

ABSTRACT

DOUBT AND FAITH IN LATE NINETEENTH
CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

By

Roy Melvin Anker

America's cultural pluralism and religious sectarianism have always complicated the task of defining its religious mood at any point in its history. The difficulty applies particularly to American religion in the late nineteenth century when orthodoxy confronted the challenges posed by Darwinism, the higher criticism, and comparative religion. By looking closely at the religious fiction of doubt and faith in eleven separate popular and elite authors, the six chapters of the dissertation attempt to understand the nature and scope of America's response to scepticism.

The first chapter examines Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896), a novel which won wide popularity in the late 1890's. Through the experience of the novel's minister-protagonist whose fate foreshadows

America's future, Frederic portrays the displacement of America's traditional spiritual-moral energy by subtle forms of a reductionist epistemology which revere only the empirical and accept self-interest as an ethical norm. The natural consequence of this secularist perspective, facilely rationalized by the new thought, leads to a social and political elitism that bodes ill for America's egalitarian ideal which demanded a measure of self-forgetfulness inspired only by a faith in the Transcendent. Similar concerns with the social complexion of America and an incipient empiricism informed part of the lifelong religious inquiry of well-known critic and novelist William Dean Howells, whose fiction is examined in Chapter Three. Through the first half of his career, Howells sought conspicuous indications of beneficent providence amid the social turmoil of urban-industrial America. Howells eventually exchanged this insistence for more complex notions of individual suffering and expiation modeled on the paradigm of Jesus. Coincident with this interest in the social was Howells' quest for conclusive evidence of an afterlife, which was initiated in The Undiscovered Country in 1880. In time, this desire led

Howells to respect the subjective and non-rational as modes to "truth" at the expense of the empiricist's insistence on factual knowledge.

Chapter Two looks at popular female novelists Augusta Evans Wilson, Elizabeth Phelps Ward, and Margaret Deland, whose best-selling fiction often sought to understand and mediate between doubt and faith in a time of widespread religious confusion. These writers were joined in their efforts by the novels of clergyman-turned-novelist E. P. Roe, which are considered in Chapter Four. Like his feminine counterparts, except in a more direct fashion, Roe through his score of volumes offered rationales for the trustworthiness of the subjective experience of Christian truth. As authors Wilson and Ward, Roe saw a conspicuous Christian piety of compassion as an effective rebuttal to the empiricist's demand for objective validation of religious claims.

The defense of heterodoxy in late nineteenth-century fiction appeared in the work of three noted sceptics, Celia Parker Woolley, Helen H. Gardener, and Minot Judson Savage. Chapter Five surveys their fiction which integrated old-style deistic criticisms of Christian

doctrine and practice with the new insights afforded by Darwinism, the higher criticism, and comparative religion. Both Gardener and Savage saw inevitable progress within the fabric of evolution. Mrs. Woolley agreed but dissented from religious liberalism's excessive emphasis on the rational at the expense of emotional and non-rational modes of knowing. Joining in this criticism of the new scepticism were historian Henry Adams and turn-of-the-century novelist James Lane Allen, who are considered in the closing chapter. Adams' Esther (1884) rejects both scientific and religious, non-rational modes of knowing as inconclusive, although both have some validity. Allen's many novels develop a comparable agnosticism. As did Mrs. Woolley, Allen noted the negative emotional and moral effects of an exclusive devotion to the distant ideals of any optimistic evolutionary faith.

Taken as a group, despite their obvious differences, these eleven notable fiction-writers, in their explicit subject matter and their expectations of readers' knowledge of contemporary religious issues, indicate that America's response to the late nineteenth century's sceptical challenges to faith were serious, reflective, and widespread.

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A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1973

64071

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1973

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is my pleasure to acknowledge Distinguished Professor Russel B. Nye, the chairman of my doctoral committee, for his guidance and consideration in the preparation of this thesis. I also wish to express gratitude to Professor Robert T. Anderson of the Department of Religion for his reading of the individual chapters as they appeared. The same appreciation extends to Professor C. David Mead and Professor Victor M. Howard of the English Department who read the final draft of the thesis and served on my doctoral committee. I wish also to acknowledge Professor James H. Pickering, Graduate Chairman of the Michigan State University English Department, whose advice over the past few years was often timely and served to expedite the length of the doctoral program. Lastly, I wish to thank my wife Ellen, without whose patience and good humor this project might never have been completed.

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INTRODUCTION

In his essay on "Evolution and Theology in America," historian Stow Persons comments that

Few comprehensive generalizations do justice to the evolutionary impact upon American religious thought because of the wide variety of beliefs and attitudes in a community that had long cherished the spirit of religious freedom. An exhaustive study would require the examination of each sect and denomination in order to determine the nature and the bitterness of the conflict, which doctrines were jeopardized, how the group reacted in defense of its traditions, and what concessions if any were made to the evolutionary outlook.¹

¹"Evolution and Theology in America," in Evolutionary Thought in America (Archon Books, 1968), p. 425.

The difficulties that Persons notes in assessing the impact of evolution on American religion apply equally well in determining the influence of two other major intellectual movements of the late nineteenth century, the higher criticism of the Bible and comparative religion. These combined with Darwinism to redefine the traditional parameters of doubt and faith in Christian orthodoxy. It will

be the purpose of this dissertation to examine, through a survey of the Gilded Age's fiction of religious doubt, the nature and extent of the religious impact made by these three movements. A careful analysis of popular and elite fiction-writers affords a view of what the authors themselves, who in only two cases were clergymen, and their often very considerable audiences were thinking religiously.

Wherever possible, this study will follow a novelist's thought through his canon in order to observe any new influences or changes in his religious direction. Often, however, as with Harold Frederic and Margaret Deland, novels of doubt were a one-shot venture at dramatizing the author's or the public's religious attitudes. In any case, the popularity, if not the durability of the age's religious fiction offers some indication of the variety and scope of serious religious inquiry. Other novels with religious subjects, such as Lew Wallace's famous Ben-Hur (1880) and Charles Sheldon's In His Steps (1898), found popularity in late century America, but this study will restrict itself to that religious fiction which directly confronts the religious issues peculiar to the late nineteenth century in America.

In order to attend directly to these problems of faith, we will look at those writers who reached maturity and began their careers in fiction by the appearance of Charles Darwin's The Origin of the Species in 1859, the volume which most symbolized and publicized incipient religious questions of long standing. Except for one novel, Augusta Evans Wilson's Beulah (1859), all the fiction under examination here followed the Civil War, beginning with Elizabeth Phelps Ward's The Gates Ajar (1868) and ending with William Dean Howells' The Leatherstocking (1916). In four cases, in order to perceive a writer's changing attitudes, fiction written after the turn of the century has been pursued. The years following the Civil War to the close of the century evidence a steady frequency of well-known religious fiction, although the century's last two decades show an increased number of self-conscious novels of doubt and faith.

Each of the eleven writers considered in the following chapters responded in a different way to the dominance of Darwinian thought in the intellectual milieu of the late nineteenth century. More than the higher criticism and comparative religion together, the validity and meaning of evolutionary theory preoccupied theological

debate. The Presbyterians offer a typical example of intra-denominational disagreement. While Princeton Seminary theologian Charles Hodge rejected Darwinism outright in his What Is Darwinism? in 1874, his seminary President, Scotchman James McCosh, attempted to reconcile evolution with traditional concepts of design in nature. Scientists matched the interpretive disputes of theologians. Indeed, eminent Harvard biologists Louis Agassiz and Asa Gray echoed the differences of Hodge and McCosh, Agassiz denying evolution and Gray christianizing it within the Nicene creed. Such contention among the orthodox was common and needs little elaboration, but evolution was no less influential for admitted secularists. As the sceptics discussed in Chapter Five illustrate, Darwinian thought not only confirmed and reinvigorated their older, deist-style criticism of Christian doctrine, but it offered a new, alternative vision of progress from which to protest against the static and moribund culture of American Christianity.

On the part of theology, two distinct attitudes emerged toward Darwinism in particular and the domains of science in general. The "dogmatic" position, as Herbert W. Schneider names it, contended that the Bible "does not

teach science and science does not teach religion." In declaring this separation, dogmaticians "accept Copernican astronomy and Darwinian evolution in so far as they are systems of natural science, but . . . reserve the right to declare the truth about God and the soul." A second group, the "philosophical," sought reconciliation or synthesis of the facts of science with the truths of revelation.² For these later, the issues posed by the Darwinian

²"The Influence of Darwin and Spencer on American Philosophical Theology," Journal of the History of Ideas, VI (January, 1945), p. 3.

controversy centered in the problematic nature of history, creating "a crisis of historical consciousness," as historian Martin E. Marty has concluded.³ Darwinism over-

³Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America (New York, 1970), p. 189.

turned prevalent religious understandings of time and natural order. It initially affronted traditional Christian assertions of spontaneous creation that are suggested by Genesis. Similarly, the precise chronology of human history, estimated by one theologian to be approximately six thousand years, met a severe rebuke in conceptions of an

almost limitless time of natural law stretching far into a non-human pre-history.⁴

⁴Langdon Gilkey, "Evolution and the Doctrine of Creation," in Science and Religion: New Perspectives in the Dialogue, ed. Ian G. Barbour (New York, 1968), p. 160.

Perhaps the greatest threat to Christian suppositions came in the Darwinian's vision of historical and natural process. Historian Richard Hofstadter comments that by the advent of Darwin, "For nearly a century the argument of design, as popularized by the English theologian William Paley, had been standard proof of the existence of God."⁵ While the Bible offers some support for

⁵Social Darwinism in American Thought, Rev. ed. (New York, 1959), p. 25.

the idea, Christian theology had incorporated design, according to Stow Persons, as an accommodation to the "philosophy and spirit of the Enlightenment," which had envisioned nature to be a sufficient indication of the character of God and a proper guide "for the purposes of rational worship."⁶ With the orderly distribution and

⁶"Evolution and Theology in America," p. 422.

immutability of the biological species as its key tenet, the appeal to design, as R. J. Wilson has summarized, "was simultaneously a scientific interpretation of nature, a theological argument, and a comforting moral view of the world."⁷ Theologically, the permanent forms posited in

⁷Darwinism and the American Intellectual: A Book of Readings (Homewood, Illinois, 1967), p. 3.

the design theory were held important, in Langdon Gilkey's words, "because they were purposefully or teleologically preadapted to each other and to their environment by the wisdom and benevolence of the Creator in a glorious harmony of ends and means."⁸ Darwin's theory replaced this

⁸Religion and the Scientific Future: Reflections on Myth, Science, and Technology (New York, 1970), p. 11.

static, balanced view of nature with the random variation of species emerging from aimless natural selection. By the early nineteenth century, geology had offered empirical proof of extinct species, and developmental anatomy soon showed man's connection with lower forms of life. Ultimately, from a Darwinian perspective, man arose "not from the purposive providence of God but out of the conflux of the random novelty of variation and the ineluctable

law of survival--strictly and solely the child of change and determinism."⁹ Such a view contradicted traditional

⁹ Gilkey, "Evolution and the Doctrine of Creation," p. 164.

Christian versions of the mechanics of creation and nature and, on a more profound level, all hope for a teleological dimension to history.

In the two decades following Darwin's Origin, few scientists and religious or secular thinkers perceived evolution in these bleak terms. Non-Christian Herbert Spencer, an English theoretician who in major ways anticipated Darwin, saw inevitable progress within the fabric of evolutionary change. Two famous American preachers, Congregationalist Henry Ward Beecher and Episcopalian Phillips Brooks, integrated evolution into essentially orthodox structures by diluting the randomness of natural selection.¹⁰ Divine immanence in natural process replaced

¹⁰ Winthrop S. Hudson, The Great Tradition of the American Churches (New York, 1963), Chapter Eight.

older reverence for transcendence, and America's Victorian optimism received encouragement from the idea of the providential operation of an ever-progressing history.

More negative interpretations of Darwinism awaited the second thoughts which appeared in the last two decades of the century. The blind, heedless force portrayed in the literary naturalism of Frank Norris and Jack London found confirmation in the social chaos of late nineteenth-century industrial turmoil. With reference to those novelists in this study, eminent novelist and critic William Dean Howells struggled with Darwinism as a threat to his hopes for a discernible moral order superintended by a beneficent deity. The two heterodox tempters of the protagonist in Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896) argue for moral fatalism and self-interest from Darwinian criteria. Patrician historian Henry Adams offered an agnostic perception of an indeterminable and unlimited force of history in his novel Esther (1884). Through a series of novels bridging the turn of the century, best-selling novelist James Lane Allen expressed reservations about a slow cosmic process that at times seemed impenetrable and often operated at the price of unwarranted individual suffering. In her second novel, Beulah (1859), Augusta Evans Wilson considered and rejected a directionless nature to see God's love infused in its many benign faces. Other orthodox novelists,

E. P. Roe and Elizabeth Phelps Ward, noted the evolutionary hypothesis but went on, as did Howells and Frederic, to grapple with the underlying epistemological questions which empiricism asked of faith.

Only three of our writers gave unqualified endorsement to an optimistic version of evolution: feminist Helen H. Gardener, clergywoman Celia Parker Woolley, and noted theologian Minot Judson Savage, one of the first American preachers to articulate such a view. All theological liberals (Miss Gardener was perhaps an agnostic), they dissented vigorously from the non-empirical theological categories and assumptions of Christian tradition. Instead, they emphasized the necessity of reason and close attention to substantiable fact as norms and benefits of evolutionary progress. Only Mrs. Woolley cautioned, as would her conservative brethren, against the dangers of an exclusive rationalism and the neglect of subjective insight.

Without doubt, Darwinism made the largest impact of any intellectual movement on the American religious scene in the late nineteenth century, as the abundance of its commentators amply illustrates. Yet, not all of this response arose from the specific contentions of

Darwin's theory. It perhaps drew the greatest attention because for many Darwin's views "completed, confirmed, and radically symbolized the new scientific world view" of the "uniformity of mechanical cause."¹¹ The spirit of Darwin's scrupulous investigation of traditional assumptions was shared

¹¹Gilkey, "Evolution and the Doctrine of Creation," p. 164.

by other fields of contemporary historical scholarship which vitally contributed to the religious controversy of the Gilded Age. As historian Sydney E. Mead has noted, if Darwinian methodology helped formulate a "so-called 'new history,'" "The 'higher criticism' of the Bible was largely the application of the new history to the sacred volume."¹²

¹²The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America (New York, 1963), pp. 168-69.

By the late nineteenth century, the application of new literary and historical critical methods, especially the more accurate dating of manuscripts, had led to serious doubts about the infallibility of Christian revelation. John Herman Randall, Jr. comments that when scholars judged the Bible

by the same canons of investigation that were being applied to the study of Virgil, of Homer, of the medieval chronicles and records, the conviction was

forced upon men that the Scriptures embodied the experience and the early myths and the later spiritual discoveries of the Hebrew people over a long period of time, and that to attempt to look upon Holy Writ as all of one piece, and as all equally inspired and valuable, was impossible. A careful study of the texts to determine the authorship and date of the various parts--the so-called "higher criticism"--revealed fundamental discrepancies with traditional beliefs. Differences in style, contradictory accounts of the same even, conflicting commandments purporting to come from God, made the older Protestant view that every word and every point was divinely inspired and literally true, exceedingly difficult to reconcile with faith in the wisdom and rationality of God. . . . the sacred books became the record of early mythological and imaginative attempts to understand the world and its meaning, of sacred poetry, of religious and civil laws, and of the prophetic messages of noble souls.¹³

¹³The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Age, Rev. ed. (Boston, 1940), pp. 551-52.

