications, it may have brought anti-slavery arguments to her attention.

Brown Blackwell leaves soon for Oberlin

Brown Blackwell's recollections of her earliest years included memories of the effects of Rev. Charles Finney's revivals in Rochester: particularly his emphasis that religion was something that you *do*. National narratives that described and enacted aspects of the "woman question," millennialism, revivalism, and benevolence and moral and social reforms influenced Brown Blackwell and her family. Rev. Finney's influence on Brown Blackwell began with her family's conversion during the famous Rochester revivals of 1830-1831: women praying or speaking in public religious meetings was still controversial, but had become more common, as Brown Blackwell recalled occasions when she spoke during her church's meetings. Rev. Finney's teachings about *acting* and *doing* was reported, explained, and exemplified in the newspapers and journals that Brown Blackwell had at home. Although Brown Blackwell's recollections, written when she was in her 80's, may not detail the ways that Rev. Finney influenced her, I

argue that from early childhood Brown Blackwell was influenced by him more than existing scholarship has revealed.

In the next chapter, Brown Blackwell and Lucy Stone (1818-1893), her dearest friend, sister-in-law, and fellow woman's rights activist, were both educated by Rev. Finney at Oberlin Collegiate Institute, where Rev. Finney's influence defined the college and shaped its students. Her experiences at Oberlin Collegiate Institute revealed the challenges that she and other female students faced as pioneers in college education for women. More significantly, Oberlin was intended to shape and form citizens of the kingdom of God: and the emphasis on the value of work, education, and sanctification would be evident in Brown Blackwell's life. Rev. Finney's example and theology were evident when Brown Blackwell was at Oberlin, just as it was when she began to speak professionally on temperance, abolition, woman's rights, and suffrage. Her ordination and pastoral duties may have challenged her understanding of Congregational theology but her subsequent religious angst resulted in a renewed commitment to her new idea of ministry: influenced by Rev. Finney, Brown Blackwell asserted her own ideas about the innate naturalness of women doing that also resonated with ideas around feeling: as if to say, "you know it when you feel it." Religion is something you *do*, and Brown Blackwell would continue to go forward *doing* and *acting* in accord with what she believed was her role and nature.

Chapter 2

1845-1869: Religion was something she *did*



Figure 3: Drawing of Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1848).
Courtesy of Blackwell Family Papers, Schlesinger Library,
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

As I argued the previous chapter, Rev. Finney's teaching that religion is something you *do* was ingrained in Brown Blackwell's experiences while she was growing up. Brown Blackwell's father and older siblings were converted during the Rochester revivals of 1830 after hearing Rev. Finney's teaching that man did not need to wait for the Spirit to remedy sin, but with conversion and piety could overcome sin. Conversions were primarily something you experienced and felt, not only an intellectual commitment. Converted Christian men and women were called to participate in building the kingdom of God, in part by working in

benevolence and social reform organizations. I surmise that these doctrines were frequently spoken about in the family home and formed an ever-present element of her formative years. As the last chapter explained, there were other aspects of her home life that reinforced Rev. Finney's teachings. The family subscribed to periodical publications that were dedicated to Rev. Finney's teachings. The *Advocate of Moral Reform*, the journal for members of the Female Moral Reform Society of the City of New York, one of the earliest associations dedicated to "purity" or anti-prostitution, was just one example where Brown Blackwell could see how women were participating in their own societies for social reform; she joined an affiliate group shortly after she arrived at Oberlin. Other articles in other subscriptions may well have provided Brown Blackwell with other examples of how men and women were working to create the kingdom of God. Clearly, Rev. Finney's teachings around the idea that "religion is something you *do*," were part Brown Blackwell's family life as well as part of her own developing religious sensibilities.

In this chapter, I argue that Finney's articulation of the idea that religion is something you *do* found full expression in Brown Blackwell's life: in choosing to be a minister when there was no precedent; in being a public speaker when a woman speaking in public was felt by others to be radical and shocking; and, in taking up woman's rights from the movement's earliest days. In this last regard, it is probable that joining (or endorsing) the woman's rights movement was thought to be even more radical and shocking than women speaking in public

for the idea of woman's rights struck at the core of domestic values.¹ There were fears about what woman's rights would mean to ideals of womanhood, hierarchies of authority, and male-dominated domains (i.e., political, religious, economic, professional). The movement's early affiliation with William Lloyd Garrison and his radical anti-slavery politics added the possibility of notoriety or outright antagonism that was unsettling.² As one of the earliest supporters of the woman's rights movement, Brown Blackwell's choices were not easy and put her in circumstances where she was ridiculed, threatened, and chastised. When she could imagine some of the challenges that she might face, why would she make such difficult, unpopular choices?

Her efforts as a public speaker were to encourage others to participate in working for reforms and rights. In the woman's rights movement, Brown Blackwell supported suffrage, but for her, the more pressing issues were expanding women's spheres of activity to provide more opportunities for education and work, more opportunities for women to exercise their bodies, talents, and potential. In the articles she wrote and the speeches she gave, Brown Blackwell maintained the tone and demeanor of a Christian woman exemplifying piety and good works. In all of these instances, as well as others that will be described, I propose argue that Brown

¹ Although I often use "the woman's rights movement" throughout, after 1869 other groups and associations were started that represented aspects of woman's rights, including regional or county-wide woman's rights groups, woman's labor unions, and woman's domestic science associations that expanded women's opportunities and influence. However, I will continue to use the "woman's (or women's) rights movement" in the singular while recognizing the reality of many movements.

² Garrison was the founder of the New England Anti-Slavery Society and the American Anti-Slavery Society in the early 1830s, publisher of anti-slavery newspaper *The Liberator*, and an out-spoken advocate of woman's rights since 1837 when he published the Grimké sisters' controversial treatises. He argued for immediate and total emancipation. That same year at the New England Anti-Slavery Convention, Garrison urged abolitionists to leave churches that were lukewarm on slavery issues, a tactic that referred to followers as "come-outers."

Blackwell made hard choices and followed untrodden paths because religion was something that she *did*.

For Brown Blackwell, there were also other factors and early influences that may well have compounded her motivations for practicing religion in the way that she did. These factors include the educational ethos of Oberlin College, where she trained, and the ways that faculty and students saw themselves fulfilling important millennial missions; and the religious practices of perfectionism and sanctification. Changing public opinions around the “Woman Question” and woman’s rights were influenced by new scientific theories that offered interpretations and commentaries on woman’s nature, roles, and capabilities.

This chapter explores the intellectual, social, and theological context that both encouraged and impeded ABB’s remarkable trajectory. Brown Blackwell began her studies at Oberlin Collegiate Institute in the spring of 1846 and graduated from the Ladies Literary Course the following year. Committed to becoming a minister—something that had not been done before and against the advice of her friends, family, and faculty—she began graduate studies in the Theological Department at Oberlin, although not fully acknowledged by the administration as a fully matriculated student. She completed the Theological program in 1850. She began lecturing on temperance. She spoke at the First National Woman’s Right Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts in October 1850. Liberal ministers (including William Henry Channing and Theodore Parker), active in the nascent woman’s rights movement, invited her to preach from their pulpits. By 1852, Brown Blackwell had developed such a reputation that Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, offered her \$1,000 to preach regularly in New

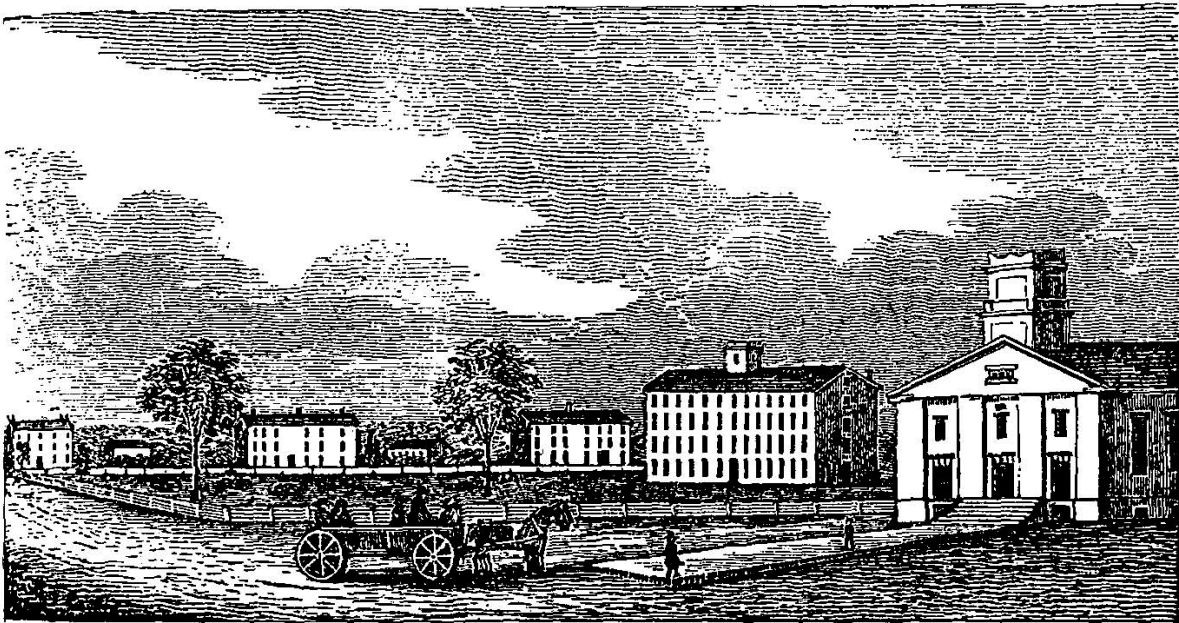
York City for a year. She turned Greeley down and continued to lecture together with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Amelia Bloomer, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, and other women active in abolition, temperance, and woman's rights. Brown Blackwell accepted the pastorship of a small church in South Butler, New York, in 1853 and entered the public spotlight – not only on account of her controversial ordination as the first woman minister– but also for the highly publicized events surrounding Brown Blackwell's participation in the World's Temperance Convention that same year. Her notoriety increased her popularity as a speaker and writer. By 1854, Brown Blackwell left her ministry in South Butler because she could not reconcile certain Congregational doctrines with her own religious experiences and beliefs. Experiencing a crisis of faith, Brown Blackwell became more active in anti-slavery lectures. In 1855, Brown Blackwell moved to New York City: in writing about life in the New York slums for the *New-York Daily Tribune*, she saw how desperately the women she wrote about needed basic rights, such as access to work and education.³

She was a featured speaker at the anniversary celebration of the American Anti-Slavery Society and participated in the National Woman's Rights Convention in Cincinnati. A few months later, in January 1856, she married Samuel Blackwell and their first daughter Florence was born later that year. Despite a growing family, Brown Blackwell continued her lecture tours and preached periodically in New York City. In 1860, it became evident that Brown Blackwell's views on marriage were not shared by some of her colleagues in the woman's right

³ Brown, Antoinette L, "Shadows of our Social System, XI. Blackberry Musings" *New-York Daily Tribune* (9 installments published between May and December 1855). Titles in the series include: "Fallen Woman," "His Mother's in There," and "The Little Candy Girl."

movement, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy Stone. These are the years that Brown Blackwell extends her sphere of activity into coeducational and non-segregated higher education, into the profession of ministry, into the sphere of professional public speakers and authors. Religion is something she *did*.

The history of Oberlin



THE MEETING HOUSE, TAPPAN SQUARE AND OBERLIN INSTITUTE BUILDINGS—1846

From a drawing made by Henry Howe in 1846, published in his *Historical Collections of Ohio* (Cincinnati—1848), page 315 and in later editions. The text states, “The engraving shows, on the right, the Presbyterian church, a substantial brick building, neatly finished externally and internally, and capable of holding a congregation of 3000 persons [?]; beyond it, on a green of about 12 acres, stands Tappan Hall; facing the green, commencing on the left, are seen Oberlin Hall, Ladies’ Hall and Colonial Hall, all of which buildings belong to the Institute.” The chemistry laboratory may be seen between Ladies’ Hall and Colonial Hall. The small building between Oberlin Hall and Ladies’ Hall is probably the “shop.”

Figure 4. The Meeting House.

Courtesy of Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio.

The history of Oberlin college, “Oberlin Perfectionism,” and their manual-labor system were factors that created an environment where Rev. Finney’s ideas were expanded, enacted, and embodied by students and faculty. Founded in 1834, Oberlin Collegiate Institute was twelve years old when Brown Blackwell arrived in 1846. It is likely that she knew something of

the origin story of Oberlin through her brother who was a recent graduate of the school.

According to the narrative, Presbyterian pastor and Oberlin founder, Rev. John J. Shipherd prayed that through God's assistance, he would plant a colony "whose chief aim shall be to glorify God, and do good to men, to the utmost extent of their ability." He described his vision:

I have been deeply impressed of late with the certainty that the world will never be converted till it receive from the Church *a better example, more gospel laborers, and more money*. We do not now keep pace with the increase of population in our own country. Something *must* be done, or a millennium will never cheer our benighted world. [Emphasis his.]⁴

In the years following the founding, the Institute had been built and developed by hundreds of willing men and women who traded their labor for their education. In the first few years of Oberlin's history, an infusion of abolitionist students from Lane Seminary (the Lane Rebels) together with an infusion of financial support from the Tappan brothers, brought Oberlin Institute new leadership under Asa Mahan and Charles Finney commencing in 1835. Manual labor on behalf of the school as well as engagement with social reform was part of the school's Christian and millennial purpose that was undergird and fueled by Finney's theology: religion was something you *do*. According to historian Fletcher:

In America where all was progress, development, movement and hope, in America the Millennium seemed about to begin, to be completely achieved by one last tremendous effort by the organized hosts of Christian reform.⁵

⁴ James Harris Fairchild, *Oberlin: The Colony and the College, 1833-1883* (New York: Garland Pub, 1984), 18, quoting from Shipherd's letter to his parents, dated August 6, 1832.

⁵ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1 (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1943), 208. In Fn. 1, he references William Cogswell, *The Harbinger of the Millennium; with an Appendix* (Boston: Pierce and Parker, 1833). Fletcher adds that the *New York Evangelist* and other religious and reform periodicals further describe the "Christian purpose of the age." Also referenced was Asa Mahan on "Reform" in the *Oberlin Evangelist*, Mar. 13, 27, Apr. 24, May 8, and Aug. 14, 1844.

Since the founding of Oberlin in 1834, students and faculty were devoted to living the tenets of Finneyism.

One great and devote brigade gathered around the standard of Oberlin, captained by Finney....Nowhere else was the vision quite so clearly seen; nowhere else was consecration to the great Cause quite so complete and fervent. And from the Oberlin center went out an influence whose power is beyond estimation, through the thousands of young men and women educated in the Institute...In Oberlin the story of Christian reform is complete; Oberlin was the embodiment of the movement.⁶

In the decade prior to Brown Blackwell's matriculation, the faculty of Oberlin—including Finney, Mahan, Morgan, Cowles—developed and refined a theology around perfectionism and sanctification. "Oberlin Perfectionism" was a distinct theological articulation that undergird Oberlin's ethos and inspired a particular millennial world-view that would influence interactions within social reforms, including anti-slavery, and (tangentially) the woman question.

Perfectionism and Sanctification

The concepts of perfectionism and sanctification were not theological innovations for Finney or the Oberlin cohort, but certain distinctions made Oberlin perfectionism unique.⁷ In Pres. Fairchild's "Doctrine of Sanctification at Oberlin," he noted that the Oberlin community was committed to these ideals from the beginning of Finney's tenure. As Fairchild was a student during the decade prior to Brown Blackwell's enrollment, his writing reflects, in part, some of the effects that he experienced or observed. Fairchild explained:

⁶ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1, 211.

⁷ James E. Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and Oberlin Perfectionism," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 46 (1968), 42-57; Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and Ethelbert Dudley Warfield, *Perfectionism*, Vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931).

The immediate outcome of this movement upon the Christian life here, was undoubtedly a general quickening of the spirituality of believers, and a better apprehension of the Gospel work in delivering from sin and giving the soul power over temptation. A more distinct and higher apprehension of Christ as Savior from the power of sin, as well as from its penalty, was not only theoretically accepted, but to a great extent practically realized. This was the general result, not temporary merely, but permanent.⁸

The changes in disposition may not have seemed permanent in expression. "Sanctification," according to Oberlin practitioners, did not become an ongoing aspect of their ministry or professed piety, but remained a private reminder of the experiences promised by their practices of perfectionism. From Fairchild's observations, those who professed sanctification and those who did not were equally proficient in their respective pursuits of Christian endeavor. Since aspects of the practices of perfectionism were private, students may not have written about their practices of perfectionism in letters or journals—even though they may have been very motivated and devout. Scholars might not know the extent of these practices or about their practitioners. For example, Brown Blackwell may well have been practicing perfectionism, but she left almost no written evidence describing any of her own religious experiences. Nonetheless, what evidence we have reveals that the movement was not insignificant and influenced many lives profoundly.

In the late 1830s and early 1840s the Oberlin iteration of perfectionism (and sanctification) met with a spectrum of responses from those outside the community: from fervent emulation and personal piety to declamations of heresy. Despite differences of opinion

⁸ James H. Fairchild, "The Doctrine of Sanctification at Oberlin," *The Congregational Quarterly* 8 (April, 1876), 237-259, 243.

regarding specific doctrinal aspects (i.e., agency, grace, sin), Oberlin was largely united in the pursuit of perfectionism and sanctification.

Although Finney wrote, preached, and lectured on aspects of perfectionism and sanctification for decades, he made Oberlin's religious orientation emphatic and explicit in his 1851 commencement address: "You cannot but know that it has been the sole purpose of the founders and patrons of this College to educate here men and women *for God and for God's cause.*" [Emphasis is his.]⁹ By the time that Brown Blackwell matriculated, "Oberlin Perfectionism" had been developed, published, and was part of the curriculum.¹⁰ Deviating from the doctrine of original sin as an indelible aspect of human nature, Oberlin Perfectionism saw both sin and redemption as choices that humans, as moral agents, could act upon. As Finney wrote in *Systematic Theology*:

The highest Well Being of God and of the Universe of sentient existences is the end on which ultimate preference, choice, intention, ought to terminate. In other words, the Well Being of God and of the Universes is the absolute and ultimate good, and therefore it should be chosen by every moral agent. [emphasis Finney's]¹¹

⁹ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1, 208; citing *Oberlin Evangelist*, April 10, 1851.

¹⁰ Among the publications on sanctification and perfection, see Rev. Asa Mahan, *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection: With Other Kindred Subjects, Illustrated and Confirmed in a Series of Discourses Designed to Throw Light on the Way of Holiness* (Boston: D.S. King, 1839); Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology: Embracing Ability (Natural, Moral and Gracious) Repentance, Impenitance, Faith and Unbelief*, Vol. 3 (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin Press, 1847); *Lectures on Systematic Theology: Embracing Lectures on Moral Government, Together with Atonement, Moral and Physical Depravity, Regeneration, Philosophical Theories, and Evidences of Regeneration*, Vol. 2 (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin Press, 1846); *Skeletons of a Course of Theological Lectures*, Vol. 1 (Oberlin, OH: James Steele, 1840). Other publications, originally printed in *The Oberlin Evangelist*, included Finney's *Views of Sanctification* (Oberlin, OH: James Steele, 1840) and Rev. Henry Cowles, *Holiness of Christians in the Present Life* (Oberlin, OH: James Steele, 1840).

¹¹ Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, 43. Note: Finney's teachings about "ultimate good" and "sentient existences" were rephrased but represented in Brown Blackwell's *Studies in General Science* (1869).

The emphasis on moral agents' freedom to choose was liberating to those who were influenced by Oberlin's perfectionism.

To that end, the *Oberlin Evangelist* (1839-62), was established in the interest of Christian perfection. Published every two weeks, it was read widely by students, families, donors, and other interested parties. Finney's texts were part of Brown Blackwell's coursework, and it is reasonable to expect that she was also familiar with the viewpoints presented by other Oberlin faculty on perfectionism. The principles of holiness and personal sanctification found expression at Oberlin in movements including manual labor in education and in anti-slavery activities. The manual labor education system was another way that reinforced the teachings associated with Finney's "religion is something you *do*."

The manual labor education system

Brown Blackwell knew that she would be working in exchange for her tuition and board: this arrangement made her enrollment possible. Work was central to the Oberlin experience and part of the narrative defining Oberlin's origins and purpose. Work, as it was practiced at Oberlin, was endowed with sacred meaning. The idea and practice of work as a physical and sacred practice was part of Brown Blackwell's Oberlin education and became part of her philosophy that reinforcing the meaning and value of *doing*.¹²

¹² For example, in 1855, in the final installment of "Shadows of our Social System" (a series of essays focusing on the lives of women and children in the city's slums commissioned for Horace Greeley's *New-York Daily Tribune*), Brown Blackwell wrote, "A black wrong it is that has outlawed women, through custom and public opinion, from being the producers of anything valuable in the world beside children." She believed work was essential for healthy individuals and communities. Antoinette L. Brown, "Shadows of our Social System: Blackberry Musings [9th Installment]," *New-York Daily Tribune*, Dec.18, 1855.

Founder Shipherd's educational system at Oberlin established the manual-labor practices that gave students quality education in exchange for four hours of labor a day. It continued afterwards as an integral aspect of the College. Providing academic or professional credentials in exchange for apprenticeships or manual labor was popular—in the few years before Brown Blackwell matriculated, nearly half of all applicants were turned away because Oberlin couldn't expand fast enough to house the students willing to work for their tuition. As the American Education Society argued in 1829:

Friends of human improvement—benefactors of mankind, and all who are laboring and praying for the final triumph of the kingdom of Christ, we make our appeal to you? Let it be your aim to bring this cause [manual labor in education] the aid of an enlightened and powerful public sentiment.¹³

The practice was already well established.

Rev. George W. Gale, who had converted Finney in 1820, founded one of the earliest manual labor schools in 1827 at his Oneida Institute in Whitesboro, a community near Utica, New York. As a stalwart abolitionist, Gale educated (among others), Theodore Weld and two of Lewis Tappan's sons. The Tappan brothers supported the ideal of combining labor and education and organized the Society for Promoting Manual Labor in Literary Institutions in 1831. Rev. Joshua Leavitt, editor of *The [New York] Evangelist*, was the corresponding secretary and on the executive committee with Lewis Tappan. Theodore Weld became the general agent

Decades later, in 1874, Brown Blackwell wrote a series of ten articles for *The Woman's Journal* that described some of her opinions on the value of work (in the home, in the public sphere, in educational institutions) for both women and men, emphasizing the need for women to have the same opportunities *to work* (writ large). These articles were incorporated into her later book, *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875).

¹³ "Union of Study with Useful Labour." *The Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society* 2, no. 2 (November, 1829), 57-70, 70.

for the Society and set about the task of promoting manual labor schools and seminaries in the United States, as well as introducing these practices into established institutions. In his 1833 *Annual Report*, Weld described all the ways that mind and body were integrated, not acting in isolation, but in harmony. Therefore, Weld argued, the manual labor system of education was the best corrective for the current state of education that had become unbalanced by emphasizing mental pursuits while neglecting bodily exercise. Exercise, the kind produced by physical labor, was the solution for safeguarding and expanding human health as well as improving all mental faculties. Weld provided pages of testimony and corroboration from leading contemporary authorities and experts. He summarized that the manual labor system of education was to be highly recommended:

It is natural
It interests the Mind,
Its moral Effect is favorable,
It furnishes important practical Acquisitions,
It promotes habits of Industry,
It promotes Independence of Character,
It promotes Originality,
It renders prominent all the manlier Features of Character.¹⁴

The manual labor system that Weld practiced and advocated was an essential aspect of Oberlin life.¹⁵ These ideas were reiterated throughout Brown Blackwell's writings and speeches about women and work as well as in her broader philosophical view of a unified universe acting in in

¹⁴ From the "Contents" of Theodore Dwight Weld, *First Annual Report of the Society for Promoting Manual Labor in Literary Institutions : Including the Report of their General Agent, Theodore D. Weld, January 28, 1833* (New-York: S. W. Benedict, 1833).

¹⁵ Shortly before Brown Blackwell arrived at Oberlin, during her brother's enrollment, Weld was instrumental in recruiting Finney to Oberlin and was a leader of the Lane rebels who defected to Oberlin. Weld did not enroll but was called to a leadership role in the growing abolition movement.

correlated equilibrium or harmony. While it is unlikely that Brown Blackwell read Weld's report, she knew and advocated the tenants of the manual labor system regarding the value of work.

Student labor built Oberlin from the ground up. Oberlin was a workshop, a living experiment that was practicing the Finney directive that religion is something you *do*. The motto "Learning and Labor" is still on the Oberlin College seal, and during early Oberlin College history, men and women participated in "learning and labor" as part achieving their academic degree. As Oberlin President and former student Fairchild recalled, "And all will thus save money, and, what is more, promote muscular, mental, and moral vigor."¹⁶

The Oberlin academic schedule was organized with morning classes, Mondays for laundry, and breaks that were linked with seasonal tasks such as harvesting, or student employments at various summer schools.

The manual-labor bell was run at one o'clock in the afternoon, and each young man repaired to the field or the forest, the shop or the mill, for his work, for which he received from four to seven cents an hour, according to his efficiency or his skill. The young women performed the domestic labor in the boarding-hall, for which they received three to four cents an hour.¹⁷

President Fairchild explained that female students paid less for tuition, board, and incidentals and consequently, their lower pay was nonetheless equivalent to what the male students were paid and required to pay for tuition, room, and board. Brown Blackwell didn't object to doing domestic labor:

Board was \$1.00 a week, and house-work three cents an hour. I began at once working by the hour, at first wiping dishes, then wiping tumblers only. Soon

¹⁶ Fairchild, *Oberlin*, 19.

¹⁷ Fairchild, *Oberlin*, 188.

however, I was appointed teaching drawing at a much higher remuneration and Lucy Stone, promoted from sweeping, taught arithmetic generally, not that either of us despised the household work but that it was necessary to have a division of labor.¹⁸

The manual labor model gave Brown Blackwell and other women opportunities that made their education possible and provided a strong narrative about the value of labor as a form of bodily exercise that was important for the development of greater mental acuity and vibrant health. Coupled with teachings regarding perfectionism and sanctification, work had special value. While there may have been inequalities and gender-based expectations, the ethos was that work was something everyone *did* within a millennial context that benefited the individual, the community, and God's kingdom. Messages or expectations about the value of women's work may have seemed mixed, but on the occasion of Shiphherd's death in the same year that Brown Blackwell began her education, the published statement of aims was clear:

1st, the education of youth of both sexes in strict accordance with the spirit & aims of the gospel, developing the mental powers in connection with a judicious system of manual labor to preserve the body sound and health & the growth of a vigorous & aggressive piety.

2nd, To bet & to confirm in the process of education the habit of self-denial, patient endurance, a chastened moral courage & devout consecration of the whole being to God; in seeing to promote the best god of man.

3rd, So deeply to fill the mind & to imbue the character with the principles of Christian benevolence, that those educated in this Seminary may be well qualified to engage uncompromisingly in the practical enforcement of the teachings of Christ & in his spirit, for the annihilation of the chattel principle as applied to man, for the removal of all oppression, for the abolition of every form of sin & for the establishment & perpetuity of universal liberty.

¹⁸ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 56. Brown Blackwell later wrote that Stone was "one of the most persistently neat and orderly house-keepers I have ever known...who daily dusted the rungs of all the chairs" (64).

Adding, “To act efficiently for the purification of the Church & the Ministry & thus furnish the World with a class of pious men & women intellectual & holy who shall firmly maintain aggressive action *against* all which God forbids & in support of all that God requires.”¹⁹ The goals and values of the Oberlin manual labor program affirmed that if religion was something you *do*, then work was an embodied performance of piety and service made visible.

For women students such as Brown Blackwell, there may have been conflicts between their personal commitments to reform—including woman’s rights—and Oberlin’s attitude regarding woman’s roles and duties. Historian Fletcher argues that Oberlin may have given women a college education, but “Oberlin’s attitude was that women’s high calling was to be the mothers of the race, and that they should stay within that special sphere...[or] the home would suffer from neglect.”²⁰ For Fletcher, the “joint education” and division of labor had this goal:

[T]hus the young ladies could be more readily kept in their proper relation of awed subjection to the “leading sex.” Washing the men’s clothing, caring for their rooms, serving them at the table, listening to their orations, but themselves remaining respectfully silent in public assemblages, the Oberlin ‘coeds’ were being prepared for intelligent motherhood and a properly subservient wifehood.²¹

If Brown Blackwell had any experiences similar to Fletcher’s account, she didn’t mention them in her letters or memoirs. After she married, she did have a more liberal and novel arrangement with her husband—they shared some of the household duties. Otherwise, she was a strong

¹⁹ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin*, Vol. 1, 232, citing T.M, August 26, 1845 in separate MS in Misc. Archives, Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio and in abbreviated form in *Oberlin Evangelist*, September 10, 1845.

²⁰ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1, 291.

²¹ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1, 291.

advocate for the sanctity of marriage, was opposed to divorce, and firmly supported the importance of prioritizing maternal obligations: values that were part of her Oberlin education.

Despite the coeducational opportunities at Oberlin, the men and women students had very different experiences, both in terms of their participation in work and in the classroom. The differences in experience can also be found in diaries, letters, and other written accounts. For example, historian Fletcher points out that the future notoriety of Stone, Brown Blackwell, and other “militant women’s rights advocates in the Oberlin student body obscured the fact that official Oberlin as well as student and town opinion generally opposed them at the time.”²² Yet Brown Blackwell’s recollections were quite different: “The closest and most cordial relation existed between the people of the village, the school and the faculty, which has continued to this day.”²³ While Oberlin reinforced gender roles in delegating their work assignments, Brown Blackwell did not find these distinctions troubling.

Abolition

Oberlin’s history had a religious origin story that set the college and students apart from other similar institutions. Amplified by practices and perfectionism, Oberlin was a religious-inspired, religiously-motivated community building and working for the greater good of God. The issue of abolition further amplified and radicalized ideals of social reform. According to her recollections, prior to attending Oberlin, Brown Blackwell had almost no contact with slaves or Negroes. Once she arrived at Oberlin, anti-slavery sentiments were

²² Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1, 291.

²³ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 57.

unavoidable. With student revolts at Lyman Beecher's Lane Seminary in Cincinnati in 1834, Oberlin became "about the only college left for young radicals to attend."²⁴ From Harvard, Phillips-Andover Academy, and Amherst College to institutions in the western frontier including Ohio's Miami University and Western Reserve College, slavery organizations and abolitionist students and faculty had been disciplined or suppressed.²⁵ When Weld was general agent for the Society for Promoting Manual Labor in Literary Institutions, the Tappan brothers asked him to find an institution that could further promote their social and religious reform agendas. Weld recommended Lane Seminary under the leadership of prominent Presbyterian minister, Dr. Lyman Beecher. Weld was a student there and Beecher described Weld's influence as godlike, as he encouraged former students from Gale's Oneida Institute to transfer to Lane Seminary.²⁶ In 1833-34, Weld presented a series of lectures that were more like an anti-slavery revival than an orderly debate on issues. In order to quell acrimonious relations with Cincinnati's citizenry, Lane's Board of Directors dismissed a professor (John Morgan), abolished anti-slavery organizations, and considered expelling Theodore Weld and William T. Allan. Students refused to back down. Many (including most of the Oneidians) withdrew from Lane and continued their studies and activism in Cumminsville, a few miles from Cincinnati.

In fall 1834, Theodore Weld, Henry Stanton (future husband of Elizabeth Cady Stanton) and other Lane defectors, together with the Tappan brothers, put forth proposals that would

²⁴ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1, 184.

²⁵ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1, 150-190.

²⁶ Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, etc. of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher, Vol. 1, (New York: Harper & Bros, 1865), 321.

bring the Lane rebels to Oberlin if Finney would be appointed as Professor of Theology, Asa Mahan appointed President of Oberlin, and John Morgan made professor. Additionally, Negroes should be admitted along with whites and freedom of speech guaranteed regarding all reform issues. These demands were not easily resolved, but divided and challenged members of the Oberlin community around concerns regarding new racial relationships, social configurations, and political and economic ramifications. As the colonists and students of the Oberlin Institute wrote in their petition to the Trustees: “[W]e want to know what is duty—and God assisting us we will lay aside every prejudice and do as we shall be led to believe God would have us to do.”²⁷ Although the Board tabled the request regarding admission of “people of Color,” lengthy and often contentious negotiations succeeded over time in securing the appointments of Finney, Mahan, and Morgan. The Board further assured that the faculty, not the Trustees, would have authority over questions of student admissions. The Tappan brothers (and others) assured Oberlin financial stability for the new faculty.

