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During the reign of Queen Victoria, herself an ardent play-goer as well as Supreme Head of the Church of England, a remarkable *rapprochement* was effected between the Church and the theatre. At the beginning of her reign considerable antagonism existed between these two institutions, but by the end reconciliation was almost complete.

In a wide-ranging account of this multifaceted subject Dr Foulkes explores the implications for the theatre of the great religious movements of the period: Tractarianism, Christian Socialism and Latitudinarianism. This central relationship is seen in the context of other important themes in Victorian cultural history such as censorship, urbanisation, transport, leisure, education and women's emancipation.

The volume contains portraits of significant churchmen (Keble, Newman, Manning, Maurice, Kingsley, Stanley, Farrar and Headlam), dramatists (Bulwer Lytton, Charles Reade, Tennyson, H. A. Jones and Shaw), actors (Macready, Phelps, Wilson Barrett and Irving) and actresses (Fanny Kemble, Helen Faucit and Ellen Terry). These were influential figures who participated in the search for a common culture which preoccupied the nineteenth century.

To the Victorians the Church and the theatre were important parts of everyday life; in this study the two institutions are explored in relation not only to each other but also to the social, economic and intellectual movements of the period.

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*To my wife, Christine, for her
faith in the book
and the author*

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Introit

Enter boldly, for here, too, there are gods.

Henry Morley

The relationship between the Church and stage in Victorian England is a vast and many-faceted subject. I have ventured outside Queen Victoria's reign by a decade or so at the beginning and by four years at the end, but I have rarely strayed beyond England into the other lands over which she held dominion. By 'Church' I mean the Church of England. I make some allusions to other denominations, but do not attempt to deal with them substantively.

From its earliest manifestations the theatre attracted opposition and in Plato it was challenged by a critic whose objections were known to and reiterated by the better-educated members of the nineteenth-century anti-theatrical persuasion. By then the arguments of antiquity had been reinforced by those of early Christianity (Tertullian, St Augustine), Puritanism and the controversies of the English Restoration stage.

At one level the Victorians were engaging in the timeless debate about the nature of mimesis and mankind's disposition towards imitation or catharsis, but they were doing so in the context of a society which was confronted by hitherto undreamt-of social, technological and intellectual challenges. Both the Church and the theatre were profoundly affected by developments as diverse as urbanisation, the expansion of the railways, the education of women and revisionary concepts of hell. The Victorian experience crystallised issues which continue to pre-occupy advanced and emerging nations – for instance: the expansion of an élite culture to the masses; the balance between education and recreation; centralised direction and individual choice; and the creation of national institutions and a sense of nationhood. It has been my endeavour to weave these and other threads together to produce a picture of Victorian England in which church spires and theatre fly-towers occupy

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Introit

the foreground. From certain perspectives this may not always seem to be the case and educational edifices of one sort and another do undeniably figure prominently.

I have approached the subject of Church and stage in Victorian England from my own discipline of theatre history. In that of church history I have served an all too brief, but totally absorbing, novitiate, which has been revealing not only in terms of material for this book, but also as an insight into another branch of scholarship. As a subject, theatre history suffers from the same lack of status as bedevilled the theatre itself for much of the nineteenth century. Entertainment in general and the theatre in particular occupied as vital a place as religion in the lives of many Victorians, but this is not reflected in late twentieth-century academia. If this volume has a mission, beyond attempting to do justice to its subject, it is to contribute to the process whereby the study of the theatre is no longer disparaged as mere anecdotage, but is recognised as part of the mainstream of social, economic, intellectual and – in this case – religious history.

As the tide of history flowed through the nineteenth century it shaped the lives of generations of men and women, who in their turn collectively and – exceptionally – individually influenced its course. The pages of history can be written in terms of the unfolding of God's purpose, the deeds of Carlylean heroes or Marxist masses. This account of Church and stage in Victorian England is peopled with prelates and prima donnas, perpetual incumbents and attendant lords, and the faceless members of countless congregations and audiences. Even with historical hindsight the task of discerning a pattern is difficult enough, to prophesy and influence one is an altogether rarer faculty. Amongst the contenders for this distinction (Bentham, Keble, Newman, F. D. Maurice, Carlyle, Arnold and Ruskin) in the nineteenth century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge emerges in terms of this study as pre-eminent. Visionary, poet, sage, dramatist, literary and dramatic critic, Coleridge wrote: 'It is the privilege of the few to possess an idea: of the generality of men, it might be more truly affirmed that they are possessed by it' (Colmer, 1976, p. 13).

This work essays the task of establishing connections between the religious ideas of the few (the leaders of the Oxford Movement, Christian Socialism, Latitudinarianism and the Broad Church) and 'the generality of men', to show that those ideas, sometimes intentionally but more often unintentionally, were instrumental in the transformation which the theatre underwent in Victorian England.

Enter boldly, for here, too, there are gods. (Morley, 1891, p. 25)