Such traditional certainties as the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the genuineness of Old Testament prophecies, and the authorship of the Gospel of John soon fell under serious question. A related widespread endeavor to discover the human, "historical Jesus" as distinct from the biblical Christ received impetus from Ernest Renan's The Life of Jesus (1896).

Biblical criticism had long been a tradition within the Christian church. Roman Catholicism had always interpreted the Bible freely, perhaps because of an alternative authority in tradition. At the start of the Reformation,

Luther's radical Christocentrism had relegated the Old Testament to virtual unimportance. English Deists both accepted and rejected the Bible on the basis of natural law. The early nineteenth century in America had seen a small, but vigorous movement of biblical criticism. Liberal Harvard professor Andrews Norton contended with the conservative scholarship of Moses Stuart, the grandfather of Elizabeth Phelps Ward whose fiction will be considered in Chapter Two. The failure of this movement to retain younger disciples, such as George Bancroft, and the interruption of the Civil War effectively ended its influence. Thus, when the biblical criticism re-emerged in America during the 1870's, its sources were almost exclusively German. Moreover, American theology and its constituency reacted as though biblical scholarship was of recent invention.¹⁴

¹⁴Jerry Wayne Brown, The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars (Middletown, Connecticut, 1969), p. 180.

Attacks upon the Bible in the late nineteenth century, if we can judge from the novels under consideration here, combined the information made available by the new historical criticism and the rational strategies of old-style deism. The later challenged the moral character of biblical personages, particularly those of Jehovah and his prophets and

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their teachings. Indeed the scepticism of well-known infidel Robert G. Ingersoll, whose disciple Helen H. Gardener we shall look at in Chapter Five, more often relied on a rationalistic moral criticism of the Bible than on the factual base of the higher criticism which undercut the Bible's traditional infallibility. Fellow sceptic, Minot Judson Savage, a prominent theologian and preacher who published a single novel Bluffton in 1878, utilized both approaches in a rationale for this liberal religion of evolutionary optimism. Unitarian clergywoman Celia Parker Woolley adopted the same approach in her novel of doubt and new, broader faith, Love and Theology (1887).

In novels of doubt which maintained a relative allegiance to the older orthodoxy Augusta Evans Wilson's heroine in Beulah (1859) finally returns to the Bible as man's only consolation and hope after rejecting it for its geological and historical inaccuracies. Assorted characters of Elizabeth Phelps Ward, granddaughter of biblical scholar Moses Stuart, are aware of biblical difficulties, but none are more affected than A Singular Life's Emanuel Bayard who is refused ordination because of his doubt about inerrancy of scripture and his denomination's treatment of the biblical understanding of hell. Bayard's doubts do not extend to the rightness of Jesus' ethics or the essential, ever-abiding love of God, however. An adherence to a strict biblicism and rigorous,

though loving Calvinism precipitate marital tragedy in Margaret Deland's John Ward, Preacher (1888). The prominence of uncertainties about the Bible in the novels of these best-selling authors was matched in the fiction of the Reverend E. P. Roe whose fiction tried to mediate faith's way between objective revelation and subjective experience.

The higher criticism also plays a crucial role in the heterodoxy of the hero in James Lane Allen's The Reign of Law (1900), although Allen does not enter into detail on specific issues and questions the adequacy of his hero's new confidence in an abstract evolutionary optimism. Similarly, in Harold Frederic's novel, the damnation of the Reverend Theron Ware results in part from the minister's uncritical embrace of Darwin and historical criticism of the Bible and a precipitant rejection of Christian ethics. The many novels of William Dean Howells contain references to issues of biblical criticism, although nowhere does he venture a discussion of them or an explicit attitude toward their merits. For Howells, as for most of these eleven writers, mention of the issues of the higher criticism presupposed reader awareness of the complexity and range of debate surrounding a particular topic. More often than not, references to biblical controversies served as touchstones for the reader that sufficed

to convey the intellectual-religious climate of an author's world.

A last major intellectual enterprise which also arose from the new historical consciousness was the study of world religions. The increased understanding of historical theology in Christendom--the way in which culture affected theological formulation at any one time--soon led, as Sydney Ahlstrom has explained in his recent religious history of the American people, to a consideration of the

relation of Hebrew religion to its ancient neighbors, or the Apostle Paul's indebtedness to Greek thought and the oriental mystery cults. In these pursuits many of the major disciplines for studying the history of religions were first developed. But it was the Western discovery of the great "higher religions" of the Orient, above all Hinduism and Buddhism, that raised the more difficult questions, because these highly philosophical religions possessed an intrinsic appeal for an age already imbued with idealistic philosophy and pantheistic theology Highly enthusiastic historical accounts raised more direct theological questions, above all, how is one to demonstrate the superiority and finality of Christianity? Even disclaimers raised the specter of religious relativism.¹⁵

¹⁵A Religious History of the American People (New Haven, 1972), p. 773.

Within such logic, Christianity could easily succumb to relativism, like other world religions. Its claim to absolute authority, embodied in the Bible and doctrine, faced yet another challenge. On Christianity, with scripture and dogma

under assault, lay the burden of proof--a word which would focus the energies of those novelists wishing to salvage Christianity's unique, transhistorical character.

Comparative religion prominently influenced the thinking of only a few of the novelists under consideration here. Harold Frederic's orthodox minister in The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896) is taken aback by the atheism of a Catholic priest and a Darwinian scientist who refer to the Incarnation as the "Christ-myth," which is only one of numerous similar myths in world religions. Augusta Evans Wilson, whose heroines and heroes show endless interest and erudition in comparative religious studies, cites the emerging discipline as a frequent cause for scepticism. The three heterodox novelists discussed in Chapter Five--Minot Judson Savage, Celia Parker Woolley, and Helen H. Gardener--discount Christianity as simply another of the world's religions, if not an inferior one. They strive, as does Mrs. Woolley's Arthur Forbes in Love and Theology (1887), for a "natural and universal religion" which transcends the self-interested parochialism of dogmatic Christianity. Like the higher criticism, scholarship in comparative religion added to the threat contained in Darwinian thought. Its picture of developing world religions with similar structures and

preoccupations, all of relatively equal value, conformed to the general thrust of the evolutionary hypothesis.

These novels clarify one further issue that has received scant attention in treatments of the Gilded Age's religious crisis. That is, the increasing conflict between scientific-empirical criteria for knowledge and the insights and intuitions of the non-rational subjective self. With the loss of the objective authority of scripture, Christian orthodoxy of necessity turned to alternative modes of knowing to validate its religious faith. Such a conflict runs through the fiction of all the novelists in the dissertation, regardless of their place on the religious spectrum of the late nineteenth century. This dilemma sought to locate the sources of religious belief when traditional rationales had been largely and widely discounted. Perhaps because the novelist, by the very nature of his task, was concerned with showing the processes of doubt and faith, this epistemological question rests at the center of religious debate in these novels. The particular issues of Darwinism, biblical higher criticism, and comparative religion point the way to this foundational question which has since affected all modes of human self-understanding. The nature of this threat to America's basically Protestant faith emerges in the fact that Catholicism remained largely

unaffected by the attack on the Bible because of its alternative source of religious authority in tradition.

Thus Chapter One finds Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896) expressing reservations about America's moral and political fate when the reductionist empiricism of modern science has fully displaced its traditional religious legacy. The implications of a strict empiricism affect the perspectives of two popular feminine novelists of the late century, Augusta Evans Wilson and Elizabeth Phelps Ward, in the second chapter. A third novelist in that chapter, Margaret Deland, considers the effect of two types of religious rationalism within marriage in her best-selling John Ward, Preacher (1888). In Chapter Three, William Dean Howells' lengthy fictional canon meditates on two questions posed by empiricism: the nature of religious certainty, especially in the probability of an afterlife, and the reality of a discernible moral logic in man's affairs. The fourth chapter will discuss the Reverend E. P. Roe's popular efforts at illustrating the trustworthiness of religious subjectivity in the private encounter with Christian truth. The novels of Unitarian clergywoman, Celia Parker Woolley, discussed in Chapter Five, show the dangers of an inordinate empiricism in religious liberalism. A fellow Unitarian, the Reverend Minot Judson Savage, seeks

to balance empirical certainty with the subjective assertions of traditional and cross-cultural religious experience. A last figure in Chapter Five, feminist Helen H. Gardener, attacks excessive subjectivity in orthodox Christian doctrine and reliance on the Bible. The dissertation's last chapter analyzes the ambivalence of Henry Adams and James Lane Allen toward the supposed certainty and moral implications of new faith in Darwinism. In his novel Esther (1884), Adams looks at the epistemological problems arising from Darwinism, recognizing the persistent authority of a non-rational mystical insight of an indeterminable nature. Allen, on the other hand, while recognizing the probable accuracy of the evolutionary framework, expressed doubts about the emotional adequacy of any moral or religious system that might be based upon its sketchy outlines. Through his many novels, Allen always admitted the impenetrable, circumscribing mystery of man's existence which was never fully dispelled by evolutionary conceptions of cosmic purpose.

The interest in religious questions throughout these novels of the late nineteenth century in America gives some indication of the time's religious tenor. As always, it is difficult to say why the public responded as it did to the more popular of these novels. Those novelists who won wide

recognition with their work, such as E. P. Roe or Augusta Evans Wilson, among others, often stocked them with sentiment and melodrama, two staples in the Gilded Age's reading taste. Even Harold Fredericks The Damnation of Theron Ware, a profound and well-wrought work, contains elements of melodrama and sensation which might have occasioned its best-seller status. The lasting work of William Dean Howells, which was well-known but comparatively little read, exhibits multiple religious themes whose subtlety probably eluded many an idol reader. In any case, part of the difficulty of assessing the pervasiveness of religious doubt in America by looking at its literature stems from the lack of a conspicuous literary figure, such as a Tennyson or Hardy in England, who articulated, and probably stimulated, a nation's doubt. Perhaps the best indication of the awareness of contemporary religious problems of America's considerable reading public appears in the fact that many novelists of the period who dealt with religious questions expected a degree of common knowledge on the part of the reader. More certain, however, is the complexion of the religious doubt and the strategies of faith that attempted to influence the American reading public during the last half of the nineteenth century. It is to this subject which we now turn in the following chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

HAROLD FREDERIC'S THE DAMNATION OF
THERON WARE: AN EMBLEM OF AMERICA'S
SPIRITUAL AND MORAL LOSS

The year 1896 stands out in nineteenth-century American fiction because two novels of serious scepticism finished fourth and fifth on the year's best-seller lists.¹

¹Alice Payne Hackett, 60 Years of Best Sellers 1895-1955 (New York, 1956), p. 96. For an account of the sales and critical reception of The Damnation, see Austin Briggs, Jr., The Novels of Harold Frederic (Ithaca, N.Y., 1969), pp. 101-04.

Not since 1888 with Mrs. Humphry Ward's Robert Elsmere and Margaret Deland's John Ward, Preacher, had two religious novels attracted widespread attention, in this case Elizabeth Phelps Ward's A Singular Life and Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware. The American Mrs. Ward and Frederic explore in detail the ways and consequences of doubt in their heroes, in each instance a young clergyman of conservative Protestant background. They differ, however, in their portrayal of serious scepticism. In the

absence of doctrinal certainty, Mrs. Ward's hero clings more steadfastly to the ethical dimensions of Christ's life and teachings, as was typical of the Social Gospel.²

²James Ward Smith, "Religion and Science in American Philosophy," in The Shaping of American Religion, eds. J. W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton, 1961), p. 424.

Frederic's Theron Ware, on the other hand, scuttles his past and moves westward for a career in real estate and politics.

Neither novel offers a satisfactory resolution to the Gilded Age's problems of doubt and theological affirmation. As discussed in Chapter Two, Mrs. Ward's novels refer to the experiential efficacy of the biblical imperative of love which remains untouched by doubt and provides a new theological starting point. With Frederic, our chief concern here, meaning and intent are far more ambiguous, as a long history of critical disagreement testifies.³ In The Damnation, which takes place in the 1880's,

³Among the critics who have looked at The Damnation, diversity of opinion is only outdone by the various interpretations of the significance and functions of the novel's assorted characters. Stanton Garner has recently commented in his Harold Frederic (Minneapolis, 1969) that The Damnation offers one of the "most widely misread novels in American literature" (p. 34); Austin Briggs, Jr.,

on this same matter, notes that only "recently have critics begun to look past the subject matter of The Damnation in order to see what the novel is really about" (Briggs, Novels, p. 107). Most critics find the novel's meaning related in some way to Theron Ware's cultural predicament. Theron's intellectual and cultural innocence becomes emblematic of an America that must contend with new, disturbing elements in almost all aspects of its experience. For example, in The American 1890's (New York, 1966), Larzer Ziff sees The Damnation as "a symbolic tale of America's progress to disunity in the latter half of the nineteenth century" that eventually culminates in the nation's "loss of innocent purpose" (pp. 212, 214). Similarly, Everett Carter in his John Harvard Library edition of The Damnation (Cambridge, 1960), expands Ziff's comments to include a sexual and aesthetic as well as an intellectual awakening and fall (pp. xxi-xxii). For Robert Morris Lovett in his introduction to a 1924 edition (New York: Albert and Charles Boni), Frederic deals directly with the "temptation" presented to the rustic "when the superiority of the pioneer gives way to the inferiority complex of the provincial" and he is suddenly confronted with "a culture which is beyond his understanding complicated as it often is with a sexual desire which is beyond his satisfaction" (p. xi). John Henry Raleigh largely concurs with Lovett in identifying Frederic's meaning in terms of the problems of pride that prompt Theron Ware to aspire "to a cultural perspective and to a woman who embodies it that are far too rich for his rather meagre blood" ("The Damnation of Theron Ware," American Literature, XXX [May, 1958], 210). Both Everett Carter and Raleigh extend their conclusions about The Damnation to note the emergence of pragmatic knowledge as a necessary consequence to the pain of lost innocence and injured pride. Carter suggests that such knowledge provides the "central reality of the tale" (p. xv), while for Raleigh it signals the "triumph of pragmatic wisdom" in the American mind (222). In "Harold Frederic's Young Goodman Ware: The Ambiguities of the Realistic Romance" (Modern Fiction Studies, VIII [Winter, 1962-63]), George W. Johnson differs from most critics in interpreting The Damnation in terms of the freedom of the American imagination to dream of "a democratic vista of harmony and resolution no matter how often or how far the vista recedes" (363). Austin Briggs uniquely focuses on the centrality

of the comic mode in *Frederic* that points to the "contrast between what men aspire to and what they achieve" and transcends cultural and historical considerations, although it often employs them in its service (Briggs, p. 14). Finally, Stanton Garner sees *Frederic* summoning America to a greater moral attentiveness at a time when its traditional values have been displaced by new intellectual and social forces and it must make its "way among the tangle of often questionable choices of the [modern] world-maze" (Garner, p. 38).

Frederic's concern is with the impact of sceptical thought on traditional religious concepts of morality, both private and social. In the place of Christianity's God and values, he discovers an emerging pragmatism and scientific rationalism. He explores America's direction as it adopts these new references and loses faithfulness to a transcendent ideal that encourages moral energy and social harmony. The nature of religion's modern surrogates--frontier individualism, aestheticism, and scientism--are detailed in their effect on the novel's main character, the young Methodist preacher Theron Ware. In this way, the minister's fate foreshadows America's future.