The influx of Lane students infused the Oberlin student body with anti-slavery activists, but in the following decade, other anti-slavery commitments came from different sources. For example, when Lucy Stone enrolled at Oberlin in 1843, her Garrisonian commitments were at odds with most Oberlinians. According to historians Lasser and Merrill, Stone had developed sympathy for anti-slavery when her local congregation expelled a deacon for his anti-slavery sentiments; but would not count her vote in support of him because she was a woman. In 1837, Stone was in the gallery when the Massachusetts General Association of [Congregational]

²⁷ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol.1, 171 (fn. 12) citing “Petition to Trustees Re *Colored Students*,” Misc. Archives, Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, OH.

Ministers assembled in her neighboring North Brookfield church and she listened to the contents of the “pastoral letter” rebuking the Grimké sisters for their unacceptable female behavior in speaking publicly about their personal experience with slavery. Because Stone was not permitted to vote on church affairs in her local congregation and then found the pastoral letter to be biased against women and weak in terms of its anti-slavery position, she became an ardent follower of William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879). Garrison denounced Protestant denominations for tolerating slavery, while most Oberlinians were anti-slavery activists in the context of their millennial vision.²⁸ Brown Blackwell recalled that “These experiences had put her [Lucy Stone] so far outside of orthodoxy that it took her years to come back to anything like a serious religious belief.”²⁹

Historians seem to agree that before the Civil War, most U.S. clergymen did not support abolition. According to Kathryn Kish Sklar, in the northern states, opposition to Garrison was stronger than the clergy’s opposition to slavery.³⁰ The pastoral letter read in North Brookfield reflected their anxieties about women participating in other social reform movements, such as temperance (that sought to limit the consumption of alcohol) and moral reform (that sought to eliminate sexual double-standards as well as supposedly control men’s behaviors). Part of the

²⁸ Carol Lasser and Marlene Merrill, eds., *Friends and Sisters: Letters between Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 1846-93* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 5-14.

²⁹ Brown Blackwell also noted that Stone’s father “fully believed in the inferiority of women and their subordination to men.” Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 63.

³⁰ Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Women’s Rights Emerges within the Anti-Slavery Movement, 1830-1870: A Brief History with Documents*, eds. Natalie Zemon Davis and Ernest R. May (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 32, with reference to John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

pastoral letter was intended to limit the activities of abolitionists such as Garrison and the Grimké sisters as the letter gave each congregation (or minister) the authority to disallow any debate regarding “perplexed and agitating subjects which are now common among us.” This restriction was directed at visiting lecturers or preachers “on certain topics of reform” to constrain them from their presentations without pastoral consent.³¹ Ministers were divinely ordained overseers and all members were reminded to “Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves...”³² But for women, such as the Grimké sisters, the injunctions were specific:

III. We invite your attention to the dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury.

The appropriate duties and influence of women, are clearly stated in the New Testament. Those duties and that influence are unobtrusive and private but the sources of mighty power....The power of woman is in her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection and which keeps her in those departments of life that form the character of individuals and the nation.³³

The letter enumerated the expression of these womanly and mighty powers, commending women for their roles: promoting piety, Christian benevolence, missionary work, Sabbath schools, and the like. “But when she assumes the place and tone of a man as a public reformer...she yields the power which God has given her for protection, and her character

³¹ *Minutes of the General Association of Massachusetts, at their Meeting at North Brookfield, June 28, 1837, with the Narrative of the State of Religion and the Pastoral Letter* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1837), 19.

³² *Minutes of the General Association of Massachusetts*, 20.

³³ *Minutes of the General Association of Massachusetts*, 21.

becomes unnatural.”³⁴ Likening woman to a grape vine, leaning upon the trellis, the analogy concluded that if the vine should “assume the independence and the overshadowing nature of the elm, it will not only cease to bear fruit, but fall in shame and dishonor into the dust.”³⁵ The letter then specifically condemned “promiscuous conversation of females with regard to things ‘which ought not to be named’.” The rebuke is directed to the Grimké sisters for their public testimonials of the sexual exploitation of slave women. The letter warned “the way opened, as we apprehend, for degeneracy and ruin.”³⁶ The letter concluded with pastoral directions to all members to cultivate their Christian nature privately.³⁷ Blackwell was familiar with this letter as she recalled, “About that time the famous pastoral letter, with almost incredible unconscious insult to the intellect of all womanhood, was widely circulated through the churches.”³⁸

As historian Kathryn Sklar explains, the pastoral letter reflected tensions that went beyond Massachusetts and beyond the issues of slavery alone.³⁹ Just before the pastoral letter, Catherine Beecher’s 1837 book *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, with Reference to the Duty of American Females*, reflected a more orthodox Congregational theology: elevating and feminizing the profession of teaching while maintaining the ideal of a domestic sphere. Beecher, her siblings, and father, Rev. Lyman Beecher had recently moved to Cincinnati (where

³⁴ *Minutes of the General Association of Massachusetts*, 21.

³⁵ *Minutes of the General Association of Massachusetts*, 21.

³⁶ *Minutes of the General Association of Massachusetts*, 21.

³⁷ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 63.

³⁸ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 63.

³⁹ Sklar, *Women's Rights*, 20-39.

Rev. Beecher was the President of Lane Seminary at the time of the defection to Oberlin in 1834.)

For those listeners and readers of the pastoral letter who were familiar with Rev. Finney's theology and practices, the letter's emphasis was opposite to what Rev. Finney taught. The letter concluded: "We should remember that while we strive to *do* good, it is of the first importance that we *be* good." For Rev. Finney, the two processes were co-constitutive: as one *did* good, they became more attuned with the ideals of sanctification and perfection and were good—but one could not claim to *be* good if they were not actively engaged in *doing* good.

The Grimké sisters, while not Finneyites, nonetheless shared similar moral imperatives to *do* one's moral duty to eliminate the evils of slavery regardless of one's gender. Angelina's oratory trainings with Theodore Weld, one of Finney's most passionate converts and allies, changed her oratory style. Using techniques he learned with Finney, Angelina became more persuasive and eloquent in using the religious rhetoric and metaphors familiar to her audiences as she called them to action. Often speaking to women's groups as well as mixed audiences, her orations were motivating. Membership in William Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society more than doubled in 1838 and many of these new members were women. Because Garrison opened membership to women, also giving them the right to vote, the American Anti-Slavery Society gave women political agency.⁴⁰ As Brown Blackwell recalled:

⁴⁰ Among his commitments to women's rights, Garrison supported women's political participation in the anti-slavery organizations he founded: women could be officers, could vote, and could speak publicly in mixed company. He provided press coverage for women's rights activities in his anti-slavery publication, *The Liberator*. When Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, U.S. delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Conference in London (1840), were denied seating with the other (male) delegates, Garrison, in protest, refused to sit with the male delegates and sat with Mott and Stanton instead.

The Garrisonians or 'Come outers' as they were called had renounced their allegiance to the United States and its Constitution. They took an advanced position on the woman question and believed in woman's rights and her duty to work for humanity outside of home life.⁴¹

These liberalities were not unproblematic. Particularly after the pastoral letter, Angelina Grimké became increasingly aware of the issue of woman's rights within the context of the anti-slavery movement. As she wrote to Theodore Weld a few months after the pastoral letter, "we are placed very unexpectedly in a very trying situation, in the forefront of an entirely new contest—a contest for the *rights of woman* as a moral, intelligent & responsible being."⁴² Grimké's assertion about the rights of woman became part of the language used in nascent women's rights speeches and texts. The issues and arguments were familiar to Stone and would become more familiar to Brown Blackwell.

The issues concerning anti-slavery were complex when Brown Blackwell arrived at Oberlin and unavoidable. Her friendship with Lucy Stone, an ardent and outspoken follower of radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison was influential in shaping Brown Blackwell's future commitments. On the one hand, Garrison supported women's rights and suffrage to the point of alienating the Tappan brothers, but Garrison's condemnation of churches' complacency regarding slavery put Lucy Stone at odds with Brown Blackwell's personal commitments. According to Brown Blackwell, "she [Lucy] was then extremely radical in religious opinion."⁴³ Nonetheless, Brown Blackwell "had great admiration for the enthusiasm, the eccentricities and

⁴¹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 60.

⁴² Weld, Grimké and Grimké, *Letters, 1822-1844, Vol. 1*, 415.

⁴³ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 62.

the courage in braving criticism of the Garrisonians. Lucy and I soon became intimate friends in spite of, perhaps because of, our differences of opinion.”⁴⁴

While Brown Blackwell described herself as a “voting abolitionist,” identifying herself with others including the Tappan brothers, Gerrit Smith, the Oberlin faculty, and her father and family, her loyalties were conflicted.

I had embraced the theories of the voting Abolitionists with a young girl’s enthusiasm. At the same time I could not help endorsing the position of the Garrisonians on the woman question . . . The voting abolitionists I knew, (with the exception of Gerrit Smith) did not arrive at a point where they were ready to have women work with them until it was too late and the war was come.⁴⁵

The Garrisonians actively supported the early woman’s rights efforts and there were connections between their agendas. Because they helped support the First National Woman’s Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1850, Brown Blackwell came to know others affiliated with Garrison’s American Anti-slavery Society, including Rev. Theodore Parker and Rev. William Henry Channing, Unitarian ministers and Transcendentalists who were among the first to invite Brown Blackwell to preach from their pulpits.

When Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell first became friends at Oberlin, their histories—with similar and dissimilar aspects—shared many compatibilities that resonated around their mutual interests in aspects of the “Woman Question.” Brown Blackwell and Stone shared their experiences of higher education as well as their attitudes and practices regarding women and religion with each other. They “agreed to disagree” on different points and both

⁴⁴ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 62.

⁴⁵ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 61.

began creating their own answers to the “woman question” refracted and tempered by their interactions with “Finneyism.”⁴⁶ Although it may seem that abolition and other reforms were central to the Oberlin experience, the ideals represented by “religion is something you *do*” were paramount.

Brown Blackwell’s Oberlin experiences

Brown Blackwell graduated from her local coeducational school, the Monroe County Academy, in 1840, when she was fifteen. She taught school in the surrounding towns while she decided what she wanted to do with her life. She thought about opening a school for girls where they “could be educated along social, moral, and religious lines as well as those of the intellect,” or about following the encouragement of her local pastor and her mother and becoming a foreign missionary.⁴⁷ After several years, with her savings from her teaching and the encouragement and support of her family, Brown Blackwell decided to go to Oberlin. She recalled, “Many things made Oberlin seem infinitely desirable. My brother William was already a graduate of the theological department [1841] and our beloved Professor Finney was now a member of the theological faculty.”⁴⁸

In February 1846, Brown Blackwell travelled by canal boat to Cleveland, and a stagecoach to Oberlin. The area around Oberlin was not inviting. As Rev. Finney recalled:

⁴⁶ I am using the term “Finneyism” to represent the complex of social, religious, political, etc. interactions and formations that formed around the revival theology of Charles Grandison Finney. In many cases, other ministers, social reformers, and those with political agendas adopted aspects of Finney’s sermons and practices and these Finney-influenced ideas or practices become integrated into larger complexes of actions and expressions.

⁴⁷ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 52.

⁴⁸ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 52. Her eldest sister had also planned on attending Oberlin earlier, but lost her courage and she became a teacher instead, a decision that she regretted for the rest of her life.

[W]e were in the heart of a great forest, and in a mud hole, as this whole neighborhood then was. The location of the institution was unfortunate, ill-considered, hastily decided upon; and had it not been for the good hand of God in helping us at every step, the institution would have been a failure because of its ill-judged location.⁴⁹

The daughter of one of the faculty members agreed: “The soil is very clayey, I should think, for when it rains it is very muddy [sic] and there are so few sidewalks that it is very difficult to walk more than a rod without getting a free shoe in the mud.”⁵⁰ Free ranging cows, hens, and hogs were the subject of ongoing community distress and (unsuccessful) regulations. Brown Blackwell also noted that “after rains mud was never an insignificant quantity.”⁵¹ But for Brown Blackwell and other students, their environment was only an aspect of their experience at Oberlin.

Brown Blackwell traveled by stagecoach the last stretch of her trip to Oberlin and she sat with a family friend from Rochester who was also an Oberlin trustee. Brown Blackwell wrote:

My friend told me of one girl in Oberlin named Lucy Stone who would be a classmate, a very bright girl, but eccentric, a Garrisonian, and much too talkative on the subject of woman’s rights. He advised me to be very careful of her opinions, not to be influenced by her or to become intimate with her . . . I resolved then and there to know more of Lucy Stone.⁵²

⁴⁹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 386.

⁵⁰ Composition by Helen M. Cowles, dated Oberlin, March 22, 1845 (Cowles-Little MSS) as quoted by Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 2, 550-1.

⁵¹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 56.

⁵² Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 54.

A few hours later, during dinner in the “Ladies Hall,” her Oberlin lodgings for the next two years, Brown Blackwell saw Stone engaged in a lively conversation with Rev. Wright and his wife, the resident managers of the boarding hall. Brown Blackwell believed that Stone seemed too young and forward to be having such a spirited discussion with a clergyman, and thought to herself that on that basis she couldn’t like Stone. However, Brown Blackwell later learned that Stone was seven years older than she was—not as young as Stone appeared—and learned of other qualities that were admirable: “[O]ur close life long friendship was begun. Mine was the intense admiration of a younger girl for one much more experienced and influential.”⁵³ Their friendship was close and intimate, yet they did not agree on all topics, particularly religion.

Yet religion was very much integrated into Brown Blackwell’s experience at Oberlin. As she recalled, “Everyone attended church. Students were expected to be present twice on Sunday.”⁵⁴ At church, Rev. Finney was typically the speaker. In addition to church attendance, Brown Blackwell participated in frequent prayer meetings. Brown Blackwell wrote about President Asa Mahan, who she believed was “unusually liberal even for the more liberal men of his day.”⁵⁵ Because he taught many of the classes that Brown Blackwell took, she was very much under his influence as well. She also took classes with Professor Morgan (from Lane Seminary) in Biblical literature and found that although he was a strong proponent of St. Paul’s

⁵³ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 54-55.

⁵⁴ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 57.

⁵⁵ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 57.

doctrine regarding women's silence and subjection, he was nonetheless "most genial and tender hearted even toward those with whom he radically disagreed."⁵⁶

With its geographical isolation and conservative views toward women speaking in public, Oberlin was a very separate self-contained world. Despite Oberlin's radical reputation, academic policies were in line with current religious teachings regarding what was deemed as the domestic sphere. Women were not to speak in public mixed assemblies. For Stone and Brown Blackwell, who wished to have careers as public speakers, Oberlin did not allow women to speak in their classes. Stone complained, "I was never in a place where women are so rigidly taught that they must not speak in public."⁵⁷ Brown Blackwell was of a similar mind. She recalled:

I read an essay appealing to the professor to allow such young women as desired it an opportunity of taking part as the young men were required to do in discussions and orations. I pointed out the injustice of requiring us to remain an hour each week as listeners for the benefit of the young men, while we had no part nor lot in exercises which we so much desired.⁵⁸

Together with Stone, Brown Blackwell was successful in persuading one professor (a former Lane rebel) to allow Stone and Brown Blackwell to debate during a mixed class. They not only spoke before the senior class but to many outsiders who had heard of this debate. Brown Blackwell wrote, "This semi-public speaking was so far disapproved by the faculty that no

⁵⁶ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 58.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell: A Biography*, 1st ed. (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1983), 28, quoting from a letter Lucy Stone wrote to her parents on August 16, 1846 and reprinted in Alice Stone Blackwell, *Lucy Stone: Pioneer Woman Suffragist* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1930), 71.

⁵⁸ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 71.

repetition of a like kind was allowed to take place while we were still undergraduates.”⁵⁹ As Brown Blackwell believed the faculty were sincere in their religious viewpoint that women’s public speaking was un-Biblical, she accepted their decision graciously. Instead, Brown Blackwell, Stone, Sallie Holley and about another half dozen women students revived the Young Ladies’ Association of the Oberlin Collegiate Institute (known informally as the Ladies Literary Society) and gathered secretly “in the house of one of Lucy Stone’s pupils, a colored woman, on the outskirts of town.”⁶⁰ Other times, the women met in the woods, posting a lookout. While some of the women had no interest in public speaking but supported the venture by serving as the audience, others, including Sarah Pellet and Sallie Holley, would become public speakers. For Brown Blackwell, Oberlin’s policies and positions around aspects of the “woman question” presented obstacles or challenges that she seemed to have navigated without undue protest or distress. For female students, they had to reconcile expectations that religion is something you *do* with very real limitations and attitudes that constrained their *doing*.

During the winter break of her senior year, Brown Blackwell was hired to teach at a large private school in Rochester, Michigan. During a delay on her train trip to Michigan, Brown Blackwell was invited by her fellow passenger, Rev. Henry Fairchild (brother of Prof. Fairchild of Oberlin and former classmate of her brother William) to spend Sunday with him and his family.

That evening we had a long talk on the “woman question.”... Of course Mr. Fairchild believed not only in St. Paul but also that the woman’s place, the one befitting her modesty and real interest, was home, social-life and life in the pews as a lay member of the church....his final words were, “Whatever you may think

⁵⁹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 72.

⁶⁰ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 65.

ought to be, the place and position of woman will never be greatly different from what it is now." Alone in my room, my heart seemed to have sunk into a kind of despair. For the first and only time in my life, I almost cried out, "Oh, I wish I were not a woman!"⁶¹

As Brown Blackwell wrote to Stone, their discussion "put me into such an agony as I never wish to feel again....heaven grant you may never know them [her feelings] by experience."⁶² The feelings that arose were so powerful that Brown Blackwell resolved "not to spend two years in studying languages but in getting more practical knowledge."⁶³ Fortunately, her teaching experience at the Rochester Academy gave her new skills while working with their "literary society"—about 50 members devoted to composition, declamation, and discussion. In a letter to Stone, Brown Blackwell wrote, "We are all getting to be womans [sic] rights advocates or rather the *investigators of WOMANS [sic] DUTIES*....a few I hope & believe will go out in the world pioneers in the great reform which is about to revolutionize society."⁶⁴ She also had opportunities to speak extemporaneously in public gatherings. Brown Blackwell was revitalized by her various engagements at Rochester.

When it came time for graduation, Lucy Stone was not allowed to read her graduation essay during the exercises and she refused to allow a man to read her essay. In fact, she refused to write her graduation essay if she could not read it herself. Since Brown Blackwell was getting her degree from the Ladies' Department—unlike Stone—she read her essay "Original

⁶¹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 70.

⁶² Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 17: Letter from Brown Blackwell to Lucy Stone, Oct. 9, 1846.

⁶³ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 18: Letter from Brown Blackwell to Lucy Stone, Oct. 9, 1846.

⁶⁴ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 20-21: Letter from Brown Blackwell to Lucy Stone, Winter 1847.

Investigation Necessary to the Right Development of Mind.”⁶⁵ In this essay, Brown Blackwell began to explain her philosophy that she further expanded in the years ahead. She argued that individuals must “act for *themselves* and to think and reason independently” rather than being “the mere collectors and retailers of other men’s thoughts or discoveries.”⁶⁶ She decried the tendency to favor the accumulation of facts rather than cultivating the capacity to think for oneself. She protested that women who chose to study were considered anomalies. “Has God delegated to any one class the right of investigating, thinking, and reasoning, while other moral agents are capable only of receiving the ideas thus handed down to them?”⁶⁷ Brown Blackwell insisted that everyone has the capacity and responsibility to exercise and expand one’s mental faculties, a topic that reflected Oberlin theological premises. She was committed to *doing*, but frustrated by the limitations that constrained her and other women.

In the same year, Pres. Mahan read one of Brown Blackwell’s senior essays—an exegesis of St. Paul’s “I suffer not a woman to teach” in I Corinthians and “Let women keep silence in the churches” in I Timothy—and he decided to publish it in the *Oberlin Quarterly*. In this article, Brown Blackwell argued that St. Paul was writing for his time, not for a modern audience. Brown Blackwell further discussed the meaning of the Greek word “*lalein*” which had been

⁶⁵ This was subsequently published: Antoinette L. Brown, “Original Investigation Necessary to the Right Development of Mind. an Essay Read by Miss Antoinette L. Brown, as a Graduation Exercise, Aug. 24, 1847.” *The Oberlin Evangelist* 9, no. 20 (Sept. 29, 1847), 156-157.

⁶⁶ Brown, “Original Investigation,” 156.

⁶⁷ Brown, “Original Investigation,” 157.

translated as “to speak” when her research revealed that it was meant to describe inconsequential speech, such as babbling or chattering.⁶⁸

Although her article was published, Prof. Fairchild had his paper on women’s rights and duties published adjacent to hers. He did not depart from normative interpretations but reaffirmed that women’s duties are to be mothers of the race. Women are further distinct from men by the nature of their delicate constitution that is not designed for “rougher labors of life.”⁶⁹ Continuing to provide examples of differences between men and women, Fairchild concluded “It is a thing positively disagreeable to both sexes to see a woman a public character. With few exceptions, woman shrinks from it, and man cannot but loathe it.” He explicitly opposed extending the right to vote to women.⁷⁰ Yet, despite what might have seemed to be a critical placement of a contradictory article, Brown Blackwell recalled:

I can never forget the sincere kindness and geniality with which he made a few trifling suggestions and corrections of punctuation, without a word of criticism upon my article. His own was extremely eloquent and excellent for that side of the subject, and we both laughed over the peculiar circumstances which brought us together.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Brown, “Exegesis of 1 Corinthians,” 358-373.

⁶⁹ Rev James H. Fairchild, “Woman’s Rights and Duties,” *The Oberlin Quarterly Review* 3, no. 1 (August 1847), 236-257, 238.

⁷⁰ Fairchild, “Woman’s Rights and Duties,” 252. In the following issue, a rebuttal to Fairchild’s article was published that offered a more generous view of women’s rights and duties. Rev C. C. Foote, “Woman’s Rights and Duties,” *The Oberlin Quarterly Review* 4, no. 1 (1847), 383-408.

⁷¹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 88.

As a result of her published article, Brown Blackwell was among the first women to reinterpret the Bible to redefine the women's sphere.⁷²

At the time of her graduation, Brown Blackwell was already committed to continue her studies in the graduate Theological Department. The Oberlin administration refused to allow her to be officially enrolled, but allowed her to attend classes. She was listed as a "Resident Graduate pursuing Theological Course."⁷³ While Brown Blackwell did not have the support of all the faculty, she did win the support of Prof. Finney. As she wrote in a letter to Stone regarding Finney's "true position of women":

[T]hough he did not think she [woman] was generally called upon to preach or speak in public because the circumstances did not demand it still that there was nothing right or wrong in the thing itself & sometimes she was specially called to speak—that he would not only permit us to take part in every exercise in his classes but would aid & encourage us in doing so &c. &c.⁷⁴

Prof. Finney remained true to his word and allowed her to take an active part in his classes as well as inviting her to participate in prayer meetings whenever she liked.

Prof. Morgan refused to allow Brown Blackwell to deliver orations or practice preaching sermons during his classes, but he could not stop the Theological Literary Society, an all-male group, from giving Brown Blackwell membership—where she participated in "discussions,

⁷² For example, Angeline Grimké suggested that the message and acts of Jesus should define how one interpreted the Bible. See Angelina Emily Grimké, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* (New York, N.Y.: American Anti-slavery Society, 1836); Angelina Emily Grimké, *Letters to Catherine E. Beecher, in Reply to an Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, Addressed to A.E. Grimké* (Boston: I. Knapp, 1838).

Sarah Grimké responded to the Pastoral Letter by offering her own readings of Biblical scriptures that challenged the Letter's interpretation of the woman's sphere. See Sarah Moore Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes, and the Condition of Woman: Addressed to Mary S. Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838).

⁷³ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin*, Vol 1, 293.

⁷⁴ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 42, Brown Blackwell letter to Lucy Stone, June 1848.

orations and essays.”⁷⁵ Brown Blackwell understood Morgan’s opposition to her participation was based on his own religious convictions. She recalled, “But Professor Morgan however firm in his own opinions on the woman question was a gentleman and one of the kindest and most sympathetic of good men.” She wrote that he was helpful and supportive in every other way during her tenure as a graduate student.⁷⁶

Her theological studies were not easy for her. Brown Blackwell was denied a student’s license to preach but was given permission to act according to her own dictates. In deference to the opinions of some faculty and classmates, she limited her preaching but did give frequent talks on temperance. She gave her first sermon in a school house in Henrietta, Ohio (a suburb of Oberlin) to a congregation of school children and their parents. With the exception of Prof. Morgan’s classes, Brown Blackwell recalled that she was an active participant “in every exercise in the entire three years’ theological course.”⁷⁷ At graduation, she was neither recognized as a graduate of the Theological course, nor was she invited to participate in the graduation ceremonies. Although a classmate offered to help her with ordination proceedings and a few

⁷⁵ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College, Vol. 1*, 293, quoting from Theological Literary Society, MS Minutes, April 17, 1848. Brown Blackwell was the only woman admitted to membership in the Society’s history.

⁷⁶ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 86.

⁷⁷ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 114. This seems unlikely as her letters to Stone describe leaving Oberlin when her sister Augusta became quite ill [with tuberculosis]. On arriving at home, Brown Blackwell discovered that her mother was also quite ill. Brown Blackwell travelled back and forth between Henrietta and Oberlin for several semesters.

ministers agreed to help, she wanted ordination in her own church following customary procedures.⁷⁸

During her three years of graduate study, she lived off campus. Although her expenses were reduced, she was not eligible to teach or work at Oberlin and her brother and father chose not to continue to support her financially.⁷⁹ She wrote to her old employer at Rochester Academy in Michigan and he promised to lend her whatever she needed. Unfortunately, he died from a short, unexpected illness without making any provisions for Brown Blackwell. However, in what Brown Blackwell considered as divine providence, she began teaching perspective drawing outside of Oberlin, and made more money doing that than she would have otherwise.

Brown Blackwell missed Stone and while her letters to Stone revealed her intense devotion and love for Stone, they also revealed Brown Blackwell's growing relationship with God. During times when Brown Blackwell was faced with obstacles and felt very alone, she wrote Stone that she had "learned to talk with God as I would talk with a friend...when any thing troubles me I can tell it all to God & he certainly does comfort me even in the most trifling griefs...."⁸⁰ Although Brown Blackwell's letters to Stone commented on Stone's disbelief in God

⁷⁸ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 115-6. Brown Blackwell's recollections are inconsistent with other records. She wrote that founder Father Shipherd agreed to help with her ordination, but he died before she matriculated in spring 1846.

⁷⁹ Brown Blackwell did not explain further.

⁸⁰ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 41, Brown Blackwell letter to Lucy Stone, Oberlin, June 1848. Brown Blackwell wrote very little about her religious viewpoints at this point in her life to make any definitive claim regarding her comments regarding her reliance upon God. However, following the scholarship of historian Timothy Smith, Brown Blackwell's familiarity with Oberlin Perfectionism suggests that her "reliance" could be understood

and in prayer, Brown Blackwell did not allow Stone's disbelief to dissuade her from her own position. Stone persisted in encouraging Brown Blackwell to pursue other paths:

I wonder if you have any idea how dreadfully I feel about your studying that old musty theology, which already has its grave clothes on, and is about to be buried, in so deep a grave that no resurrection trump can call it into being, and no Prophet voice, clothe its dry bones with *living* life? Even now, it prolongs its existence only by a kind of *galvanism*. The *quickenning spirit* is *wanting*.... Yet my own dear Nette is spending *three* precious years of her life's young prime, wading through that deep slough, from the stain of which she can never wash herself....⁸¹

Stone continued to write in the same vein, explaining that because of her great love for Brown Blackwell, she felt she must speak freely. Brown Blackwell replied, "And you are afraid I am getting bigoted exclusive and narrow minded. No no I am not—I *am not* at any rate I think so."⁸² Stone believed that Brown Blackwell had agreed to her theological studies—without receiving equal consideration—on dishonorable terms. Stone wrote, "They trampled your womanhood, and you did not spurn it."⁸³ But Brown Blackwell wrote to Stone:

I came back here just upon no terms at all. They refused to receive me in the Institution. I came back to study Theology and get knowledge. I do get it; they don't interfere. I am not responsible for their conduct or decisions.... I am bound to put myself into the most favorable position for improvement possible while the day for improvement lasts . . . and what if they or anybody else think I act

within that context. For Finney and Mahan (and others), the call to moral action was served by heeding the inner voice of the Holy Spirit. Smith, "Righteousness and Hope," 21-45.

⁸¹ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 53-54, Stone letter to Antoinette Brown, West Brookfield, Mass, August 1849.

⁸² Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 63, Brown Blackwell letter to Lucy Stone, Henrietta, December 28, 1849.

⁸³ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 72, Stone letter to Antoinette Blackwell, West Brookfield, June 9, 1850.

unwisely, or dishonorably, or foolishly, what can that be to me? I respect their advice, but I do not abide by their decisions.⁸⁴

Although their exchange of letters revealed Stone's continuing disagreement with Brown Blackwell's religious commitments, Brown Blackwell remained unswayed, believing that her relationship with God freed her to act according to her own conscience. For her, the study of theology was not only the path to her possible vocation, but the most enlightened way of expanding her understanding of the world and her place in it: religion was something she *did*.

Brown Blackwell completed her graduate studies in the summer of 1850. While she was busy with her studies, through her correspondence with Lucy Stone, she kept up with events that would influence the course of her life. With all that she learned and experienced at Oberlin, she was about to put her beliefs and practices to the test.

Public speaking

Brown Blackwell had done some public speaking during her time at Oberlin. Although she had not been granted a student license to preach, she was free to make her own arrangements and she gave talks and lectures at local churches. The summer of 1850, she hoped to speak at a antislavery convention in Oswego (near Oberlin) that was organized by Gerrit Smith, but discovered that Smith was not yet ready to endorse women speaking in public nor to have women participate in their anti-slavery organization.⁸⁵ Although she was not allowed to speak to the anti-slavery assembly, she began writing her opinions in a series of brief

⁸⁴ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 77-78, Brown Blackwell letter to Lucy Stone, Oberlin, July 1850.

⁸⁵ Despite his opinions about women's participation in public venues, he would later participate in her ordination.

articles under a pseudonym that were published in Frederick Douglass' *North Star*.⁸⁶ Upon completing her theological studies in 1850, twenty-five-year-old Brown Blackwell had no options for employment while Stone had nearly three years of experience as a public lecturer speaking on temperance, anti-slavery, and woman's rights. Stone, one of the organizers, wrote Brown Blackwell inviting her to speak at the first National Woman's Right Convention to be held in Worcester, Massachusetts in October 1850. Brown Blackwell was ambivalent because the trip—even with some of her expenses paid by the convention—would deplete her meager financial resources. Stone's letter raised some concerns about the Garrisonian support of the convention: would Brown Blackwell fit in with their radical political stance? Would these radical positions influence the woman's rights organization?

Returning home to Henrietta, Brown Blackwell considered her options and thought that lecturing and writing would provide her with a livelihood more agreeable than teaching or missionary work. However, Brown Blackwell's family was against any of her proposals to become a public lecturer as they were concerned for her safety, health, and reputation. While Brown Blackwell was considering Stone's invitation to speak at Worcester convention, she received an invitation from a former Oberlin auditor, Mrs. Barnes, who offered Brown Blackwell housing and a salary if she would go to New York City to work in the slums for the Female

⁸⁶ Douglass, a former slave, was a supporter at the Woman's Right Convention at Seneca Falls (1848) and maintained his lifelong commitment to woman's rights. He published the anti-slavery newspaper *North Star* in Rochester, New York, from 1847-1852 when it received an infusion of financial support from Gerrit Smith and was published as *Frederick Douglass' Paper* until 1860. Unfortunately, Brown Blackwell did not reveal her pseudonym and her articles have not been identified.

Guardian Society.⁸⁷ Their work with women and children was focused in the Five Points district—blocks from Finney’s Broadway Tabernacle—and Lewis Tappan, Horace Greeley, and others from Oberlin were among their financial supporters. It was a grim and desperate area.

Charles Dickens described the neighborhood during an 1842 visit:

This is the place: these narrow ways diverging to the right and left, and reeking every where with dirt and filth. Such lives as are led here, bear the same fruit here as elsewhere. The coarse and bloated faces at the doors have counterparts at home and all the wide world over. Debauchery has made the very houses prematurely old. See how the rotten beams are tumbling down, and how the patched and broken windows seem to scowl dimly, like eyes that have been hurt in drunken frays....A kind of square of leprous houses....From every corner, as you glance about you in these dark retreats, some figure crawls half-awakened, as if the judgment-hour were near at hand, and every obscene grave were giving up its dead.⁸⁸

There is no evidence that the area had changed in any significant way since Dickens’ visit, except perhaps, to become even more appalling and grim.

