Criminal Conversations
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SECTION ONE

Identifying the Causes and Impacts of Bad Behavior

This section features the chapters examining Victorian conversations problematizing for respectable society some expressions of both bad behavior and actual criminality. The debates raised in the various chapters focus on different groups within society which felt threatened by some aspect of the “bad” behavior of the age. The conversations range from the broad debates around the dangerous classes through to the concerns surrounding juvenile delinquency in the chapters by Taylor and Abbott, and the micropanic felt by the Church of England over the morality of farm servants in Moses’s chapter.

Worries about the new shape of society and the new opportunities for crime at all levels of society are also covered in this section in the chapters from Barnes and Ferris. Throughout, the identification of appropriate evidence and judgments about what constituted a competent witness (issues interpreted through established gender, age, class, and racial stereotypes) are emphasized. In addition, there is a highlighting of the suggestions made by the Victorians for dealing with these issues in order to keep them within bounds and so achieve a stable, secure, and harmonious society, something with profound contemporary echoes.