As *Frederic's* title indicates, the novel's main interest and interpretive problem lies in the process and nature of the Reverend Theron Ware's damnation. Near the end of the story, after his three-day debauch, the

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preacher articulates this focus to Sister Soulsby, his mentor and confidante, stating that

"Six months ago I was a good man. I not only seemed to be good, to others and to myself, but I was good. I had a soul; I had a conscience. I was going along doing my duty, and I was happy in it Now, how do you explain that [his moral deterioration]? How can it be explained? Was I really rotten to the core all the time, years ago, when I seemed to everybody, myself and the rest, to be good and straight and sincere."⁴

⁴Harold Frederic, The Damnation of Theron Ware (Chicago, 1896), p. 498. All page references in parentheses will be to this edition.

In other words, was Theron damned from the start, without moral worth, or was his final plight brought about by his encounter with the alien, modern world he confronts in the story? In a half year's time, it seems, the hopeful and talented young preacher turns infidel and, not long after, into a charlatan, thief, would-be lecher, and snob, which all the while he mistakes for "'uphill instead,'" or, to use the ironic title of the English edition, Illumination (p. 340)?

Frederic's adept handling of the psychological facts of the novel manages to include the reader in Theron's uncertainty and self-deception. Thus, a full

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understanding of the author's intent in Theron's fate depends on a recognition of three vital factors that shape his world. Foremost is Frederic's perception of the historical situation of the late nineteenth-century Methodism of which Theron is a product and active participant. Second is Theron's own character, a mixture of noble traits and moral limitations. A last element involves a series of startling, heterogeneous people and points of view that Theron meets in his first months in Octavius--a priest, a scientist, an attractive aesthete, and a matronly debt-raiser. Together, these factors contribute to Theron's fall and, in their respective roles, strike a pessimistic note in Frederic's assessment of the culture that decides Theron's damnation.

One of these underlying factors in The Damnation, often overlooked by critics, is a moral tension between Methodism's past and its present. On one level, this contrast has importance as it gives rise to a comparable tension in Theron Ware's character. On another, the Methodist past establishes a positive moral norm from which to judge the ethical stature of other characters

and their points of view. Theron Ware's story opens on the last day of the Nedahma Conference annual meeting when the ministerial assignments for the following year are to be announced. As the omniscient narrator surveys the overflow crowd in the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Tecumseh, he laments a marked difference in the appearances of a wide range of clergy in the audience. Among these, the "impress of zeal and moral worth seemed to diminish by regular gradations as one passed to younger faces" from the older (pp. 8-9). With their presence "in the nature of a benediction" to the days of frontier evangelism, these elderly clerics in attendance, "the venerable Fathers in Israel," seem an antique remnant of bygone "heroic times" "when a plain and homely people had been served by a fervent and devoted clergy-- by preachers who gave their lives without dream of earthly reward to poverty and to the danger and wearing toil of itinerant missions through rude frontier settlements" (pp. 7-8). Waiting tranquilly for their deaths, outmoded and dependent on church charity, the narrator respectfully concludes that "even to the least sympathetic vision there show upon them the glorified light of the Cross and crown" (p. 8).

The long-suffering service of the Methodist forebearers contrasts with the "modern and go-ahead" congregation of Tecumseh, whose frame of mind the younger ministers generally share (p. 11). Far from the "plain and homely," these prestige-minded church people could not imagine that they were not "an improvement on those who had gone before them" (p. 9). Their new church building marked a "standard of progressive taste" unparalleled in the Nedahma Conference. Locally, rivalling the Presbyterians in wealth and social distinction, they lacked only "an attractive and fashionable preacher" to fulfill their vision of modern piety (pp. 9, 11). When the desired prize, none other than the Reverend Ware, is assigned elsewhere, many Tecumseh members desert the meeting in righteous anger. But the average cleric at the conference exhibits neither an archaic self-forgetfulness nor a piety of self-congratulation; rather, he is an inoffensive mixture of old and new tendencies--"goodness, candor" blended with a bland, "imperturbable self-complacency" (p. 8).

Somewhere between the rigor of Methodism's frontier past and Tecumseh's secularity lies the settled agricultural life of Octavius Methodism, the scene of Theron Ware's pastorate during the novel. While the rural folk

have lost the spirit of their founders, they have retained and solidified their creeds and customs, and, in so doing, repeat the desire of their urban brethren for some ground of social differentiation, whether it opposes other Protestants or the cultural aliens of Octavius' Italian and Irish Catholic population.

Frederic's views on late nineteenth-century Methodism also pertain to its environing culture whose ethical norms the church had adopted in place of its own spiritual and moral heritage. It is this tension between the church's past and its present secularity that Theron Ware must resolve in himself while he confronts the unsettling non-Methodist influences of Octavius. In any case, the Methodism of Tecumseh and Octavius had traveled a long distance from the selflessness and spiritual idealism of early Methodism's circuit riding preacher.⁵

⁵Only occasionally has a critic mentioned the moral dimension of the obvious historical cultural tension in The Damnation. In A Mirror of the Ministry in the Modern Novel (New York, 1959), Horton Davies observes that The Damnation is unique among religious novels because Frederic "gives a much more sympathetic account of the older generation" than the typical novel in which a loss of faith occurs. Davies also contends, as will this chapter, that Frederic would "seem to suggest rather the danger than the exhilaration of adopting the new thought and the emancipated manners of modern times" (p. 72). Austin Briggs, Jr. has noted the merit of the church

fathers but suggests that "No sooner has Frederic established this contrast . . . than he begins to play with it" by first identifying Theron with the noble past on superficial grounds and then by allowing Theron's actions and thoughts to demonstrate his actual unworthiness (Briggs, Novels, pp. 114-15). John Henry Raleigh also speaks of Theron Ware's link to the past, but neglects mention of the moral earnestness in order to associate Theron with the "two outbursts of emotionalism that occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Methodism in the Protestant religion and the Romantic love of Nature" ("Damnation," 214). Raleigh emphasizes this aspect of Theron's character to establish the significance of the eventual triumph of pragmatism in his thinking (222). While not praising Theron's character, Larzer Ziff still recognizes his link as a part of Methodism to "the Christian rural ideal" which is lamentably forsaken in the course of The Damnation for "a grab bag of third-hand tastes, ill-digested ideas, and smirkingly cynical opinions about those who nourished and shaped him,"--a "set of shoddy modern opinions" poorly understood and ill-suited for the "needs created by the changes which had destroyed the ideal" (The American 1890's, pp. 214-15).

Amid the variegated many at the Tecumseh conference meeting, there was among its mundane young an exception to the habit of increased secularity. The Reverend Theron Ware, with his "broad white brow, thoughtful eyes, and features moulded into . . . regularity of strength," reminds the narrator of the "American Senatorial type in those far-away days of clean shaven faces and moderate incomes before the War" (p. 12). Although the reference

is not directly religious, Ware seems a throwback to an earlier time, sharing more in the spirit of the fathers than in the snobbery and triviality of his churchly contemporaries. This early positive description of Ware initiates the central interpretive problem of the novel: does a fall of some variety take place in the story, and, if so, why and how and of what kind? Is the recouped man at the story's end "the same old Theron," but bereft of his delusion of goodness, as Austin Briggs, Jr. has argued?⁶

⁶Briggs, Novels, pp. 110, 111. Briggs' most distinguished ally in this view is Howells who suggested that with The Damnation, "When you get to the end . . . although you have carried a hazy notion in your mind of the sort of man Ware was, you fully realize, for the first time, that the author has never for a moment represented him anywhere as a good or honest man" (Quoted in Briggs, p. 120). Allen F. Stein also agrees with Briggs and Howells in "Evasions of an American Adam: Structure and Theme in The Damnation of Theron Ware," American Literary Realism 1870-1910, V (Winter, 1972) 23-36. Most critics, however, have neglected the intricacies of Theron's psychology for the nature of the new intellectual and cultural forces he confronts. Everett Carter contends that "Frederic tried to make Theron's innocence typical" of American innocence at the time. Consequently, Carter diminishes the role of individual psychological causes in Theron's fall from innocence to elaborate on the symbolic cultural significance of Theron's fate, finally regarding The Damnation as an introduction to the uncertainties of the twentieth century ("Introduction," p. xviii, passim). John Henry Raleigh largely repeats Carter's approach, although he stops to note the ambiguity in Theron's character, that he is "simultaneously likable and despicable." Theron

invites the reader's sympathy because he is "incurably boyish" in his adolescent enthusiasms and apparent sincerity (212). Yet, he is also susceptible to a "pride of intellect" (210). Raleigh implies that Theron's essentially static character only awaited a confrontation with the cultural and intellectual sophistication of the modern world for which his rural background had ill-equipped him ("Damnation," 211). George W. Johnson regards Theron as a relentless seeker after "freedom," both individual and social, "an imaginative wholeness and serenity, the dreamland of grace, utopia, and business-like idealism" ("Young Goodman Ware," 363). In this light, Theron's final damnation lies in the fact that after his fall, in the philosophic and ethical relativity of the modern world, he "does not and cannot know whether . . . his experience [his quest] has been a grand melodrama or a parlor anecdote--he cannot know how or whether he is really damned at all" (372).

To clarify the issue, a closer look at Theron Ware's character is necessary. When he first arrives in Octavius, assorted non-Methodists grant him a respect that agrees with the narrator's Senatorial image. For example, shortly before Theron's climatic debauch, the dying Michael Madden, brother of attractive sophisticate Celia, recalls that on arriving six months before, the young minister had the conduct and "face of a saint" (p. 441). Theron's pious conduct had even helped Michael to dispel doubts about the salvation of non-Catholic Christians (pp. 437-41). Levi Gorringer, the town lawyer and a church trustee, also expresses a liking for Theron, noting that he was "'different'" from and more "'human'"

than other ministers (pp. 184, 185). In Celia's last encounter with Theron, this time in a New York hotel room, she recites the amusement with which she, Forbes, and Ledsmar at first viewed his character, stating that "'you impressed us as an innocent, simple, genuine young character Your honesty of nature, your sincerity in that absurd religion of yours . . . pleased us a great deal'" (p. 478). A further indication of Theron's character at the story's beginning comes from his wife, who would perhaps know him best. Midway through the year in Octavius, noting her husband's new marital indifference and apparent reprobation, Alice Ware longs for "'the old days'" when Theron was "'just a good, earnest simple young servant of the Lord'" (p. 305).

But neither view, Briggs' nor the various characters', is entirely correct. At the start of the story, Theron Ware exhibits an ordinary, fully human mixture of active charity and latent self-concern. The chief tragedy of The Damnation lies in the collision of these tendencies within Ware and the gradual triumph of the latter. Briggs' view that Frederic is basically a writer of comedy, albeit of a rather dark variety, rests on his judgment that Theron's self-concern was always the moving force in his

behavior, Octavius only providing an occasion for its emergence. Briggs, however, arrives at this view by misinterpreting some important scenes in the novel. When Theron and Alice evidence a child-like excitement over possibly winning the valued Tecumseh appointment, their expectation and "simple pride" is seen as an indication of Theron's egoistic, "vaulting imagination [which] had already occupied" the Tecumseh pulpit (p. 13).⁷

⁷Briggs, p. 116.

Briggs also accuses Theron of cowardice in dealing with his belligerent trustees: he supposedly exchanges his wife's bonnet flowers for not having to pay parsonage repair bills. A closer reading of the confrontation with the trustees reveals that Theron understandingly concedes to "old, simple, primitive" Methodism's prohibition on colorful dress, but he experiences growing "stiffness in his moral spine" at the trustees' obvious grasp for financial and congregational power (pp. 45, 50). Theron sees through their pretense of homely piety, and the meeting ends in a contentious stalemate. That Theron's behavior with the trustees is at least justifiable is confirmed by the "deliberate wink" that is left with him by

non-Methodist trustee Levi Gorringer, one of the novel's more admirable characters (p. 53). As for the flowers themselves, their removal from Alice's bonnet represents an injustice that Theron freely admits and offers to rectify in full (p. 56).

Briggs is more accurate, however, in his criticism of Theron's behavior in his previous pastorate in Tyre, another rural farming community. The moments immediately before the trustees' arrival find Theron reflecting on that segment of his past in the ministry, Octavius being his third charge. His thoughts reveal notably unadmirable character traits during what he himself considers an "unworthy epoch in his life history" (p. 36).

It seems that after some months in his second charge, the exuberant, newly married minister and wife suddenly found themselves eight hundred dollars in debt. The narrator sympathizes that a man in Theron's position, a respected member of the clergy "who receives from all his fellow-men a special deference of manner and speech, is in the nature of things prone to see the grocer's book and butcher's bill through the little end of the telescope" (p. 32). As common to newlyweds as Theron's pecuniary imprudence might be, a demeaning hostility toward

his congregation appears after reassignment to Tyre "to pay his debts, and drain the cup of disciplinary medicine to its dregs" (p. 34). Aware of his eminent preaching ability, Theron deliberately "withheld himself from any oratorical display which could afford" his parishioners gratification. Further, with regard to his future when he might finally be liberated from Tyre, an "ambition, at once embittered and tearfully solicitous, possessed him" (p. 35). Both inadvertent cause and victim of his unhappy situation, a defensive pride of social superiority emerged to compensate for his humiliation. At last for Theron, it became unpleasant, as it had not been in the first months of his ministry, "to sit at table with the unfragrant hired man, and still worse to encounter the bucolic confusion between the function of knives and forks" (p. 26).

The full weight of Briggs' indictments of Theron's character is somewhat mediated, however. In the matter of the hired hand, while "conscious of having moved along" socially, Theron was not sure that his refinement was, "after all, an advance" (p. 26). In addition, sitting in the parsonage study, Theron deeply regrets his past-- "thank God! All that was past and gone now"--and looks

to future pastoral challenges: "the Call sounded, resonant and imperative . . . and there was no fibre of his being, which did not stir in devout response" (p. 37). Even though this new dedication arose in part, as some critics have pointed out, from the emotional intensity of subjective religion, this constitutes no real reason to doubt either the sincerity or commitment within Theron's sense of calling "which beckoned him with a new and urgent significance" (p. 36).⁸

⁸Austin Briggs dismisses the significance of Theron's religious promptings because he considers them unrelated to Theron's conduct which in Briggs' mind is unworthy (p. 121). Yet, as this chapter will contend, there is some correlation between Theron's religious devotion and the consequences of his actions. John Henry Raleigh makes somewhat the same assumption but is more reasonable in suggesting the unsuitability of a subjectively-oriented frame of mind for coping with the intellectual and social problems of the late nineteenth century in America (Raleigh, 215-17).