⁸⁷ According to the records, Mrs. Barnes was one of the Vice-Presidents of the organization. The Female Guardian Society was formerly the New York Female Moral Reform Society—Brown Blackwell was very familiar with them from her childhood because her family subscribed to their newspaper and she had been a member of their affiliated society at Oberlin. For more details regarding the Female Guardian Society, see *Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Female Guardian Society, and Home for the Friendless for the Year Ending May, 1849* (New York: Publication Office of the Society: Printed by William S. Dorr, 1849).

⁸⁸ Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1842), 109-110.



Figure 5: The Five Points in 1859.
Illustration from D.T. Valentine,
*Manual of the Corporation for the City of New York*⁸⁹

With assurances that Brown Blackwell was free to arrange her own speaking opportunities in her spare time, she readily agreed to go to New York. Arrangements had been made for her to board with Mrs. Zeruah Porter Weed who was a member of the first graduating class of the Ladies Literary Course at Oberlin (1838). Phoebe Palmer, who was known for the holiness movement that she led from her home, took Brown Blackwell to a Sunday meeting where they both participated—treating Brown Blackwell with friendly kindness.⁹⁰ Palmer was also working

⁸⁹ Illustration from D.T. Valentine. *Manual of the Corporation for the City of New York. Numbered avenues and streets, 1765-1870.* Illustration in collection from various editions published 1841-1870], accessed 1/2/2014, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2005683317/>.

⁹⁰ See Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness, with Notes by the Way; being a Narrative of Experience Resulting from a Determination to be a Bible Christian* (New York: Piercy and Reed., 1843).

within Five Points. With the Methodist Ladies' Home Missionary Society, Palmer established the Five Points Mission in 1852 at the site of the Old Brewery—an eighteenth-century brewery that had been converted to a tenement. In describing the locality in 1850, *The New York Times* wrote:

An exhibition of poverty without a parallel—a scene of degradation too appalling to be believed and too shocking to be disclosed, where you find crime without punishment, disgrace without shame, sin without compunction, and death without honor.

The report continued:

The Old Brewery was at this time the centre of purlieu of wretchedness and crime, a haunt of the debauched of both sexes....Vice flaunted itself everywhere and unhindered. Robberies were hourly occurrence and murders and atrocious assaults frequent. Had the Points a gate, Dante's warning of the Inferno might have been inscribed on it for the benefit of adventure-loving or vice-seeking sailors and strangers who visited the region unescorted.⁹¹

Despite what was known about the area and the population, or maybe because the locality was so much a part of Rev. Finney's history—and the site of many religious and reform activities—Brown Blackwell did not hesitate to accept Mrs. Barnes' offer.

Before embarking upon her new duties, Brown Blackwell left New York City to speak at the first National Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester. Open to both men and women, approximately 900 men and women from eleven states attended. At this point in the woman's

For a favorable review and endorsement, see "The Way of Holiness, with Notes by the Way." *The Oberlin Evangelist* 6, no. 20 (Sept, 25, 1844), 158.

⁹¹ "New Five Points Mission: Work of Demolishing the Old Structure Begun." *The New York Times*, May 20, 1894.

right movement, the records reveal language in the Call (or convention announcement) that would have resonated with women such as Brown Blackwell.

The sexes should not, for any reason or by any chance, take hostile attitudes towards each other, either in the apprehension or amendment of the wrongs which exist in their necessary relations; but they should harmonize in opinion and co-operate in effort, for the reason that they must unite in the ultimate achievement of the desired reformation.⁹²

The organizers' hopes were to address the many questions around women's rights including education, work, civil and political rights. Summarizing their view of woman's current condition, they wrote:

Woman has been condemned for her greater delicacy of physical organization, to inferiority of intellectual and moral culture, and to the forfeiture of great social, civil, and religious privileges....But, by the inspiration of the Almighty, the beneficent spirit of reform is roused to redress these wrongs....Womanhood is everywhere awakening to assert its divinely chartered rights, and to fulfil its noblest duties....Wisely give the protection of your name and the benefit of your efforts to the great work... achieving the success of this high and holy movement.⁹³

The rhetoric was religious and the call to labor on behalf of the movement echoed Finneyian teachings, infusing the call with divine purpose. The Convention's Preamble and Resolutions reiterated and expanded upon the Call:

Whereas, The very contracted sphere of action prescribed for woman, — arising from an unjust view of her nature, capacities, and powers, and from the infringement of her just rights as an equal with man, — is highly injurious to her physical, mental, and moral development; therefore,

⁹² *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Worcester, October 23rd & 24th, 1850.* (Boston: Prentiss & Sawyer, 1851), 4.

⁹³ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention*, 4-5.

Resolved, That we will not cease our earnest endeavors to secure for her political, legal, and social equality with man, until her proper sphere is determined, — and what alone should determine it, — her Powers and Capacities, strengthened and refined by an education in accordance with her nature.⁹⁴

Additional resolutions addressed property rights, citizenship, suffrage, and gendered language in State Constitutions. The language that described a “contracted sphere of action” would be reiterated throughout Brown Blackwell’s future speeches and writings.

Following Sojourner Truth at the podium, Brown Blackwell gave a speech that was an adaptation of her published exegesis refuting Biblical arguments against women speaking in public. A report of the proceedings noted:

Antoinette L. Brown [Blackwell], a graduate of Oberlin College, and a student in Theology, made a logical argument on woman’s position in the Bible, claiming her complete equality with man, the simultaneous creation of the sexes, and their moral responsibilities as individual and imperative.⁹⁵

“The simultaneous creation of the sexes” was new. Unfortunately, records do not include this text or argument. Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison were the speakers after her. Brown Blackwell was introduced to a group of women and men working throughout the Northeast on a variety of social reforms. As biographer Cazden wrote, “Brown [Blackwell] found that despite her own ambivalence toward organized feminism, she was viewed as one of the radicals.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention*, 4-5.

⁹⁵ Stanton, Anthony and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 1. 1848-1861, 224. For partial transcriptions of several presentations, see *Proceedings of the Woman's Right Convention*.

⁹⁶ Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 58.

This notoriety had an effect on her appointment with the Female Guardian Society in New York. As Brown Blackwell explained in a letter to Stone, Pres. Mahan advised her that the ladies of the Society were not in accord with her broader agenda of preaching and lecturing. Although Mrs. Barnes and Mrs. Weed supported Brown Blackwell in spirit, Brown Blackwell was reluctant to burden them with her potential notoriety: everyone agreed to part company.⁹⁷ This was no misfortune for Brown Blackwell as she had speaking engagements on temperance and woman's rights in the months that followed. By the following Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester (October 1851), Brown Blackwell was determined to travel and lecture on woman's rights and had prepared at least a dozen lectures that she could present. She had not forgotten her desire to be ordained and Prof. Finney promised to pray upon her petition and aid her in any way that he could.

Although Brown Blackwell was prepared to embark upon her public lecturing career, her initial bookings were disappointing: despite the connections she had made at Worcester, her fees did not cover expenses. Mrs. Barnes lent Brown Blackwell enough money to keep her afloat, and slowly Brown Blackwell made progress. Rev. Theodore Parker invited her to preach in his large Boston congregation. Others began offering her opportunities to preach or lecture and the novelty of a woman speaker made audiences swell in number. By request, her Sunday sermons were often on Biblical interpretations of women. She continued to participate in temperance, anti-slavery, and woman's rights activities, but her goal to be ordained continued to elude her.

⁹⁷ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 99-100, Brown Blackwell letter to Lucy Stone, New York, Dec. 19, 1850.

“What hard work it is to stand alone!” Brown Blackwell complained. And her itinerant lifestyle was also not without hardship.

I came home two days ago, had spoken 18 times in 19 days, in Wayne Co. Two or three evenings after speaking over an hour liberty was given for others to make remarks, that led to discussions that kept us there till after 9 o’clock [9 o’clock]...engaged the stage to call for me at 2; but it was full and went on and left me. So at 4 I started on foot got a ride of about 2 miles and walked the other 7 ½ through the snow in the midst of a big snow storm....⁹⁸

Brown Blackwell was often met with “jeers and ridicule” but was undeterred. She recalled:

It was a time when the intellect of woman was seriously depreciated. No one believed that she could compete intellectually with man in any of the higher realms of thought or investigation. She had no opportunity to test her own abilities...she feared to act independently....⁹⁹

Brown Blackwell may have had momentary lapses of insecurity, but evidence of her resolve and commitment—to the causes she supported as well as to her own capabilities—withstood the hardships and setbacks that she faced. By and large, she was well-regarded as a speaker, as a newspaper reported:

Her lecture was sprinkled all over with rich metaphors, with graphic figures, and that rare quality of modern productions, originality. The ideas expressed were clothed in beautiful language, such as none but the finest intellectual gifts could produce, sentences superbly framed, periods rounded with a grace not surpassed by the numberless gems of the great English essayists....There is not one that did not leave the hall with the most profound respect for the rare mental endowments of the speaker.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 127, Brown Blackwell letter to Lucy Stone, Henrietta, Dec. 16, 1852.

⁹⁹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 154.

¹⁰⁰ Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 62, citing *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, December 17, 1853 as copied in Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 351.

Although it was common for itinerant speakers to be employees or agents of sponsoring reform organizations, Brown Blackwell was not affiliated with any group until the winter of 1852-53. In addition to speaking at the second National Woman's Rights convention in 1851, she lectured throughout New England, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania with growing success. During her travels, she attended many of the reform organizations' conventions, meetings, and gatherings, making new connections, renewing friendships, and using what she heard as fodder for her own lectures. Her own lecture schedule seemed to coincide with these other reform meetings, which was a sensible way of increasing attendance at her own lectures.

In the fall of 1852, she agreed to join Stone in campaigning for Gerrit Smith, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's cousin and an abolitionist running for Congress for the Liberty Party (which he helped found). While Smith's campaign was successful, Brown Blackwell found the political scene distasteful: "How I should hate to sink so low as to become a common vulgar politician," she wrote to Stone.¹⁰¹ Brown Blackwell quickly returned to her own speaking engagements, speaking mostly about woman's rights.

Temperance

During the winter months of 1852-3, Brown Blackwell agreed to lecture together with Susan B. Anthony and Mrs. Amelia Bloomer as agents of the newly formed Woman's New York State Temperance Society. The women's temperance society had been founded because existing temperance organizations refused to admit women or allow them to speak during

¹⁰¹ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 123, Brown Blackwell letter to Lucy Stone, November 1852.

larger temperance conventions.¹⁰² According to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's letter to the founding women of the new temperance organization, she proposed that women "exercise her right to the elective franchise" in order to have a voice in changing laws regarding the sale and consumption of alcohol. In this letter Stanton also hinted at proposing changes to divorce law in order to protect the women and children who were victims of drunkenness. But initially, according to this letter, Stanton's emphasis was on cultivating "the nobler elements of our being... & we should soon see a change not only in our homes our nurseries, but in the world at large."¹⁰³ This emphasis may well have resonated with Brown Blackwell's childhood experience of temperance in her home, or influenced by Finney's sermons that called converts to abstinence as evidence of their commitment to *do* religion rather than just say empty words.¹⁰⁴ In Chapter 1, Finney's revivalism in Rochester, New York explicitly linked temperance (which took the form of abstinence) as evidence of sincere conversion.

There were other links between the values promoted in temperance organizations that were central to women's self-definition as the ordained guardians of the domestic sphere. As historian Barbara Epstein argues, at the beginning of women's temperance activity in nineteenth-century America, the women's temperance movements had a central goal that was

¹⁰² The *History of Woman Suffrage* made it seem that the woman's temperance organization was founded as a result of Stanton being denied the opportunity to speak at the Albany men's temperance convention. However, there is evidence that Stanton and Anthony had planned a separate women's organization in advance of the Albany convention. See fn 1 in Ann D. Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Vol. 1* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 193.

¹⁰³ Letter from Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the Women's Temperance Meeting, Albany, [before January 28, 1852] in Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Vol 1*, 192-3.

¹⁰⁴ See also Susan B. Anthony's first public address given to the Daughters of Temperance on March 2, 1849 in which she exhorts her audience to "lend your aid to this great Cause, the Cause of God and all mankind." Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Vol 1*, 135-42.

in tandem with women's evangelism: "the moral reformation of American life...."¹⁰⁵ Epstein explains:

[T]he temperance movement was the largest and, having originated in the churches, the most closely linked to the evangelical tradition. The temperance movement in the latter part of the [nineteenth] century was made up primarily of the same kind of people as those that had shaped evangelical religion people of the same class and ethnic background, Congregationalists or their descendants. Unlike evangelism, temperance was a movement of social reform, but it was religiously and morally inspired social reform and had its base in the Protestant churches.¹⁰⁶

Epstein notes that it wouldn't be until later in the century that some factions within temperance reform would emphasize female equality as the means for achieving social reform.¹⁰⁷ Stanton made this point in 1853, at the first annual meeting of the Woman's State Temperance Society when she spoke: "We have been obliged to preach woman's rights, because many, instead of listening to what we had to say on temperance, have questioned the right of a woman to speak on any subject."¹⁰⁸ The events that brought the ideals of temperance and woman's rights together were contentious and challenging: Antoinette Brown Blackwell found herself to be a central character in some of the ensuing dramas.

The early years of the Woman's State Temperance Society were busy years for Brown Blackwell and she was often in the limelight. She was a vice-president of the new organization and together with Anthony and Bloomer, they spoke in nearly every county in New York,

¹⁰⁵ Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America*, 1st ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 4.

¹⁰⁶ Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*, 4.

¹⁰⁷ Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*, 4-7.

¹⁰⁸ Stanton, Anthony and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 1. 1848-1861*, 495.

organizing local auxiliary societies, and circulating petitions and tracts. In January, 1853, all the temperance societies in New York met in Albany and the Woman's Society meetings were crowded at every session. On September 5, the *New York Herald* reported that the New York Women's Total Abstinence Society met at the Broadway Tabernacle and Mrs. Mary C. Vaughn, president of the society, told the crowd of 600 people that they had presented the Legislature with a petition signed by 28,000 women demanding the passage of "the Maine law" (a prohibitory law recently passed in Maine). However, according to the *Herald*, the legislature refused to pass the law.¹⁰⁹ As the editors of the *History of Woman Suffrage* wrote, "The women of New York brought to this work a religious earnestness and intense enthusiasm, that seemed determined to override every obstacle that blocked the way to family purity and peace."¹¹⁰ And there were many obstacles.

¹⁰⁹ "The Maine Law. Women in Council." *The New York Herald*, September 6, 1853. It's not clear from this account when the presentation of the petition was made to the New York legislature.

The editors of the *History of Woman's Suffrage* tell a more complete version of this history. They wrote that the Women's Society [founded in January 1852 when women's temperance societies were forbidden to take part in larger New York temperance assemblies because of their sex, with Mrs. Vaughan as President] was convened in January 1853 during a "mass-meeting of all the temperance organizations of the State [New York]" in Albany. They wrote:

Emily Clark, Mrs. Bloomer, Mrs. Vaughan and Mrs. Albro were appointed a committee to present to the Legislature a petition signed by 28,000 women for a prohibitory law. On motion of S.M. Burroughs, of Orleans, the rules of the House were suspended and the ladies invited to the Speaker's desk. In a brief and dignified speech, Miss Clark presented the petition, after which they returned to the Convention, and reported the success of their mission. But alas! they forgot that women were a disfranchised class, and that legislature gave no heed to the claims for such protection. (489)

There are differences between the *Herald's* report and the history presented by the editors of *History of Woman's Suffrage*. From the editors' account, the connections between temperance and woman's rights are explicit. For a full account of their history of women's temperance activities in New York until September 1853, see Stanton, Anthony and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 1. 1848-1861*, 476-517.

¹¹⁰ Stanton, Anthony and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 1. 1848-1861*, 492. According to this same source, the *New York Evening Post* reported that about 3000 people were at their first meeting New York City meeting at the Metropolitan Hall (see page 490).

In the first week of September, in addition to the World's Fair, "representatives of all the unpopular reforms were holding their several conventions."¹¹¹ Antoinette Brown Blackwell was a speaker at the Anti-Slavery Convention, the Woman's Right Convention and at two temperance conventions. The first temperance convention was the Whole World's Temperance Convention, organized by Lucy Stone followed by the World's Temperance Convention. These two temperance conventions highlighted some of the political limitations that women experienced then. The editors of the *History of Woman Suffrage* went on to report:

[T]he mob element held high carnival through that eventful week. Starting in the anti-slavery and temperance meetings, they assembled at every session in the Woman's Rights Convention. Gentleman and ladies alike who attempted to speak were interrupted by shouts, hisses, stamping, and cheers, rude remarks, and all manner of noisy demonstrations. The clergy, the press, and the rowdies combined to make those September days a disgrace to the metropolis, days never forgotten by those who endured the ridicule and persecution.¹¹²

On September 6th, 1853, Brown Blackwell preached to five thousand people at the Anti-Slavery Society followed by another speech to thousands assembled for the Woman's Rights Convention, which the editors of the *History of Woman Suffrage* called the "Mob Convention." According to the editors, the [*New York*] *Herald*, the [*New York*] *Times*, and others—and with the exception of Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* and William Cullen Bryant's *The Post*—were relentless in their harsh coverage of the woman's right convention. The *Herald's* coverage was particularly significant as they had the largest circulation of all of the newspapers with national distribution. Brown Blackwell was featured in two front page headlines in the *Herald*

¹¹¹ Stanton, Anthony and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 1. 1848-1861, 546.

¹¹² Stanton, Anthony and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 1. 1848-1861, 547.

on September 7th: the World's Temperance Convention was featured at the top of the left hand column while the Woman's Rights Convention was featured at the top of the right hand column.



Figure 6. *New York Herald*, front page headlines from Sept. 7, 1853

The *Herald's* World Temperance headline on the left hand side of the front page pointed to what was a highly charged, controversial event in which Brown Blackwell played a prominent role. When Brown Blackwell, as an official delegate, tried to speak at the World's Temperance Convention in New York City, she met with utmost resistance. As an elected delegate from two temperance groups, her intention was to make a brief statement approving the Convention's inclusion of women and then she was going to withdraw. However, because she was a woman, she was denied the right to speak for two consecutive days. The convention's actions regarding her attempt to speak became fodder for scathing commentary in the *New York Herald* and

supportive commentary in the *Tribune*. Despite women's ongoing roles and participation in temperance movements, women were still not to be included in either speaking or voting within this larger convention that had representatives from many of the largest national and local temperance organizations. On the third day, the Convention passed the Woman Gag Act. As Brown Blackwell wrote about it:

On one side of the platform angry men are clenching their fists, growing red in the face, and looking daggers at me, until it is oppressive even to breath, without making any effort to speak....Stormy minutes roll over us. Rev. John Chambers comes forward, stamps with impressive dignity, points the significant finger, and shouts with stentorian emphasis, "Shame on the woman! shame on the woman!"¹¹³

Brown Blackwell wrote that she struggled to maintain her composure, she wanted to cry. She felt alone. She remembered kind voices advising her to withdraw. More men cry out to her from the audience. She felt like she in the garden about to be betrayed by the "Judas-kiss." But she stood firm:

Confronted by angry men, who were stamping till they were enveloped in a cloud of dust, I caught the flashing of defiant eyes—sneers, taunts, and insults were falling thick around. There was a principle within, above and all around stronger than all else. Moral and physical cowardice were subdued. The combined powers of earth and hell could not, at that moment, have tempted me to do otherwise than stand firm.¹¹⁴

Brown Blackwell maintained her composure and gained front page notoriety.

¹¹³ Antoinette Louisa Brown, "To the Readers of the Una: The Proceedings of the World's Temperance Convention . . ." *The UNA: A Paper Devoted to the Elevation of Woman* 1, no. 10 (1853): 148-149, 149.

¹¹⁴ Brown, "To the Readers of the Una," 149.

Despite giving the Woman's Convention front page prominence, the *Herald* author was also pointing at Horace Greeley, editor of the rival *The New York Tribune*, who had supported the woman's right convention (as well as other reforms) in his paper. The *Herald* reported:

The Last Vagary of the Greeley Clique—The Women, their Rights and their Champions. The assemblage of rampant women which convened at the Tabernacle yesterday was an interesting phase in the comic history of the nineteenth century. We saw, in broad daylight, in a public hall in the city of New York, a gathering of unsexed women...publicly propounding the doctrine that they should be allowed to step out of their appropriate sphere, and mingle in the busy walks of ever day life, to the neglect of those duties which both human and divine law have assigned to them. We will not stop to argue against such a ridiculous set of ideas. ...

It is almost needless for us to say that these women are entirely devoid of personal attractions. ...

That [this convention] is an affair in which we can have no possible interest. Let them repent before it is too late. ¹¹⁵

The author was also criticizing the "Bloomers" worn by many of the women speakers—an outfit that was part of a dress reform movement supported by many women in the woman's rights movement at that time. ¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ "Grand Rally of the Bloomers. Woman's Rights Convention." *The New York Herald*, September 7, 1853, 4.

¹¹⁶ Amelia Bloomer was not actually the originator of the costume. While Gerrit Smith's daughter, Elizabeth Smith Miller wore such an outfit to the Seneca Falls convention, Bloomer promoted the clothing in her temperance journal, *The Lily*, published in Seneca Falls. Her coverage of this dress reform corresponded to an eight-fold increase in subscriptions (500 to 4000).



AMELIA BLOOMER, ORIGINATOR OF THE NEW DRESS—FROM A
DAGUERRETYPE BY T. W. BROWN.—(SEE PRECEDING PAGE.)

Figure 7. Amelia Bloomer-Originator of the New Dress
From A Daguerreotype by T. W. Brown
Illustrated London News (27 September 1851), 396.

According to historian Sylvia Hoffert:

By wearing reform dress in public, they adopted an alternative strategy, one that visually announced their membership in a group committed to the principle that women's social, economic, and political roles as well as their minds and bodies should be freed from artificial restraints of conventions which helped deprive them of power and influence outside the home.

Although what came to be known as "Bloomers" were worn at Seneca Falls and were adopted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, and many others—and were initially viewed as evidence of one's level of commitment to woman's rights—it was not adopted

universally among all of the leaders in the movement. However, they were in evidence at the conventions in 1853. Brown Blackwell, for one, never adopted the dress as she felt it was not appropriate for a minister. Nonetheless, according to the *Herald*, what the women wore made the headlines, not what they said.¹¹⁷

According to the *New York Herald's* headline on the right side of the page, the reference to Antoinette Brown [Blackwell] was favorable and the article reported: "The lady referred to stepped upon the platform and was received with tremendous applause." In part, the applause was in support of her rude treatment and her quiet demeanor during the World's Temperance Convention the day before (reported in the headline on the left side of the page). In the article about the Women's Convention, Brown Blackwell argued that woman's rights were not about overthrowing nature or jeopardizing civil and religious freedom. According to the *Herald's* account, she said,

That is a mistake, because there cannot be a conflict between them. The rights of men cannot interfere with the rights of women. We do not wish women, in seeking for those rights, to go out of the sphere of her nature; but when women ask for what is theirs, they should not be met with such opposition.¹¹⁸

For Brown Blackwell, she wanted to keep the peace between the men and the women. She didn't challenge the idea of gender-specific spheres and she confirmed that women's nature is

¹¹⁷ By 1855, almost all of the leaders in the woman's right movement felt compelled to abandon "Bloomers" (and variations) because of unwanted public scrutiny and comment: the effect of the clothing as a political strategy was deemed as no longer useful. Sylvia D. Hoffert, *When Hens Crow: The Women's Rights Movement in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 21-32, 23.

See *The Lily*, an abolitionist newsletter published by Amelia Bloomer for articles, letters, and commentary on "Bloomers" and dress reform – particularly 1850-1853. "The Lily." Accessible Archives, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/the-lily/>.

¹¹⁸ "Grand Rally of the Bloomers. Woman's Rights Convention," 2.

innate and appropriate to her sphere. She then proceeded to describe the circumstances that had transpired at the World's Temperance Convention and concluded her account by speaking about the necessity for women to exercise their intellect. According to the *Herald's* account, she concluded:

The day is dawning when women shall be recognized as the equals of men in everything. (Here a storm of hisses assailed the speaker, but she paid no attention to them.) The greatest wrong done to women is to deny them their intellectual qualifications. They say our daughters ought to be educated, but only to be intellectual drones. The world will not let her take advantage of the information she has obtained. (Hisses and cries of "Order.") And what is a woman to do? Is she to stand and see her sex crushed to the earth?

VOICES—Yes! Yes! (Hisses, laughter and applause)

Miss Brown—I say No! When she hears the voice of God calling upon her to go forward, I say let women forget all the conventional nonsense about her sphere. (Hisses and cries.) Let her maintain her position for her rights, and every fervent heart will say amen.

Voices in the Gallery—Time! time! Sit down.¹¹⁹

Brown Blackwell began her speech by supporting the idea of separate spheres, but in her conclusion she refers to a religious experience of communing with God: and God calling upon "her" to go forward. According to Brown Blackwell, under these circumstances, if one is called by God to go forward, then one stands in accord with that calling, regardless of how that upsets conventions about "spheres." This is her way of showing, by example, how her religion is something that she does. No matter what: even with a very challenging audience.

The editors of *History of Woman's Suffrage* commented: "The mob represented more than itself; it evidenced that general masculine opinion of woman, which condensed into law,

¹¹⁹ "Grand Rally of the Bloomers. Woman's Rights Convention," 2.

forges the chains which enslaves her.”¹²⁰ The editors reported that Unitarian minister William Henry Channing addressed the audience with this paradox:

The largest assemblies greet with clamors Jenny Lind, when she enchains the ear and exalts the soul with the sublime strain, “I know that my Redeemer liveth”; but when Miss Mott or Miss Brown [Blackwell] stands with a simple voice, and in the spirit of truth, to make manifest the honor due to our Redeemer, rowdies hiss, and respectable Christians veil their faces. So, woman can sing, but not speak, that “our Redeemer liveth.”¹²¹

Channing followed with several other examples that illustrated the inconsistencies regarding women’s actions in the public sphere. Reaffirming Channing’s comments, Lucy Stone remarked, “Last Sunday, at Metropolitan Hall, Antoinette L. Brown [Blackwell] conducted divine service, and was joined in it by the largest congregation assembled within the walls of any building in this city.” Although that announcement was met with hisses, Stone went on to tell the audience that Brown Blackwell was to be ordained as a pastor later in the month.¹²² This announcement would have repercussions for Brown Blackwell in the days ahead.

Brown Blackwell faced another confrontation in 1860. Disagreements surfaced around the issue of divorce that polarized the membership of the New York State Temperance Society: Stanton and Anthony were removed from leadership. Disagreements over divorce would become a point of contention between Brown Blackwell and Stone, Stanton, and Anthony as well.

¹²⁰ Stanton, Anthony and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 1. 1848-1861*, 547.

¹²¹ Stanton, Anthony and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 1. 1848-1861*, 551.

¹²² Stanton, Anthony and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 1. 1848-1861*, 554-555.

Perfection through marriage

In 1860, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton put the question of marriage on the agenda for the Tenth National Woman's Right Convention in New York City, the participants themselves were divided. In advocating for divorce, Stanton's statement, nonetheless preserved ideals of womanhood. She said:

Do wise Christian legislators need any arguments to convince them that the sacredness of the family relation should be protected at all hazards? ... Call that sacred, where woman, the mother of the race — of a Jesus of Nazareth — unconscious of the true dignity of her nature, of her high and holy destiny, consents to live in legalized prostitution! — her whole soul revolting at such gross association! — her flesh shivering at the cold contamination of that embrace, held there by no tie but the iron chain of the law, and a false and most unnatural public sentiment?

Stanton maintained the sacred aspect of the woman's role with familial relations, but challenged those relations that were abusive. Women had no legal protection regarding sexual relations within marriage — if women left abusive marriages, they had no legal rights to their children or to any of the property. Even if husbands abandoned their families, they still had legal control over all assets. Many women felt trapped within marriage.¹²³

¹²³ For example, shortly after the Convention, a prominent Massachusetts' Senator's wife came to Susan B. Anthony in secrecy to plead for assistance. When the wife had confronted her husband with his sexual affairs, he threw her down the stairs and "thereafter was very abusive." When his wife threatened to expose him, he committed her to an insane asylum. It took more than a year for her brother, a United States Senator and lawyer, through writ of habeas corpus, to gain her release. Although she was permitted a short visit with her three children, when she pleaded for custody of her thirteen-year-old daughter, her brother answered: "It is no use for you to say another word. The child belongs by law to the father and it is your place to submit. If you make any more trouble about it we'll send you back to the asylum." The woman succeeded in escaping with her daughter seeking refuge with Anthony. Anthony's participation in this woman's situation resulted in legal harassment against her as well, and men prominent in suffrage also argued for Anthony to withdraw her aid. Despite all efforts, the father succeeded in finding the child and the mother (and her allies) had no success against the law. Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony: Including Public Addresses, Her Own Letters and Many from Her Contemporaries during Fifty Years, 3 Vols.*, Vol. 1 (Indianapolis; Kansas City: Bowen-Merrill; Hollenbeck, 1908), 200-205

Stanton continued:

In the best condition of marriage, as we now have it, to woman comes all the penalties and sacrifices... in marriage, woman gives up all. Home is her sphere, her realm. Well, be it so. If here you will make us all-supreme, take to yourselves the universe beside; explore the North Pole; and, in your airy car, all space; in your Northern homes and cloud-capt towers, go feast on walrus flesh and air, and lay you down to sleep your six months' night away, and leave us to make these laws that govern the inner sanctuary of our own homes, and faithful satellites we will ever be to the dinnerpot, the cradle, and the old arm-chair. (Applause). ...

Stanton was not opposed to the idea of the woman's sphere – her objection is that women remain without authority within their own domain.

Stanton followed with this statement that connects women's suffering with ideas of Christian resurrection.

If in marriage either party claims the right to stand supreme, to woman, the mother of the race, belongs the scepter and the crown. Her life is one long sacrifice for man. You tell us that among all womankind there is no Moses, Christ, or Paul, — no Michael Angelo, Beethoven, or Shakespeare, — no Columbus, or Galileo, — no Locke or Bacon. Behold those mighty minds attuned to music and the arts, so great, so grand, so comprehensive, — these are our great works of which we boast! Into you, O sons of earth, go all of us that is immortal. In you center our very life-thoughts, our hopes, our intensest love. For you we gladly pour out our heart's blood and die, knowing that from our suffering comes forth a new and more glorious resurrection of thought and life. (Loud applause).¹²⁴

Stanton shaped her argument in the context of models of womanhood. She reminded her audience that marriage was sacred and women would be devoted to their sphere if they were

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Speech of Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the Tenth National Woman's Right Convention, May, 1860," in *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 1: 1848-1861*, eds. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage (New York: Fowler and Wells, Publishers, 1881), 720-22.

given more autonomy. In her closing statement, she reasserted women's suffering and extreme devotion. Nonetheless, she advocated on behalf of divorce.

Blackwell spoke in response. She began by presenting a number of resolutions. The first was "Resolved, That marriage is the voluntary alliance of two persons of opposite sexes into one family, and that such an alliance, with its possible incidents of children, its common interests, etc., must be, from the nature of things, as permanent as the life of the parties."¹²⁵ Marriage, as a relationship between a man and woman, was meant to be everlasting. Consequently, a subsequent resolution stated that divorce "is naturally and morally impossible, even though we should succeed in annulling all legalities." While Blackwell was strongly opposed to divorce, she proposed that legal separation might be necessary under extreme circumstances, but "even such separation can not invalidate any real marriage obligation." In her comments that followed the presentation of her resolutions, she elaborated on several of her key ideas. She began by saying that one's first obligation is personal, according to the laws of life that God has "traced upon our souls." Marriage "grows out of the relations of parties . . . and from this relation originates the law." Blackwell argued that within this relation, women have an obligation to maintain their own independence as woman is the equal of man, his peer, not to be subjected to her husband. She recognized that the laws in most American states made marriage a contract of subjection and that this state of relationship was wrong. The

¹²⁵ All quotations from this section are from this same source: Antoinette Brown Blackwell, "Speech of Rev. Antoinette Brown Blackwell to the Tenth National Woman's Right Convention, May, 1860," in *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 1: 1848-1861*, eds. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joselyn Gage (New York: Fowler and Wells, Publishers, 1881), 723-729.

problem was less with the institution of marriage, she believed, but that men and women lacked fitness to be married.

They neither fully respect themselves and their own rights and duties, nor yet those of another. They have no idea how noble, how godlike is the relation which ought to exist between the husband and wife....

If marriage went awry and abuses or degradations violated “all the interests of home and its holiest relations,” it was the obligation of the wife to not turn from her husband but to do everything possible to “regenerate” him. The wife should go to another state and get a divorce if necessary, but her obligation was to then return and honor her relation with him. The solution, for Blackwell, was in education: if young women were properly educated, Blackwell believed the relations of marriage would be improved and woman’s fullest potential fulfilled.

Let the young girl be instructed that, above her personal interests, her home, and social life, she is to have a great life purpose, as broad as the rights and interests of humanity. I say, let every young girl feel this, as much as every young man does. We have no right, we, who expect to live forever, to play about here as if we were mere flies, enjoying ourselves in the sunshine....she need not absorb herself in her home, and God never intended that she should; and then, if she has lived according to the laws of physiology, and according to the laws of common-sense, she ought to be, at the age of fifty years, just where man is, just where our great men are, in the very prime of life! When her young children have gone out of her home, then let her enter in earnest upon the great work of life outside of home and its relations. (Applause).

Blackwell saw the sphere of women’s activity extending beyond the home, to fulfill a greater vision of purpose. Blackwell then concluded her argument:

The cure for the evils that now exist is not in dissolving marriage, but it is in giving to the married woman her own natural independence and self-sovereignty, by which she can maintain herself.... So long as society is constituted in such a way that woman is expected to do nothing if she have a father, brother, or husband able to support her, there is no salvation for her, in or out of marriage. When you tie up your arm, it will become weak and feeble;

and when you tie up woman, she will become weak and helpless. Give her, then, some earnest purpose in life, hold up to her the true ideal of marriage, and it is enough — I am content! (Loud applause).

If women had greater autonomy, purpose, and economic and intellectual independence, she would find that marriage was not intolerable, but the sphere that could give expression to woman's greatest work and purpose. In her model of womanhood that she would continue to develop and articulate in *Sexes*, women's education and work were essential.

In this particular debate, Stanton's position was not well received by her audience and was one of her more radical positions that split the woman's movement in 1869. Other than in a few states, women would find it difficult to be granted a divorce until after the turn of the century. Many women who were active in woman's rights found Stanton's position on divorce too unsettling. In contrast, Blackwell's view was familiar, but not without problems. Some felt that she was overly optimistic regarding the potential for changes within marital relations—and abuse was a significant problem for women. For Blackwell, divorce was just not an option. How her views on marriage and her model of womanhood were part of her arguments in *The Sexes Throughout Nature (1875)* will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Briefly, Brown Blackwell proposed that with education and exercise—a complimentary program that exercised both mind and body—girls would be encouraged to develop their potential fully. Young women would marry later in life bringing their more seasoned outlook into relation with her husband, who would be her equal within the relationship. They would share domestic responsibilities. And when the children, if any, were grown, she would still be at her peak, able to contribute meaningfully to the world at large. When the different qualities and attributes of men and

women (husband and wife) were brought into relation within a marriage commitment, this was like bringing two halves of a whole into harmony. In Brown Blackwell's vision, both would work together mutually and synergistically for the expression of their highest good. This was the model of womanhood that Brown Blackwell presented within the pages of *Sexes*, applying the theory of natural selection to the marital relationship. For example, she wrote:

Let us suppose that the natural selection has continually averaged the duty of the sexes to offspring, by modification and adjustment of each organism to its appropriate functions. At maturity, then, males and females would be true equivalents, each equally well fortified to meet its own responsibilities. Woman's share of duties must involve direct nutrition, man's indirect nutrition. She should be able to bear and nourish their young children at a cost of energy equal to the amount expended by him as household provider. Beyond this, if human justice is to supplement Nature's provisions, all family duties must be shared equitably, in person or by proxy. Work, alternated with needful rest, is the salvation of man or woman. Far be it from me to encourage one human being as an idler!¹²⁶

In this brief passage, Brown Blackwell presented essential aspects of her model of womanhood, her vision of marriage, her emphasis on work – all while using the terms and definitions of science.

¹²⁶ Blackwell, *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875), 113.

Chapter 3

“Science” according to Brown Blackwell

Assumptions and issues that emerge in writing about science.¹²⁷

In the previous chapters, the focus has been on Brown Blackwell’s religious development. Ordained in 1853, she became the first woman minister in America. In 1854, she was also the first woman minister who resigned from her parish. However, she was often invited to preach in other pulpits and she continued to expand her roles in that capacity. In her public speaking about temperance, abolition, and woman’s rights, her arguments were beginning to coalesce around certain ideas such as equivalent attributes (found not only in men and women, but throughout all of creation), equilibrium or harmony (as the ideal state or outcome of all actions), and progress (the innate movement toward greater complexity and good). These ideas had origins in Brown Blackwell’s religious development. For example, her idea of progress had resonances with perfectionism and millennialism.

Although *Studies in General Science* (1869) was Brown Blackwell’s first book, and her first significant publication that addressed scientific topics, she had two previous texts that give insights into her more mature interpretations of science. These two essays reveal her underlying assumptions as well as the themes and topics that she’ll be using in her future books.

¹²⁷ I am using the singular word “science” to represent the complex of sciences that was emerging during in nineteenth-century America.

In an essay that Brown Blackwell read as a graduation exercise in 1847, she attempts to parse distinctions between different approaches to knowledge. In “Original Investigation Necessary to the Right Development of Mind,” she explained her foundational assumption:

Nature’s book has been opened....The human mind is so correlated to the external world, God, and the universe, that it only needs to study the principles of divine economy—to learn more of the Creator and his wondrous works, in order to ensure its own growth, and the unfolding of its noblest powers.¹²⁸

Her primary assumption is that there is a God that is revealed in and through all of creation, “Nature’s book.” As she explained further, there is something “inherent in knowledge” that can be discovered in “the mysteries of Infinite Wisdom.” However, Brown Blackwell believed that most people, even the most educated, failed to think for themselves, “fearing to *act* for *themselves*”—but, “have been satisfied to become the mere collectors and retailers of other men’s thoughts or discoveries.” In other words, there is something that exists that can be known through discovery that is involved with thinking for oneself. Based on the religious dimensions of her Oberlin experiences, it may well be that she is comparing the way in which one’s personal religious testimony is confirmed by one’s attending to an interior dimension (such as an “inner voice”) rather than by manipulation of facts or data: or, a subjective approach versus an objective approach. Brown Blackwell will insist to the end of her days that both approaches are necessary, but her argument is less explicit and inchoate in her 1847 essay. She wrote:

Man may investigate a thousand different sciences—trace out causes, and their effects, and continually learn more of the spirit, the motives, and the plans of

¹²⁸ Brown, "Original Investigation," 156-157.

Deity, till the intelligence shall be able to unfold ideas which are incomprehensible now....¹²⁹

Brown Blackwell is trying to parse out distinctions that she doesn't seem to have adequate language to describe now but will be developed as "intuition" in her later works. At this time, Brown Blackwell is tentative and vague regarding the two mental roads to knowledge (i.e., principles and facts), but she will return to this discussion again and again.¹³⁰

The second example revealed Brown Blackwell's ideas about differences between the sexes. While she does not use science to prove her points, she will turn to science to attempt to validate her hypothesis. In 1855, in response to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's argument about the equality of the sexes, Brown Blackwell responded by reasserting that God did give different attributes to "manhood and womanhood."¹³¹ Brown Blackwell's position was: "the two sexes must be about equals in the aggregate of desirable qualities; equals they may be, and yet not identicals....in so far as they are unlike, they cannot be compared."¹³² She concluded her article with a question, "But *why* does Mrs. Stanton deny all natural mental differences?"¹³³ As will be described in more detail, Brown Blackwell engaged with science to find evidence to support these primary assumptions as well as other arguments that she would advance.

¹²⁹ Brown, "Original Investigation."

¹³⁰ Oberlin College does not have records of the courses that she studied while she was there. She may well have studied Mahan's *System of Intellectual Philosophy* which opened with a study of classifications of science, leading into more specific studies regarding the mental sciences (as they were understood at that time). Asa Mahan, *A System of Intellectual Philosophy* (New York: Saxton & Miles, 1845).

¹³¹ Antoinette L. Brown, "Are Manhood and Womanhood Comparable?" *The UNA: A Paper Devoted to the Elevation of Woman* 3, no. 8 (1855), 118-119.

¹³² Brown, "Are Manhood and Womanhood Comparable?"

¹³³ Brown, "Are Manhood and Womanhood Comparable?"

The decade before Studies in General Science (1869)

During the 1860's, the Brown Blackwells' younger daughters Edith and Grace were born. Samuel experienced a "temporary breakdown" due to being caught unprepared in a snow storm. Without his income, they sold their home in Short Hills, New Jersey to visiting Oberlin classmates and returned to Brown Blackwell's family home in Henrietta. By the following summer, Antoinette Brown Blackwell's family, Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell's family, and her mother-in-law had all moved to Roseville, New Jersey, a village outside of Newark. These were quiet years of domesticity for Brown Blackwell.

Despite her more domestic life, Brown Blackwell remained active and influential; she continued to articulate her arguments for woman's rights in articles and speeches. With the outbreak of the Civil War, there were no more woman's rights conventions as northern women mobilized around issues of emancipation and the war effort. Preoccupied with raising her family and living in rural New Jersey, Brown Blackwell continued to advocate on behalf of suffrage and emancipation of the slaves although less frequently on the front lines. On May 14, 1863, Brown Blackwell addressed the newly-convened Woman's Loyal National League, lending her support with other prominent women's rights activists (including Lucy Stone and Angelina Grimké Weld) under the leadership of Susan B. Anthony as Secretary and Elizabeth Cady Stanton as President.¹³⁴ Through their efforts, they presented nearly 400,000 signatures to Congress in 1864 to pass the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery.¹³⁵ This effort also

¹³⁴ For the text of her address, see Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 201-207

marked a change within the woman's rights movement: from arguments based on moral premises to organized political action. As described in the next chapter, Brown Blackwell was not comfortable with organized political action and maintained her moral thesis.

With Samuel's success in property investments, they purchased a small farm north of Somerville, New Jersey in 1869. Brown Blackwell was 45 years old with four living daughters and pregnant with her fifth when *Studies in General Science* was published in 1869.¹³⁶ As Blackwell wrote in her memoirs:

As my views matured, naturally I began to write them down as better method of clearing my own thought. While my children were all small, generally one or two were playing about me as I carried on reading, thought, or writing.¹³⁷

She described her circumstances a bit differently in the Preface to *Studies in General Science*.

There she wrote:

[W]hile those earlier studies were hindered by duties which few women attempt to shoulder, the later ones were impeded (perhaps in both cases I should say aided) by duties which no man ever performed—those which devolve on the mother of a young family, all of whom are still in childhood.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ There appear to be a variety of names that the organization was known by, even the *History of Woman's Suffrage* is inconsistent: titles include, National Woman's Loyal League, National Loyal Woman's League, Woman's National Loyal League. Despite variations, The Woman's Loyal National League was the name on the League's letterhead. For more, see Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Frances Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).108-114; Wendy F. Hamand, "The Woman's National Loyal League: Feminist Abolitionists and the Civil War," *Civil War History* 35, no. 1 (1989), 39-58.

¹³⁶ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*.

¹³⁷ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 211 (incomplete fragment).

¹³⁸ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, vii.

In her Preface, Brown Blackwell sketched a brief trajectory of her intellectual history—that was punctuated by her ordination, public speaking, and activism; and, by her motherhood and domestic commitments.

Science and Religion debates

During the same period that Brown Blackwell was working on *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875), debates were beginning to circulate describing relations between science and religion. John William Draper's *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874) and Andrew Dixon White's *The Warfare of Science* (1876) set the stage for describing relations in martial terminology, shaping the field of science and religion itself.¹³⁹ New York University professor of medicine and chemistry Draper and historian and president of Cornell University White had specific problems with what they saw as the intrusion of religion in secular institutional science studies; it wasn't until White's 2-volume opus, *A History of the Warfare of*

¹³⁹ John William Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (New York: D. Appleton, 1874); Andrew Dickson White, *The Warfare of Science* [earlier abridged version published in *Popular Science Monthly*] (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1876); Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom, 2 Vols.* (New York: D. Appleton, 1896). White first introduced his warfare model in his speech, "The Battle-Fields of Science," at Cooper Union in New York City in 1869.

Historian of science John Hedley Brooke argued, "Until the third quarter of the nineteenth century there would have been little evidence from the titles of books that a separate field of study bearing the description 'science and religion' might be constituted." The polemical stance and "tendentious claims" of Draper's and White's books "set an agenda" for the body of literature that followed that exposed the inadequacies of the conflict metaphor. John Hedley Brooke, "Science and Religion, History of Field" In *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, ed. Wentzel Van Huyssteen (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003), 752.

In his assessment of the religion and science literature, historian of science Ronald Numbers observed that scholars remained divided over the nature of the relationship between the Darwinian debates and religion in America as well as when these so-called debates ensued. Numbers noted that many scholars adopted this stance: "American theologians largely ignored evolution before 1874, when 'the grand battle was joined' following Charles Hodge's *What is Darwinism?*" He added that American historians have emphasized the acceptance of natural selection rather than its rejection—which undoubtedly represented the viewpoints of the majority of nineteenth-century Americans. Ronald L. Numbers, "Science and Religion," *Osiris* 1, *Historical Writing on American Science* (1985), 73.

Science with Theology in Christendom (1896)—twenty years later—that Darwinian controversies became part of White’s warfare narrative between science and religion and the conflict narrative motif was more broadly adopted, adapted, or critiqued.¹⁴⁰

Draper’s *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* emphasized the contours of the conflict between the “two contending powers”—Draper meant the Roman Catholic Church and Science—he was specifically referring to Church pronouncements that public institutions were not exempt from church authority. While Draper made that distinction explicit, he nonetheless described the conflict more generically throughout: Science and Religion represented by the expansive force of human intellect and science against the compressive effect of “human interests” and religion—faith was static while science was progressive: therefore divergence was inevitable.¹⁴¹

White expanded his “Battle-fields of Science” presentation over the years until it was published in 1876 as a brief survey, *The Warfare of Science*. In the Preface, he wrote:

My thesis, which by an historical study of this warfare, I expect to develop, is the following: In all modern history, interference with science in the supposed interest of religion, no matter how conscientious such interference may have been, has resulted in the direst evils both to religion and to science—and invariably. And, on the other hand, all untrammelled scientific investigation, no matter how dangerous to religion some of its stages may have seemed, for the

¹⁴⁰ In his 1876 book, White glossed the Darwinian controversies with only a few words. In 1896, in the section titled, “IV. The Final Effort of Theology,” White provided an account of the controversial exchange between Bishop Wilberforce and Thomas Huxley during the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in 1860, seven months after the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 70.

Paradoxically, Draper was not only present at that meeting in 1860, he was the speaker prior to that exchange between Wilberforce and Huxley: yet, he does not mention the occasion or underlying controversy in his own book.

¹⁴¹ Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, vi-viii, x-xii.

time, to be, has invariably resulted in the highest good of religion and of science. I say "invariably." I mean exactly that. It is a rule to which history shows not one exception. [Emphasis is the author's]¹⁴²

White clarified that centuries ago "a devoted army of good men" decided that independent scientific investigation was "unsafe" and must be supervised by theology to ensure that the Biblical record be taken as a standard by which to assess scientific results. "And so began this great modern war."¹⁴³

While Draper and White described their concerns about the interplay between science and religion, their accounts were predominantly historical and for the most part, did not describe conflict examples from within American history. Nor, except for the briefest passing reference, did they mention Darwin. It was 1896 before White included America as a site for confrontations between science and religion. Despite the popularity, potency, and persistence of the conflict thesis, contemporary historians agree that *conflict* and *warfare* were not the only way to interpret the science and religion interactions in Postbellum America.

Draper and White may well have set the agenda for describing relations between science and religion, but records and scholarship reveal that for Brown Blackwell, their arguments did not seem to find any traction or attention in her own books, journals, correspondence, or memoirs.

¹⁴² White, *The Warfare of Science*, 8.

¹⁴³ White, *The Warfare of Science*, 10.

A “theology” of science?

It was rare and unusual for an American woman to write a book on science for the general public. Before the Civil War, what would be known as “science” was more often labeled as natural history or natural philosophy. Historians of science may disagree on the specific numbers, but they agree that there were only a few hundred science practitioners before 1860.¹⁴⁴ Among those practitioners, women were a rarity. For example, women had only recently become licensed as medical doctors: Brown Blackwell’s sister-in-law, Elizabeth Blackwell, was the first woman to receive a medical degree in America in 1849. Women did contribute articles of scientific nature to journals and newspapers, but comprehensive books on scientific topics were only rarely written by American women.¹⁴⁵

Brown Blackwell’s *Studies* were her own insights and intuitions into the topics that she discussed. In a style that she repeated in her future books (less so in *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875)), she circled around her topics, because she wanted the reader to share in her experience of using intuition or mental vision. Using “repetition, frequent reference to parallel

¹⁴⁴ See Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, “In from the Periphery: American Women in Science, 1830-1880,” *Signs* 4, no. 1, *Women, Science, and Society* (Autumn, 1978), 81-96; Robert V. Bruce, *The Launching of Modern American Science, 1846-1876*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1987); Donald deB. Beaver, *The American Scientific Community, 1800-1860: A Statistical-Historical Study* (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

Literary historian Nina Baym notes that different tallies of scientists are based on how and where they were counted. Nina Baym, *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), fn. 3, 211.

¹⁴⁵ There were notable exceptions in nineteenth-century America, including Almira Hart Lincoln Phelps (1793-1884) who published textbooks in botany and chemistry (among others).

As historian of science Sally Kohlstedt points out:

During the period from 1800-1864 a substantial number of women produced textbooks and illustrations in science, yet a standard index like the Royal Society’s catalog of scientific papers identifies only three American women writers in those years and five more from 1865 to 1874. Kohlstedt, “In from the Periphery: American Women in Science,” 81-96, 82.

points and analogies, and a continual coordination of thoughts in harmony with the supposed coordinations of things,” she proposed to introduce different standpoints.¹⁴⁶ As this was her own method for approaching the subjects that she wrote about, Brown Blackwell explained that although “I have tried to give authority for every statement of fact of scientific theory,” she further explained:

How far the system of thought which the book contains was derived by the author directly from the universe itself and how far from books, it would be impossible now to determine; nor is it really of much importance. If one can perceive a truth, it matters very little whether he got it first hand from God’s book, or from man’s.¹⁴⁷

Recalling her graduation essay of 1847, it may well be that Brown Blackwell wrote an entire book to discuss the two ways of perception and argue that both are necessary. She credited her childhood, Oberlin, her ministry, and her years of lecturing as influential in the formation of her ideas. For Brown Blackwell, “I studied first to reconcile revealed and natural religion, and afterwards to learn what the basis and doctrines of the one absolute religion really are.”¹⁴⁸ The more scientific portions of the book, “harmonizing the whole,” were the studies of her mature years.¹⁴⁹ In many respects, I argue that this book represents what I call her theology of science.

The book begins with “General Statement” that there is Absolute Being. According to Brown Blackwell, materiality or the created world is “an established, preadjusted scheme of

¹⁴⁶ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, v.

¹⁴⁷ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, vi.

¹⁴⁸ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, vii.

¹⁴⁹ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, vii.

pure principles, literally applied and made operative in things.”¹⁵⁰ Absolute Being may be outside of direct perception, but is known through “the testimony of what is self-evident, and may be immediately perceived.”¹⁵¹ That which is visible is also constituted of relations, processes, and principles that are mutually adjusted and adapted: we know of them by our perceptions of the visible, and can explain them through mechanical and mathematical terms. However there are “sentient properties [of the mind]” that do not ignore or contravene the laws of materiality, but also have laws and principles of their own, of a wholly unlike and higher character.”¹⁵² In the next chapter, “The Text-Book,” Brown Blackwell explains why all of this matters.

Brown Blackwell explains that Nature reveals all knowledge to those who have “powers adequate to find it.”¹⁵³ Therefore, all mental properties (i.e., social, religious, moral) are knowable. She wants to know where moral truths are to be found and “if one has power to discover or verify them for himself.”¹⁵⁴ Moral laws (or truths) are not substances, but expressions of the permanent constitution of things. She wrote:

[I]f man was made in the intellectual likeness of his Creator, he must learn, through the use of his own powers, little by little to comprehend even the higher modes and processes over which he himself can exercise little or no control.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 3.

¹⁵¹ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 4.

¹⁵² Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 10.

¹⁵³ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 12.

¹⁵⁴ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 15.

¹⁵⁵ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 17.

In other words, based on her foundational assumptions (for which she offers a variety of “proofs” or evidence), to what extent can the highest [moral] expressions can be verified. Her project reads like a theology of science or scientific theology in that she interprets a variety of scientific laws to reveal what she believes is the obvious: an inter-related, cooperative universe that is the unmistakable expression of God. Principles, properties, and laws were illuminated through her own careful, methodical study, observation, and reflection. She oscillated between the religious and the purely scientific, not to confound the reader, but to synthesize the theology and science into cohesive, coherent arguments.

According to Brown Blackwell, reviews were favorable and recognized Brown Blackwell’s intellectual rigor as well as her unique philosophical and metaphysical positions. In her memoirs, Brown Blackwell copied parts of some of the reviews, such as this fragment: “We honor Mrs. Blackwell for putting her matured thoughts on paper and giving them to the public in a book.”¹⁵⁶ The review in the *New York Tribune* (published on page 2 of the newspaper) wrote:

The mental independence of the author is strikingly evinced in the boldness, unless it be a species of intellectual naïveté, with which she takes to task such thinkers as Aristotle, Reid, Sir William Hamilton, Cousin, and Herbert Spencer, for maintaining that matter is incognizable in itself, and that we can form no idea of its substance. She asserts the reverse of these propositions, maintaining that we perceive not only the phenomena or qualities of bodies, but their actual substance, immediately and literally....¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 212.

¹⁵⁷ “[Review] Mrs. Blackwell's Studies in General Science.” *New York Tribune*, Apr 16, 1869.

In part, the reviewer noted that while certain thinkers posited that one cannot know things in and of themselves, but only in their relations to us; in *Studies*, Brown Blackwell qualified her position. She agreed that everything is in relations, but the particular perception which is direct intuition has more potential to reveal the essence of things. She protested the conclusions of these philosophers who argued that one's observations were unreliable: "Poor, clear-sighted, untaught man! Let him learn to distrust his own senses..."¹⁵⁸ She insisted that substance, as the extensions of a series of properties and actualized principles, can be directly perceived.

Brown Blackwell devoted at least ten essays (out of 32 total) to explain how she understood the concept of perception. She made a distinction between perception that is sensory and conception which is mental, and includes all of the rational products of investigation (i.e., hypotheses, inferences, arguments, proofs) – yet does not include immediate direct perceptions. According to Brown Blackwell, scientists and philosophers have erred when they have confounded their perceptions with hypothetical systems of logic: "*the fallacy that we can conceive and elaborate the principles of an existing universe by subjective processes of reasoning and reflection*" [emphasis hers].¹⁵⁹ Observation of the thing itself was primary, stating one's observations were the outcome. Brown Blackwell wrote:

If man is really endowed with a reliable power or intellectual force for apprehending the nature of things, and for discriminating between the real and imitative, then ontology, including the ontology of rational concepts, which are the realities of finite constructive thought, is the whole of universal philosophy; and is a science which may be acquired by pure and simple perception.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 49.

¹⁵⁹ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 34.

¹⁶⁰ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 38.

Brown Blackwell cautioned that practicing perception, as she had described it, was not to be taken lightly: “The eyes are servants of the heart, and whatever we look for, we shall find, if nature has it among her treasures.”¹⁶¹ Brown Blackwell wanted to make explicit the distinction that the nature of things was not the same as the even the most carefully wrought exposition of that thing; and that there was the potential error in only seeing what we want to see.

Brown Blackwell insisted throughout *Studies* that the laws of the Universe were directly perceivable by anyone with adequate abilities of perception. All knowledge “*is knowable as it is...*” [emphasis hers].¹⁶² In her essays in *Studies*, Brown Blackwell asserted that her own investigations, meditations, perceptions, and testing have revealed the “the nature and operations of the vast number of things” and that such knowledge about the nature of the Universe was equally available to anyone who chose to cultivate their powers of perception.¹⁶³

As Brown Blackwell had written in her Preface, these earlier metaphysical essays on perception “were the special studies of early youth, when everything pertaining to mental philosophy was eagerly devoured; with such imperfect digestion as youth has for abstract theorizing.”¹⁶⁴ She was only six when Rev. Finney held neighboring Rochester aflame with religious revival and Brown Blackwell’s father was converted at one of Finney’s meetings. Ideas about temperance and purity were circulated in Brown Blackwell’s household newspapers and

¹⁶¹ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 4.

¹⁶² Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 12.

¹⁶³ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 18.

¹⁶⁴ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, vi.

periodicals—largely devoted to Finney and his causes. In *Studies*, the idea that perception was something that you *do*, or practice, had equivalencies with Rev. Finney’s admonition that religion was something you *do*.

In Finney’s theology, in *doing*, one experiences or is fully present with the millennial spirit of creating the Kingdom of God. For Finney, his students, and his followers, the doctrine of sanctification elevated the believers’ intentions and motivations—the better to refine the individual as well as advance the kingdom of God. In the third to the last chapter, “Social Progress,” she makes the connection to Finney’s theology explicit; as well as her argument regarding the equivalency of the sexes.

First she addressed the equivalency of the sexes. She wrote:

Typical differences seem to exist in the mental natures of two sexes. Such a distinction has been largely insisted on as an argument for keeping women within their proper spheres. Instead of allowing woman to develop any particular gifts which she may possess, freed from conventional restraints, a predetermined sphere has been marked out for her, and she has been rigidly enjoined to keep within its precincts. Granted the fact of her peculiar feminine gifts, this obviously is a direct argument in favor of her developing all of her powers untrammelled; and finding for herself her own level in society.¹⁶⁵

Brown Blackwell does not back away from her arguments that she made in the past. For her, women have peculiar gifts. But, Brown Blackwell uses several examples to assert that “Variety [is] built upon a substratum of unity....and each is ‘very good’ in its original constitution...”¹⁶⁶

Brown Blackwell argues that all of humankind’s achievements, science, and discoveries are designed to be a “free legacy” that should leave no room for jealousy. Taken all together, “a

¹⁶⁵ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 331.

¹⁶⁶ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 331.

forward movement in any direction enlarges all other capabilities.”¹⁶⁷ According to Brown Blackwell, the more differences in talents and functions between individuals mean more and better achievements for all: “we shall soon progress into a literal earthly millennium.”¹⁶⁸ In her final paragraphs, she wrote, “Humanity is assuredly so constituted as to be guaranteed a ceaseless ultimate progress—an unlimited development towards perfection.” She added, “Every sentient and rational being must needs choose to better his condition perpetually; and this instinct, as an ever-active incentive, is a pledge of unending progress.”¹⁶⁹ In this chapter, Brown Blackwell asserts that it is natural and good that women have different qualities than men; variety has the potential to fulfill the millennial promise with unlimited movement towards perfection. Brown Blackwell modified her own interpretation of Finney’s creed by maintaining the essence of action while expanding on a method of perception, or direct intuition, which revealed the principles, laws, and properties of the Creator’s universe. Brown Blackwell’s insisted that one’s own perception, exercised with nobility of spirit, was the only knowledge that one could verify for oneself. For her, the universe in its very presentation revealed an Absolute Being actualized (or glorified) in substance. With chapters of dense theory and explorations science to validate her theories, Brown Blackwell’s “theology of science” proposed in *General Studies in Science* (1869), reiterates that for her, religion is something you *do*.

¹⁶⁷ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 332.

¹⁶⁸ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 333.

¹⁶⁹ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 334.

Studies presents Brown Blackwell's unified explanation of existence that accounts for matter, properties, and principles. Anyone with the eyes to see, could perceive and know the universe in which balance and cooperation prevail. While Brown Blackwell's religious orientation was foundational, others in the woman's rights movement—including Stanton and Stone—questioned Brown Blackwell's commitments because they believed that Christianity oppressed women.

They may well have misunderstood Brown Blackwell's mature reflections. Brown Blackwell never relinquished the lessons of work and piety and purity that she learned from and through Rev. Finney. She did give up notions of a punishing God as believed within Orthodox Congregational communities. With her experiences with clergy and laity of various religious persuasions, including at Oberlin, as a pastor in South Butler, as a professional speaker preaching or lecturing in churches, Brown Blackwell knew the limitations imposed on women within American denominations. Although Brown Blackwell faced obstacles in becoming a minister or speaking in public due to certain Christian interpretative stances, ultimately there was no Christian (or other) oppression in Brown Blackwell's world because she believed that she, and everyone else, had the capacity to know what was true without relying on the authority of so-called experts. Brown Blackwell explained:

A truth of principle, from its nature, which is thought, not substance, may exist as the same identical principle in any number of minds, and be actualized or substantialized in any number of substances....In pure perception the apprehension is one with the object: it is the immediate cognition of the embodied truth: it does not *represent* the truth, but *it is the literal principle introduced into the perceiving mind.*¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Blackwell, *Studies in General Science*, 24.

Emancipatory and empowering aspects of Brown Blackwell's theology may not have been evident to all of her feminist friends and colleagues, but Brown Blackwell was giving authority to every woman (and man) to perceive and act upon their own cognizance of truth. Anyone had the capacity to perceive and know truth. Knowing the truth was never enough—there was always the aspect of *doing* to further substantiate both the knower and the known. For those readers who found resonance with Brown Blackwell's religious sensibilities, one could contextualize their actions with moral qualities and attributes adding religious meaning and significance.

Another approach to science: *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875)

In the years that followed publication of *Studies in General Science*, biographer Cazden wrote that Brown Blackwell was disappointed with the books reception, given the public debates and conversations that Spencer's and Darwin's books had generated. But working alone, in relative isolation, raising her young children, Cazden wrote "Her writings from the 1860s on have the aura of someone who has been talking to herself for so long that she does not know whether her words have meaning for anyone else, and rather fears they do not."¹⁷¹ Instead of continuing with more philosophy, theology, or science, Brown Blackwell turned to writing fiction, her book *Island Neighbors* (1871) was published as well as a serialized novel and some shorter fiction pieces.¹⁷² When they didn't bring the response that Brown Blackwell

¹⁷¹ Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 152-153.

hoped for, she turned again to writing about woman's rights: particularly how women could balance home and work. These articles were then compiled together with some additional essays and published as *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875).

In *Sexes*, Brown Blackwell addressed claims about women's nature, roles, and capacities common in scientific literature of her time.¹⁷³ In this book, Brown Blackwell proposed that if science made methodological changes and was interpreted differently, the truth about woman's nature would be revealed and would validate and authorize women's equality and equivalence: not unlike what she wrote in *General Studies in Science* (1869). Perhaps because many of the chapters were written as articles for an audience of women, *Sexes* is not as theoretically dense and Brown Blackwell does not use the repetitive circular style from *Studies*.

Sexes reiterated her questions about the role of women's actions. The topics that Brown Blackwell described and explained in *General Studies in Science* (1869) and *The Physical Basis of Immortality* (1876) (as well as later books) were in a trajectory that included *Sexes* (1875). Her ideas of equivalence and equality in *Sexes* had roots in her earlier discussions of unity and harmony as aspects or expressions of God and science. Equivalence and equality were aspects of her ideas about women's action: because women's actions were equivalent—regardless of the qualities attributed to her various actions—they should be valued as having the potential of being equal. Only the political, social, and physical limitations imposed upon women's actions

¹⁷² Antoinette Louisa Brown Blackwell and Samuel Charles Blackwell, *The Island Neighbors. A Novel of American Life*, Vol. 542 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871); Antoinette Brown Blackwell, "The Market Woman," *The Woman's Advocate* (Serialized., 1869-1870); Antoinette Brown Blackwell, "How Patty Kept Her Engagement," *The Woman's Journal* 1, no. 20 (1870), 158-159.

¹⁷³ Blackwell, *The Sexes Throughout Nature*.

rendered their actions as seeming to be less than men's actions. As she advocated elsewhere, *Sexes* promotes her ideas about expanded spheres of women's activities. She proposed that a proper understanding of science could expand women's sphere of activity and action. And, as we read in *General Studies*, according to Brown Blackwell, a more robust sphere of women's action was theologically pertinent and socially beneficial. I argue that Brown Blackwell wrote *The Sexes Throughout Nature* to continue to challenge contemporary methods and interpretations of science in order to bring the authoritative weight of science (properly done and interpreted) to validate her ideas about equivalency between the sexes and expanded spheres of activities for women (and men). If she could change people's minds, "convert" them, so to speak, the potential outcome might well mean collective movement towards perfection and millennial fulfillment.