But there are less ambiguous, more positive aspects to Theron's character that have gone unnoticed. In the first days of his vocation, "People had prized him for his innocent candor and guileless mind, for his good heart, his pious zeal, his modesty about gifts notably above the average" (p. 29). Some of these notable traits persist into the events of the novel and point to the moral

seriousness that plays a major role in his personality. On his arrival in Octavius, various characters, as we have already seen, perceived him as saintly and human, honest and sincere in his religious practice. Theron himself expends some time in theological and moral reflection as indicated by his reverie in the parsonage study, and he is not reluctant to observe and defend moral distinctions. He regards the Methodist revivals, which manipulate religious emotion for economic ends, "'about the lowest down thing we [Methodists] produce'" (pp. 181, 48). Also disturbing is the detrimental impact that the legalistic application of the Methodist Discipline has on personal morality. "'Like the Beatitudes,'" the discipline should be taken as a "'spiritual suggestion,'" not as a vehicle for salvation (pp. 185, 160). Nor does the social significance of Christian morality escape Theron as it clearly does trustees Winch and Pierce and Sister Soulsby, another conspicuous figure in Methodism. He tells Levi Gorringer with self-directed satire that "'no modern nation could practice the principles handed down in the Sermon on the Mount and survive for twenty-four hours'" (p. 185). It is also significant that when Theron thinks of writing a book on Abraham, the moral complexity of the story attracts

him more than its strictly theological dimensions (p. 60). In sum, the young preacher takes himself and his religious profession seriously.

More indicative of Theron's character are his deeds, which reflect his thought and words. On numerous occasions, his moral concern appears in a sensitivity to the diverse world beyond his own consciousness. The first words Theron speaks in the novel console his wife at their loss of the Tecumseh appointment, introducing a solicitude that is often repeated in the early part of the story (p. 18). The same understanding is later offered to Levi Gorringe when the lawyer confesses that he once mistook romantic love for religious conversion (pp. 183-84). And it is Theron's instinctive sympathy and desire to serve that prompts him to follow the injured workman of Jeremiah Madden, thus introducing him to Father Forbes and Celia Madden and enmeshing him in a new, deceptive dimension of experience (pp. 61-62).

Theron's readiness to understand extends beyond sharing warmly in the experience of others. He demonstrates a receptiveness to novel ideas that transcends the limitations of his parochial background. Whether an evidence of his eager "guileless mind" or a conscious moral attitude,

this openness to people and things provides a positive norm against which to judge the man who at the close looks westward anticipating a future of politics and money. Early in the novel, when Theron first looks upon the spring landscape behind the Octavius parsonage, he intuits in nature a beneficent design that is independent of human agency, naming it "'God's goodness'" (p. 23). Yet, by the close of the novel, this capacity to revere something beyond himself--be it other people, ideas, or nature--has wholly disappeared, indicating the real measure of his damnation. A year later, Theron's response to a similar scene as he stands on the Soulsbys' doorstep is an egoistic image of an orator's power over a throng of political supplicants. This time, his eyes "did not soften and glow . . . at the thought of how wholly one felt sure of God's goodness in these wonderful new mornings of spring" (p. 511). Rather, nature now functions, like the rest of Theron's world, as a convenient adjunct for his exploitive egoism.

It is part of the irony of Frederic's novel that the openness that enables Theron to discern his cultural biases also begins him on the course of his own damnation. He readily appreciates, for example, the aesthetic

qualities of the death sacrament that Father Forbes administers to the Madden workman. Impressed and moved, Theron revises his estimate of the Irish and their religion to "the very verge of feeling that heaven must have heard" their petition (p. 77). When first faced with organ music, an expression forsworn by the ascetic Methodists, Theron recognizes its aesthetic merit as well as its sacred and secular moods (pp. 117, 126).

In sum, Theron who has always by his own acknowledgement "'lived in little places'" lacks, as Celia readily tells him, the confining "'prejudices and nonsense'" found in the "'ordinary Orthodox minister'" (pp. 147, 148-49). In his own words, he tries "'to preserve an open mind, and to maintain my faith that the more we know, the nearer we shall approach the throne.'" This confidence may be naive, but that the open mind exists at all, given Theron's background, merits some measure of respect (p. 111). Initially at least, Theron is not all bad, or at least has enough good in him, contrary to Briggs' opinion, to merit calling his slow moral decay a genuine fall or damnation.

As significant a role as Theron's pride plays in his downfall, it is important to note, as has George C. Johnson, that in his fall, Theron is "as much sinned against as sinning."⁹ In this regard, each of Theron's

⁹Johnson, "Young Goodman Ware," 336.

non-Methodist influences is culpable--Forbes, Ledsmar, Celia Madden, and Sister Soulsby, who despite her title apparently never joined the church. While each fosters pride in the young preacher, each is also a victim of the same fault. It is in the pedantic, cultured world of Forbes, Ledsmar, and Celia that Theron first confuses intellectual and aesthetic sophistication for moral wisdom. Confronted with the hypocrisy of his trustees, the complacency of his congregation, and the doubtful integrity of contemporary Methodism, Theron strives for an alternative intellectual and artistic identity that is encouraged by his new friends.

Critic Stanton Garner admits that Theron's three cultured influences "must share some of the blame" for his fall insofar as they are "careless" in their dealings with him. However, Garner errs in concluding that their guilt is somewhat diminished by the fact that each was "genuinely

concerned with his [Theron's] intellectual and spiritual growth."¹⁰ To the contrary, the weight of their actions

¹⁰Garner, Harold Frederic, p. 34.

and attitudes in relation to Theron, although often seemingly inadvertent, has substantial negative impact on the well-intentioned, fumbling naif. Forbes and Ledsmar are eager religious critics who readily parade their scepticism before Theron's untested orthodoxy. The history of Celia's relation with Theron reveals an impetuous, inconsiderate mode of behavior. In short, the three treat him as an object, an "'acquisition,'" as Celia terms it, for the amusement of their private coterie. When the "'mother's milk'" of Theron's innocence turns sour with conceit, each readily avoids contact with him, in two instances by lying, instead of charitably correcting him, as does the dying Michael Madden (p. 478).

Because Forbes and Ledsmar resemble one another in intellectual orientation and life style, they affect Theron in similar ways, although Forbes perhaps exerts more influence in his role of an elder clerical model. When Forbes first meets Theron at the cottage of the dying workman, he responds to Theron's comment on the

impressiveness of the last rites with a recitation of its ancient pagan origins which he has uncovered through a broad study of comparative religion (p. 71). In so doing, he makes the unwarranted assumption that Theron shares, for one, his "'understanding of just what it [religion] all amounts to'"--that is, "'savages in a dangerous wood in the dark, telling one another ghost stories around a camp fire'" (pp. 363, 357). Forbes display of learning brings Theron to see an intellectual inadequacy that plants the seeds of a scholarly aspiration which soon disintegrates into pretension.

Theron is further impressed with his own ignorance when he dines with Forbes and his "'particular friend'" Dr. Ledsmar, an ex-physician, Darwinian scientist, Assyriologist, and culinary expert (p. 101). To Theron's queries about Abraham on whom he intends to write a book, the pair inform him of the patriarch's non-existence as a person and the eponymous character of the name. For illustrative purposes Forbes injects the eponym Marmaduke, which offers "'the original prototype of our "divine intermediary"'" that culminates in "'this Christ-myth of ours'" (pp. 110-11). Theron's dismay at this unexpected view, soon succumbs, however, to his pleasure in the

"charm of contact with really educated people" (p. 111). A further charm is Forbes' life style of exquisite cookery, fine wine, cigars, "scholarly symbols," luxurious furniture, and classical engravings. The effect of this strange milieu is to make Theron feel, as does the rectory's electric doorbell, "rather more a countryman than ever" (p. 99). Impressed if not awed, Theron perceives this intellectual and aesthetic world as uplifting, as it is for him at times, and thus, morally superior to his own. He grasps after its mystique as an affirmation of his potential and an escape from the dispiriting pettiness of his congregation.

Through all their dealings with Theron, the motivation behind the directness of the priest and scientist remains uncertain. Forbes does restrain Ledsmar from disputing Theron's expression of faith in the reality of the "throne," but the eagerness and sense of privileged enlightenment with which the two express their views undercuts the possibility that they are genuinely concerned with Theron's well-being (p. 111). Although Celia Madden is usually an unreliable relayer of information--as the ambiguous kiss with Theron finally reveals--her comment about the intellectual arrogance of Forbes and Ledsmar

confirms the ambiguity in their motivation, stating that "'they think it smart to laugh at all the sweet and beautiful things in life, and to sneer at people who believe in ideals, and to talk about mankind being merely a fortuitous product of fermentation'" (p. 151). Ledsmar's pride emerges clearly in the pains he takes to make certain "that the young minister should appreciate the favor extended him" in inviting Theron to visit him at his home (p. 120). Secure in his special knowledge, Ledsmar disdains most everyone for good scientific reasons: musicians, women, most men, and the Chinese.

Some of the arrogance of Forbes and Ledsmar falls in line with their pessimistic views of man and history. From experience and study, Forbes has concluded that in spite of "'the most tremendous changes in races and civilizations and religions, stretching over many thousands of years,'" mankind is yet and "'will always remain'" unaltered from savage, prehistoric patterns of thought and behavior (pp. 357-360). Any hope of gradual improvement in human nature is "'utterly baseless and empty'" (p. 360). Rather the motive forces in man's psyche, "'self-protection and inertia,'" render him hopelessly egoistic. In repeating "'dead men's thought and belief'"

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and "'dead races" faiths and imaginings,'" modern religious man still imagines that the world was "'made for him, and that the rest of the universe is subordinated to him and his world, and that all the spirits and demons and gods occupy themselves exclusively with him and his affairs'" (pp. 109-10, 360). Those few enlightened who have rid their minds of superstition soon find that their explanations have "'very little influence'" with the masses and that, subsequently, the "'chief wisdom in life is to bend to the pressures'" of the "'crowd'" (p. 366).

Given this circumstance, Forbes has chosen to remain in the Church and to "'make the best of it'" (p. 363). A norm of personal convenience supplants professional honesty and public candor. He does find, however, some support for this tactic in the traditional Roman Catholic concept of hierarchical authority. In contending with Theron about the usefulness of broad public awareness of important religious problems, he asks

"Why should 'everybody' be supposed to know anything at all? What business is it of 'everybody's' to know things . . . the truth remains the truth, even though you give a charter to ten thousand separate numskulls to examine it in the light of their private judgment, and report that it is as many different varieties of something else" (p. 108).

To Forbes, the main activity of Protestant denomination-
alism, an "'absurd and fruitless wrangling over texts and
creeds,'" seems so much "'barbaric nonsense'" (p. 361).
And since man's nature demands that "'there must always
be a church,'" Forbes finds something "'intelligent and
rational,'" "'intelligible and fine'" in a church whose
obstacles to belief are declared "'sacred mysteries'" and
"'taken for granted'" (pp. 362, 361). For those enlight-
ened who wish to avoid public censure for scepticism,
Roman Catholicism provides "'a restful house'" where "'the
manners are charming, the service excellent, the decora-
tion and upholstery most acceptable to the eye, and the
music . . . divine'" (p. 361). But, more importantly,
Forbes believes that the church furnishes an indispensable
social artifice, stating that it serves "'first and fore-
most, as a police force [and] secondly . . . as fire in-
surance.'" It also provides the "'most pure atmosphere
for the growth of young children'" and "'the best obtain-
able machinery for marrying off one's daughters . . .
patching up quarrels, and so on.'" In this context the
priest earns his salary as an agent who insures the effi-
cient and tranquil functioning of society. For those
clergy who desire, theology is "'thrown in as a sort of

intellectual diversion, like the ritual of a benevolent organization'" (pp. 362-63). Thus, the church earns respect not for its pretention to any kind of ultimacy, but as a secular social apparatus whose virtue lies in adaptability to its culture (p. 361). Frederic symbolizes this fact in the new, imposing sanctuary of the Octavius Catholic church that still lacks a steeple, the traditional sign of aspiration and fidelity to a transcendent ideal (p. 98).¹¹

¹¹Most critics attribute no more than an inadvertent role to Forbes in accounting for Theron's moral disintegration. He is an instrument, along with Ledsmar, for broadening Theron's knowledge of the higher criticism of the Bible and of a pessimistic view of man that opposes Theron's optimism. John Henry Raleigh properly analyzes Forbes' thought and suggests that for Frederic he is a mouthpiece who "tells us what we are" ("Damnation," 227). This view may be quite correct, but Raleigh neglects to attend to the moral dimensions of Forbes' conduct and the social implications of his thinking. Most critics, as does Austin Briggs, accompany Raleigh in his error. Larzer Ziff goes so far as to ascribe a positive social benefit to Forbes' thinking, suggesting that Forbes controls "his knowledge of the psychological origins of religious feeling so as to be of greater service in his parish" (The American 1890's, p. 214). There is, however, no evidence that Forbes attends his parish duties with any more than a perfunctory necessity. Only George W. Johnson briefly notes the underlying moral fatalism that makes Forbes a "cynical defeatist" with regard to the worth of moral struggle ("Young Goodman Ware," 366). As will be seen, Forbes' example functions as an ostensible sanction for Theron's clerical duplicity.

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Scientist Ledsmar seems to have drawn largely the same conclusions as Forbes by way of modern evolutionary thought. At middle-age, he has forsworn medicine because it is insufficiently scientific and has turned his energies to research in plant genetics, opium tolerance, and reptiles. A critical foil to Celia's aestheticism and Theron's orthodoxy, he expounds a rigorous empiricism of rationality and objectivity as requisite norms for proper knowing and acting. He emerges as zealous an advocate of scientific positivism as any frontier Methodist of revivalist Christianity. Ledsmar himself was converted to science when he noted a pet monkey's instinctive aversion to snakes, although the beast had never before seen one; that incident, he tells Theron, "'changed my whole life'" (p. 328). Having taken his stand, he is an insistent proselytizer. As mentioned, when Theron expresses hope in the reality of the "'throne,'" Ledsmar readies to argue the point until Forbes urges caution (p. 111). Ledsmar does not concede easily, however. Some weeks later, Theron receives a packet of books that contains Ernest Renan's Recollections of My Youth, which tells how the young priest declared "that he could no longer believe at all in revealed religion" (p. 189).

Devotion to an empirical ideal informs Ledsmar's personal tastes as well. He prefers the concrete and certain pleasure of good food to the non-discursive nature of aesthetic response. The Jews are admired because they penalized the making of art, "'the tendency to brood on the beautiful,'" which as a "'sign of rot'" always parallels the decay of a culture (p. 122). Musicians deserve contempt because they resemble birds which are a "'debased offshoot'" of reptiles, "'the very lowest type of vertebrata now in existence'" (pp. 121-22). A similar evolutionary analogy supports an abhorrence of women. In their irrationality, lasciviousness, and superstition, the sex has only reached a stage of development comparable to the "'dawn of mediaevalism'" (p. 325). Their worst fault is that they lack the objectivity required for rational thought.

Because Ledsmar's confidence in scientific methodology dictates practical detachment from the world about him, he can experiment indifferently with plants, animals, and people, as he does with his Chinese servant. In his contact with other people, this posture toward experience proves both ethically and perceptually inadequate. Like Forbes and Celia, he neglects an opportunity to correct

Theron's self-inflation by feigning illness (pp. 335-36). He must also share with Forbes and Celia the niavety that supposed Theron's innocence would remain unaffected when immersed in a different and, to their minds, superior intellectual-cultural realm. A similar error arises in Ledsmar's judgment of the pragmatic Soulsbys whom he regards as "'really genuine people'" (p. 323). As Alice Ware observes on first meeting Sister Soulsby, intelligent and shrewd the matron may be, but genuine she is not (p. 203). Whatever the merits of Ledsmar's views, they become a rationale Theron uses to excuse himself from further distracting involvement with his wife or congregation.¹²

¹²Frederic's critics have generally been more unanimous and accurate in their assessment of Ledsmar than of any of the other characters in The Damnation. Everett Carter suggests that Frederic's rendering of Ledsmar who is the "essence of experimental science" represents a reversion in American fiction to a Hawthornian concept of the scientist and "a climate of doubt about the advances of man through empirical science" (pp. xix, xx). Austin Briggs concurs with Carter and observes that those critics, Carter concluded, "who wish to make Frederic a spokesman for pragmatism have not dealt adequately with the thoroughly pragmatic Dr. Ledsmar" (p. 131). And perhaps it is Briggs who best summarizes the conclusions of Johnson, Raleigh, and others by stating that Ledsmar's scientism "has led him to a misanthropy which is only less mild than his misogyny" (p. 130).