Darwin, Spencer, and Clarke

Recent books and articles by Charles Darwin, including *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871); Herbert Spencer, including *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (1861), *First Principles* (1862), *The Principles of Biology* (1863), and "Psychology of the Sexes" (1873); and, Dr. Edward Clarke, *Sex in Education* (1873) and *The Building of a Brain* (1874) offered scientific arguments that often seemed tethered to popular opinions about women's mental inferiority and intellectual deficiencies.¹⁷⁴ When interpretations of these men's ideas

¹⁷⁴ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, Or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* [London: John Murray. 1st Edition, 1st Issue.] The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online, 1859). Accessed January 1, 2009. <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>; Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2 Vols. (New York: Appleton and Company, 1871); Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (London: G. Manwaring, 1861); Spencer, *First Principles* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1862);

were connected to questions about woman's nature, the authority of science seemed to promise to answer the woman question with the same certainty that the concept "survival of the fittest" seemed to describe biological relations. Many of the cultural comments about women expressed the view that women possessed smaller brains than men. Others suggested that women were restricted to a secondary role in society by their physiology, especially reproduction. Some evolutionary writers took this further to argue that women might be developmentally arrested in a lower state of evolution. Darwin and Spencer, as other scientists of the nineteenth century, subscribed to craniometry, cranial measurement practices. Craniometry produced (questionable) evidence of white European male superiority. The size of the brain (or skull) was considered the best indicator of intelligence and women's skulls were smaller, therefore less intelligent.¹⁷⁵ Scientific explanations of women's evolutionary development varied, but in "Psychology of the Sexes" (1873), Spencer suggested that "earlier arrest of individual evolution in women than in men, necessitated by the reservation of vital power to meet the cost of reproduction" had two results:

Spencer, *The Principles of Biology*. His System of Philosophy (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863); Spencer, "Psychology of the Sexes," *Popular Science Monthly* 4 (1873), 30-38; Edward H. Clarke, M.D., *Sex in Education; Or, A Fair Chance for the Girls*, 2nd ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1972 (1873)); Clarke, *The Building of a Brain* (Boston: JR Osgood and Company, 1874).

¹⁷⁵ In nineteenth-century science, the size of the brain (or skull) was considered the best indicator of intelligence and women's skulls were smaller, therefore less intelligent. Darwin drew upon and cited Karl Vogt's *Lectures on Man* (1864) and Alexander Ecker's "On a Characteristic Peculiarity in the Form of the Female Skull," (1868)—Vogt and Ecker were more explicit than Darwin in their assessment of male brain-size superiority. See Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 317 [fn. 2, 3] citing Karl Christoph Vogt, *Lectures on Man; His Place in Creation, and in the History of the Earth*, ed. James Hunt (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1864), 81; Alexander Ecker, "On a Characteristic Peculiarity in the Form of the Female Skull, and its Significance for Comparative Anthropology," *Anthropological Review* 6, no. 23 (Oct, 1868), pp. 350-356.

For a thorough discussion on the biases and assumptions associated with craniometry practices and interpretations, see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Revised and expanded ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996 (1981)).

The mental manifestations have somewhat less of general power or massiveness; and beyond this there is a perceptible falling short in those two faculties, intellectual and emotional, which are the latest products of human evolution—the power of abstract reasoning and that most abstract of the emotions, the sentiment of justice—the sentiment which regulates conduct irrespective of personal attachments and the likes or dislikes felt for individuals.¹⁷⁶

Darwinian interpretations were influential and persuasive; they described women's and men's characteristics and behaviors as "natural" or innate.¹⁷⁷

Biological definitions of woman's nature mattered. In their introduction to their collection of primary sources that presented arguments against women's rights, historians Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant write:

The nineteenth-century critics of the emerging women's movement launched the conservative defense of a delineated woman's sphere and redefined the cult of domesticity with appeals to scripture and history, as well as to contemporary scientific theories that emphasized the physical-gender differences.¹⁷⁸

As they note, revalidating the prevalent Christian Protestant interpretation of woman's role was one of the more pressing concerns for critics of woman's rights. While it may seem paradoxical for scientists to support theological or religious arguments, theological language was often used in scientific texts. For example, Spencer discussed "Divine rule" and "Divine arrangements" in the Introduction to *Social Statics* (1851), as one reason for readers to accept

¹⁷⁶ Spencer, *Psychology of the Sexes*, Vol. 1, 32. Darwin made a similar assessment. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Vol. 2, 630-631

¹⁷⁷ My use of the term "Darwinian" encompasses the variety of discussions, articles, books, and other interactions that evoked Darwin or concepts about evolution, natural or sexual selection, or other theories attributed (rightly or wrongly) to Darwin within nineteenth-century interpretations.

¹⁷⁸ Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, *Opposition to the Women's Movement in the United States, 1848-1929*, Vol. 1 (New York: Garland Pub, 1997), x. They focused on writers who represented the middle class and had a presence in the popular press.

his arguments and conclusions.¹⁷⁹ He continued with a more thorough discussion in Chapter III: “The Divine Idea, and the Conditions of its Realization.”

[T]here are few if any amongst civilized people who do not agree that human well-being is in accordance with the Divine will. The doctrine is taught by all of our religious teachers; it is assumed by every writer on morality: we may therefore safely consider it as an admitted truth.”¹⁸⁰

Spencer continued, “They have not observed that the truth has two sides, a Divine side and a human side; and that it matters much to us which we look at.”¹⁸¹ Spencer, who was agnostic, justified his use of theological language in *Social Statics* (1851):

I have always felt some difficulty, but have concluded that the usual expressions were as good as any others. Some words to signify the ultimate essence, or principle or cause of things, I was obliged to use, and thinking the current ones as good as any others, I thought best to use them rather than cause needless opposition.¹⁸²

For readers such as Brown Blackwell, Spencer’s inclusion of theological language in *Social Statics* may have seemed to reconcile science and religion in ways that appealed to her own sensibilities: particularly since Spencer argued that the “first of those fixed conditions to the

¹⁷⁹ Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics: Or, the Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified., and the First of them Developed* (London: John Chapman, 1851), 40-51.

¹⁸⁰ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 66.

¹⁸¹ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 67.

¹⁸² David Duncan, *The Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer* (London: Methuen & Co, 1908), 60. Duncan does not identify the specific source of this quote, using it in context to describe Spencer’s rebuttals to various critiques following the publication of *Social Statics* in 1851. However, because Duncan presents Spencer’s letters chronologically, this quote was probably written shortly after publication and before Duncan’s next dated entry of 25 March 1852.

Spencer’s agnosticism, rooted in his belief of the “Unknowable,” is more complex than these few references explain. For more thorough discussions, see Emile Boutroux, “Herbert Spencer and the Unknowable,” in *Science & Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*, trans. Jonathan Nield (London: Duckworth, 1909); George Santayana, *The Unknowable; the Herbert Spencer Lecture Delivered at Oxford, 24 October, 1923*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923).

obtainment of greatest happiness” was contingent upon “happiness within his own sphere of activity, without diminishing the spheres of activity required for the acquisition of happiness by others.”¹⁸³ But, as a rule, as historian Susan Mosedale notes, “Thus scientists played an important part in the overwhelming masculine tendency, in the face of feminism, to shore up the traditional female role, uncritically lending their theories and their professional authority to the negative side of ‘the woman question.’”¹⁸⁴ If the goal was to keep women in their domestic sphere, it did not undermine scientific arguments to deploy religious or theological language. Rather, the use of such language may have served to make their arguments more appealing to a broader audience.

Charles Darwin (1809-1882)

The rise of the American woman’s movement after 1848 coincided with the growing popularity of evolutionary theories to describe woman’s nature. Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) argued that species diverged in characteristics and accumulating variations over long periods of time by means of natural and sexual selection. As such, his theories challenged the creation story in Genesis and suggested that human evolution and development could be understood, in part, through examples from non-human species (including plants).

Darwin’s theories may well have been disorienting, upsetting, or blasphemous for the majority of Americans who were Christians (a substantial majority of Christians were women).

¹⁸³ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 68.

¹⁸⁴ Susan Sleeth Mosedale, "Science Corrupted: Victorian Biologists Consider ‘the Woman Question’," *Journal of the History of Biology* 11, No. 1 (Spring, 1978), 2.

Particularly for Christian women, the idea that women's nature, roles, and capabilities could be adequately described without referencing woman's innate, natural piety and other attributes that were God-given and laden with religious values and meaning may well have turned their world upside down. Without suffrage, with limited rights within marriage, and all the other limitations imposed upon women, the idea that a godless science could answer the "Woman Question" may well have seemed threatening to their ideals of womanhood.

In the 1870s, in the wake of Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin and Darwinian-influenced theories proposed ideas about arrested evolutionary development and physiological differences between men and women that defined what were presented as deficiencies in women (such as smaller brains that implied lower intelligence) or defined the division of labor. In the struggle for existence, those who developed greater strength, mental abilities, or social institutions were the most successful at reproducing; and these adaptations were passed on to descendants through the inheritance of acquired traits, with men transmitting these traits "more fully" to their male offspring. Darwin wrote, "Thus man has ultimately become superior to woman."¹⁸⁵ But male superiority didn't end there.

In the section "Difference in the Mental Powers of the two Sexes," he suggested that since dispositions were so obviously different between male and female animals, these differences in mental disposition were likewise as evident in men and women.¹⁸⁶ Relying, in part, on accounts from "Mungo Park's Travels, and by statements made by many other

¹⁸⁵ Darwin, *The Descent of Man, Vol. 2*, 313.

¹⁸⁶ "No one disputes that the bull differs in disposition from the cow, the wild-boar from the sow, the stallion from the mare, and...the males of the larger apes from the females" Darwin, *The Descent of Man, Vol. 2*, 310-11.

travellers” for their observations of “savages.” Darwin wrote that women had “greater tenderness and less selfishness” (even among savages) as displayed toward their infants and other humans. He added, “It is generally admitted that with woman the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in man....”¹⁸⁷ These attributes of women’s disposition were “characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilization.”¹⁸⁸ While his language seemed suggestive on this point, he wrote with more certainty in the next passage:

The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shewn by man's attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman—whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands. If two lists were made of the most eminent men and women in poetry, painting, sculpture, music (inclusive both of composition and performance), history, science, and philosophy, with half-a-dozen names under each subject, the two lists would not bear comparison. We may also infer, from the law of the deviation from averages, so well illustrated by Mr. Galton, in his work on 'Hereditary Genius,' that if men are capable of a decided pre-eminence over women in many subjects, the average of mental power in man must be above that of woman.¹⁸⁹

Man, Darwin insisted, will always excel over a woman. Genius in man was “declared by a great authority to be patience; and patience, in this sense, means unflinching, undaunted perseverance.”¹⁹⁰ But, he explained that perseverance must be coupled with “the higher powers of imagination and reason” to achieve “eminent success.” Darwin proposed that women, at the age of puberty, ought “be trained to energy and perseverance, and to have her

¹⁸⁷ Darwin, *The Descent of Man, Vol. 2*, 311.

¹⁸⁸ Darwin, *The Descent of Man, Vol. 2*, 311.

¹⁸⁹ Darwin, *The Descent of Man, Vol. 2*, 311-312.

¹⁹⁰ Darwin, *The Descent of Man, Vol. 2*, 312-313.

reason and imagination exercised to the highest point; and then she would probably transmit these qualities chiefly to her adult daughters.”¹⁹¹ However, despite woman’s capacity to increase her mental faculties, Darwin concluded that men would always advance their mental powers to a greater degree than women; consequently inequality between the sexes would persist.¹⁹²

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)

Herbert Spencer was not trained as a scientist, but he applied evolutionary theory to psychology and human societies. He was widely read in the United States. In *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (1974), historians John S. Haller, Jr. and Robin M. Haller described Spencer’s influence:

Few men had greater impact on middle-class thinking in Victorian America than English philosopher Herbert Spencer...his influence lay in his ability to support the foundations of the status quo while at the same time introducing to the middle class the revolutionary mechanism of evolutionary law and the discoveries of science...his passion for discovering nature’s laws rested on a liberal use of the “comparative method” to bridge the social and scientific world...Yet for every person who questioned his theories, literally thousands read and studied his works with reverence and excused his lapses in logic with the indulgent air of devoted servants.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Darwin, *The Descent of Man, Vol. 2*, 314.

¹⁹² Darwin, *The Descent of Man, Vol. 2*, 314. In a footnote, Darwin referred to Karl Vogt’s comparative analyses of cranial cavities. Mosedale further explains the reference.

Vogt made racial and sexual comparisons of such measurable characteristics as brain weights, and generalized upon mental traits in such statements as: “The grown up Negro partakes, as regards his intellectual faculties, of the nature of the child, the female, and the senile White”; or again, Vogt quotes Emil Huschke as saying: “Woman is a constantly growing child, and the brain, as in so many other parts of her body, she conforms to her childish type. Mosedale, “Science Corrupted,” 1-55 citing Vogt, *Lectures on Man*.

¹⁹³ John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 61-62.

In 1851, he wrote a chapter on “The Rights of Women” in *Social Statics* (1851) that insisted, “The law of equal freedom manifestly applies to the whole race—female as well as male.”¹⁹⁴ He agreed with the dominant cultural view:

Let it be granted that the intellect of woman is less profound than that of man—that she is more uniformly ruled by feeling, more impulsive, and less reflective than man is—let all this be granted....And what is the meaning of the assertion that woman is mentally inferior to man? Simply that her faculties are less powerful.¹⁹⁵

Spencer argued that despite these differences, women should have the right “to exercise the faculties she *has!*”¹⁹⁶ He anticipated arguments against his proposal for equality—that “politics are beyond her [woman’s] sphere.” Spencer asked: “Who shall say what her sphere is?”¹⁹⁷ He concluded:

However much, therefore, the giving of political power to women may disagree with our notions of propriety, we must conclude that, being required by that first pre-requisite to greatest happiness—the law of equal freedom—such a concession is unquestionably right and good.

Thus it has been shown that the rights of women must stand or fall with those of men; derived as they are from the same authority; involved in the same axiom; demonstrated by the same argument.¹⁹⁸

Despite his favorable position regarding women’s equality in this particular chapter, Spencer did not offer any particular course of action to achieve these ends.

¹⁹⁴ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 156.

¹⁹⁵ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 157-8.

¹⁹⁶ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 158.

¹⁹⁷ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 169.

¹⁹⁸ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 171.

Spencer's position regarding women changed over time. Historian Mark Francis wrote, "His thinking about women displayed neither consistency nor the detailed empirical basis that accompanied his other political discourse....he was likely to vacillate and, paradoxically, issue extreme and biologically reductionist explanations of behavior."¹⁹⁹ Spencer's viewpoints in *Social Statics* led others to believe that he was in support of women's suffrage. In August 1867, John Stuart Mill hoped that Spencer would join him in a society to promote women's suffrage. Mill did not know how far Spencer had changed his position in the 16 years since he published *Social Statics*. In a letter (9 August, 1867) to Mill, Spencer wrote:

[W]hile I should advocate the extension of the suffrage of women as an *ultimate* measure, I do not approve of it as an *immediate* measure, or even as a measure to be shortly taken....Of course, whoever holds that the minds of men and women are alike, will feel no difficulty of this kind. But I hold them to be unlike, both quantitatively and qualitatively. I believe the difference to result from a physiological necessity, and that no amount of culture can obliterate it. And I believe further that the relative deficiency of the female mind is in just those most complex faculties, intellectual and moral, which have political action for their sphere.²⁰⁰

Spencer's change of heart was seen in the revised and abridged version of *Social Statics* published in 1892 where he revised "The Rights of Women" from 17 to 6 pages.²⁰¹

However, in the period prior to Brown Blackwell's *Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875), Herbert Spencer's support of suffrage in *Social Statics* (1851) may well have been encouraging to those supporting woman's rights. "Psychology of the Sexes" (1873) may well have been

¹⁹⁹ Mark Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 69.

²⁰⁰ Duncan, *The Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 138-9.

²⁰¹ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 73-79.

more troubling. Published in *Popular Science Monthly*, Spencer's article reached a broad audience in the United States. In "Psychology," Spencer offered a seemingly biological and historical narrative that offered a comparative psychology of women. Without references to sources for his pronouncements, he made claims such as this:

"The comparisons ordinarily made between the minds of men and women are faulty in many ways, of which these are the chief: Instead of comparing either the average of women with the average of men, or the elite of women with the elite of men, the common course is to compare the elite of women with the average of men."²⁰²

Spencer wrote that one of women's unavoidable circumstances was that her reproductive capacities limited her mental abilities. "That men and women are mentally alike, is as untrue as that they are alike bodily."²⁰³ Spencer asserted "The first set of differences is that which results from a somewhat earlier arrest of individual evolution in women than in men, necessitated by the reservation of vital power to meet the cost of reproduction."²⁰⁴ This resulted in quantitative mental deficiencies:

The mental manifestations have somewhat less of general power or massiveness; and beyond this there is a perceptible falling short in those two faculties, intellectual and emotional, which are the latest products of human evolution—the power of abstract reasoning and that most abstract of the emotions, the sentiment of justice—the sentiment which regulates conduct irrespective of personal attachments and the likes or dislikes felt for individuals.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Spencer, "Psychology of the Sexes," 31. Edward L. Youmans founded *The Popular Science Monthly* in 1872 to give Spencer a forum for the serialization of his *The Study of Sociology* (1873).

²⁰³ Spencer, "Psychology of the Sexes," 31.

²⁰⁴ Spencer, "Psychology of the Sexes," 31-32.

²⁰⁵ Spencer, "Psychology of the Sexes," 33.

Women and men may have had the same kinds of mental capacities, but Spencer might well be understood as saying that women's capacities had not fully evolved; women lacked faculties that were higher on the evolutionary development scale, particularly powers of abstract reasoning and "sentiment of justice," which Spencer defined as an emotional quality.

Spencer then described the qualitative distinctions between men and women, focusing on the differences evidenced by the "parental instinct": in his opinion, women had more of a response to "infantine helplessness" than men, who had a different kind of response. Spencer wrote, that women had "special aptitudes for dealing with infantine life an adapted power of intuition and a fit adjustment of behavior. That there is here a mental specialization, joined with the bodily specialization, is undeniable..."²⁰⁶ Spencer, like Darwin, recognized intuition as a special womanly aptitude. Spencer presented his own narrative to explain women's ability to survive with their lesser capacities: women developed "the ability to please and the concomitant love of approbation." To these skills, Spencer added women's abilities to disguise their feelings and arts of persuasion, as well as the ability to read the feelings of those around them. All of these abilities would result in her success at survival.²⁰⁷ According to Spencer's narrative, with aggressive, brutal, and/or powerful men, successful women adapted a particular mental stance that was both intuitive and submissive. Women who evolved in tandem with such powerful men were more likely to survive and have children that survived.

²⁰⁶ Spencer, *Psychology of the Sexes*, 33.

²⁰⁷ Spencer, "Psychology of the Sexes," 33.

Spencer offered other [what are presented as] conclusions: that women's "distinctive mental trait" was linked to women's concern for the welfare of the state (i.e., "love of the helpless," also tethered to women's superior talents with the infantile) that had a religious dimension:

[T]here goes the admiration of power in general, which is more marked in women than in men, and shows itself both theologically and politically. That the emotion of awe aroused by contemplating whatever suggests transcendent force or capacity, which constitutes religious feeling, is strongest in women, is proved in many ways.

Spencer's history showed that women were "more religiously excitable than men" and that in more contemporary terms, her religious stance was not "due to the education of women, but has deeper cause in natural character."²⁰⁸ As Brown Blackwell wrote in *Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875), Spencer's narrative was significant in attempting to naturalize the mental and behavioral states of women. In many ways, Spencer reasserted some of the qualities of ideal womanhood: woman's intuitive, maternal, submissive, and religious qualities were naturalized. At the same time Spencer used his conclusions to argue that women had physical/mental limits to what they were capable of doing that should be accounted for in making decisions regarding their political participation. By taking "these traits of intellect and feeling which distinguish women," Spencer suggested that social phenomena and social policy could best be created that took the psychology of sex into consideration: "we must include the comparative psychology of the sexes; so that, if any change is made, we may make it knowing what we are doing."²⁰⁹ As

²⁰⁸ Spencer, *Psychology of the Sexes*, 37.

²⁰⁹ Spencer, "Psychology of the Sexes," 38.

compelling as his arguments may have seemed, his evidence was thin: he merely asserted that this must have been the way that it was.²¹⁰

Edward Clarke, M.D. (1820-1877)

A highly regarded medical doctor and professor at Harvard Medical School, Dr. Clarke's most notable publication was *Sex in Education; or A Fair Chance for the Girls* (1873).²¹¹ Written about a year after he gave an address on the same topic to the New-England Women's Club in Boston, the "unexpected amount of discussion" together with brief reports in public journals resulted in further discussions, criticisms, and appreciation for his topic. Clarke expanded the lecture's essay into a more comprehensive text. The book went into a second printing in little more than a week after its initial publication.²¹² Regarding the "problem of woman's sphere," he asked, "What can she do? And this includes the further question, What can she best do?" Clarke continued: "The *quæstio vexata* of woman's sphere will be decided by her organization. This limits her power, and reveals her divinely-appointed tasks...."²¹³ In his assessment, the education of girls was to be undertaken in respect of her unique physiology to insure that she will best fulfill ideals of womanhood and reproductive destiny. Therefore, girls needed a

²¹⁰ Spencer did not cite or reference any studies or other scientists or authorities.

²¹¹ Clarke, *Sex in Education*. His obituary noted his exemplary standing in his graduating class from Harvard College (1841) and his contributions to his profession and community. He died of a "malignant affection of the lower portion of the intestinal track, slow in its progress, distressing in its symptoms, inevitable in its consequences....during the three years of his slow martyrdom.....[he suffered] the pains as of a woman in travail..." [an idiom of suffering.] "Edward Hammond Clarke," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 13 (May, 1877 - May, 1878), 438.

²¹² Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 5-6, 10.

²¹³ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 12-13.

separate mode of education; coeducation presented conditions of mental exertion that Clarke considered dangerous.

Clarke presented a series of medical case studies that illustrated the debilitating effects of too much education. In these cases, the young women's participation in education was regarded as the cause of a disruption of their menses. Although the female anatomical processes were deemed natural, the effects were medicalized and viewed as illness. Clarke's observations about the sickliness of young women were attributed to their method of education: "the educational methods of our schools and colleges for girls are, to a large extent, the cause of 'the thousand ills' that beset American women."²¹⁴ Blood, diverted to the brain, depleted vital nourishment to the nerves and organs—putting reproductive capacities at risk. "When arrested development of the reproductive system is nearly or quite complete, it produces a change in the character, and a loss of power...."²¹⁵ Such arrested development resulted in "Amazonian coarseness and force," and women became masculine in habit and form. According to Clarke, undue brain activity was sterilizing in its effect and the consequences were the ruin of civilization.

Clarke's proposal was to educate women differently than men. During the time of her menses, women should not study at all: "Force must be allowed to flow thither in an ample stream, and not diverted to the brain by the school, or to the arms by the factory, or to the feet

²¹⁴ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 22.

²¹⁵ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 12.

by dancing.”²¹⁶ Thus he proposed four conditions “in order to give girls a fair chance in education”: good nutrition, management of her menses, ample time to rest and allow for bodily repair and sexual development, and plenty of sleep.²¹⁷ Clarke wanted to stop the growing tendency towards co-education that did not take these conditions into account. Education for women was fine, in his opinion, as long as it prepared her for her true motherly vocation.

Summary

This brief overview of some of the texts that Brown Blackwell responded to in *The Sexes Throughout Nature (1875)* shows that in some aspects of Darwin’s, Spencer’s and Clarke’s science, their analysis that defined women also naturalized traditional views of womanhood.

Mosedale is more blunt in her assessment:

Most of them [scientists] betray, by their uncritical acceptance of popular opinion about women, their emotional commitment to the traditional concept of the female’s place in society. This commitment leads them to grasp at any fact, or alleged fact, of physiology, evolution, or anthropometry which might be worked into a system of evidence in support of woman’s traditional role.²¹⁸

The traditional role that science was trying to maintain shared views of women’s “special” qualities, but they were embedded in overarching narratives that made women often seem akin to “savages” or animals. Women were described as less intelligent and incapable of achieving the intellectual and physical capabilities of men without jeopardizing femininity and

²¹⁶ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 12.

²¹⁷ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 12.

²¹⁸ Mosedale, *Science Corrupted.*, 3.

reproductive vigor. It seemed that much of Darwin's, Spencer's, and Clarke's preoccupation with women centered on their reproductive and maternal roles and capacities.

Darwin and Spencer on marriage

For Darwin, in *Descent of Man*, the word "marriage" was used to describe reproductive relations among animals as well as humans. "Some apes, however, would probably declare that they could and did admire the beauty of the coloured skin and fur of their partners in marriage," he wrote, adding further on: "Too little is known of the habits of reptiles and fishes to enable us to speak of their marriage arrangements."²¹⁹ Among humans, practices of monogamy, polygamy, polyandry, and other mating arrangements were significant for determining how sexual selection worked and to also address issues around questions of race.²²⁰ Although Darwin used marriage to define reproductive relationships, marriage was one of the essential aspects defining ideal models of womanhood.

Spencer argued for equality within marriage in "The Rights of Women" in *Social Statics* (1851), but in his 1867 correspondence with John Stuart Mill, Spencer's opinion on marriage—and women's roles therein—were ambiguous. His correspondence did not address the marriage relationship explicitly. Based on Spencer's later writings, Francis argues that Spencer

²¹⁹ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Vol. 2, 126, 220.

²²⁰ For example, were different ethnic groups ("races") also different species? If so, then reproduction between members of different races wouldn't produce offspring.

believed in a “restricted set of rights” for women that would not conflict with the bonds of marriage.²²¹

In *Sex in Education*, Clarke used the word “marriage” or “wife” only a few times to describe the relations between the sexes. “The law has, or had, a maxim, that a man and his wife are one, and that the one is the man.”²²² His focus was addressing female reproductive capacities: Quoting Dr. Weir, Clarke noted, “[The American woman] is not fairly up to what Nature asks from her as wife and mother.”²²³ Although Clarke does not specifically address marriage in conjunction with reproduction, it is implied within the scope of his project: he advocated a separate system of education for girls “that shall develop all her powers, without mutilation or disease, up to the loftiest ideal of womanhood, is alike the teaching of physiology and the hope of the race.”²²⁴

While Darwin, Spencer, and Clarke used the language of marriage to frame some of their discussions about women’s nature and roles, as we read in the previous chapter, for Brown Blackwell, marriage was essential for women and men to achieve their highest potential—to be fully evolved. Through the synergy of actions within a framework of marriage, both men and women would be able to bring their equivalent talents and capacities to their fullest expression.

²²¹ Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life*, 75, referencing Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics* (New York,: D. Appleton and company, 1892).

²²² Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 43.

²²³ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 40, citing S. W. Mitchell, *Wear and Tear, Or, Hints for the Overworked* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1871).

²²⁴ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 40.

Although ideals of womanhood presented monogamy, matrimony, maternity, and motherhood as ideals, some within the woman's suffrage movement felt that divorce should be an option. Divorce, custody issues, property rights, and the establishment of a woman's separate legal identity were legal developments that were not well received by many men and women, regardless of their commitment to suffrage. As John Stuart Mill observed, "The indissolubility of marriage is the keystone of a woman's present lot. . . .And the truth is, that this question of marriage cannot be properly be considered by itself alone. The question is not what marriage ought to be, but a far wider question, what woman ought to be."²²⁵ Marriage and divorce may not have been central within Darwinian or other scientific narratives, but were central within ideal models of womanhood as well as for Brown Blackwell.

Overview of The Sexes Throughout Nature

Although *The Sexes Throughout Nature* was published in 1875, portions had been previously published elsewhere. The chapter "The Alleged Antagonism Between Growth and Reproduction" was published in *Popular Science Monthly* in 1874. "Sex and Work" was serialized in *The Woman's Journal* in 1874 (in modified form). As Brown Blackwell noted in the "Preface," only the leading essay, "Sex and Evolution" and the concluding essay, "The Trial by Science" were original to this publication.

²²⁵ John Stuart Mill and Harriet Hardy Taylor Mill, *Essays on Sex Equality*, ed. Alice S. Rossi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 67-84 as cited by Helsinger, Sheets and Veeder, *The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837-1883: Social Issues*, 22.

The collection of essays in *Sexes* was “all hung on a framework of criticism.”²²⁶ Regarding woman’s “normal powers and functions,”²²⁷ Brown Blackwell challenged the conclusions of some of the most notable scientists and social theorists of her time, including Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. She also challenged those who were engaged in arguments about women’s abilities to participate in higher education, primarily Dr. Edward H. Clarke, author of *Sex in Education*.

In the first essay, “Sex and Evolution,” Brown Blackwell presents her main argument about equivalency that she first presented in argued that contrary to the assessments of Darwin and Spencer, women were equivalent, not inferior.²²⁸ She observed that Darwin had described, in great detail, the evolution of masculine characteristics, relying on “the accepted theory that the male is the representative type of the species.”²²⁹ In her interpretation of Darwin, “the male force always predominates.”²³⁰ She pointed out that there could be no proper comparison between the sexes when there were no substantial investigations of the females within species.

According to Brown Blackwell, Spencer attended to women’s functions more fully than Darwin. Spencer argued that due to reproductive functions, woman’s development was

²²⁶ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 5.

²²⁷ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 5.

²²⁸ She referred to (but did not cite) Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* [1859] and *Descent of Man* [1871]; Herbert Spencer’s *Social Statics: Or, the Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified., and the First of them Developed* [1851], *First Principles* [1862], “four weighty volumes of *Biology and Psychology*” [various dates] and “*Psychology of the Sexes*” [1873].

²²⁹ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 17.

²³⁰ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 17.

arrested. "At any rate," Brown Blackwell noted, "Mr. Spencer scientifically *subtracts from the female*, and Mr. Darwin as scientifically *adds to the male*." She added,

The facts of Evolution may have been misinterpreted, by giving undue prominence to such as have been evolved in the male line; and by overlooking equally essential modifications which have arisen in the diverging female line....Mr. Spencer and Mr. Darwin are both wrong in the conclusion that, in the processes of evolution, man has become the superior of woman.²³¹

Brown Blackwell sought to correct these imbalances by presenting her idea of equivalency between the sexes.

Brown Blackwell referred to both Darwin's and Spencer's evidence, and used it as the basis for her interpretation of equivalence between the sexes: "a balance of activities—an equilibrium which requires that at all stages of development there shall be a virtual equivalence of sex in every species."²³² She countered Darwin's theory of secondary sexual characters in males as an inadequate explanation: males and females must contribute equally in order for the advancement of the offspring. "By the survival of the fittest, the nearest approximations to equivalents in the sexes would leave the greatest number of offspring, and those best adapted to survive," Brown Blackwell countered. "The higher the development of the species and the more differentiated in structure and functions, the greater need would there be of a complex opposite polarity of activities in the uniting elements."²³³ You cannot leave mothers behind in evolution, she argued.

²³¹ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 17.

²³² Blackwell, *Sexes*, 17.

²³³ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 33.

It is hazardous to rely altogether upon an *á priori* dogmatism, learned or unlearned, which forces one to set up the assumption that the Creator has been driven by partiality to model an unbalanced, unsymmetric humanity; like an unshapely apple, one half large and desirable, but the other half small and unsavory.²³⁴

In determining the capacity of women, Brown Blackwell argued that there was variety in equivalents and that if one sex was ennobled did not mean that the other had been degraded.

The sexes were not unequally balanced in their highest values.

[O]pposition of the functions of sex, though real and continuous, is in reality a balance of activities—an equilibrium which requires that all stages of development there shall be a virtual equivalence of sex in every species.²³⁵

She explained that in “a wide sense in which it may be said that the feminine and the masculine, with their opposed tensions and polarities of forces, are combined in every organism,” but that among all higher (more complex) organisms, there were divisions of functions that “co-operate by successive actions and reactions.” Brown Blackwell argued, “*Division of function, then, is the origin of sex.*”²³⁶ She provided several examples and then presented a series of charts (see Fig. 1 and 2, following) for each of the biological groups (plants, fishes, birds, etc.) that she collated from Darwin’s comparisons of secondary sexual characteristics.

Fixing attention, as he [Darwin] does, upon masculine characters only, there seems to be no equilibrium of sex; but, holding the feminine characters up beside the others in a balanced view, the equilibrium is restored.²³⁷

²³⁴ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 179.

²³⁵ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 41.

²³⁶ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 43-44.

²³⁷ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 59.

In her charts, Brown Blackwell illustrated the “equilibria of sex” that constituted “moving points of simpler adjustments within wider and wider systems of more complex adjustments.”²³⁸

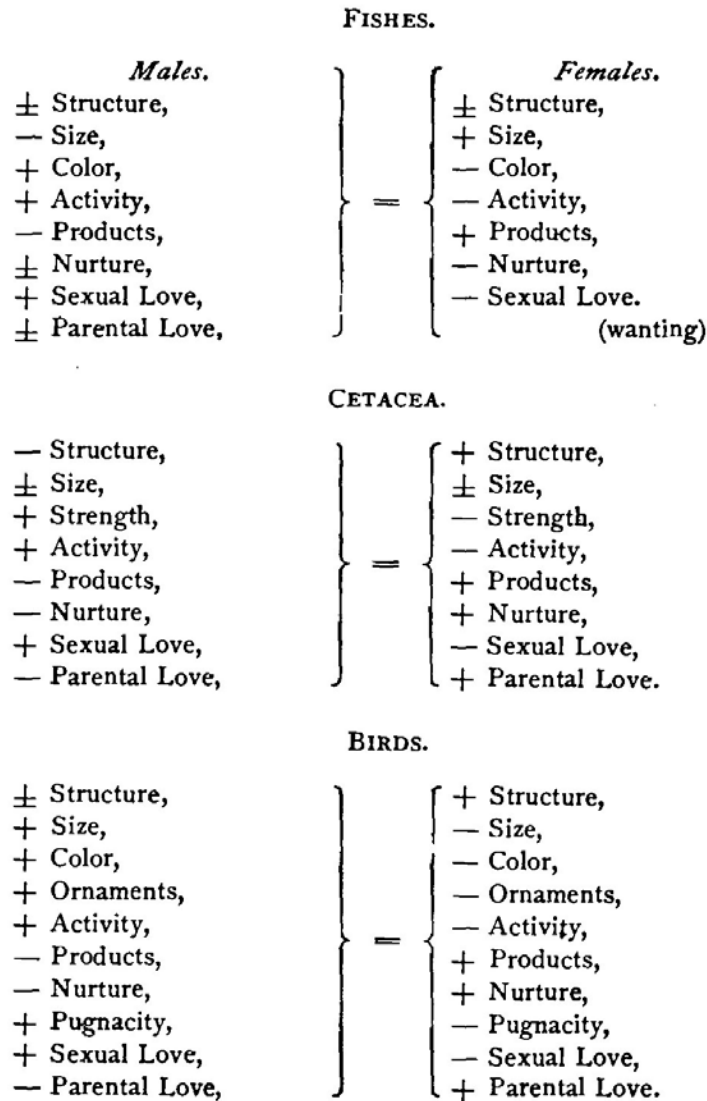


Figure 8. The Sexes Throughout Nature, p. 56.

²³⁸ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 59.

MAN.

<i>Males.</i>		<i>Females.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Structure, + Size, + Strength, + Amount of Activity, — Rate of Activity, + Amount of Circulation, — Rate of Circulation, — Endurance, — Products, — Direct Nurture, + Indirect Nurture, + Sexual Love, ± Parental Love, + Reasoning Powers, — Direct Insight of Facts, — Direct Insight of Relations, + Thought, ± Feeling, ± Moral Powers, 	} = {	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Structure, — Size, — Strength, — Amount of Activity, + Rate of Activity, — Amount of Circulation, + Rate of Circulation, + Endurance, + Products, + Direct Nurture, — Indirect Nurture, — Sexual Love, + Parental Love, — Reasoning Powers, + Direct Insight of Facts, + Direct Insight of Relations, ± Thought, ± Feeling, ± Moral Powers.

Figure 9. *The Sexes Throughout Nature*, p. 58.

Brown Blackwell argued that these seemingly opposing functions were part of a larger “organic equilibrium in physiological and psychological equivalence of the sexes.”²³⁹

She argued that Spencer’s evidence regarding the superiority of male strength (also growth and locomotion) had equivalencies in feminine functions, including maternity, lactation, as well as what she elaborated as mental/intellectual quickness. In fact, she argued that if men acquire truth by reasoning and women through intuition, “it must become evident that they [women] would bring new modes of force and fresh methods of inquiry into every department

²³⁹ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 59.

of research.”²⁴⁰ In other words, these different modes of analysis represent two halves of a connected whole.

Another aspect of her argument focused on the scientific practices of measuring brains as evidence that the smaller female brains indicated mental inferiority. “The brain is not, and cannot be, the sole or complete organ of thought and feeling,” Brown Blackwell insisted. She argued that the entire nervous system must be included in the assessment: “the brain-system is no more shut up in the cranium than the great system of blood-vessels is shut up within the heart.”²⁴¹ By expanding the scope of what constituted the site of mental functioning or “the mind” to beyond the boundaries of the skull, Brown Blackwell argued that sexual equivalencies became evident.

Brown Blackwell’s essay, “The Alleged Antagonism Between Growth and Reproduction” was first published in *Popular Science Monthly* in response to Spencer’s essay “The Psychology of the Sexes.”²⁴² According to Brown Blackwell, Spencer argued that “a somewhat earlier arrest of individual development in women than in men is necessitated by the reservation of vital force to meet the cost of reproduction.”²⁴³ His argument proposed that there was a “cost” to reproduction, while Brown Blackwell argued that “force modified or readjusted is not force

²⁴⁰ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 122.

²⁴¹ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 122. In 1882, Nina Morais would add that brain size in proportion to total body weight was greater in women than in men. Nina Morais, “A Reply to Miss Hardaker on the Woman Question,” *Popular Science* 21 (May 1882): 70-78 as noted by Louise Michele Newman, ed., *Men's Ideas/Women's Realities: Popular Science, 1870-1915* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 9.

²⁴² Spencer, *Psychology of the Sexes*, 30-38; Rev Antoinette Brown Blackwell, “The Alleged Antagonism between Growth and Reproduction,” *Popular Science Monthly* 5, September (1874), 606-609. Note that she used her title “Rev.”

²⁴³ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 224.

subtracted or destroyed...Nor is it true that one who expends the least has the most remaining."²⁴⁴ Rather, she proposed that activity often initiated more activity. What was seen as women's arrested development was more a factor of social conditions (i.e., lack of opportunities to expand talents beyond the home) rather than what Spencer argued was a constitutional deficiency.

When the vast weight of past social conditions is considered, that women thus far have failed to acquire large powers of abstract thinking and feeling, affords no reason for supposing that there is a corresponding constitutional lack of ability in this direction.²⁴⁵

Brown Blackwell asserted that in New England, women were no less versed in these abilities than men. And, if women were adequately and equally educated, there were no differences between the mental capabilities and capacities of men and women.

Sex in Education

Her chapter "Sex and Work," a series of essays critiquing Dr. E.H. Clarke's book *Sex in Education* and the follow chapter, "The Building of a Brain," her response to Clarke's book of this same title. Despite some progress towards creating opportunities for women in higher education at the end of the century, there was a wealth of literature that discussed the "woman question" regarding women's suitability in the educational sphere.²⁴⁶ In *Sex in*

²⁴⁴ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 224.

²⁴⁵ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 147.

²⁴⁶ The Association of Collegiate Alumnae compiled all (known) available literature on the subject of women in higher education in response to "the increasing number of requests coming to the officers of the Association for information as to the history, development and value of the higher education for women . . ." Their survey of available literature (predominately, but not exclusively, covering American and British history) included an entire section devoted to "Higher Education in Relation to Health. This includes physical education and the question of

Education (1873), Clarke proposed: “The problem of women’s sphere...Its solution must be obtained from physiology, not ethics or metaphysics.”²⁴⁷ Arguments such as Clarke’s presented biological reasons that women should not (or could not) engage in such endeavors. Despite some progress towards creating opportunities for women in higher education at the end of the century, the question of women’s suitability in the educational sphere gave rise to articles and books in the popular press that argued against women’s education. For Brown Blackwell, the ultimate problem was not to prove that women’s collegiate education would not be physically detrimental to women’s reproductive capacities, but rather to explain why education was necessary.

Clarke asserted, “Educate a man for manhood, a woman for womanhood, both for humanity.”²⁴⁸ Men and women required different methods of education. His physiology was based on the belief that the body could not do two things at once: “The system never does two things well at the same time. The muscles and the brain cannot *functionate* in their best way at the same moment.”²⁴⁹ For those engaged in higher learning, brain activity depleted energy stores more than any other activity. For women, the energy drain was exacerbated by their reproductive system; monthly menses was an ongoing drain of energy. Clarke argued that

the mental inferiority of women,” which contained over 100 references. The largest section “General and Historical,” included approximately 300 authors. Committee of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae and Mary H. Rollins, eds., *Contributions Towards a Bibliography of the Higher Education of Women* (Boston: The Trustees of the Public Library, 1897).

This proliferation of opinion seems significant considering that degree-granting education for women (outside of seminaries) had only become available in 1833 (Oberlin).

²⁴⁷ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 237.

²⁴⁸ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 237.

²⁴⁹ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 16.

blood and life energy directed to the brain simultaneously robbed the reproductive system or leads to disruptions in the nervous system. With such physiological demands, women were ill-suited to take on the additional energy drain of sustained mental activity. Clarke substantiated his argument by quoting Dr. Henry Maudsley (1835-1918):

In the great mental revolution caused by the development of the sexual system at puberty we have the most striking example of the intimate and essential sympathy between the brain as a mental organ and other organs of the body.²⁵⁰

According to Maudsley, if young women had improper training and work during puberty, their physiological limits might be so taxed as to become pathological. Maudsley argued that the arrested state of an overtaxed young woman's "reproductive apparatus" would have dire consequences:

[W]omen, whose ovaries and uterus remain for some cause in a state of complete inaction, approach the forms and habits of men....While woman preserves her sex, she will necessarily be feebler than man, and, having her special bodily and mental characters, will have, to a certain extent, her own sphere of activity; where she has become thoroughly masculine in nature, or hermaphrodite in mind,—when, in fact, she has pretty well divested herself of her sex,—then she may take his ground, and do his work; but she will have lost her feminine attractions, and probably also her chief feminine functions.²⁵¹

Thus, according to Clarke, if a woman participated in the rigors of education at the time of puberty and beyond, her reproductive capacities would be in peril; she might produce defective

²⁵⁰ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 16, citing Henry Maudsley, *Body and Mind: An Inquiry into their Connection and Mutual Influence, Specially in Reference to Mental Disorders; being the Gulstonian Lectures for 1870, Delivered before the Royal College of Physicians*. (London: Macmillan and Co, 1870). Maudsley was a prominent British psychiatrist who also wrote "Sex in Mind and in Education" (1874) in which he argued that women's menstrual cycle meant that women were not fit for the same kind of higher education that men enjoyed.

²⁵¹ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 40.

children (if fertility was even physically possible); and she would become less beautiful in the process.

Although Clarke was a medical doctor referencing physiology as the basis of his opinion, he also evoked models of womanhood to support his position. He referenced a feminine ideal that had divine attributes and holy sanction, thus using science to define the facts and religious rhetoric to enhance moral and aesthetic value.

Both sexes are bound by the same code of morals; both are amenable to the same divine law. Both have a right to do the best they can; or, to speak more justly, both should feel the duty, and have the opportunity, to do their best. Each must justify its existence by becoming a complete development of manhood and womanhood; and each should refuse whatever limits or dwarfs that development.²⁵²

These divine attributes were different according to one's sex. "Inspired by the divine instinct of motherhood, the girl that can only creep to her mother's knees will caress a doll, that her tottling brother looks coldly upon."²⁵³ For Clarke, respecting the differences that were ordained by God, included following different programs of education. Anything that stood in the way of women's divine role of motherhood was to be abhorred: "identical education of the two sexes is a crime before God and humanity, that physiology protests against, and that experience weeps over."²⁵⁴ Again and again, he asserted the naturalness of motherhood emphasizing that motherhood was basic to all females across all species.

²⁵² Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 7.

²⁵³ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 15.

²⁵⁴ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 128.

For Clarke, beauty was lauded as an aspect of ideal womanhood. To seek beauty was “a legitimate inspiration” for her “radiant halo,” for “attaining an ideal beauty and power, which shall be a crown of glory and tower of strength to the republic,” and as evidence of “divine and peculiar gifts of strength and beauty.”²⁵⁵ Clarke cautioned that women’s beauty was at risk if girls or young women were educated in the same manner as boys or young men.

As a medical doctor, Clarke’s argument carried authority. His educational reforms would preserve the reproductive vigor of women.

A woman, whether married or unmarried, whether called to the office of maternity or relieved from them, who has been defrauded by her education or otherwise of such an essential part of her development, *is not so much of a woman, intellectually and morally as well as physically, in consequence of this defect.* Her nervous system and brain, her instincts and character, are on a lower plane, and incapable of their harmonious and best development, if she is possessed, on reaching adult age, of only a portion of a breast and an ovary, or none at all. [Emphasis mine.]²⁵⁶

Despite any thinly-guised intentions to advance the education of women, Clarke showed that modern methods led to ““non-survival of the fittest.””²⁵⁷

Brown Blackwell’s response to Clarke

Clarke, in his arguments against coeducational education for women, evoked models of womanhood, rich with religious meaning, as well as medical and evolutionary science. He warned that there would be serious consequences for women who overly exercised their

²⁵⁵ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 127.

²⁵⁶ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 127.

²⁵⁷ Clarke, *Sex in Education*, 127.

intellect. Although he had his own medical credentials, he cited other authorities to give weight to his arguments. Brown Blackwell took a similar strategy in her response, blending moral models of womanhood and scientific theory to produce a very different conclusion. For Brown Blackwell, it was essential for women to exercise their minds and bodies to achieve their potential. Education was the key for preparing for marriage and as part of a balanced life of work and family.

Brown Blackwell began by challenging Clarke's claim that the question of education could be determined by physiology alone: "mental influences are as potent in maintaining the health of the body...as these same bodily functions are in influencing the character and strength of mental activities."²⁵⁸ If attention was only paid to physiology in educational models, Brown Blackwell feared that "a recurring idleness" imposed upon the methods of education would be sufficiently potent as to foster the thought and weaknesses of invalidism as well have the space to indulge in "hurtful revery and growing sexual sentiment" – these effects could be "infinitely pernicious."²⁵⁹

Brown Blackwell took issue with Clarke's characterization of masculine methods of study as "persistency" while women's were described by "periodicity." She suggested that these characterizations were based more on social conditions and habits than on predisposition. Persistency alone was a fiction, as every student eats and rests periodically throughout each day. Girls should not be singled out "condemned to whole days under the cruel tuition of

²⁵⁸ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 150.

²⁵⁹ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 150.

idleness”²⁶⁰ while boys were developing their muscles and brains. She argued that girls needed the same opportunities to develop as robustly as boys.

Isolating women in idleness was applicable in education as well as in the realm of work.

Brown Blackwell wrote:

Whether good or bad, our national modes of work are a natural outgrowth from our particular social conditions. They influence women, and their methods of study, and work, and recreation, more powerfully perhaps than men; and young girls, from the national latitude and freedom of manners, more than any other class, not excepting male young America.²⁶¹

Brown Blackwell continued in this line of argument, arguing that due to their past education, women were “already infirm enough in purpose, narrow enough in aims, and low enough in aspirations.”²⁶² These were the deficiencies that Brown Blackwell noted that rendered both men and women unfit for marriage, incapable of contributing equally. Rather, Brown Blackwell recommended, “let every girl exercise mind and body fearlessly, with wholesome vigor and in due proportion.”²⁶³

While Clarke argued that women would be physically incapacitated by habitual study, Brown Blackwell argued that women themselves could best attest to the effects of education. She reminded the readers that many robust women had attained mental achievements that had not undermined their feminine constitution, herself included. She added that many women do not have the opportunity to rest during their menses, as Clarke recommended. As examples,

²⁶⁰ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 153.

²⁶¹ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 157.

²⁶² Blackwell, *Sexes*, 158.

²⁶³ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 161.

she included women who worked in mills, factories, farms, and charities, as well as teachers and servants. What these women may have lacked in education, they made up in vigor and health. “Who have feminine weakness? Who have ailments more than the stars of heaven for number? Not the servant girl, but her ‘little mistress;’ not the most active women, but the most inactive.”²⁶⁴ She asserted that women would thrive if they were allowed to work and participate in higher learning and exercise. These uses of women’s faculties would be strengthening:

Every process in Nature is but some mode of work; and if there is unity in the human constitution, male or female, the due use of all our functions, those highest in character kept most continually in exercise, must outline the noblest method of healthful self-development.²⁶⁵

Here, in the context of her arguments directed at Clarke, she reasserted that activity (*doing*) that would best develop women’s potential (as well as men’s potential). And she concluded this chapter with the advice that women must work: “[I]nactivity is death! The laws of Nature are not to be set aside for our benefit. Our Father worketh hitherto, and we must work.”²⁶⁶ With this conclusion, Brown Blackwell synthesizes her scientific argument with her religious sensibilities.

In her chapter, “The Building of a Brain,” she noted that Clarke had adjusted his viewpoint in his latest book (of the same title) from his position in *Sex and Education*.²⁶⁷ Brown

²⁶⁴ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 170.

²⁶⁵ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 215.

²⁶⁶ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 224.

²⁶⁷ Blackwell does not tell us anything about the specifics of his book. See Clarke, *The Building of a*.

Blackwell wrote that in his latest book, Clarke advised young women to rest from “gymnastics, long walks, and such like;’ from ‘dancing, visiting, and similar offices,’ admitting that the ordinary home and school life may then ‘only be interfered with in exceptional cases.’”²⁶⁸

Although Brown Blackwell saw his new conclusions advantageous to advancing educational opportunities for girls, she also recognized that science could not yet provide any data for guidelines. She wrote:

Physiology and psychology, hygiene and medical science, all alike confound woman with man, in everything except her domestic characteristics. A womanhood with a complexity of character and functions, if such a type has been evolved in the world, is as yet undiscovered by scientific intellect....It requires a deeper reading of facts, a reconsideration of all the old data, from the bottom upwards; in a word, a new science—the science of Feminine Humanity.²⁶⁹

Her elaboration of this science of Feminine Humanity was scant, but relied on carefully gathering facts “to be slowly and carefully gathered, and to me still more slowly and guardedly lived....But the experience of women must count for more here than the observation of the wisest men.”²⁷⁰ Her descriptions echo earlier arguments put forth as early as her graduation essay in 1847, through disagreements with Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1850, and further elaborated in *General Studies in Science* (1869). Brown Blackwell believed that far too much emphasis was on men’s observations and too little authority had been given to women’s own experiences.

²⁶⁸ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 219.

²⁶⁹ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 224.

²⁷⁰ Blackwell, *Sexes*, 224.

However, *The Sexes Throughout Nature* was not merely written to contest particular scientific ideas about woman's nature. As can be seen by Brown Blackwell's argumentative strategy described above, it was also part of Brown Blackwell's trajectory of metaphysical, religious, and philosophical projects that described the unity of all things, created by God, progressing toward harmony. Woman's place in Brown Blackwell's trajectory was defined by various models of womanhood that were based in religious rhetoric about home and domesticity. Particular idioms, such as motherhood, marriage, and suffering, not only defined woman's experiences within her "separate sphere" but gave meaning to women's lives. In the context of Finney's millennialism and perfectionism, these idioms took on more meaning. Brown Blackwell asserted that women, with God-given abilities, could to choose to *do* and *act* according to her own vision. As Brown Blackwell defined the equivalencies between the sexes, women may well have found that her explanations gave them influence and authority within particular realms of activity (predominately the home and church) with potential to contribute to the greater good through their actions on behalf of others. Brown Blackwell proposed that as women moved into the public sphere in to participate in social reform (i.e., abolition, temperance, revival, and suffrage), they were expanding their sphere of activity, without necessarily relinquishing any of their religious sensibilities. Although women's interactions with science complicated these notions of womanhood because of arguments that women's intellectual and physiological capacities were diminished compared to men, in *The Sexes Throughout Nature*, Brown Blackwell was able to weave these threads together into a coherent

series of essays that challenged science, reinterpreted it, and asserted a new, empowered, active, autonomous model of womanhood that reaffirmed religious sensibilities.

Chapter 4

From “I am going to do it” to “I did it”

In the decades following the publication of *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875), Antoinette Brown Blackwell directed her energies towards new channels: political, ministerial, theological, and metaphysical. I argue that her priorities nevertheless remained the same: advocating, in part on the basis of her previous writings, for women to have expanded arenas of activity, of agential action, of *doing*. *Doing* for Brown Blackwell, as we have seen, has multiple levels of meaning: a description of the natural roles and capacities of women, *doing* also echoed Rev. Finney’s insistence that religion was something you *do*, a demonstration of building up others for the good of all, for the kingdom of God. Brown Blackwell maintained her support for suffrage, speaking to local and national meetings as well as the elected president of the New Jersey Woman Suffrage Association (1891). Yet, the period following *Sexes* represents a time when Brown Blackwell was less of an activist and more of a philosopher. This chapter will describe Brown Blackwell’s recommitment to ministry with the Unitarian Fellowship, her participation in the Association for the Advancement of Women, the American Purity Association, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Her final books, metaphysical and philosophical in nature, continue to assert her commitments to the unity of all things and the correlation of all action.

If Brown Blackwell’s early life is represented by her commitment to become a minister with her assertion “I will do it!” – even when faced with Lucy Stone’s contrarian opinion, then the closing chapter of her life—a very long chapter indeed—is represented by her many examples that revealed that she DID *do* it, again and again—to the very end of her life. The

“Woman Suffrage Amendment,” the 19th amendment to the Constitution of the United States, was introduced in Congress by Senator Aaron Sargent (California) in 1878; was approved by Congress on June 4, 1919, and ratified by the requisite 36 states on August 18, 1920. That November, during the first Presidential election in which women could vote, Brown Blackwell, nearly deaf and blind, was the only woman from the ranks of the earliest feminists in the era of Seneca Falls who voted, and the only participant in the 1850 Women’s Rights Convention in Worcester, MA to live to do so.

Brown Blackwell’s recommitment to ministry

From the time of her ordination in 1853 until the end of her life, Brown Blackwell thought of herself as a minister, as Reverend Brown Blackwell. For twenty years, although she did not formally affiliate herself with any denomination after leaving her South Butler parish in 1854, she continued to write and speak in ministerial capacities. Her memoirs detail trips and visits throughout the United States: “I generally lectured on some phase of the Woman question, preaching wherever I could get the opportunity.”¹ In the decades following *Studies in General Science* (1869), Brown Blackwell continued to think theologically and philosophically, working through some of the more challenging questions that arose in her South Butler days. For example, just as Brown Blackwell argued in *Sexes* (1875) that the correct interpretation of scientific principles could provide a more accurate description of female nature, in *The Physical*

¹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 277. For more details regarding her travels, see particularly Chapters 8 and 13. Also Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters* which presents Brown Blackwell’s activities chronologically.

Basis of Immortality (1876), she argued that scientific principles could also prove the immortality of the soul.

Although Brown Blackwell seemed to be comfortable with her own religious, philosophical, and metaphysical positions in the mid-1870s, she missed the unity of feeling and purpose that she once enjoyed during the beginning of the woman's movement. In a letter to Rev. R. R. Shippen, Secretary of the American Unitarian Association, she wrote:

[H]aving grown up in the midst of those who shared common beliefs, aims, sympathies and work religiously, I have greatly missed the moral support which that class of associations can give. In studying others, I am more and more convinced that many become lax and inefficient if not hopeless from need of the same bracing influence.²

By 1878, nearly twenty-five years after leaving her South Butler Congregational parish, Brown Blackwell was drawn to the Unitarian Church. According to biographer Elizabeth Cazden,

Unitarianism was, in fact, quite similar to the liberal Congregational theology of Charles Grandison Finney that Antoinette Blackwell had absorbed as a child and as a student at Oberlin....In New England, at least, the Unitarian churches attracted well-educated middle- and upper-class people, interested in social reforms. They included many of the people Blackwell had worked with over the years in suffrage, temperance, and abolition organizations, as well as many of the ministers who had supported her when she was a young struggling speaker.³

Samuel as well as two of his sisters had joined the Unitarians earlier. After visiting the congregations near their New Jersey home and in New York City, Brown Blackwell decided to join the Unitarian Fellowship and successfully applied to have her ministerial credentials

² Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 190, citing letter from Brown Blackwell to R. R. Shippen, Somerville, NJ, December 29, 1878.

³ Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 191. For example, Theodore Weld, formerly one of Finney's most influential converts and advocates, and his wife, Angelina Grimké were also Unitarians in 1878.

recognized. The following year, Oberlin College awarded Brown Blackwell an honorary master of arts degree (even though she completed the requirements during three years of graduate study in their Theological Department).⁴

Brown Blackwell had hoped to find employment as a minister in order to contribute to household finances. The Panic of 1873 changed the American experience from one of prosperity to depression.⁵ Samuel Blackwell's real estate holdings lost value in a stagnant market, forcing the sale of properties at a loss, including their home in rural Somerville, New Jersey. Until Samuel returned to full time work in 1880, Brown Blackwell felt more pressure to contribute financially. In 1880, there were more than two hundred ordained women ministers and a more liberal religious environment: Brown Blackwell was no longer an anomaly. Nonetheless, despite possibilities for a pastorship near home, Brown Blackwell chose not to pursue full-time ministerial positions.⁶ Although Maria Mitchell offered her a teaching position at Vassar, Brown Blackwell refused because she only wanted to preach. She continued to preach upon invitation and to speak as a minister at various national forums, including the Parliament of Religions during the Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893). Her neighbor Sarah Gilson (who helped edit and compile *First Woman Minister*) wrote of Brown Blackwell: Yet it was as a *minister* that she thought of herself and wanted to be thought of, not as a reformer,

⁴ In 1908, Blackwell received an honorary Doctor of Divinity from Oberlin College.

⁵ A well-documented event, see for example Nicolas Barreyre, "The Politics of Economic Crises: The Panic of 1873, the End of Reconstruction, and the Realignment of American Politics," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10, no. 04 (2011), 403-423.

⁶ Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 190-4.

nor a pioneer in other fields.”⁷ In 1903, Brown Blackwell moved to Elizabeth, New Jersey, to live with her daughter Agnes’s family, as Samuel had died in 1901. There, Brown Blackwell helped organize and build All Souls Unitarian Church and she served as the pastor during the first year. After a new full-time pastor was found, Brown Blackwell became Pastor Emeritus and preached there at least once a month while she was physically able. Ministry was something she did.

The Association for the Advancement of Woman

Brown Blackwell’s commitments to new associations were influenced by events and circumstances that were in the period around 1869, when *Studies in General Science* was published. While Brown Blackwell was a lifelong supporter of women’s suffrage, the animosity between her old comrades and some of their political controversies distressed her. She recalled:

In the early days of the suffrage movement there was a marvelous harmony and sympathy of feeling which impresses me more and more as the years go by and average life with its discordances makes itself more and more manifest . . . There seemed to be no jealousies and very little self-seeking. We all stood together in a difficult and common cause...The sympathy that grew up through opposition and ridicule was something beautiful to remember.⁸

Brown Blackwell remembered these more harmonious times before the suffrage movement divided into two opposing factions and old friendships were disrupted.

⁷ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 12.

⁸ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 277.

In part, this is what happened. In 1869, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony had founded the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), publishing their newspaper, *The Revolution*, to advocate primarily for women's suffrage as well as legal and economic inequalities and other pertinent issues. The editorial tone was too radical for most audiences, including the female ones. As historian Agnes Hooper Gottleib writes, "*The Revolution* caused upheaval and dissension. Rather than inform and woo women interested in their goals, the newspaper served to alienate potential advocates...."⁹ Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, and Julia Ward Howe, in disagreement with Stanton and Anthony about the direction of the suffrage movement, formed the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) with Henry Ward Beecher as the first president. In 1870, they began publishing *The Woman's Journal*, more conservative in tone than *The Revolution*.¹⁰

Brown Blackwell found the acrimony between her friends upsetting: while she aligned her allegiance most consistently with the AWSA due to her loyalty to Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell, she also attended meetings at both organizations and maintained close friendships with Stanton, Anthony, and others affiliated with NWSA. Brown Blackwell had also come to believe that there were other issues more important than suffrage. For her, the idea of women's *doing* meant that women needed more access to more fields of activity. The idea of *doing* also meant participating in social reform to elevate the human condition: neither of these

⁹ *The Revolution* had folded by 1872. Agnes Hooper Gottleib, "The Revolution," in *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Social and Political Issues*, eds. Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 339-345, 339

¹⁰ *The Woman's Journal* continued publication until 1917. David R. Spencer, "The Woman's Journal," in *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Social and Political Issues*, eds. Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 468-478.

ideas of *doing* was contingent upon women getting the right to vote. Other early feminists, like Brown Blackwell, also focused on other aspects of women's conditions including divorce rights, alcoholism, or labor rights. For example, in an address to the New England Women's Club in 1873, Brown Blackwell argued that men and women should share only some of the household duties and asked, "how much might be gained by a thorough reconstruction of business life!" Her proposal suggested that workers (business as well as domestic) could choose at least two different kinds of occupations to do each day. Without sacrificing any aspect of domestic and maternal care, the proposed variety of work options would invigorate natural (but latent) talents, strengths, and capabilities. Brown Blackwell explained that this was in accord with "Nature's regime of work" which "incites both domestic instincts and wholesome outside activities" in a harmonious blending of masculine and feminine traits and abilities.¹¹ Brown Blackwell's presentation was about expanding opportunities and varieties of work for women (and men)—suffrage was not part of her proposal.

In the 1870s, women's rights were not only about the right to vote. Most women found the idea of suffrage unsettling: or, they found the political arena of women's suffrage movements to be alienating. Other strategies were used that reformed the power dynamics and still led to women's greater access to economic independence, educational opportunities, and legal changes. The Association for the Advancement of Woman (AAW) was an alternative for women who were active in the professions, business, and reform associations but who did

¹¹ Antoinette Brown Blackwell, "Work in Relation to the Home--I. A Paper Read before the New England Women's Club," *The Woman's Journal*, 5, no. 18 (1874), 137. The paper, in its entirety, was published in five parts in *The Woman's Journal*, 5, No. 18-22 (1874).

not necessarily support suffrage (although many did). The origins of the AAW reveal the feminist underpinnings that were simultaneously bound to ideals and values of womanhood as well as to expanding women's options and influence. The AAW was a later development of Jane Cunningham Croly (1829-1901) vision for a new kind of association for women. She founded the women's literary club Sorosis in New York City in 1868. She did not want to do away with the ideals of womanhood that endowed them with qualities such as piety and motherliness, but she recognized women's need for greater influence and authority. Like Brown Blackwell, Croly wrote about the limiting effects of social attitudes about woman's nature:

The little girl must not play out of doors when she is little, because it will spoil her complexion. She must not run when she is older, because people will think her a tom-boy; whatever her faculties are, she must only put them to use in a certain way, because there are only a few things that society admits a woman can do, or will tolerate her doing....No wonder women are ill-formed, ill-made, half-made, and not at all grown into natural womanhood—the wonder is, that there is anything left of them at all. If nature had not been stronger than conventionalism, nothing would have been left of them.¹²

Like Brown Blackwell, Croly believed that girls and women needed expanded realms of action; Croly wanted to elevate the ideals of women's virtues in the domestic sphere while providing support for them to move beyond that sphere. As historian Karen Blair explains, through their meetings "clubwomen transformed ladydom by providing an intellectual and social self-improvement program outside the realm of the household, designed to nurture the skills that

¹² Jane Cunningham Croly, "Physical Life of Women," *Demorest's Illustrated Monthly Magazine and Mme. Demorest's Mirror of Fashions*, August, 1872, 236, as cited by Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined., 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980), 17.

In addition to writing for *Demorest's* (Croly was also coeditor for several years), she wrote for many other women's publications and also wrote several books.

would enable women to demand reforms....”¹³ Clubwomen may not have embraced suffrage (most of them did not), but they were committed to developing their talents and capabilities to effect social change. They just didn’t think that they needed the vote in order to accomplish reforms. By the numbers, all of the club associations that came after Sorosis that were modeled on similar values—such as the New England Woman’s Club (NEWC) and the AAW—attracted far more supporters than suffrage did.¹⁴

NEWC and Sorosis initially developed chapters in other parts of the country (and world), but despite the growth of their respective associations of affiliated clubs, the leadership of both associations believed that an overarching federation of women’s associations would stimulate greater progress. In 1873, as Brown Blackwell recalled, Mrs. Charlotte Wilbour, one of the “pioneers in the Woman’s Movement” and President of Sorosis [Croly’s successor] issued an invitation “to all women who were active in any reform or public interest” and many of those initial respondents met for a consultation “and it was at once decided to call a meeting in New York.”¹⁵ The initial invitation “bemoaned ‘the absence of fellowship and concerted action among women...solitary and isolated’ and solicited “those who by their example inspire others

¹³ Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 5.