The greatest influences on Theron in the novel are feminine personalities, and they at various times alter his thinking to an extent that surpasses their powers of intellectual persuasion. We are told that early in their marriage, Alice Ware imparted a sense of humor to her husband who until then had been noted for his sincere, somber personality (p. 29). Sister Soulsby, the middle-aged fund-raiser, later converts Theron to her "common sense" view of religion and self-interest. Theron's acceptance of her closely parallels his growing awareness of her lingering sexuality--that she was once an attractive "'frontranker in the Amazon ballets'" and that even now she indulges in such Methodist prohibitions as lowcut dresses, perfume, and jewelry (p. 264). At the time of Theron's greatest liking for Father Forbes, he is vaguely conscious of "a quaint sensation of feeling as a romantic woman must feel in the presence of a specially impressive masculine personality" (p. 417). But Theron's most dominant influence, following in the tracks of Sister Soulsby, is Celia Madden, a wealthy, witty Irish Catholic beauty who attracts Theron to her adaptation of Greek life.

Although at no time does Frederic make sexual selection the decisive factor in human behavior, he was

enough of a naturalist to recognize the subtle, constant play of sexual considerations at the deeper levels of thought and motivation.¹³ As often as thought and reason

¹³ Everett Carter and Austin Briggs err when they take Frederic's statement that sex "is the mainspring of all human activity" as the norm for motivation in The Damnation (Quoted in Briggs, p. 131; Carter, p. xxi). As the following discussion will show, sex is a major factor in human activity for Frederic, but it is not exclusive in its influence.

are cited as justifications for human action, they are never uninfluenced by unrecognized sexual needs, much as thought also succumbs to the demands of pride and self-interest. Instances of this gap between conscious and unperceived sexual motives recur throughout The Damnation. For example, a mixture of sexual and religious motives combined in Levi Gorringer's one-time decision to join the church (p. 184). Forbes' celibacy remains mysterious throughout the novel, although he seems to maintain undetermined affection for Celia Madden (p. 417). Ledsmar's devotion to science, almost of a monastic calibre, grows from a psychological condition that causes physical revulsion at the thought of sex (p. 327). The intricate pattern of relationships between Forbes, Ledsmar, and Celia resembles a highly sublimated sexual triangle with the

priest at the apex. The sophisticated and schooled, it seems, are no less susceptible to sexual demands, as in their capacities for pride, than the simple and ignorant whom they condemn. The only character in the novel who transcends sexual considerations is the charitable, deeply religious Michael Madden; his energies are exhausted in his quest for religious truth and his concern for the welfare of his workmen. In the case of Theron, it should be noted that his egoistic and sexual needs increase as his vocational commitment diminishes.

Celia Madden, the third member of the heterodox group that befriends Theron in Part One, eventually becomes the potential satisfaction for Theron's mounting egoistic and sexual needs. The large role he assigns to her in his moral disorientation finds ample justification in her conduct. Because this behavior is consistent with her "Greek" view of life, it is useful to examine it nad her background before turning to her relationship with Theron.

The only daughter of an immigrant Irish peasant who has struck it rich, Celia lives a pampered life of her own design in the private chambers of the new opulent Madden mansion. Inspired by her study of Greek culture, she has set out to be a "'fine early Greek'" devoted to

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the "'beautiful and the strong.'" Yet, she lacks, as she herself recognizes, the graceful discipline and thoughtful control of Greek life at its apogee (pp. 154, 152). While adhering to public mores, her private life represents, she tells Theron, "'what I mean'" by being a Greek, albeit at times that eclectic vision seems "'quite of the decadence'" (pp. 288, 154). Whether Frederic meant to identify Celia with the excesses of fin de siecle Continental culture or with the decline of Greek culture remains unclear, but Celia's Greek ideal evidences attitudes antipathetic to the standards of proper maidenhood in late nineteenth-century, very Victorian America.¹⁴

¹⁴On a cultural level, as John Henry Raleigh has pointed out, Celia "represents a phenomena that occurred in the late nineteenth century when, as a reaction against utilitarianism, rationalism, relativism, Catholicism cum Art emerged with a vengeance" ("Damnation," 215). As an embodiment of the extravagant habits of this movement, Raleigh concludes, Celia is "never quite credible and always verging on the preposterous" (216). In "The Damnation of Theron Ware as a Criticism of American Religious Thought," Elmer F. Suderman aptly summarizes Celia as a "combination of Madonna, seductress, and troubled human being," a witty inversion by Frederic of the stereotypical pious maiden of late nineteenth-century sentimental religious fiction in America (Huntington Library Quarterly, XXXIII [November, 1969], 68). Austin Briggs thinks Celia credible and, if absurd in her "new hedonism," then necessarily so, although he does not say why (pp. 124, 128, 132). Briggs also notes Celia's loss of interest in Theron after his evening in her rooms, although he retains sympathy for her as one who endures genuine existential

anguish (pp. 135, 132). George W. Johnson ignores this factor in Celia and, perhaps recognizing the extent of her selfish conduct in relation to Theron, pronounces her a "rather masculinized, sadistic, and coldly superior" advocate of a "vague pagan monism" (366, 368). Although somewhat overstated, especially with reference to Celia's "masculine," liberated womanhood, Johnson's comments point to one instance, the other being Sister Soulsby, of the "duplicity of feminine moral guidance" in The Damnation (370).

The first tenet of Celia's Greek philosophy, the "'recognition that beauty is the only thing in life that is worthwhile,'" leads to an aestheticism that worships Chopin devoutly, furnishes her rooms with nude male statuary and paintings of the Virgin, and pursues painting, sculpting, and wood-carving. "'Absolute freedom from moral bugbears,'" her second principle, relates to the third, a wish "'to kick out of one's life everything that isn't worthwhile'" (p. 300). She shares in the feminism of her day in decrying marriage as an institution that sanctions the ownership and enslavement of women (pp. 378-79). In its place, she would advocate romantic love amid a greater sexual equality and openness reminiscent of pre-Christian Greece. For Celia, the culprits of Western culture, much as they are Ledsmar's heroes, are the "'epileptic'" Jews who alone "'could imagine a religion without sex in it'" (p. 384). The goal of Celia's philosophizing,

beyond sanctioning her freedom, lies in returning the church to the Greek spirit which venerated "'art and poetry and the love of beauty, and the gentle, spiritual, soulful life'" (p. 383).

What seems unclear, however, is Celia's seriousness in her adopted Hellenism. Dr. Ledsmar, who abhors the sensuous when connected with subjectivity, thinks Celia an elaborate poseur--"'a mere bundle of egotism, ignorance, and red-headed lewdness . . . a little brain addled by notions that she is like Hypatia, and a large impudence rendered intolerable by the fact that she has money'" (p. 334). Celia reminds Forbes, on the other hand, although he too recognizes her egotism, of an "'atavistic idealization of the old Kelt at his finest and best,'" of the Irish people two millenia ago when they were "'the merriest and saddest, the most turbulent and the most docile, the most talented and the most unproductive, the most practical and the most visionary, the most devout and the most pagan . . .'" (pp. 416-17). Yet, Forbes expresses doubt about the conception on which his respect rests, stating that "'If it were not such a noble thing to be an Irishman, it would be ridiculous'" (p. 418).

Celia is also aware of the unsubstantial surface of her assertive Irish Hellenism. On one of her "'very unhappy'" nights, she concedes that life at best is "'a very paltry affair . . . Luckily it's soon done with,--like a bad dream'" (p. 154). Late one evening when her distant piano-playing is overheard by the Wares, Theron suggests that the noise belongs to "'some distressed soul . . . seeking relief from . . . sleeplessness;'" Alice's response is succinct, stating "'Distressed fiddlesticks'" (p. 159). In short, Celia's posture of Hellenistic discipleship seems less a serious philosophy of life than an intricate game intended to escape the boredom and despair of an affluent, meaningless existence. Unable to sustain a steady confidence in the purposefulness of life, she resorts to affectation and private melodrama to assuage her restlessness.

Celia's frequent selfish actions in relation to various characters, especially Theron, only confirm this conclusion. As with her intellectual eclecticism, she consistently adopts or rejects aspects of her world according to her pleasure. This she does with her family, unkindly regarding her father and brother as privileged servants. Nor is religion exempt from appropriation.

Publicly an ardent devotee of the church, she is privately a "'pagan'" and "'only a Catholic in the sense that its symbolism is pleasant'" and serves "'very well my own system'" (pp. 383, 151). Following the lead of Father Forbes, she disregards the Church's desire for doctrinal adherence and puts "'into it what I like'" (p. 383). These instances fall in line with Celia's declaration that she "'will not have anything about me--or anybody either--that I don't like,'" a dictum that she harshly fulfills with regard to Theron. As she later tells Theron, "'it is the one fixed rule of my life to obey my whims'" (p. 377).

On three separate occasions, this impulsiveness prompts duplicity in her relations with Theron. The first occurs after Theron's encounter with Forbes and Ledsmar and his exposure to the majesty of classical organ music. Theron ends up escorting Celia home, and on the way, she inquires into his tastes in art and literature. In response, he pleads that he has "'always lived in little places'" and has not had much experience in the arts (p. 97). In spite of Theron's disclaimer, Celia predicts that he will be "'thrown into friendship, close contact, with Father Forbes'" because there is "'nobody else in

this raw, overgrown, empty-headed place for you and him to like . . .'" (p. 148). Theron, it seems to Celia's brief knowledge of him, is "'full of poetry, of ideals, of generous, unselfish impulses,'" words which later return to advance Theron in his self-inflation (p. 150). Celia's praise continues until Theron interprets her comment about being an "out-and-out Greek'" as a declaration of national origin instead of a philosophic orientation (pp. 151-52). Giving proof of his ignorance, Celia attempts to retract her earlier flattery, petitioning Theron to "'let it all be as if I hadn't spoken'" and not to "'mind anything I have said'" (p. 152). The caution is belated, however; the many glowing words of encouragement outweigh the mild and incidental denial.

The second occasion of Celia's whimsy comes some months later in Theron's visit to her rooms in the Madden mansion. Celia brings him there promising "'to make you well again'" with the music of Chopin and, she ambiguously adds, to "'show you what is my very own'" (pp. 280, 283). Amid cigarettes, nude statuary, and paintings of the Madonna, Theron listens to Celia's spirited rendition of her Chopin repertoire. After some time, she stops playing and with an "almost roguish smile" departs into her bedroom.

When she returns, her conventional dress has been exchanged for a revealing Greek-style costume of "shapeless, clinging drapery, lustrous and creamy and exquisitely soft" (p. 294). She resumes playing, significantly a lullaby and then a love poem. Theron, quite overwhelmed by all he has seen, heard, and anticipates, almost faints and must be revived with wine. Then amid his request of Celia to help him become more of a Greek, Celia unceremoniously yawns, revealing her real attitude toward Theron. Taking the hint, Theron departs, and shortly after his leaving, Celia reflects on the evening and breaks into a "joyous laugh" at the fumbling, bumpkin preacher (p. 302).

The final incident involves the ambiguous kiss Celia allows at the close of their forest meeting. For Theron, the act signifies the fait accompli of their romantic intentions, but in Celia's mind, it marks the end of their relationship. On this occasion, instead of the honesty that she knows Theron's egotism now demands, she gives into the lure of melodrama and conceals her ambivalence of disgust and pity in playful disguise. The idea of the kiss, she later confesses, "'seemed to me to mean something at the moment,'" to be a symbolically appropriate way of simultaneously "'saying good-bye'" to Theron as well

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as to his innocence (p. 476). In any case, Theron, who was raised in the country where "'They don't have kisses in assorted varieties,'" fails to recognize that the kiss really expressed pity--"'that just for one little moment I permitted myself to be sorry for you.'" Celia later apologizes that the gesture was "'too subtle'" and did not consider Theron in his "'greenhorn'" status as an illicit lover (p. 475). Celia's coyness again takes precedence over necessary honesty, and, in the process, by playing to Theron's self-deception, accelerates his moral deterioration.

Celia's speech to Theron in the New York hotel room does much to clarify the shortcomings of the moral perspective shared by Forbes, Ledsmar, and herself. Initially Theron impressed the trio as "'an innocent, simple, genuine young character, full of mother's milk . . . like the smell of spring in the country'" (p. 326). Further, Theron's "'honesty of nature,'" his "'sincerity in that absurd religion . . . and general naivety of mental and spiritual get-up,'" "'pleased us a great deal.'" In short, Theron becomes an object of entertainment in their sedate insular world, "'a real acquisition.'" His subsequent departure from the "'unsophisticated and delightfully fresh

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Yet, as Celia, Forbes, and Ledsmar are all clearly instrumental in Theron's change of character, the issue is not one of initial misjudgment but of misdirection and unconcern in the ways their attitudes serve as precursors for Theron's end. For example, Celia accuses Theron of a prurient interest in George Sand's life because it has an "'unclean side,'" but she during the evening in her apartment and the day in the forest panders to Theron's imagination (p. 479). She further rebukes Theron for the discrepancy between his private views and his posture within his church, stating that he enjoys "'ridiculing and reviling the people of your church, whose money supports you, and making a mock of things they believe in, and which you for your life wouldn't dare let them know you didn't believe in'" (p. 479). Such a tactic, however, is implicit in the example set by Father Forbes and Celia. She clearly puts the church to her own ends, disregarding its stated purpose for itself. Forbes draws his support in the same manner as Theron, prudently not bothering to tell his people what he disbelieves. Living in quiet luxury and

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intellectual refinement, Forbes himself has chosen, as he advises Theron to do, "'to make the best of it'" (p. 363).

With regard to the common man, the priest's opinion, like Ledsmar's, is no higher than Theron's, considering the mass of men childlike and incapable of coping with reality (p. 108). At heart, Celia, Forbes, and Ledsmar are intellectual aristocrats of one sort or another, advocating social control by an intellectual plutocracy. Forbes retains a secularized version of church structure for the maintenance of social order (pp. 108, 362-63). Celia expresses intolerance for the uncultured and longs for an ideal that resembles ancient Greece "'where all the people were artists, where everybody was an intellectual aristocrat, where the Philistine was an unknown'" (p. 289). Ledsmar as well thinks his interests and knowledge special and lives a hermetic existence in pursuit of both.

In the matter of pride, Theron's overweening flaw, each of the three has special hopes for his point of view and warms to Theron most when he responds to their special interest. Consequently, Celia sympathizes with Theron when he approves the significance of women in history. Forbes repeats this pattern in Theron's response to his

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The group fails most in not exerting honesty with Theron after he had accepted the friendships that had been "'mistakenly extended'" to him. They accuse him of being an ass and of not being an "'honest, straightforward donkey at that!'" But none of the Octavius group has been honest with Theron, especially Celia. And as for Theron trying to play a "'lap-dog,'" it was they who first hinted that he could join their special world (p. 480).

In the end, Theron's real mistake in the eyes of the group is not his duplicity, but his lack of tact in the way he carries out his new beliefs. For every fault of which Celia accuses Theron, a parallel shortcoming exists in themselves. Although schooled and socially adept, their self-knowledge and understanding of human nature, as dictated by their special points of view, does not exempt them from the same shortsightedness and pride to which Theron Ware more conspicuously falls prey.

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ways prepared for, by Sister Candace Soulsby, Methodist debt-raiser. Some of her influence can be attributed to the fact that she encounters Theron at an opportune time in his ministry. She visits Octavius for a week when the first difficulties in Theron's new charge, "all sorts of conditions wholly novel to him," are beginning to appear (p. 160). The church there embodied the schismatic right wing of Methodism that identified moral and spiritual purity with the preservation of the ecclesiastical and social customs of its founders' time, by then some eighty years past. Given to hairsplitting on the Sabbath use of streetcars and on attendance at traveling menageries, the church proves narrowly legalistic, strongly revivalistic, and intensely factious. Theron's homiletic powers accomplish little in recruiting new members--the Methodists have a bad name in Octavius--or in liberalizing the congregation which suffers tight control by the small conservative faction that dislikes Theron. Caught in the classic ministerial predicament, Theron must choose between expressing his best understanding of Methodism and currying the favor of his opponents.¹⁵ Reluctantly, he

¹⁵ Horton Davies has commented on the precarious paradox in which the minister always finds himself--"that God has entrusted the . . . Gospel to the earthen vessel

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of the minister's personality" (Davies, Mirror, p. 4). As man and God's minister to man, the clergyman experiences an unceasing tension, as Theron Ware early in the novel, between "truth and tact, between Christian charity and expediency, and between the pressures of fidelity to God and fulfilling popular expectation" (p. 183).

sets about organizing members who would support him in a time of crisis. The political nature of the activity has, Theron reflects, some "apostolic warrant," but "If there had not been . . . the mere elementary demands of self-defense would have justified his use of strategy" in "per-versely enigmatic Octavius" (pp. 165, 168).

It is with this uncertain mind that Theron first meets Sister Soulsby who has, at the trustees' request, come to rescue the church from its large debt. As a vestige of the past which employs excessive religious emotion, only now for economic ends, Theron considers debt-raising "'about the lowest down thing we [Methodists] produce'" (pp. 48, 181). Hence, Theron gives a cool reception to Sister Soulsby, a well-known representative of the practice. Mrs. Soulsby comes to her profession and to Octavius with a widely varied background. Born in the South, she left home with a married man; subsequently, she traveled the West as a professional clairvoyant, fortune-teller, "'frontranker in Amazon ballets,'" and comic opera

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actress. She once would have been indicted by a grand jury if "'the smartest and most famous train-gambler between Omaha and 'Frisco . . . who died in his boots and took three sheriff's deputies along with him'" had not bribed the decisive vote. Mr. Soulsby, too, apparently had a similar period in his life in which he was a confidence man and "'a regular bad old rooster'" (pp. 264-65). In any case, she and her present partner "'both soured on living by fakes'" and decided for a quiet retirement of books and gardening (p. 266). The couple soon determined, however, after witnessing a Methodist revival in which they were somewhat moved, to shun leisure to become "'good frauds'" (p. 268). At the time, they came "'mighty near to going up to the rail and joining the mourners,'" but instead, noting "'what tremendous improvements . . . were possible in the way that amateur revivalist worked up his business,'" applied their frontier savvy and went into the practice themselves (p. 266).

The Soulsbys' response to the conversionist challenge reveals an orientation in Sister Soulsby that sets the pattern for her actions through the novel. A product of the hard contingencies of frontier survival, she repeatedly advises a self-interested individualism that has

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its justification in the logic of "'common-sense'" practicality. Sister Soulsby values the world about her in proportion of its exploitive potential, expressing an unmediated form of commercial impulse in religious garb. Her work in Octavius leads Theron to exchange his religious idealism for the confidence-man's ethic of "'machinery,'" the use of showmanship and deception for personal ends (p. 257).

In her days of leisure, Sister Soulsby still maintains esteem for the empirical and pragmatic in experience; she reveres nothing that she cannot apprehend concretely and does not conform to the demands of her frontier past. This perceptual bias prompts her to discount religious yearnings as "'a matter of temperament--of emotions,'" impractical and unsubstantial--and to name theological aspirations for truth "'pure moonshine'" (pp. 267, 264). Instead, she accepts human limitations, both epistemological and moral, as normative and, in "'real wisdom,'" employs these shortcomings in order to "'get the best of what's going!" (p. 258). In brief, she has concluded from her huckster's experience that "'You've got to take folks as you find them; and you got to find them the best way you can'" (p. 211; my italics). Because human nature will

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always remain selfish and vainglorious, the conversionist hope of Methodism is futile and illusory (pp. 254, 269).

It is soon clear that Sister Soulsby's actions concur fully with her views on human nature and the function of the church. In her debt-raising revival, she shows a complete disregard for the religious content of her work except as traditional phraseology excites and disarms her audience. Every gesture in her presentation operates to create an emotional effect on the audience. For example, in their first appearance, the Soulsbys surprise and please the Octavius people with "delightfully sacred duets," traditional hymn lyrics set to the melodies of Chopin (p. 240). While Soulsby's address comes off uninspired and hackneyed, his wife captivates her audience without any more insight or profundity. She is, in fact, all style, demonstrating the controlled flourish of the consummate actress, the narrator stating that "What Sister Soulsby said did not matter. The way she said it--the splendid, searching sweep of her great eyes; the boldly, jubilantly triumphant; the sympathetic swaying of her willowly figure under the stress of her eloquence--was all wonderful" (p. 230).

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However, her best skills are saved for the surprise debt-raising that she springs on an unwary revival audience. Speaking in "a breezy, off-hand fashion," she handily wins over the resentful with a "bright-eyed impudence" directed at their gullibility (p. 240). But the humor, as the surprise itself, is not without purpose. The narrator describes the scene, stating that Sister Soulsby would

set them all laughing; and then, with a twist of the eyes and a change of voice, lo, and behold, she had them nearly crying in the same breath. Under the pressure of these jumbled emotions brethren began to rise up . . . and say what they would give. The wonderful woman had something smart and apt to say about each fresh contribution, and used it to screw up the general interest a notch further toward benevolent hysteria. With songs and jokes and impromptu exhortation and prayers she kept the thing whirling (p. 241).

For an added attraction, Soulsby has arranged for one of the trustees to provoke a new member, the recently committed Levi Gorringer, into "a sort of duel of generosity" (p. 241). She justifies her contrivance on the ground that generosity resembles "'a habit, like tobacco, or biting your finger-nails, or anything else'" and lacks connection to the giver's experience of religious truth (p. 255). Strong emotion provides a convenient device

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for reorienting an old habit. Questions of any religious reality that might be conveyed through intense emotion, a traditional Methodist supposition, become secondary and incidental to the raising of money. Because she assumes the unreliability of emotion as a guide to truth, it does not disturb Sister Soulsby that her guise of emotion, accepted as genuine by others, is staged for mercenary ends.

To Theron's question about the ethics of her tactics, Sister Soulsby replies that "'very queer things indeed turn out to be the means of grace.'" Further, one "'simply can't get along without some of the wisdom of the serpent'" and is "'commanded to have it, for that matter'" (p. 212). Correct in her biblical citation, she neglects the second portion of her text which enjoins that a dove-like innocence should accompany worldly knowledge.¹⁶ When Theron doubts Soulsby's biblical interpreta-

¹⁶ Jesus' words in Matthew 10:16 read "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

tion, she compares the church to the stage, hoping to point out the inevitability of "'dirty work'" or "'machinery'" in any successful venture (pp. 255, 257). She

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observes that in a theatre "'the performance looks one way from where the audience sits, and quite a different way when you are behind the scenes.'" In reality, "'the trees and house are cloth, and the moon is tissue paper, and the flying fairy is a middle-aged woman strung out on a rope'" (p. 256). Yet, she rightly insists, the presence of backstage manipulation and "'machinery'" "'doesn't prove that the play, out in front, isn't beautiful and affecting, and all that.'" Soulsby realizes that the play is only a play and has its value in the aesthetic-emotional satisfaction it might give. She explains that Theron, on the other hand, after having "'been let in on the stage, behind the scenes,'" simply wishes "'to sit down and cry because the trees are cloth, and the moon is a lantern'" (pp. 256-57). The problem here, as with Soulsby's logic in general, is that the church contends that it is more than a stage, attempting always to relate special insight into the nature of reality. Machinery and dirty work are alien to the church's claim of honesty and hope for transparency to divine reality.

The real mischief of the Soulsbys is that they increase the disparity between appearance and reality in an institution that encourages implicit trust by its

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subscribers. Prospering on this strategy, the Soulsbys represent an updated, semi-urban advance from Twain's King and Duke, the fumbling hucksters of Huckleberry Finn.

Humanity being what it is, Sister Soulsby urges Theron to follow her lead, as Twain's crooks attempt to enlist Huck. That is, "'get the best of what's going'" by "'keeping up this grip you've got on your people'" (p. 257). The logic of self-interest precludes leaving the ministry because, in short, Theron is trained to do nothing else; and, besides, Soulsby knows other ministers who have experienced doubt and disgust, but they have "'stayed in and made the best of it--[and] well, one of them will be a bishop in another ten years'" (p. 258).

Unfortunately, the consequences of Sister Soulsby's practice extend beyond Theron's private choices. The pragmatic bias leads her to misjudge situations and others in a way that further disrupts Octavius. The most immediate and lasting victim is Alice Ware. The fund-raiser not only undervalues Alice's intelligence, but implants a similar idea in her husband, reducing her stature still more in contrast to the glamorous Celia Madden. (pp. 215-16) However, the young wife emerges as one of the two characters in the novel--the other is Michael Madden--whose judgments

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are unfailingly accurate. Alice is the one who recognizes Levi Gorringer as an ally in her husband's struggle against the conservative elements in his church. It is also Alice who invites the Soulsbys to stay in the parsonage because the business-like matron "'is as smart as a steel trap,--that woman is,--and if she took the notion, I believe she could help get us a better place'" (p. 203). All through Theron's moral decay, Alice maintains a clear perception of his duplicitous conduct (pp. 422-30). She alone realizes that mysterious forces within "miserable, contemptible Octavius" were the chief cause of Theron's fall and not, as Sister Soulsby contends, professional inaptitude (p. 507). Theron's self-inflation, to which Sister Soulsby gives succor, condemns Alice to a future of quiet suffering before her husband's overweening selfishness.

Accompanying Sister Soulsby's misperception of Alice is an overestimation of Theron's intellect. On separate occasions, she adds to Celia's flattery by suggesting that Theron possesses "'brains'" and is an "'intellectual man,'" "'greatly the other way'" from mediocrity (pp. 215-16, 259). After Theron's fall, illness, and apparent recovery, Sister Soulsby retracts this assessment to announce that Theron henceforth will "'be just an

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average kind of man--a little sore about some things, a little wiser than he was about some others'" (p. 508). Although this estimate of his mental stature is more realistic, her prophecy is belied by Theron's hopeful, egoistic imaginings of the future. Of course, her judgment that Theron never belonged in the ministry reveals more of her misconception of the ministry than it does of his character. For Sister Soulsby, the ideal clergyman must possess the skills of a charlatan that Theron in his innocence clearly lacked (p. 269).

Sister Soulsby's "'good fraud'" also affects the church and its social setting. In order to raise the church's required deficit, she opportunely capitalizes on Trustee Levi Gorringer's new seriousness in the pre-arranged "duel of beneficence." When it is finally exposed, the "duel" not only disenchants Gorringer, a potentially forceful and positive member of the church, but it also administers, in its dependence on Theron's complicity, a coup de grace to the minister's remaining insistence on the moral integrity of the Christian community. Lastly, Soulsby's work in Octavius only gives added power to the sanctimonious self-interest of Winch and Pierce, the

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¹⁷Sister Soulsby has drawn more critical disagreement than any other character or issue in The Damnation. Everett Carter, Austin Briggs, and John Henry Raleigh all evaluate Sister Soulsby's role as positive and meritorious. Austin Briggs accepts the Soulsbys as Theron's "good doctors" because they, after the Octavius trio deserts Theron, stick around to pick up the pieces and pragmatically minister to him with the saving "gift of comic vision" (pp. 135, 136). Everett Carter sees the Soulsbys as "complete and exuberant embodiments" of Jamesian epistemological and ethical pragmatism (p. xiv). Sister Soulsby is "a healing and restoring madonna" who tells Theron the "homely, unpretty truth of the realistic, the pragmatic attitude towards life" (pp. xv-xvi). John Henry Raleigh finds the "triumph of pragmatic wisdom" in the American mind symbolized in the Soulsbys (222). The Soulsbys are an "antidote" that counters the deleterious effects of Ledsmar, Forbes, and Celia on Theron, and while they "have learned to bend to the wind and to tell necessary lies," they still preserve "an inner integrity and a moral purpose of their own" (222). They restore Theron, "salvage as much good as they can from the materials at hand," and send him off to Seattle "wiser, if sadder" (223). Raleigh finally identifies Sister Soulsby as the ethical mouthpiece of Frederic, much as Forbes is supposedly his philosophic voice, who tells "what we must do" (227).

Those critics who oppose the above point of view take quite a different view of the consequences of Sister Soulsby's pragmatism. In the words of Stanton Garner, she is a "shape-changer" "who touches Theron's weakest point, immobilizing his moral faculties with a vision of petty illusions disguising the sordid 'reality' of the world," thus pointing out the speciousness of Soulsby's analogies of manure and stage. To Theron's misfortune, she wins him as "a permanent convert to the cynical philosophy of sharp practices and self-indulgent generalizations" (p. 35). George Johnson has best suggested the process by which Soulsby's conversion of Theron takes place. She manages to blur Theron's moral sense with her pragmatic philosophizing, and that brings him to "imagine that he is too

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good for poor little Alice, that he is superior to his congregation, and that he is cut out for larger things" (365, 371).

Much like the views of Forbes, Ledsmar, and Celia Madden, the Soulsbys presence in The Damnation finally suggests, as Larzer Ziff has perceptively noted, the "possibility of social control" in America by a small, knowledgeable elite.¹⁸ Ziff admits that the Soulsbys make

¹⁸ Ziff, The American 1890's, p. 210.

their living by manipulating smalltown "greed and prurience for their own ends," but he nevertheless contends that "a love for the people" turns their work to "the good of those manipulated."¹⁹ As evidence of this uncommon human-

¹⁹ Ziff, pp. 216-17.

ity, Ziff cites the Soulsbys' willingness to care for the disoriented Theron over a long winter. Actually, Theron's return to the Soulsbys illumines the role they played in his collapse. In her assertiveness, Sister Soulsby is far more than Theron's "'pal,'" as she names herself; rather, she is his mentor and a symbolic progenitor of his fate in politics and real estate. Frederic fixes this role

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through Theron's drunken arrival at the Soulsbys. When he rouses them from sleep, the wife asks if the intruder is, indeed, "'Our Brother Ware?'" The husband replies positively, stating "'Well, yes, I suppose he's our Brother Ware . . .'" (p. 487). As such, the Soulsbys' charity for the Wares hardly merits exceptional praise. Nor are their other acts of conspicuous kindness, "'real piety'" as Sister Soulsby calls them, especially praiseworthy for an affluent couple who have made a life of fraud (p. 267).