¹⁴ The New England Woman’s Club (NEWC) was founded in Boston in 1868 by Caroline Severance but after her move to Los Angeles, Julia Ward Howe was president from 1871 until her death in 1910. Although not associated with Croly or Sorosis, NEWC “met the needs of women who sought ways to exert influence outside the home and who insisted ‘we were glad to prove also our loyalty to the first and most important institution of humanity, marriage and family-life.’” (45) Also, unlike Sorosis whose members were more career-minded (including pioneers in literary fields), NEWC members were primarily reformers, including Lucy Stone and Louisa May Alcott. (32-33) Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 31, citing Julia A. Sprague (compiler), *History of the New England Woman's Club from 1868 to 1893* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1894), 45.

¹⁵ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 315. It is not clear whether Blackwell participated in the initial consultation although she was a Vice-President by the time of the First Congress of the AAW in 1874. Her recollections were similar to AAW reports and histories.

not only to covet the best gifts, but to labor earnestly for them.”¹⁶ The new Association approved a Constitution before their First Woman’s Congress in New York that included this article of purpose: “Its object shall be to receive and present practical methods for securing to women higher intellectual, moral and physical conditions, and thereby to improve all domestic and social relations.”¹⁷

The idea that women’s domestic talents could be deployed to solve world problems was not far from millennial agendas from Brown Blackwell’s youth where religion was something you *do* to help prepare a Godly kingdom on earth. The women of the AAW used similar rhetoric. In the First Woman’s Congress of the A.A.W., Julia Ward Howe proposed “I should say then that we must come together in a teachable and religious spirit...with a belief that the good we may do should lead to the better which shall be done after us.”¹⁸ She appealed to the ideal of self-sacrifice modeled after that of Jesus then comparing this new association of women to the founding of the Christian Church. “The little society, weak, poor and persecuted, became the church of which Christ foretold that the gates of hell should not prevail against it.”¹⁹ Howe’s language elevated her view of the woman’s condition with comparisons to familiar Christian ideals and values. Howe added:

¹⁶ Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 44, citing *Papers Read at the Fourth Congress of Women* [1876], (Washington, D.C.: Todd Brothers, 1877), 123.

¹⁷ Julia Ward Howe, ed., *Historical Account of the Association for the Advancement of Women, 1873-1893. Twenty-First Women's Congress, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893*. (Dedham, MA: Transcript Steam Job Print, 1893), 5.

¹⁸ *Papers and Letters Presented at the First Woman's Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Woman, (New York, 1873)* (New York: Mrs. Wm. Ballard, Book & Job Printer, 1874), 5.

¹⁹ *Papers and Letters Presented at the First Woman's Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Woman, (New York, 1873)*, 7.

Has not my Association now grown to be a church of the First-born, a high court of all the charities, a garden celestial and spiritual beauty? . . . Plant an Association like this in the sparse settlements of the wilderness, or in the moral jungles of great cities, or in the roughness of mining or agricultural districts, and I can tell you what will come up—a redeemed society.²⁰

With terms and images evocative of millennial ideals, Howe iterated what was at the heart of the Association for the Advancement of Woman: the elevation of the highest ideals of womanhood rooted in religious rhetoric. At the same time, Howe, a longstanding supporter of woman's rights, insisted:

I think that before the eye of God his church is one—it has no cruel limits nor exclusions. But the womanly side of it can only come into being when women shall know their own individual value, shall learn their own combined power, and shall decide to resolve as individuals and to act as one united body daring to follow the truth it sees, to stand up for its faith, for its measure, the knowledge of God which grows with every day of a devout and earnest life.²¹

Howe's rhetoric was feminist, but it also maintained a tone that appealed to an audience of women that found affinity in the ideals and values of womanhood. Women's clubs such as the AAW offered an avenue for women to gain influence and authority while maintaining "ladylike" behavior that was in keeping with their religious sensibilities. Blair explains, "Club goals...sought to gain women power as moral homemakers and as sensitive career women not by breaking out of their prescribed roles but by stretching them a bit and circumventing them when necessary."²² Like the women described in earlier chapters who answered Rev. Finney's

²⁰ *Papers and Letters Presented at the First Woman's Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Woman, (New York, 1873), 7.*

²¹ *Papers and Letters Presented at the First Woman's Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Woman, (New York, 1873), 10.*

²² Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 12.

call to *do* their religion by joining social reform organizations to help create a Godly world, the AAW members were also *doing* religion. Blair explains that AAW rhetoric “insisted that women striving toward justice would hasten the coming of the millennium.”²³ Blair continued by writing that the members regularly sang “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” (not only because their president Julia Ward Howe wrote the lyrics) but “a more important reason was that the “Battle Hymn” suggested the coming of Judgment Day, facilitated by the earnest work of women.”²⁴ AAW women were feminists, like Brown Blackwell, working to expand women’s spheres of activities and opportunities beyond the domestic sphere. The AAW achieved this goal by creating a new kind of network that was still dedicated to woman’s rights in the context of religious sensibilities. It is not surprising that Brown Blackwell resonated with their vision.

During that inaugural Congress, Brown Blackwell presented her paper, “The Relation of Woman’s Work in the Household to the Work Outside.” This echoed her 1873 presentation to the New England Woman’s Club, “Work in Relation to the Home.” However, she expanded her opening sentences that were in full accord with the Association’s sensibilities:

There is one dogma, I believe, which has been taught and accepted universally. It asserts that the paramount social duties of women are household duties, avocations arising from their relations as wives and mothers, and as the natural custodians of the home. I make haste to endorse this dogma; fully, and without equivocation. The work nearest and clearest before the eyes of average womanhood is work within family boundaries,—work within a sphere which men cannot enter; surrounded by a still wider area of duties and privileges that very few of us desire to relinquish. I yield to none in the earnest of my faith that to

²³ Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 49.

²⁴ Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 49.

women preeminently has been committed the happiness, the usefulness, and the dignity of the homes of Christendom.²⁵

As she had asserted to the Woman's Convention in New York in 1853, Brown Blackwell explicitly aligned herself with the rhetoric of ideal womanhood without challenging the dogma. For her, the attributes that she described were aspects of woman's nature. Nonetheless, in the following paragraphs, she argues that "All agree in admitting that there is a special woman's sphere...", she added "but it is utter destruction for any human being to be compressed wholly within any merely domestic world."²⁶ As she proposed in her earlier address, "Work in Relation to the Home," Brown Blackwell reiterated her proposal that wives and husbands should share more of the household duties to their mutual benefit. But in this presentation she added the innovation of "systematic leisure," three to six hours of time for every man and woman to do as they so choose: If rest or recreation was impossible, then at least "a complete change of occupation" to refresh and invigorate.²⁷ Brown Blackwell expanded her vision to include "distinct classes of three to five hour industries, with a fresh relay of workers at stated intervals, arranged for the express benefit of men and women, who desire to give but a small portion of their time to outside pursuits."²⁸ While Brown Blackwell imagined the difficulties of such a proposal, she remained optimistic that "partial work" might be a transformative innovation that

²⁵ *Papers and Letters Presented at the First Woman's Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Woman, (New York, 1873), 178.*

²⁶ *Papers and Letters Presented at the First Woman's Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Woman, (New York, 1873), 178.*

²⁷ *Papers and Letters Presented at the First Woman's Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Woman, (New York, 1873), 180-1.*

²⁸ *Papers and Letters Presented at the First Woman's Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Woman, (New York, 1873), 181.*

would have significant benefits. She emphasized broader arenas of *doing* that offered more variety as well as opportunities to contribute to the social welfare. Mothers with children under the age of ten were given a different set of recommendations, still intended to encourage a variety of daily work and recreations appropriate within the boundaries of the household.

Brown Blackwell concluded her presentation:

The co-operation of both sexes must reach everywhere, into industries, science, art, religion, and into the conduct and government of the State. Family interests, instead of suffering from this widening of womanly influence, must surely be ennobled and benefited proportionately with the wider sympathies of a more enlightened motherhood...Nature is full of compensations...and men and women are equals, but not identicals, associates but not rivals.²⁹

Her rhetoric of persuasion recognized ideals and virtues of womanhood while still calling upon women to consider options that would give them more opportunities and influence beyond the domestic sphere.

In her memoirs Brown Blackwell devoted seven pages to sharing details about memorable relationships and particular conferences during her association with the AAW from its founding to its quiet demise in 1898. She appreciated the intellectual stimulation and quiet comradery of AAW women working together across their different organizations and associations:

Papers were read by well-known women and for years the brilliant conversations appealed to intelligent and cultured audiences in the cities in which they were held. The subjects discussed attracted many hearers whom prejudice would have kept away from suffrage meetings but who listened happily to many of the suffrage leaders speaking from the platform of the A.A.W.³⁰

²⁹ *Papers and Letters Presented at the First Woman's Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Woman, (New York, 1873)*, 184.

³⁰ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 321.

During her long association with the AAW, the meetings were “composed of the most intelligent people in the several communities. The A.A.W. appealed to a large class as being apparently less radical than meetings for a special cause such as peace, temperance, suffrage, or anti-slavery.”³¹ Nonetheless, Brown Blackwell pointed out that “nearly all the reforms in progress in the country engaged many of us in their promotion.”³² Brown Blackwell formed deep friendships with many of the women of the A.A.W., including scientist and Vassar professor, Maria Mitchell, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, and feminist and medical doctor Abby May. Brown Blackwell’s niece, Alice Stone Blackwell and her sister-in-law Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, were also active members. Brown Blackwell found that her ongoing relationships with these women, in the context of their mutual efforts, were “one of the chief rewards of a somewhat strenuous life.”³³

The last Congress was in 1897, and Howe noted that “The quiet study of social problems may not make a great noise in the world, but without it, the world will not be greatly helped.”³⁴ Blair concluded that AAW and the women’s clubs it inspired “transformed the lives of millions of American women.”³⁵

³¹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 315.

³² Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 320.

³³ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 315.

³⁴ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 56, citing *Springfield Republican*, November 1897.

³⁵ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 56.

American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)

In 1881, Brown Blackwell was one of the first women elected to membership in the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). As Brown Blackwell recalled:

The Science Association was more than ready to receive women for membership and to admit their papers along lines of observation with various practical tests....One can hardly affirm that manhood has been guilty of any special inhospitality to the thought of womanhood; but the giants in the mansions up above have never found it easy to extend comfortable hospitality to the undistinguished, men or women, who seem to climb upward by the aid of their personal beanstalks.³⁶

Brown Blackwell explained that men in the sciences, like other professionals, required some particular mark of validation to have their work accepted: the lack of this seal of approval explained why there were fewer independent discoveries or “new interpretations of unsettled questions” among women. While she attended meetings and presented a few papers during the early years of her affiliation, there is little evidence that she enjoyed any genuine fellowship or camaraderie; her ideas did not seem to have any direct impact on her colleagues. In a letter to Lucy Stone following her second presentation to AAAS in 1882, Brown Blackwell described her interactions with the membership: “Deference and snubbing get mingled a little, like sweetened acid.”³⁷ A decade later, in “Women in Science” (1891), Brown Blackwell wrote:

As devotion to science is pre-eminently modern, of course women are venturing with more or less assurance into many branches of scientific inquiry. They are welcomed to these but partially explored domains, provided they come with definite achievements; but the doors of instruction generally not being open to them, it has been extremely difficult to climb up in some other way without

³⁶ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 323.

³⁷ Lasser and Merrill, eds., *Friends and Sisters*, 239, citing Brown Blackwell letter written in Somerville, Sept. 3, 1882 to Lucy Stone.

being regarded as thieves and robbers....An *a priori* presumption of incompetence faces every woman, a palpable hindrance to all scientific work; it discredits her to herself and every co-worker.³⁸

Outside of the category of women physicians, Brown Blackwell mentioned astronomer Maria Mitchell and botanist Mary Treat as exemplars; acknowledged a few other notable women in the sciences by name; and referred obliquely to others “which time forbids to mention.” With more detail and examples, Brown Blackwell described women physicians (mentioning many by name) to reveal the obstacles they overcame and their many accomplishments: their achievements were comparable (or exceeded) their male counterparts. She admitted that she could not “report that women have discovered great facts, laws or principles which mark an epoch in science” because those kinds of discoveries were usually products of laboratories with assistants and cohorts of colleagues. She concluded by referring to “a quality of feminineness” that she then described: “When this correlated insight-intuition becomes a considerable factor in human efforts to comprehend and interpret the marvels of the universe, science will have entered upon a new stage of its long and slow progress.”³⁹ Although Brown Blackwell does not say it, it seems that according to her own analysis, she does not meet the criteria for being a woman of science in this time. And one of the qualities of womanhood—intuition—that she believed should be regarded as a legitimate source of understanding, was not valued as a factor in science.

³⁸ Antoinette Brown Blackwell, “Women in Science [Special 8 Page Section: Woman's Enlarged Sphere],” *The Independent: “Even as we have been Approved of God to be Intrusted with the Gospel . . .”* (1848-1921), May 7, 1891, 6.

³⁹ Blackwell, “Women in Science,” 6.

In 1881, the year she was elected to membership, she presented her paper "The Constitution of the 'Atom' of Science."⁴⁰ She had already described and explained the constitution of the atom in several chapters of *Studies in General Science* (1869) and further elaborated on her initial discussions of the atom in *The Physical Basis of Immortality* (1876). For Blackwell, the atom was the unit constituting "the physical basis" in relation to her arguments about immortality. In her AAAS abstract, she proposed: "This hypothesis claims to offer an explanation of the joint facts of both matter and mind": a new discussion of a core element of her philosophy.⁴¹ In 1882, Brown Blackwell presented "Cross Heredity from Sex to Sex" to the Biology subgroup of the AAAS and her article was published in *The Woman's Journal*.⁴² Presenting what might seem as paradoxical contradictions, Brown Blackwell argued that females and males contribute to offspring in complementary equilibrium, but she also argued for "the principle of special cross-inheritance from father to daughter or granddaughter, and from mother to son or grandson." She wrote that since Darwin and others "strongly called attention" to the law of heredity that entails secondary sexual characteristics to descendants of the same sex only, that it followed from her assumption of equal (complementary) parental

⁴⁰ According to the *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science*, Brown Blackwell's paper was read before the Chemistry section; a footnote indicated that the abstract was published in *Science. Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Thirtieth Meeting, held at Cincinnati, Ohio, August, 1881*, ed. Frederick W. Putnam (Salem, MA: Salem Press, 1882), 79. Blackwell, A. B. "The Constitution of the "Atom" of Science" [Abstract] *Science*, 2, no. 64 (Sep. 17, 1881): 443. No record of the paper being published.

⁴¹ Blackwell, "Constitution of the 'Atom.'"

⁴² Antoinette Brown Blackwell, "Cross Heredity from Sex to Sex [Abstract]," in *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Thirty-First Meeting, held at Montreal, Canada, August, 1882*, ed. Frederick W. Putnam (Salem, MA: Salem Press, 1883), 492-493; Blackwell, "Cross Heredity Form Sex to Sex," *The Woman's Journal* 13, no. 40 (1882), 314. According to Blackwell, her article was also printed in the *Montreal Star*.

influence “that a corresponding domination in other characteristics would be entailed to the opposite sex distinctively.”⁴³ Establishing her own test criteria and finding sample families for her data, Brown Blackwell used mental and racial “evidence” such as skin color or degrees of mental acuity and drew conclusions from her observations. She also referenced other observers for data regarding offspring of “mixed blood” (i.e., mulatto, white/Indian, etc.). Although she concluded that “there is still a fair margin for disparity of conclusions,” she asserted “the more I have studied this subject, the more I am convinced that the distinct law of cross heredity in time will be fully established.”⁴⁴ Her conclusions seem ambiguous or contradictory; it is clear that Brown Blackwell lost the thread of her ideas regarding compensatory equilibrium, made explicit and robust in *Sexes* (1875) and *Studies in General Science* (1869). In those texts, Brown Blackwell explained that men, women, atoms, and nature (writ large) express actions and interactions in ways that achieve equilibrium (although equilibrium is fluid, not static). Within the flux of equilibrium, different constitutive actions/interactions are compensatory. For Brown Blackwell, these terms were pertinent to describe her ideas about expanded spheres of activity and opportunities for women: females may be different, but their capabilities and talents were complementary/compensatory and equivalent to males. Men and women need to appreciate that their differences help achieve equilibrium. Unfortunately the consequentiality of her terms “compensation” and “equilibrium” were underdeveloped in her AAAS presentation and her argument may well have been unconvincing to her audience.

⁴³ Blackwell, “Cross Heredity From Sex to Sex,” 314.

⁴⁴ Blackwell, “Cross Heredity From Sex to Sex,” 314.

In 1884, Brown Blackwell made her final presentation to AAAS to the Biology subsection on "The Comparative Longevity of the Sexes." Based on the Abstract, Brown Blackwell did an analysis of "a grouping of statistics condensed from of the earlier as well as more recent census returns of our own and other countries."⁴⁵ As she wrote to Lucy Stone, Brown Blackwell was enthusiastic about her topic:

When you see just what I have been doing you will thank me in the interest of Women. It is marvelous how clear a case is made out of figures to prove; that while the sexes *as a whole*, are kept equal in numbers; that the small boys are in excess; and that women *at all* periods of life live longer than men; *especially in late life*, so that *the race owes a steady Increase in Longevity to Women*.

I already count up several hundred Millions, and there is no exception any where, *in any country*. (I have over a dozen) to this same law.⁴⁶

With no record of this paper having been published, there is no way for contemporary readers to evaluate her conclusions; that longevity is an inheritable trait that females pass to future generations may well have seemed legitimate at that time.

The last public connection between Brown Blackwell and the AAAS came in 1893, when *Science*, a publication of the AAAS, published a review of *The Philosophy of Individuality, or the One and the Many* (1892). The reviewer did not present a favorable opinion:

This work is a new attempt to solve the problem of the universe. It is by no means easy reading, the style being at once verbose and obscure, and the same thought is often repeated again and again, without ever being made clear . . .

⁴⁵ Antoinette Brown Blackwell, "The Comparative Longevity of the Sexes [Abstract]," in *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Thirty-third Meeting, held at Philadelphia, Penn., September, 1884*, ed. Frederick W. Putnam (Salem, MA: Salem Press, 1885), 515-517.

⁴⁶ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 249, referencing letter from Brown Blackwell, El Mora, New Jersey, August 1884 to Lucy Stone.

[Brown Blackwell's] theory is admitted to be nothing but a hypothesis, and we fear that it will always remain so.⁴⁷

The reviewer pointed out that Brown Blackwell's theory of mind was similar to Herbert Spencer's: mind and matter being aspects of one reality. However, according to the reviewer, Brown Blackwell's theory was more radical: she wrote, "The rhythmic atom is *alive* with the high possibilities of ever-growing sensibility and actual knowledge." While this was not a new theory from her perspective: she had been developing these ideas since *Studies in General Science* (1869), if not before, the reviewer objected that without "arguments and proofs," that "we find little in her arguments that is convincing or satisfactory....we cannot think that she has added anything important to our knowledge of nature or of man." According to available AAAS records, Brown Blackwell did not maintain any active membership after 1892. Although Brown Blackwell may have been one of the first women elected to membership in the AAAS, she did not seem to find much satisfaction in her participation.

⁴⁷ "Review: The Philosophy of Individuality, Or the One and the Many by Antoinette Brown Blackwell." *Science* 21, no. 537 (May 19, 1893), 279.

American Purity Association (APA)



Figure 11. Rev. Antoinette Brown Blackwell [Undated]
from *The National Purity Congress* (New York: 1896), 23.⁴⁸

Brown Blackwell's involvement in the Purity movement was a lifelong commitment. As we read in Chapter 1, Brown Blackwell was introduced to the Purity movement through her father. Then, she was active in the Oberlin Female Moral Reform Society (an affiliate of the New York Moral Reform Society), and she joined their executive committee in 1848.⁴⁹ At the time of her death, one biographer wrote, "It is also nearly seventy years since the Purity Alliance was

⁴⁸ From the "Preface," "The volume includes a rare galaxy of portraits of representative, philanthropic men and women, of America and of Europe, which will be of exceptional interest to its readers in any and every clime." Her portrait was one of the sixteen portraits included. Aaron Macy Powell, ed., *The National Purity Congress: Its Papers, Addresses, Portraits. an Illustrated Record of the Papers and Addresses of the First National Purity Congress, Held Under the Auspices of the American Purity Alliance (Baltimore, October, 1895)* (New York: American Purity Alliance, 1896). vii.

⁴⁹ For an overview of the purity movement at Oberlin (as well as events in New York that precipitated it), see Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1 (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1943), 296-307.

organized to carry out the plan of reform which is now known by the name of Social Hygiene—and she is one of the first members of the Alliance.”⁵⁰ Most scholars give her participation in this movement negligible mention, in part because Brown Blackwell didn’t say much about it either, beyond two pages in her memoirs devoted mostly to her later involvement (1880s onward). However, it seems that her devotion to the cause was in keeping with her ingrained belief that religion is something you *do* and her participation was on behalf of women as well as the greater good. In *First Woman Minister* she wrote:

[It] is hard to realize that but a few years ago the entire question of immorality was taboo for public discussion and considered itself almost an immorality....My father was much interested in the cause of Purity and was a subscriber to the “Advocate of Moral Reform” a paper published by women in New York – the very women with whom I was expecting to work when I first came to New York in 1850. In this way this one cause was impressed upon me from early youth. Mr. Blackwell [her husband Samuel] was for many years an active member of the Purity Alliance, speaking, writing, and contributing as he might for it; and I have been more or less associated with it from the beginning as well.⁵¹

Her sister-in-law, Dr. Emily Blackstone, served on their executive committee and other colleagues and friends from other organizations, including the AAW, were members. As Brown Blackwell recalled, “[The Purity Alliance’s] object was not merely rescue work...it’s special object was the obstruction of any legislation designed to protect vice or immorality.”⁵² While Brown Blackwell referred to this organization as the Purity Alliance, until 1895 their official

⁵⁰ "Antoinette Louisa Brown Blackwell. *Scannell's New Jersey's First Citizens: Biographies and Portraits of the Notable Living Men and Women of New Jersey with Informing Glimpses into the State's History and Affairs. 1917-1918. (Vol. 1)*, eds. J. J. Scannell and William E. Sackett (Paterson, NJ: J.J. Scannell, 1917), 48-50, 49

⁵¹ Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 324. Delegates from Purity associations were members of the AAW, and the topic of Purity was discussed during every AAW annual meeting.

⁵² Blackwell, *First Woman Minister*, 325.

name was the New York Committee for the Prevention of State Regulation of Vice—which more appropriately reflected their goals. Brown Blackwell recalled attending their Congresses annually over several years including the one held in conjunction with the Parliament of Religions at the time of the Columbia Exposition (aka Chicago World’s Fair) in 1893.⁵³ In 1895, the American Purity Alliance convened the National Purity Congress in Baltimore. Brown Blackwell, her husband, Julia Ward Howe, Dr. Emily Blackwell, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, William Lloyd Garrison, and Henry Blackwell were among those who presented papers and/or participated as respondents. In addition to offering responses to the welcoming addresses during the first session, Brown Blackwell presented a paper, “Immorality of the Regulation System” during the same session. In keeping with the objectives of the American Purity Alliance, Brown Blackwell argued, “The regulation scheme is a shield manufactured and uplifted exclusively for men. It recognizes only their perils, needs, and wishes to be protected along a line of admitted debasement.”⁵⁴ She made further points that advocated for the value of marriage: an institution and privilege she believed had been corrupted by the men who engaged the services of prostitutes as well as spoiled for prostitutes to enjoy. Although the American Purity Alliance would become the American Social Hygiene Association in 1913 and it broadened the scope of its agenda to include eugenics, for Brown Blackwell, her participation in

⁵³ Organizational records show that the New York Committee for the Prevention of State Regulation of Vice (founded 1876), changed their name to the American Purity Alliance in 1895. Powell, *The National Purity Congress*, vi. See also Anna Rice Powell [Secretary], *New York Committee for the Prevention of State Regulation of Vice: 18th Annual Report*, (1894).

⁵⁴ Rev Antoinette Brown Blackwell, "Immorality of the Regulation System," in Aaron Macy Powell, ed., *The National Purity Congress*, 26.

the Purity Alliance was focused on the obstruction of legislation that would regulate prostitution for the protection of men.

Brown Blackwell presents her life and philosophy in books

In addition to three substantial books written during the final trimester of her life, *The Philosophy of Individuality: or the One and the Many* (1893), *The Making of the Universe* (1914), and *The Social Side of Mind and Action* (1915), she also wrote *Sea Drift: Or, Tribute to the Ocean* (1902) was a metaphoric representation of her views on the unity and relationality of the universe in which she used poetry to express her metaphysics.

Less active as she lost her sight and hearing, Brown Blackwell retreated more and more from the activities of the world and focused on her internal world. With the help of neighbor and feminist Sarah Gilson, as well as her daughters and niece Alice Stone Blackwell, Brown Blackwell worked on her autobiography, *The First Woman Minister* (1909), which was not published but has been a central primary source for this paper as well as for other scholars.⁵⁵

***The Philosophy of Individuality: or the One and the Many* (1893):** In Chapters 2 and 3, I described pertinent aspects of Brown Blackwell's books *Studies in General Science* (1869), *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875), and *The Physical Basis of Immortality* (1876). I argued that Brown Blackwell was presenting her ideas around the unity of the universe and equilibrium or harmony of constitutive actions. She used evidence from her studies of various fields of science. After *Studies in General Science* (1869), each subsequent book nuanced aspects of her

⁵⁵ For example, Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*; Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*.

initial theses: *Sexes* (1875) discussed, in part, how women's capabilities could be better understood if interpreted as *equivalent* rather than weaker or "less than." In *The Physical Basis of Immortality* (1876), Brown Blackwell proposed that applying "the great law of 'the correlation and conservation of forces,'" (also known as the "new dynamism"), she could show that there was "an actual, continuous, unchanging personal unity, the living *me*, which is also indestructible [immortal]." ⁵⁶ In the 1890s, Brown Blackwell resumed writing metaphysically and published *The Philosophy of Individuality: or the One and the Many* (1893): a reinterpretation of science (i.e., topics including motion, matter, light, organic life) according to her view of a unified, relational universe in which matter and mind were not oppositional, but aspects of one existence. As in *The Physical Basis of Immortality* (1876), Brown Blackwell's central objective was "specially illustrating and confirming the central theory of correlated persistent individuality in each of the ultimate units of Conditioned Being." ⁵⁷ Brown Blackwell referred to the *Physical Basis of Immortality* (1876) as presenting her ideas regarding "persistent mind matter" as still being legitimate in the context of *The Philosophy of Individuality* (1893). However, Brown Blackwell recognized that she needed to return to each category of phenomena to justify or discredit her theories regarding "ultimate atoms" that she put forth in her previous book. Therefore, in this book, Brown Blackwell would be more thorough in arriving at her objective:

The motion-feeling individualities afford a consistent explanation of the possible emergence of the Relative from the Absolute by the intervention of Beneficent

⁵⁶ Blackwell, *The Physical Basis of Immortality*, 9.

⁵⁷ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, iii-iv.

and Rational Causation. They would be sufficient evidence that the All of Being must be Intelligent Living Power which everywhere “makes for righteousness” by sustaining the ultimate beings, so conditioned that they are impelled to increase in knowledge and to desire a higher excellence both for themselves and for others.⁵⁸

In comparison with her previous books, Brown Blackwell was not only hoping to “prove” her ideas regarding persistent or immortal individuality, but she described the underlying basis of materiality in theological terms, attributing the quality of beneficence to it. And, this All of Being, “makes for righteousness.” In this proposal, it is as if Brown Blackwell brought the Finney’s assertion that religion is something you *do* into her philosophy.

In the first two hundred pages of *The Philosophy of Individuality*, Brown Blackwell discusses atoms and molecules in more detail, describing their actions in various contexts, including motion, light, heat, and electricity. She presented more than twenty illustrations of atoms and molecules to help illuminate her ideas. For example, in her Chapter “The Rhythmic Atom,” Brown Blackwell presented a series of illustrations including this:

⁵⁸ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 4-5.

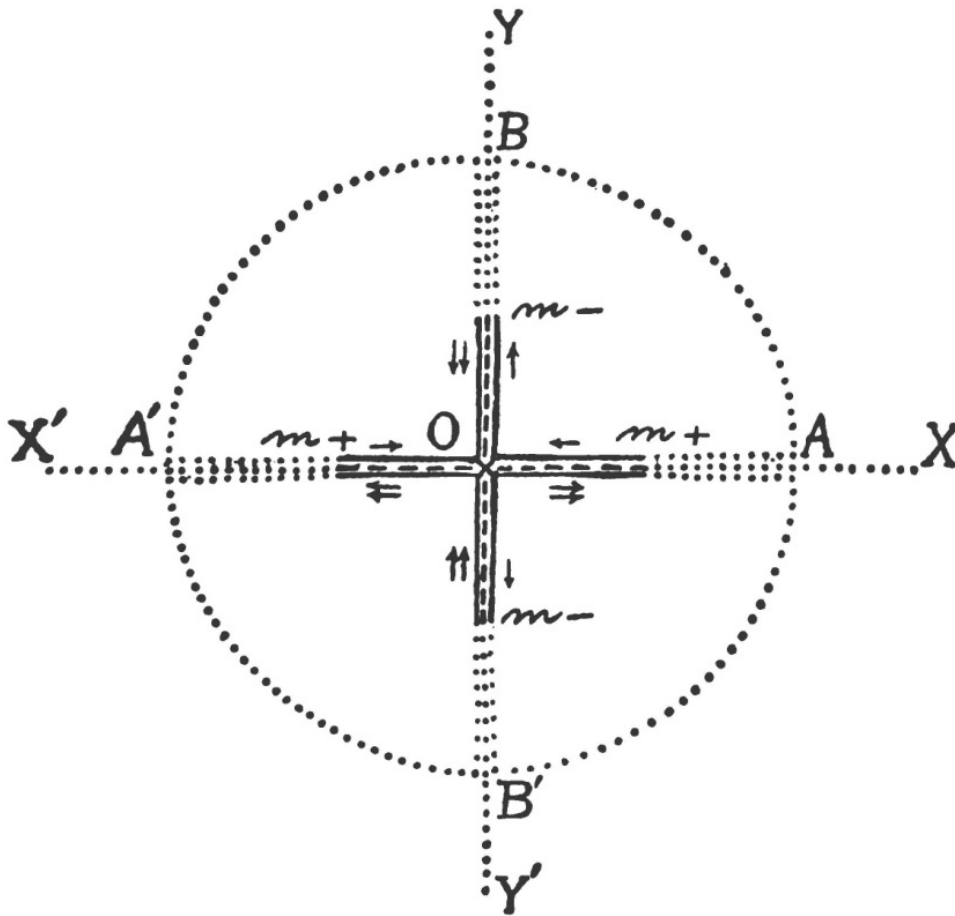


FIG. 2.

Rhythmic atom half-way in direct phases.

$m +$ = increasing elongation.

$m -$ = decreasing elongation.

m° = reversal position.

Figure 11. *The Philosophy of Individuality*, page 63

Brown Blackwell wrote:

In Fig 2 vibrators O A, O A¹ are elongating, and vibrators O B, O B¹ are retracting—the action of the A group facing outwards and that of the B facing centre-wards. The two groups differ in phase by exactly a half beat—the

condition represented being midway in both phases—when an atom of this type must have the form of a Greek cross....⁵⁹

As was common in the nineteenth century, Brown Blackwell offered no footnotes or sources to help the reader understand the basis of her illustration or analysis, and several chapters of illustrations and accompanying text were dense with theory but often without commentary to explain the relevance within her broader philosophical project. Although her ideas seem similar to others, scholars cannot definitively link her science or metaphysics to any system or thinker.⁶⁰

Midway in the book, in the chapter “Summing Up,” Brown Blackwell restated her conclusions from the previous chapters with references (and some footnotes) to other scientists (i.e., Helmholtz, Prof. Hertz, Clerk Maxwell), whom she thus implied were in some accord with her claims regarding “the rhythmic atom and its methods of co-operation.”⁶¹ She concluded the chapter by asking her readers “to accept for the time the claim that the mind-

⁵⁹ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 64.

⁶⁰ Other scholars have informally suggested to me that her work seems to resonate with Transcendental authors and ideas. It is possible. Brown Blackwell became close friends with Rev. William Henry Channing, a Unitarian minister and Transcendentalist: they crossed paths during the origins of the woman’s right movement and they corresponded until his death, but he moved to England in 1857 and then to Washington, DC in 1862. She mentions writing to him about her crisis of faith in 1853, but beyond that, scholars do not know what they corresponded about. Brown Blackwell is only mentioned once, briefly, by one of Channing’s biographers.