In any case, the "good" of which Ziff speaks is arbitrary in nature, picking and choosing its favorites according to whim. Theron receives its questionable benefits because he seems bright and innocent, while Alice Ware is turned away because of apparent dullness; still further, no cause emerges for Sister Soulsby's preference for the interests of self-seeking Winch and Pierce over those of Levi Gorringer. In short, recipients of Sister Soulsby's beneficence merit her favors in the degree to which they mirror her self-image of the intelligence and common sense that grew out of her youthful naivety. Her goodness benefits only the already or potentially powerful, not the victims of their craft.

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The beneficent social control envisioned by Ziff depends on the creation of "a meritocracy of common sensical people who sympathize with the masses and are knowledgeable enough to translate new intellectual developments into a tongue they can understand."²⁰ As Ziff suggests,

²⁰ Ziff, p. 216.

the Soulsbys manage to expose the uncultured Octavians to Chopin, but aesthetic pleasure offers a poor substitute for confidence in the trustworthiness of the moral and religious posture of the church. For Sister Soulsby, the self-serving impulse of the modern advertising genius takes precedence over the welfare of mass man. In sum, Elmer Gantry's surname should have been Soulsby--a good grandson for Sister Candace Soulsby.

Theron's descent into damnation is slow, but steady. Forbes' chance remark on the Turanian origins of the last rites brings Theron to the "unsuspected and staggering truth . . . that he was an extremely ignorant and rudely untrained young man, whose pretensions to intellectual authority among any educated people would be laughed at

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with deserved contempt" (p. 93). With this observation, Theron dismisses his background and attributes his self-recognition to his native intelligence. Aspiration sets in after his optimism concludes that "There was bright promise in the very fact that he had discovered his shortcoming" (p. 91). In the moment of recognition, the nomadic Israelites lose the "poetic light [which] had shown" around them and become mere "rude tramps of the uncivilized plain" (p. 93).

Theron's impressions of ignorance are reinforced in the dinner meeting with Forbes and Ledsmar who inform him of the "'Christ myth.'" As suggested, Theron's shock at this news is alleviated by the "charm of contact with really educated people" (p. 111). On leaving the rectory, Celia Madden unfoundedly flatters Theron's "'temperament and bent of mind and tastes'" (p. 148). As at the last rites, Theron finds it unusual that his first sample of Octavius "polish and intellectual culture" should come from its Irish Catholic segment (p. 78). On returning to his parsonage later that evening, his "newly informed eye" judges its contents, his sleeping wife presumably included, to be "bare and squalid" (p. 155). It is also on this evening that Theron first lies to his wife.

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Part Two of The Damnation focuses on church politics and introduces the Soulsbys. Arriving shortly before the Soulsbys, however, is the parcel of books from Ledsmar, which Theron begins to read furtively. Inspired by the contents, especially Renan, he feels lifted "bodily out of the slough of ignorance, of contact with low and sordid, narrow things" into "a world of culture and grace, of lofty thoughts and the inspiring communion of real knowledge, where creeds were not of importance, and where men asked one another not 'Is your soul saved?' but 'Is your mind well furnished?'" (pp. 192-99). Noting Forbes' cynicism about man and his comfortable vocation in spite of disbelief, Theron discounts any obligation to his congregation, concluding that "he could never again harbor the delusion that the tie between them was blessed." Without taking "time to reflect on what he was abandoning," Theron issues a "new oath of allegiance" to the world of Forbes and Ledsmar (p. 199). In doing so, he responds less to the intellectual content of this new world than to its romantic aura.

The effect of Sister Soulsby's coming is to render explicit the conduct and advice of Forbes and Ledsmar. She also flatters Theron's intelligence, but demeans his wife,

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making Theron wonder if men "like Father Forbes and Dr. Ledsmar would care much about her [Alice]" (p. 219). Ledsmar's objectivity provides criteria for Theron's greater criticism of the emotional excesses of revivalism (p. 283). By the example of her week of chicanery and the import of her "common-sense" conversation, Sister Soulsby finishes Theron's counter-conversion to moral fatalism.²¹

²¹The idea that Frederic is playing on the conventions of the contemporary sentimental religious novel is the main point of Suderman, "The Damnation of Theron Ware as a Criticism of American Religious Thought." Counter-conversion is one example of Frederic's foiling of reader expectation.

Left in Part Three with only his ego, Theron's fancy plots intrigue with Celia Madden. Her expression of boredom after the evening of Chopin is effectively filtered by Theron's now overwhelming self-love. Under her influence, as at first with Forbes and Ledsmar, Theron is entranced with a "new birth" from the "country lout, the narrow zealot, the untutored slave groping . . . after silly superstitions." In his new discipleship, he is "a Poet . . . a child of light, lover of beauty and sweet sounds, a recognizable brother to Renan and Chopin--and Celia!" (pp. 307-08).

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By early Fall, Theron has conformed to Sister Soulsby's advice and Forbes' example, and "the results were already wonderful" (p. 346). After preaching an expedient, popular sermon at a camp-meeting, he "retreats" to the hills, only to visit a nearby Catholic picnic. There, he comes across Celia and Forbes, drinks beer, and is greeted with silence in his marital complaints. Alone later in the forest with Celia, she administers her ambiguous kiss, which symbolically seals Theron's fate.

In the last section of The Damnation, Theron receives a series of warnings against his present behavior, which are disregarded until Celia's rebuke in New York. Levi Gorringer responds to Theron's innuendoes about Alice Ware by telling Theron that "'It wouldn't be worth any grown man's while to quarrel with so poor a creature as you are'" (p. 404). On the pretext of a sick-call, Forbes dispenses with Theron when the preacher drops by to gossip about Ledsmar and Celia. Alice Ware confesses to Theron that he is like "'some man who never loved me, and doesn't even know me, much less like me.'" In sadness, she has even tried "'to intercede with Him, and to try to lose my burden at His feet'" (pp. 426-27). But Heaven, as her husband, remains indifferent. Her subsequent religious

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²²In A Mirror of the Ministry in the Modern Novel, Horton Davies clarifies the nature of Theron's scepticism, especially when seen in contrast to Michael Madden's and Alice's, by naming it "dishonest doubt" (p. 78).

Theron's last warning issues from Michael Madden who is slowly dying of congenital lung disease. He reluctantly informs Theron that once he had the conduct and "'face of a saint . . . [but] it is more like the face of a bartender now!'" (p. 441). Michael also depreciates his sister's wisdom in religious matters, thus discounting the role of spiritual mentor that Theron has assigned her (p. 440). Theron departs, thinking the perceptive Michael a "ridiculous bore," a term that Celia will soon apply to Theron (p. 444).²³

²³Michael Madden, the son of a long-suffering father, also offers a connection to the spiritual-moral rigor of an arduous frontier past. As Austin Briggs has pointed out, although neither Michael nor his father Jeremiah Madden do anything to determine the action of the novel, Frederic devotes over half a chapter (Nine) to describing the pair (Briggs, pp. 136-37). This fact can perhaps be explained by their use as foils to the modern adherents to Catholicism, notably Celia and Forbes, much as the decrepit circuit riders contrast with a decline in late nineteenth-century Methodism.

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When Celia at last does tell Theron his true stature in her eyes, Theron feels isolated in "the Egyptian night which lay upon the face of the deep while the earth was yet without form or void . . . awful, planetary solitudes . . . crushed him." In short, "the universe held him at arm's length as a nuisance" (p. 481).

Frederic's final comment on the nature and significance of Theron's fall comes in Theron's thoughts before his departure for Seattle. The ex-preacher's political image of himself suggests the continuation of self-concern as the motive force in his character. Theron has recovered from his illness with no lasting recognition of the distance he has traveled or remorse for the moral heritage he has lost. His lifelong capacity for egoism has emerged dominant and blatant, and he eagerly embraces the philosophy of self-interest urged by Soulsby and enacted by Forbes, Ledsmar, and Celia Madden.

Unlike most religious novelists of the period, Frederic chooses not to resolve the metaphysical question implicit in the theistic and naturalistic explanations that Theron gives for his fall. He speculates, rather, on the individual and social consequences of the loss of confidence in a transcendent ideal that dictates humility

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and selflessness between men and before God. Subsequently, Frederic focuses on possible substitutes for this traditional allegiance. Theron's character balance of ethical idealism and subtle egoism makes him a fitting vehicle for examining the impact of America's new cultural and philosophic pluralism. His naivety allows for an unsophisticated, stumbling enactment of the suggestions urged and lived by numerous characters, thus magnifying the motivation and implications of those points of view. Sister Soulsby points out this fact to Theron, stating that "'I'm afraid you'll never make a really good fraud Your intentions are all right, but your execution is hopelessly clumsy'" (p. 289).

In this way, Theron's fate offers a somber indication of the direction of American culture in the modern age. In the twentieth century's absence of traditional certainties that at their best offered an admirable model for social intercourse, Frederic foresaw the emergence of multiple forms of self-interest which would persist behind elaborate structures of philosophic justification. Amid agnosticism, which Frederic probably shared, or a pragmatic empiricism which would deny the relevance of man's religious urgings, Frederic envisioned modern man's aimless

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isolation, "alone among awful, planetary solitudes" (p. 441).

The perspectives of Theron's four major influences in The Damnation--Forbes, Ledsmar, Celia, and Sister Soulsby--offer little recourse to twentieth-century multiplicity. While their views arise from the pervasive religious doubt of the time, each absolutizes his individual point of view and allows it to function as a rationale and a dubious ethical posture. Theron himself readily adopts the vocabulary of naturalistic science to explain his conduct. His pursuit of Celia is justified by the fact that he "was only obeying the universal law of nature . . . which prompts the palled spindling sprout of the potato in the cellar to strive feebly toward the light" (p. 276). Similarly, Theron sees his desertion of Alice as one of "the accidents in life, the inevitable harsh happenings in the great tragedy of Nature . . . and there was nothing more to be said" (p. 432). Forbes and Celia, as Sister Soulsby, share Theron's moral fatalism that severs them from compassion for all but their own social and intellectual equals. Thus, the worse judgment that Celia can pronounce on Theron is that he has become a "'bore'" (p. 477).

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Sister Soulsby's pragmatism fully repeats this pattern. Her belief that the individual is incapable of alteration in character, "'that the time to separate the sheep from the goats is on Judgment Day,'" justifies the manipulation of human frailty (p. 264). Soulsby's activities in the church tend, as do Forbes', toward the exertion of authority by an enlightened few who withhold their special knowledge for their own advantage (pp. 260-61; 108, 359-63). This attitude in Sister Soulsby's fundraising and Forbes' intellectualism increases the disparity between appearance and reality within the church, a self-proclaimed arbiter of divine truth from which one could expect unqualified integrity. Significantly, Ledsmar, Forbes, and Soulsby, all employ the term "'machinery'" to denote their concepts of the way in which the church should function (pp. 114, 362, 257). In their hands, ecclesiastical structure becomes artifice and tool for social control rather than a vehicle for community and the imparting of religious wisdom. The church's susceptibility to self-interest speaks pessimistically of the fate of the secular culture of which it is a self-proclaimed moral leader.

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It is the prospect of an elitist oligarchy for democratic America, with either philosophic or pragmatic rationales, that Frederic represents in the moral fall of Theron Ware. The political ambition of Theron, a profession always disdained by Frederic, clashes sharply with the candor, humility, and selfless concern of his Methodist forefathers who gave their lives in civilizing the frontier. Theron, like Sister Soulsby, values the frontier for its exploitive potential. Although Frederic does not endorse the metaphysical suppositions of the pioneer Methodists, he does lament the passing of a disposition that was connected with humility before a transcendent religious and moral ideal. It is the premature dismissal of this frame of mind that bodes ill in Frederic's vision of America's future.

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CHAPTER TWO

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PATH BETWEEN ORTHODOXY AND DOUBT

Among the novelists of the late nineteenth century who portrayed the tension between doubt and faith, none drew more attention to the conflict than three female writers whose best-sellers treated crucial contemporary religious issues. Born in successive decades of the mid-century and in different regions, the three represent, moving from the eldest to the youngest, distinct stages on the path from orthodoxy to theological liberalism. Each novelist, in one or more works, considered causes for doubt and expounded a rationale for continued religious faith, despite the persistence of unsolvables.

The earliest and perhaps the most popular of the group, Southerner Augusta Evans Wilson initiated the half-century's novelistic depiction of religious uncertainty with Beulah (1859), a gloss on her own experience with scepticism. Her St. Elmo (1866), a latter variation on

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the same theme, set new sales records and ranks among the top three best-sellers of the nineteenth century.¹ Two

¹William Perry Fidler, Augusta Evans Wilson 1835-1909: A Biography (University, Alabama, 1951), p. 129.

years after St. Elmo, New Englander Elizabeth Phelps Ward won wide recognition with a novel of death, consolation, and the afterlife, The Gates Ajar (1868). Mrs. Ward's subsequent fiction turned often to religious themes, most notably in the best-selling A Singular Life (1896), which tells of a heretic minister and his martyrdom in social reform. Lastly, Margaret Wade Deland pointed to the dangers of religious incompatibility in marriage with John Ward, Preacher (1888), a novel which became known as the American Robert Elsmere. Together, if popular fiction truly reflects its time, these feminine writers rendered the experience and limits of denial and affirmation common to a religiously confused public. It is the logic and nature of that uncertainty and faith which provides the focus for our discussion here.

A native Georgian, and, as the Civil War would prove, a loyal daughter of the South, Augusta Jane Evans first novel, Inez (1855), described the frontier life of

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southwestern Texas and the events leading to the battle of the Alamo. Published in the author's twenty-first year, the novel's setting and subject resulted from her family's brief tenure in pioneering. Filled with the melodrama of political intrigue, the author's religious concerns are already conspicuously present. Inez sought to explain, as biographer William Perry Fidler has summarized, "the dangers of Catholicism . . . and the virtues of Protestantism."² Voicing traditional Protestant

²Augusta Evans Wilson, p. 42.

complaints about priestcraft, superstition, and intellectual tyranny, Miss Evans also debates intricate theological points with long discussions and numerous learned quotations. In any case, because the novel assumed the necessity and correctness of religious belief, it need not fall under consideration here. The young author soon experienced fundamental religious doubt which would effectively rid her of sectarian bias. Her concern became not which sect or faith to follow but whether religious faith remained a viable possibility in light of evolutionary thought, higher criticism of the Bible, and comparative religion.

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Miss Evans turned to this matter in her second novel, Beulah (1859), which Fidler calls a "fictional confession" of the author's intellectual experience in late adolescence and early twenties.³ The novel tells of a

³Fidler, p. 48.

youthful orphan girl's journey from faith, through scepticism, and back to faith. As such, the novel probably represents America's most detailed account of the sources and logic of rational religious doubt. Stocked with erudition and philosophic debate, the heroine's religious inquiry parallels a romantic interest between herself and her middle-aged sceptical guardian, Dr. Guy Hartwell. The physician is not brought to affirmation by the novel's close, but the author strongly implies that the pious example of Beulah, now his wife, will eventually bring the doubter to faith. Whether due to its religious content or its romantic effects, Beulah sold 22,000 copies in its first nine months and continued a popular favorite throughout the century.⁴

⁴Fidler, p. 74.