While she also met Emerson and Thoreau (once) and knew other Transcendentalists after 1850, she doesn’t mention them or their ideas in available scholarship or records. In a letter that Lucy Stone wrote to Brown Blackwell in 1849, Lucy asked, “Nette don’t you remember how we laughed over Emmerson’s [sic] Essays.” While Lucy did write about her change of heart about Emerson, Brown Blackwell never did respond in a similar vein. Other scholars may well find similarities between Transcendentalist ideas and Brown Blackwell’s ideas, but confirming that Transcendentalism influenced her ideas is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Letter from Lucy Stone, West Brookfield, Mass, August 1849 to Brown Blackwell in Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 53.

⁶¹ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 214. Blackwell did not provide more information regarding her sources than what I indicated in parentheses. In another case, she footnoted a reference to a Prof. Tate, with a footnote that merely read, “Prof. Tate.”

side of the correlated individuality is as literally real and persistent as the matter side; and that in an actual sense the two are but one indivisible unity.”⁶² Despite her commentary that offered more detail on her investigations into the atom, Brown Blackwell has not addressed the theological aspects that she introduced at the beginning of the book.

In the second half, Brown Blackwell offered some provocative ideas, such as “the rhythmic atom is *alive* with the high possibilities of ever-growing sensibility and actual knowledge.”⁶³ With her assumption that mind and matter are part of an indivisible unity, her philosophic leap is that if there is intelligence in one place, it must exist (even as potential) in all others. In the following pages, Brown Blackwell describes relations between life (matter) and mind with more illustrations of atoms and molecules, accompanied by theories that circled back upon previous theories. She challenged the idea that consciousness is a product of brain processes alone. Instead she proposed,

The development of mind is doubtless effected through the assistance given by the organism, yet the same kind of development might be secured to it in was greatly dissimilar from the present one, provided it could secure the co-operation of other systems of motion, with our without self-conscious emotion sides of their own.⁶⁴

As she tried to explain in the pages leading up to this (as well as in her previous books), Brown Blackwell was suggesting a unified field of everything, including mind and matter, with mind (or potential mind) present in everything.

⁶² Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 243.

⁶³ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 248.

⁶⁴ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 274-5.

In the final portion of the book, Brown Blackwell argued that mind was not associated solely at the personal or individual level but operated cooperatively and collectively at the atomic level as well. In trying to provide evidence for her thesis, she argued that if we accept the idea of a correlated universe—that it is both something that can be thought as well as something comprehended—then mind and matter are correlated aspects of one persistent individuality. For example:

The skin will breathe for the lungs, will absorb food for the stomach or for a wounded tissue in its neighborhood; it will do something towards taking the work of any of the special senses when that is incapacitated; it absorbs free energy and excretes waste matters for the whole organism. It is often difficult to decide which organ is the initiating seat of disease and is defaulting in its own work, so intimately do all co-operating organs sympathize by responsive disturbances of their functions. All organic movement is normally movement co-operative towards some determinate end, not only where consciousness testifies to the carrying out of its purposes, but also when consciousness is not subjectively in evidence.⁶⁵

In this example, the different parts of the body are cooperating on behalf of the individual, without conscious thought involved. This can be read as an example of “Intelligent Living Power” that sustains and seeks a “higher excellence” that she mentioned in the Preface, in the opening paragraph of this section. Referring back her discussions of the atom in the first half of the book, Brown Blackwell described that regardless of the kinds of motion or vibration (i.e., electrical, sonic, light), rhythmic atoms reveal co-operative interactions. Thus, rephrasing Brown Blackwell’s argument, if it happens on an atomic level, it happens with every organic process.

⁶⁵ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 299.

Other than in the Preface, Brown Blackwell had been oblique about connecting this discussion with her idea of “God” (and Brown Blackwell rarely used the word God). But at the end of her chapter on “Correlated Theory,” Brown Blackwell concluded:

Then, since one is individualized solely by constitutional correlations, he is not only a relative being, but in the eternal substance of his being he is now and always of the Absolute. He is now and always an actually undivided part of the Infinite. Hence, if we study our own entire natures, both relative and absolute, if we look both within and without, questioning the whole of Being, related and unrelated, we sure may gain very definite conceptions not only as to “man’s place in nature,” but also as to man’s place among the immortal verities....⁶⁶

Now Brown Blackwell has brought all of the aspects of her opening proposal into relation: correlational and cooperative persistent individuality that is an expression of a greater unity that “makes for righteousness.” In hundreds of pages of dense theory, interpretation, and commentary, she has presented her ideas about equilibrium, unity of mind and matter, correlation of actions, and much more. She has endeavored in painstaking detail to provide several different ways of looking at the same question or problem. While her arguments regarding “persistence” are based on “the great law of ‘the correlation and conservation of forces,’” Brown Blackwell’s evidence for the persistence of the individual mind seems thin in comparison. Although she goes into great detail discussing theories of mind, sensation, attention, imagination, and the like for another three chapters, some of her own conclusions seem ambiguous:

Is it asked, where then do the subconscious and dimly conscious animal individualities go when separated from their organisms? Possibly where we go. Neither experience nor other knowledge can give a definite answer.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 355.

⁶⁷ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 504.

Brown Blackwell becomes sermonical at times during the final pages where she makes assertions about “essential Sensibility,” “Existence which persists,” “Existences with its Infinite attributes...” “abiding Totality of Being” and other expressions that describe her theological ideas about unity.⁶⁸ Her last sentences of the book are: “But our God is the sender of the rains upon the evil and on the good! He is not afar off. If we look within or without He is here; He is everywhere. If we would worship Him we can worship only in spirit and in truth.”⁶⁹ In ending her book this way, she connected her science with her religious sensibilities; but without a definitive conclusion to her opening proposal.

Other reviews echoed the unfavorable tone of the one in *Science*. The reviewer from *The Monist* found “many passages to which no monistic thinkers would take exception,” but found other ideas difficult to prove, such as her ideas regarding the rhythmic motion of atoms. He discredited her ideas about ultimate atoms when he compared her ideas to Goethe’s soul-monads or to those of German psychologist Herbart whose science was “curiously mingled with improbable vagaries” and “regarded as a thing of the past.”⁷⁰ The reviewer from *The Philosophical Review* was less kind. “[I]t is to be feared that the book fails of its purpose—chiefly because its method is as mistaken in principle as it is tedious in execution.” The reviewer dismissed her idea “utilizing the permanence which physical theory has attributed to the atom,

⁶⁸ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 505.

⁶⁹ Blackwell, *The Philosophy of Individuality*, 512.

⁷⁰ κρς, "Review: The Philosophy of Individuality, Or the One and the Many by Antoinette Brown Blackwell," *The Monist* 3, no. 4 (July, 1893), 649-650. Note: the odd characters representing the author’s name copy the characters in the actual review.

as a proof of immortality” as an error in principle: “reducing the mind to a conception it has itself formed to explain the character of its contents, in this case to the conception of an atom.” Offering other examples representing errors, the reviewer concluded, “One can only regret that this production should have been put forward as a contribution to philosophy rather than to science. For it really contains far more pseudo-science than pseudo-philosophy.”⁷¹ It may be that these reviewers were accurate in their some of their assessments, or they may have misread some of her ideas, or they may have found that her presentation style was problematic. Nonetheless, Brown Blackwell’s ideas revealed the extensive reading, study, and thoughtfulness that she brought to her enterprise. Whether she succeeded in proving persistence of the individual mind remains up to the reader.⁷²

Sea Drift: Or, Tribute to the Ocean (1902): On the blank page before the first chapter of *Sea Drift*, Brown Blackwell wrote without further explanation, “We see through a glass darkly.” There seem to be no records of Brown Blackwell’s response to the poor reception of *The Philosophy of Individuality* (1893). In the intervening years, she had a full schedule and wrote other articles for publication. Perhaps the summer months spent on Martha’s Vineyard for the last several years offered another perspective on Brown Blackwell’s interest in the unity of the universe. According to biographer Cazden, Brown Blackwell wrote this series of poems to

⁷¹ F. C. S. S, “Review: The Philosophy of Individuality, Or the One and the Many by Antoinette Brown Blackwell,” *The Philosophical Review* 3, no. 1 (Jan, 1894), 121-122.

⁷² Without a more thorough investigation into other philosophies of mind of her time that is beyond the scope of this review, it seems that Blackwell offered some innovations for her time.

present her philosophy through metaphors and poetry.⁷³ Perhaps: Regardless of the inspiration or motivation, Brown Blackwell wrote verses that seemed to resonate with events and circumstances. For example, she may have been referring to herself:

Yet each must speak his own deliberate mind,
His dearest thought, for ends that suit himself,
Let others hear aright or hear all wrong.⁷⁴

Many poems seemed to observational, describing her particular view of the sea, such as:

Old Ocean blazes; glorious morning sight!
Each wavelet caps in music and delight;
And near and far, farther than eye can reach,
The great Sea sings soft anthems clear as speech.⁷⁵

Still others seemed devotional in tone:

In growing vision far and rife,
In almost disembodied life,
From fields of light and hope, we raise
To His Omniscience trustful praise!

Although *Sea Drift* had a warmer reception and wider audience, her poems did not seem to present her philosophy, as Cazden suggests, in any cohesive or significant way.

⁷³ Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 210.

⁷⁴ Blackwell, *Sea Drift*, 14.

⁷⁵ Blackwell, *Sea Drift*, 170.

The Making of the Universe: Evolution the Continuous Process Which Derives the Finite from the Infinite (1914) and The Social Side of Mind and Action (1915): When Brown Blackwell was in her eighties, her vision began to decline and she was eager to finish a long project of revising and consolidating her previous philosophical endeavors. As Brown Blackwell wrote to her niece Alice Stone Blackwell,

Can you believe it I am still working over “that everlasting book.” I think enough has been said and directly wake up at night and some point insists some thing more should be said about it or a brand new one gets the floor.

They are all a set of loyal allies and I have to yield.

Then I work under serious difficulties in these days getting slower and slower in doing things. Well I shall be 88 two months from to day.⁷⁶

Eventually she decided to divide the book into two separate titles with more rewriting. Brown Blackwell hoped that these versions would be easier to read. In another letter to Alice Stone Blackwell, Brown Blackwell wrote, “I am...really getting towards the close of topics to be treated of, though there will be corrections and additions to make....At last I have really told my last full thoughts on those great subjects...”⁷⁷

The Making of the Universe (1914) revisited topics that Brown Blackwell wrote about in previous books with chapters that described correlation, the atom, and the unified universe. Perhaps the writing of the book gave Brown Blackwell the opportunity to pick up her thoughts on topics that she had been turning over in her mind for more than sixty years, but her writing style was still dense and her arguments spiraled repetitively around an idea as if to give the

⁷⁶ Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 255, citing Brown Blackwell to Alice Stone Blackwell, received March 22, 1913 [Blackwell Family Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University].

⁷⁷ Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 256, citing Brown Blackwell to Alice Stone Blackwell, n.d. [Blackwell Family Papers].

reader many vantage points to regard the topic. In this book, Brown Blackwell uses theological language, sometimes together with discussion of more science-oriented ideas. In describing aspects of correlation, Brown Blackwell wrote:

Doubtless the Infinite transcends the finite. God's energies and modes of action measurelessly transcend relative activities, and it is solely His energy at work in the universe...if our theory is right in this claim, no other coworker can diminish or increase the amount of force bestowed.⁷⁸

In Brown Blackwell's rewriting of earlier versions of her philosophy, her theological voice seems to take the foreground. She is more explicit about stating what seemed implied, but not expressed, in *The Philosophy of Individuality* (1893) or *The Physical Basis of Immortality* (1876): "essential Being is...ever-existing Mind..." "The Absolute must be the comprehensive total of reality and all created things," and "the Allwise and Ever-loving has created a universe in which it is literally better to give than to receive."⁷⁹

Her final book, *The Social Side of Mind and Action* (1915), was published when she was 90 years old. In her shortest book, only 140 pages, Brown Blackwell intended to integrate all the aspects of "the theory of applied correlation of constitutional adaptations, as the method of deriving the finite from the Infinite..."⁸⁰ She proposed to bring all of the subject into "personal relation" so that the reader, if inclined, might experience the points being presented and "also make a personal interpretation."⁸¹ Her tone is more intimate: she wants to share the Truth

⁷⁸ Blackwell, *The Making of the Universe*, 18-19.

⁷⁹ Blackwell, *The Making of the Universe*, 22, 38, 77.

⁸⁰ Blackwell, *The Social Side of Mind and Action*, 7.

⁸¹ Blackwell, *The Social Side of Mind and Action*, 7.

with her readers. “All truth is one...” Brown Blackwell began.⁸² Unlike other books dense with theory and seemingly circuitous commentary, Brown Blackwell presents her idea almost like a story. When Brown Blackwell does delve into theory, her writing is more concise—presumably because this is oft-traversed terrain. The nature of life is action. “We move and are moved, we change and are changed, we grow up and we grow old, all in exact reciprocity...”⁸³ Brown Blackwell stated quite simply, “The fundamental nature of all mind action is purposive and progressive. All action, even the slightest, is a reaching on toward some desired value.”⁸⁴ And her plain language seems to echo the words of Rev. Finney from long ago, when he insisted that religion is something you *do*. Or, as Brown Blackwell stated this in the final paragraphs: “All humanity needs to be sustained, strengthened by help from one another, and by helping one another we help ourselves.”⁸⁵

Brown Blackwell’s Lifelong Commitment to Suffrage

Brown Blackwell had hoped to bring about a reconciliation between the two opposing suffrage groups NWSA and AWSA, but Lucy Stone was adamant in her rejection of any peace between them. As she wrote to Brown Blackwell:

As to meeting Mrs. Stanton it is out of the question with me. She sent a letter to Mr. Shattuck of this city, which he read to a little group, of which I was one, in which she said I was “the biggest liar and hypocrite she had ever seen”—After

⁸² Blackwell, *The Social Side of Mind and Action*, 12.

⁸³ Blackwell, *The Social Side of Mind and Action*, 50, 63

⁸⁴ Blackwell, *The Social Side of Mind and Action*, 98.

⁸⁵ Blackwell, *The Social Side of Mind and Action*, 138.

that, you will see that I cannot with any self respect meet her with a pretence [sic] of good fellowship.⁸⁶

In 1888, the Elizabeth Cady Stanton of the National Woman Suffrage Association decided to celebrate 40 years of the woman's suffrage movement by inviting "all associations of women in the trades, professions and reforms, as well as those advocating political rights" to the International Council of Women.⁸⁷ Her hope was to bring together many of the associations that had not yet been supporters of women's suffrage. Speakers and participants came from around the world. Brown Blackwell offered the opening prayer and closing benediction at the religious service that was the first scheduled event. As a delegate from the American Woman Suffrage Association, Brown Blackwell offered the Invocation at the formal opening of the Council before Stanton's address. At a later session, "Conference of the Pioneers," Brown Blackwell joined many other women (and men) who were recognized as the founding members of the woman's suffrage movement, including Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, Susan B. Anthony, and Frederick Douglass. According to Lasser and Merrill, at this meeting Brown Blackwell "staked her claim that the Oberlin debating society that she and Stone had founded in 1846 was the first organized woman's club of the nineteenth-century club movement."⁸⁸ At the final public session, "Religious Symposium," Brown Blackwell presented a paper "What Religious

⁸⁶ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 250, letter from Lucy Stone, written at home in Dorchester, Mass, Jan. 10, 1886 to "Nettee" Blackwell.

⁸⁷ *Report of the International Council of Women, Assembled by the National Woman Suffrage Association (Washington, D.C., 1888)* (Washington, D.C.: National Woman Suffrage Association, 1888), 10.

⁸⁸ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 233.

Truths can be Established by Science and Philosophy,” a topic that represented her ongoing commitment to her metaphysical philosophy.

Despite Stanton’s hopes for the outcome of the International Council of Women, it wasn’t as conciliatory as planned. As Lasser and Merrill describe it, Brown Blackwell was upset that her paper was badly summarized and printed by the *Woman’s Tribune* (the newspaper providing official conference coverage). When Stanton failed to mention any of Lucy Stone’s contributions to the early years of the woman’s right movement, Stone was upset. “In both cases, the concerns of Stone and Brown Blackwell for the accuracy of the documentation of their historical roles outweighed their pleasures at the event itself.”⁸⁹

In 1890, despite Lucy Stone’s reluctance to cooperate with Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Susan B. Anthony, the two suffrage groups merged into the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Although Stanton and Anthony served as the initial presidents for the first three years, under a new generation of leaders, NAWSA was instrumental in helping pass the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (colloquially known as the Woman Suffrage Amendment) in 1920. Following the deaths of Lucy Stone in 1893, and then Stanton in 1902 and Anthony in 1906, Brown Blackwell had almost no involvement with NAWSA: “When well over eighty years of age, she rode with Lucy Stone’s daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell, at her side, in an open carriage in the massive New York City Suffrage parade of 1915.”⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 233.

⁹⁰ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 234.



Figure 12: Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 1917.
Reprinted from *Scannell's New Jersey's First Citizens*
(Paterson, NJ, 1917), 49.

On November 2, 1920, women throughout the United States were voting in their first presidential election. Just a few months earlier, the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified, granting women the right to vote. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had drafted and submitted the amendment in 1878—thirty years after women’s rights were first addressed at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention in New York. As suffragists Carrie Chapman Catt (1859-1947) and Nettie Rogers Shuler (1865-1939) described the history of woman’s suffrage: “It was a continuous, seemingly endless, chain of activity. Young suffragists who helped forge the last links of that chain were not born when it began. Old suffragists who forged the first links were dead when it ended.”⁹¹

⁹¹ Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement* (Buffalo, NY: W.S. Hein, 2005 [Originally published., C. Scribner's Sons, 1926]), 107-8, as cited

Rev. Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825-1921), was one of the very few women who had been active from the earliest days of the woman's right movement to this culminating moment when women could, at long last, vote. Rev. Blackwell was 95 years old, frail, suffering from deafness and blindness, but she did not use her absentee ballot. Instead, on a cold, grey day, Brown Blackwell drove with one of her daughters to the polling place to vote for the president.

As her daughter Agnes recalled:

They drove over to Elizabeth [New Jersey] by automobile picking up a camp stool at a neighbor's so that Mrs. Blackwell might rest if the line of voters was long, but when she appeared [at the polling place] about noon, the line made way for her the signing of her own name was quite an occasion, as she could not see, and the officials were most kind. The daughter and a clerk went into the booth with her and when the clerk asked for instructions she said in a voice which could be heard by all. "I wish to vote the straight Republican ticket; all things considered at the present time, it seems to me the wisest plan." Her decision was met with applause by the waiting lines of voters.⁹²

Starting with Brown Blackwell's insistence as a young collegiate woman on her ministerial vocation, the first of its kind in America, "I am going to do it" was exemplified in her lifetime of commitments to ideals of *doing*. In the end we might speak for Brown Blackwell, on her behalf, "I did it."

As Mr. Frank Sinatra might speak for her:

And now the end is near
And so I face the final curtain
My friend I'll say it clear
I'll state my case of which I'm certain

by Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Frances Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁹² Handwritten manuscript of Blackwell's memoirs apparently by her daughter Agnes Blackwell. Blackwell Family Papers.

I've lived a life that's full
I traveled each and every highway
And more, much more than this
I did it my way⁹³

⁹³ The lyrics to the song "My Way" were written by Paul Anka for Frank Sinatra. Anka set the lyrics to music based on the French song "Comme d'habitude" (1967 by Claude François and Jacques Revaux): the lyrics are original and unrelated to the French version. Frank Sinatra recorded it in 1968 and it was at the top of the charts in the United States and the United Kingdom. Source of lyrics: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/my-way-lyrics-frank-sinatra.html>, accessed 3/28/2015.

Conclusion

Weaving the threads together

Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825-1921) became one of the most outspoken and remarkable women of her era: an ordained minister, a published author, a prominent public speaker, and a philosophical thinker whose writings described and explicated her syntheses of theology and science. Her life was punctuated by “firsts” that have significance within women’s history as evidence of a woman succeeding in what were then male-dominated arenas. In this dissertation I propose that the arguments that Brown Blackwell presented on behalf of women’s rights can be understood as a synthesis of Rev. Charles Grandison Finney’s religious teachings around *doing* with science-based theories that she believed revealed validating evidence about women’s nature and abilities to *do*. After the publication of her book, *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875), her contributions to women’s rights movements and her books were less documented by historians, perhaps because she was less focused on suffrage. I argue that during that time, her contributions to woman’s rights were nevertheless significant as she worked among women who resonated with her religious sensibilities, agendas, and rhetoric: while many actively supported woman’s suffrage, most did not. In advancing woman’s rights, Brown Blackwell used rhetoric that synthesized her Finney-inspired ideals with her interpretations of science. This dissertation will add to the existing scholarship about women’s rights, by recognizing the existence and thoughts of the thousands of “religious” women who contributed to woman’s rights (even if they didn’t support suffrage) as an outward expression of their inward piety.

Her evidentiary method includes scientific data, facts, methods, and theories together with her proposal for an experiential way of perception. In other words, I suggest that Blackwell was trying to use the methods that brought about testimonies of inner conviction (based on the practices of conversion, perfection, and continuity) to understand, interpret, and describe not only her own reality, but as another way to approach and interpret science. She appreciated that science had tools and methods that were effective and carried the authority of “truth” or “fact” in the various interactions around the “Woman Question.” According to Brown Blackwell, if science was properly done and interpreted, it would show the equivalencies and synergies between all of creation that were innately progressing (and evolving) toward equilibrium. Her assumptions included “God,” represented in a variety of terms, and a worldview that revealed aspects of unity, harmony, immanence, immortality, and universality as expressed in and through mind and matter. One could discover the laws and principles of science by close attention and special perception that she sometimes described as inner sight or intuition. She used theories and examples from physics, biology, chemistry and more to reveal the mechanics and laws of her ideas of unity, harmony, equilibrium, equivalence, and more. For her, her science proved the existence of God and persistence or immortality of mind. She adapted how she presented these ideas depending on her audience. For example, among suffragists in the 1850s, her speeches and writings were more religiously based: she presented evidence for women’s rights based on her Biblical exegesis and reinterpretation of texts that were used to define woman’s sphere and woman’s nature. Without challenging the ideas of spheres and

accepting the values and qualities that were supposedly God-given and innate in woman's nature (such as piety, modesty, religious, moral) , she proposed that woman's rights could be achieved by expanding spheres of activities (including education and work) beyond the domestic sphere without compromising Godly womanhood. While she supported suffrage, she did not think it was what women needed most in order to achieve more rights and influence.

As the woman's suffrage movement split into factions in 1869, Brown Blackwell remained supportive of the goals and continued to attend and give speeches at suffrage events, but she found aspects of the political environment around suffrage contentious and distressing. When she chose to focus on other aspects of woman's rights aside from suffrage, her contributions and accomplishments didn't seem to be included in the historiography of women's rights. I suggested that in women's history, woman's suffrage is represented as the most significant aspect of woman's rights and other contributions outside of suffrage are marginalized. When Brown Blackwell shifted her focus away from suffrage, her contributions to woman's rights were not included in that historical narrative, with the exception of her biographers.¹

I argued that the historiographical conflation of woman's rights with woman's suffrage may well have rendered Brown Blackwell, and the majority of woman's rights activists, less visible in woman's rights historical narratives.² Until the turn of the century, the majority of

¹ Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 1982; Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 1987.

² There may well be another bias around the contributions of evangelical women to woman's rights (broadly construed). Further scholarship regarding evangelical women within women's rights movements may well be warranted.

women did not support suffrage; yet hundreds of thousands of women participated in associations that advanced aspects of women's rights. For example, when the Association for the Advancement of Women was founded in 1873, this association offered Brown Blackwell an alternative that she resonated with: she was in the midst of educated, reform-minded women who also espoused the rhetoric of Godly womanhood. The rhetoric of Godly womanhood represented aspects of models of ideal womanhood, particularly Christian ideals that were millennial and emphasized *doing*. While some of the women in the AAW supported suffrage, most did not. The AAW, and associations like them such as the American Purity Alliance, advanced women's rights along a different trajectory than their suffragist sisters. In the early 20th century, when the hundreds of thousands of women represented by these organizations finally accepted that suffrage was necessary, the weight of their numbers and influence was the tipping point that changed the outcome of the suffrage movement.

I argue that Rev. Finney's influence was a significant American phenomenon, particularly during the peak season of his revivals (1825-1835) and as the charismatic theologian, president, and minister at Oberlin College (1835-1875). In relation to Brown Blackwell, my arguments rest squarely on the profound influence of his example, teachings, and methods in Brown Blackwell's life. I built my evidence from several aspects and components: his emphasis on humankind's moral capacity to renounce sin; his conversion method that built upon the penitent's feelings and experiences; his "new measure" that allowed women to pray in public; the practices around perfectionism and sanctification; and his call to all Christian, men and

women, to authenticate their piety through working to re-form the world in preparation for the millennial vision of the kingdom of God.

These aspects and components of Rev. Finney's practices and teachings were amplified during Brown Blackwell's Oberlin experience where students worked to make manifest Oberlin's millennial sacred narrative.³ Oberlin had a sacred origin story and ethos that was embodied, enacted, and radical. Geographically isolated, it was a world unto itself. It was the first coeducational college to grant degrees to men and women; it was the first college to award college degrees to Negroes; it was a hotbed of abolitionist and reform activities; it adopted the manual labor system that traded education for work—allowing all students to have access to a “free” education. Above all, as Fletcher wrote in his history of Oberlin, “It was his [Finney's] theory that the conversion of sinners was the first essential to the Millennium, which, once accomplished, would be followed by the comparatively easy success of other reforms.” According to Fletcher, Finney further refined this in a lecture to the Oberlin Maternal Association the following year (1844): “Mere outward reform is of no avail—Reform of the heart is alone able to secure permanent good.”⁴ Under his leadership and influence, an army of young people practiced his ideal in order to change the world.

During the period of 1836 to 1842, Oberlin was in a near constant state of revival. Additionally, faculty members often visited their students to assess and encourage the

³ Upon reflection, I might look into how the Oberlin experience was similar to other utopian communitarian experiments.

⁴ Rev. Finney's emphasis on a particular kind of heart-based feeling was essential. Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, Vol. 1, 210.

development a “better state” of religious feeling.⁵ While Oberlin was no longer in a state of constant revival by the time that Brown Blackwell enrolled, reports of conversions were included in many Oberlin reports. The emphasis on conversion and salvation continued to be Oberlin’s primary objective for many years beyond Brown Blackwell’s enrollment. The term conversion was expanded to be used to describe not only the religious conversion associated with renunciation of sin, but also to describe students’ commitments to reforms or feelings. Students were converted to the cause of abolition or converted to moral reform. Brown Blackwell wrote to Lucy Stone that she believed that some individuals had been “converted from *selfishness* to *benevolence*....a healthful state of feeling seems to exist...”⁶ The implication is that conversion (or the verb “converted”) represents a series of experiences, similar to religious conversion, that would give participants a visceral sense of what it feels like to act as an abolitionist or moral reformer or experience benevolence. The idea that this quality of feelingness was heart-based (not intellectual) and provided authentic testimony of truth or fact arising from one’s personal experience. While Finney and others could describe what this might look like (in reports of witnessing religious conversions), there was always a sense that the words failed to adequately represent the experience. There was something happening in conversion experiences that were beyond words. Feeling was believing.

While I described conversion, emphasizing the necessity of feeling—which seemed to be linked to the effect of the Holy Spirit—Brown Blackwell did not report her own religious

⁵ Fletcher, *History of Oberlin*, Vol. 1, 209.

⁶ Lasser and Merrill, *Friends and Sisters*, 36, regarding a letter from Brown Blackwell (Henrietta, March 28, '48) to Lucy Stone.

experiences. However, I assume that as a theological student preparing for ministry, she would have undergone conversion and may well have practiced perfectionism, as did other ministerial students. As these kinds of religious experiences had their place in religious assemblies, they were not necessarily something that you wrote about in your correspondence or diary: although many people did write about their religious experiences. Brown Blackwell did not write about her own religious experiences, or if she did, the texts are lost. Although she does not write about her own experiences, it is clear to me that she has had conversion experience(s) because she also emphasizes an inward feeling that defines the boundary of revealed religion as well as wisdom and knowledge.

In looking back upon her life, I think that if Brown Blackwell had experienced conversion, if she had her own testimony of having knowledge or wisdom revealed to her through some inner reflection or meditation upon ideas or theories, then she might use this same technique in other arenas of activity. There was precedence for this idea. Theodore Weld, one of Finney's most influential converts and followers, specifically adapted Finney's revival methods to be used within the abolitionist movement. For example, I described how he trained his future wife Angelina Grimké to speak using vocabulary and expressions that were common to her audience. After learning this and other techniques, membership swelled. This was, in part, how the Finney's teachings would be extended far beyond the boundaries of Oberlin and his own congregations. Therefore, Brown Blackwell may well have been experimenting with how she might use Finney's techniques in her own work.

In a way, adapting Finney's methods to evoke feelings to bring about a change in disposition and behavior was suited to Brown Blackwell's primary audience: Christian women already self-identified as having more developed capacities to feel, to be religious. But I didn't find evidence of her using this method to evoke feeling in her speeches; but she hints at this idea in her books. I say "hints at" because she does not seem to make this idea explicit, although it is present, like a pale shadow, in all of her books—except her last book, *The Social Side of Action* (1915). There she really explains that she has written her books so readers can experience what she is talking about. It was only in the last book that as a reader, I finally understood her method—that she wanted me to use a different sense for approaching her ideas, an approach that was like the process of conversion.

My claim about Brown Blackwell's methodology of feeling may not be correct. I didn't see it as a possibility until the end of my own analysis and study. From my experience, her books *The Physical Basis of Immortality* (1876), *The Philosophy of Individuality* (1893), and *The Making of the Universe* (1914) were so dense, bordering on impenetrable. As I explained in the last chapter, I was not alone in my opinion of her writing style. I had no way of evaluating nearly all of her scientific theories or claims. Why was she doing this? What was her point? In *The Social Side of Action*, she wrote:

In this essay, it is not intended to either endorse or criticise [sic], but, as far as possible, to build up assured convictions based on self-evident foundations, which each reader can perceive and test satisfactorily. There are various general tests that may be applied to all intelligent beliefs that admit of more than one interpretation. A few of them will be enough in scope to be comprehensively applied to all kinds of religious and other reasoned conclusions.⁷

⁷ Blackwell, *The Social Side of Mind and Action*, 11.

Brown Blackwell doesn't tell the reader what these tests are. She writes about truth requiring sight and insight, but doesn't spell out her criteria for tests. Or maybe she does and I missed it. The point is, that she seems to be pointing to personal experience, or insight, or intuition, or perception, or other words that she uses to try to describe that which resists being expressed in words.

I argued about the centrality of Rev. Finney's teachings in Brown Blackwell's approach to woman's rights. The theological position that humankind had free will and agency to renounce sin stood in contrast to Calvinist ideas of predestination. In the Calvinist view, Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden in the Biblical creation story made her a temptress and sinner, qualities that adhered to women thereafter. The theology of free will and agency released women from that interpretation of their nature. Like men, women could act in accord with God. Women had the capacity to *do*.

I described how his "new measure" that allowed women to pray in public should be understood as radically transformative. In the context of a Christian nation where the majority of church members were women, Rev. Finney changed the dynamics of women's participation in their congregations. They could pray in public. This reversed one of the primary Biblical texts used to define women: that women should be silent in church.

Rev. Finney called upon all Christians to show their piety through work on behalf of others to create the kingdom of God. Together with the teaching of moral agency to *act*, and opportunities to be full participants in their congregations, women's had a fuller sense of their moral agency to *act* and an expanded sphere of activity to *do*. While women such as Brown

Blackwell may have not experienced the full effect of his teachings and ideals during her Oberlin experience, it may well have been why she believed she could become the first woman minister. She had moral agency to choose to act in order be Godly; to create the kingdom of God. I argued these teachings may have had far more effect on thousands of women who were eager to work on behalf of God's kingdom, but did not want to abandon other God-given attributes and values by which they defined themselves.

These thousands of Christian women continued to work on behalf of temperance, education reform, among others. They maintained their ideals of Godly womanhood while expanding their sphere of influence beyond the walls of their home. For example, their innate talents and abilities found expression in new professions as nurses, Sunday school teachers, social workers, and missionaries. They elevated their domestic skills and talents into domestic sciences that became institutionalized in Home Economics' departments. As inroads were made in the professions, other advances were achieved around legal rights. The variety of contributions to woman's rights was extensive and deserves more recognition within the historiography of woman's rights.

This dissertation revealed some aspects of the complex question of women's action through the science and theology of Antoinette Brown Blackwell. The more answers that seemed to be revealed only led to more questions. I believe that I've brought forward more of her story, providing evidence and examples of her contributions to woman's rights that extended beyond her commitments to suffrage.

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