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No small part of Beulah's religious doubt results from the adversities of her childhood. Orphaned with a younger sister by her parents' deaths, she lives happily in a foundlings' home until age fourteen, when her pretty sister is adopted by the wealthy Grayson family, who will have nothing to do with the less than attractive Beulah. Shortly thereafter, an orphan friend, again adopted by affluent parents, departs for five years to study abroad. Yellow fever strikes the Southern city, and the sister dies, the parents refusing the lowly Beulah admittance to the deathbed. The series of untoward events brings Beulah to reflect that she "'never loved anything but trouble came upon it.'"⁵ Disproportionate suffering plants the

⁵Beulah (New York, 1868), p. 68. Future references will be given in parentheses.

seeds of doubt that will later question the origins of evil in a supposedly beneficent universe. Hardly beyond childhood, the author explains that already "Hope fainted; faith fainted; and bitterness and despair reigned in that once loving and gentle soul" (p. 73).

All is not bleak, however. Beulah meets the widowed Guy Hartwell who takes compassion on her plight

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and brings her into his home, although her fierce independence will not allow formal adoption. "A proud, gifted, and miserable man," the wealthy Hartwell habitually manifests a "stern sadness" that makes him "a baffling, fascinating mystery" to the young girl. They live happily together for three years as Beulah becomes increasingly "grave, earnest, restless, and searching; indexing a stormy soul" (p. 132). In Hartwell's scholarly library, she encounters Poe where she catches "tantalizing glimpses of recondite psychological truths and processes, which . . . ever eluded analysis" (p. 147). Unable to detect "adroitly disguised sophisms," Poe's "Eureka," by a "seemingly infallible reasoning," "cooly informed her that she [Beulah] was her own God." "Mystified, shocked, and yet admiring," Beulah is thus brought to "the portal through which she entered the vast Pantheon of Speculation" (p. 149). Her guardian warns her of the threat serious study poses to her Christianity, but Beulah cannot "'be satisfied with a creed which I could not bear to have investigated'" (pp. 157-58).

So begins Beulah's long inquiry of years. Her catalogue of authors mounts: Richter, Jean Paul, Coleridge, Carlyle, Goethe, and Spinoza, among many others.

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Added to these are her own speculations on mortality which inevitably arise from her close acquaintance with death. She soon asks, "Aside from revelation, what proof had she that unlike her moldering flowers, her spirit should never die?" (p. 160). In seeking answers to this and other "primeval foundation questions," she turns often to the Bible, but there she only confronts "inexplicable passages" (pp. 256, 257). Whatever authority the Bible maintains for Beulah soon falls to the findings of pre-Darwinian geology, which had anticipated many later threats to orthodoxy. Beulah discovers that "in those pre-Adamic ages, Paleontologists find no trace whatever of that golden time, when the vast animal creation lived in harmony, and bloodshed was unknown; ergo, man's Fall has no agency in bringing death into the world; ergo, that chapter in Genesis need puzzle her no more." In addition, comparative religion "beckoned her on to conclusions apparently antagonistic to the revealed system" (p. 258). Thus, the "landmarks of her earlier years were swept away" (p. 259). The "grim fact" of evil, which also bothered contemporaries E. P. Roe and William Dean Howells, has no explanation (p. 350). On the ground of logic alone, she

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dismisses the Christian solution, asking "'why curse a race in order to necessitate a Saviour?'" (p. 255).

In her spiritual crisis, Beulah would turn to others for consolation. The "pompous austerity of his manners" discounts her clergyman (p. 257). A kindly physician to whom she turns, the partner of Guy Hartwell, tells her that he is an unsafe guide for he shares her doubts about the Bible (p. 300). The conspicuous scepticism of her guardian disqualifies him from any role as counselor. A local heiress who has befriended Beulah also lacks faith, although she lives with a slow death from heart disease (pp. 285, 376-77). The climate of Beulah's time seems to combat faith: "On every side she saw the footprints of skepticism; in history, essays, novels, poems, and reviews" (p. 353). Beulah's two closest Christian friends, a fellow-teacher and the orphanage matron, are pious but timid and unquestioning in their faith. From this context, Beulah must decide to study independently, and she plunges into formal philosophy, against which other doubters have warned her.

Her first confidante on her new line of study is Hartwell, to whom she confesses that "'There are mysteries in physics, morals and metaphysics, that have wooed me on

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to investigation; but the further I wander, deeper grows the darkness Cloudy symbolisms mock me on every side'" (p. 320). Hartwell's assurances, assuming "'all creeds and systems are null,'" are few: "'I know that I exist; that a beautiful universe surrounds me, and I am conscious of a multitude of conflicting emotions I stand on the everlasting basis of all skepticism, "there is no criterion of truth!" All must be subjectively true'" (pp. 320, 322).

A similar declaration comes from Beulah's wealthy dying friend, warning Beulah that metaphysical systems and philosophers "'are worse than useless. They will make you doubt your own existence . . .'" (p. 378). The invalid reasons that she cannot know that "'all truth is not merely subjective How do I know that my "true," "good," and "beautiful" are absolutely so? My reason is no infallible plummet to sound the sea of phenomena and touch noumena'" (p. 285). This epistemological dilemma, shared again by Howells and Roe, recurs often to Beulah and comes to lie at the center of her intellectual struggles (p. 352). Later in the story, in preparation for Beulah's conversion, Miss Evans recalls Beulah's history in inquiry, which merits quoting at length:

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Rejecting literal revelation, she was perplexed to draw the exact line of demarkation between myths and realities; then followed doubts as to the necessity, and finally, as to the probability and possibility of an external, verbal revelation. A revealed code, or system, was antagonistic to the doctrines of rationalism; her own consciousness must furnish the necessary data. But how far was "individualism" allowable? And here the hydra of speculation reared its horrid head; if consciousness alone furnished truth, it was but true for her, true according to the formation of her mind, but not absolutely true (pp. 382-83).

In trying to find any definite truth through philosophy, Beulah becomes disenchanted with the capability of human reason and the emotional adequacy of any abstract philosophic system. In Beulah's careful study, philosophy does much to disqualify itself through intramural contentiousness. On the basic facts of man's psychology, "instead of unanimity among metaphysicians, she found fierce denunciation of predecessors, ingenious refutations of principles . . . and an intolerant dogmatism which astonished and confused her" (p. 351). The same result emerges from her study of the history of philosophy, in which she expected to find more objectivity (p. 352).

To facilitate Beulah's disillusion, the author injects a knowledgeable suitor whose sole purpose seems to be the devaluation of philosophical speculation. A

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lawyer about to be elected to Congress, Reginald Lindsay spars with Beulah's unbelief by recounting his own experience in speculation. His main point suggests that "'the very absurdities of philosophy are the most potent arguments in substantiating the claims of Christianity. Kant's theory, that we can know nothing beyond ourselves, gave the death blow to philosophy'" (p. 408). Lindsay also strikes the other theme that will force Beulah to Christian submission, claiming that "'merely logical forms of argumentation do not satisfy the hungry soul. The rigid process of Idealism annihilated the external world; and Hume proved that Mind was like a chimera; yet who was ever seriously converted by their incontrovertible reasoning?'" (p. 439).

Beulah and Reginald never reach philosophic conclusion, for they are usually interrupted at crucial junctures, but the lawyer's arguments do prepare the way for Beulah's surrender to faith. In their last meeting when Beulah finally dismisses Lindsay's proposal, the lover offers a perspective that the author earlier intruded to suggest and that Beulah will finally accept. That is, "'to receive the attempted solutions of philosophy required more faith than [to receive] Revelation'" (p. 446).

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Or, as the author poses her axiom, "the attempted refutations of Christianity contained objections more gross and incomprehensible than the doctrine assailed" (p. 351). In Lindsay's words, doubt dictated entering "'vagaries more inexplicable than aught I fled from in revelation'"

(p. 445). Lindsay articulates the alternatives that will soon decide Beulah's philosophic fate. Admitting that Christian revelation "'is insufficient for our aspiring souls,'" scripture nonetheless "'declares emphatically that here 'we see through a glass darkly.' Better this, than the starless night in which you grope, without a promise of the dawn of eternity, where all mystery shall be explained'" (pp. 446-47). To support his claim, the advocate of faith argues for the trustworthiness and qualitative superiority of the Bible. He quotes a latitudinarian and sceptic of verbal inspiration, stating that when philosophers "'deliver prophecies as clear as those of the Hebrew seer . . . when they shall speak with the sublime authority of Jesus of Nazareth . . . then we may begin to place them on the elevation which they so thoughtlessly claim'" The Bible, in short, "'bears incontrovertible marks of divine origin'" (p. 446).

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Beulah at last comes to the impasse between final, complete negation and orthodox faith. With logic which would reappear in the arguments of Henry Adams' Reverend Stephen Hazard, Beulah asks, "'Of two incomprehensibles, which was the most plausible?'" Philosophy had given her "'dim, doubtful conjecture, cold metaphysical abstractions, intangible shadows, that flit along my path, and lure me on to deeper morasses'" (p. 457). Beulah concludes that

"this world is indeed as a deluge, and in it there is no ark of refuge but the Bible. It is true, I did not see this soul's ark constructed . . . yet, all untutored, the exhausted bird sought safety in the incomprehensible, and was saved. As to the mysteries of revelation and inspiration, why, I meet mysteries, turn which way I will. Man, earth, time, eternity, God, are all inscrutable mysteries" (p. 451).

In spite of persistent mystery, Beulah's "weary spirit found rest" as "only the exhausted wanderer through the burning wastes of speculation can truly comprehend and appreciate" (p. 461).

In Beulah's closing speech to Hartwell, the author offers one more, previously unintroduced reason for belief. Pointing to traditional philosophy and the new science, Beulah asks, "'has all this learned disputation contributed to clear the thorny way to strict morality? Put the

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Bible out of sight,'" she admonishes Hartwell, "'and how much will human intellect discover concerning our origin--our ultimate destiny? . . . notwithstanding the many priceless blessings it [science] has discovered for man, the torch of science will never pierce and illumine the recesses over which Almighty God has hung his veil'" (pp. 508-09). Although "'There is a divine mystery infolding it, which tells of its divine origin,'" "'Christianity is clear, as to rules of life and duty . . . about the [divine's] directions to man'" (p. 509).

The theme of Christianity's unparalleled moral stature comprises the chief focus of Augusta Jane Evans most popular novel, St. Elmo (1866). This long tale largely repeats the successful formula plot of Beulah. Orphan Edna Earl, injured in a train wreck, is befriended by the wealthy Mrs. Murray, whose son St. Elmo becomes the Byronic hero of the novel and the beneficiary of Edna's Christian witness.

When Edna Earl enters the protection of the Murray home at age thirteen, she quickly impresses the lordly middle-aged son who has long since discarded any reverence for humanity or religion. Even St. Elmo's eyes cast a "cynical glare," and his mouth carries "a chronic, savage

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sneer, as if it only opened to utter jeers and curses." Such features reveal a character "blotted by dissipation, and blackened and distorted by the baleful fires of a fierce, passionate nature, and a restless, powerful, and unhallowed intellect."⁶

⁶St. Elmo (New York, n.d.), p. 56. Future references will be given in parentheses.

The author withholds the sources of St. Elmo's abrasive cynicism until the later part of the novel when he confesses his love to Edna. Once possessed of a "'tender, loving heart,'" as one character testifies, St. Elmo Murray fell victim to the romantic duplicity of his fiancée and his best friend, whom he had long idolized (p. 334). In his rage which followed the discovery, St. Elmo killed the friend, a ministerial student and the son of the local minister, in a duel. Since that time, the morose young man surrendered "'to every species of dissipation'" and to the "'hate of every thing human, especially of every thing feminine.'" The fact that the deceit of "'A minister's daughter, a minister's son, a minister himself'" composed the occasion of his disillusion only compounded the young idealist's despair.

Subsequently, St. Elmo designed his life "'to mock and make my race suffer'" (p. 316).

Edna's life of consistent Christian virtue gradually works to reorient St. Elmo's attitudes. Penultimate cynic, St. Elmo finds his expectations confounded by the young girl who, to his surprise, pities and despises his fearsome demeanor (p. 83). As St. Elmo later confides, "'I saw in your character traits that annoyed me, because they were noble and unlike what I believed all womanhood and girlhood to be'" (p. 319). Still sceptical of the girl after a four year absence, the now seventeen-year-old beauty continues to amaze. Anxious to prove his affections misplaced, St. Elmo confesses to Edna that he "'strewed infidel books where . . . you must see them . . . I teased and tormented and wounded you whenever an opportunity offered; for I hoped to find some flaw in your character, some defect in your temper, some inconsistency between your professions and your practice'" (p. 322). Edna's continued integrity and selflessness at last convince St. Elmo that damnable humanity has at least one worthy exception, and, thereupon, love and hope return to his malignant, deadened spirit.

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St. Elmo is further redeemed by the charity of the Reverend Hammond, the learned and saintly man whose son had duped St. Elmo and had, in turn, been avenged. In addition to St. Elmo's satisfaction upon the minister's son, he wooed and jilted the minister's only surviving daughter, an act which led to the death of the frail, consumptive girl. In rebutting St. Elmo's negative estimate of humanity, Edna cites the example of the elderly clergyman "'whose unswerving consistency, noble charity, and sublime unselfishness . . . ought to leaven the mass of sneering cynics, and win them to a belief in their capacity for rising to pure, holy, almost perfect lives'" (p. 160). Nevertheless, the minister does indeed forgive St. Elmo. When they are finally reunited after almost twenty years St. Elmo discovers the depth of the old man's forgiveness, exclaiming that "'You amaze me, for I hate and scorn myself so thoroughly . . . I can not understand how you can endure the sight of my features'" (p. 405). Between the time of his disillusion and his acquaintance with Edna and reunion with Hammond, St. Elmo had nowhere found any evidence of Christian charity, even in his mother--"'a woman of stern integrity of character and sincerity of purpose; but she is worldly and ambitious,

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and inordinately proud, and for her religion I had lost all respect'" (p. 318).

In dwelling on ethical representations of Christianity, Augusta Evans returns to a major theme developed by the minor characters of Beulah. Although it is not an element in Beulah's religious doubt, the ethical laxity and inconsistency of Christians bring several characters to scepticism. Most notably, Beulah's wealthy friend dies an unbeliever after disenchantment with the church wherein she "'set out to anchor myself in a calm faith'" (p. 283). The minister of her fashionable church parades pompously before the lowly but bows "'with a servile, fawning sycophancy'" before the wealthy and powerful. Similarly, the congregation either squabbles over sectarian claims or plainly pursues "'Mammon worship'" (p. 284). Unable to find but one consistent, self-effacing Christian through all her world travels, the dying girl concludes that "'If all Christians set an example as pure and bright as hers, there would be less infidelity and atheism in the land'" (pp. 377, 78). The husband of this exceptional Christian woman, himself an unbeliever, confesses to Edna that he must "'acknowledge the happy results of her faith, and I may yet be brought to yield up old prejudices and confess

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its divine origin'" (p. 300). Following their marriage two decades before, the husband, Guy Hartwell's medical partner, "'did not expect her [his wife] to prove so pure-hearted, unselfish, humble, and genuinely pious as I found her if it [religion like hers] were not so rare, I should never have been so sceptical'" (p. 301).

With this relation between faith and conspicuous fidelity to its ethical dictates firmly in mind, Edna Earl proclaims to the cynical St. Elmo that "'Even if our religion were not divine, I should clasp to my heart the system and the faith that make Mr. Hammond's life serene and sublime. Oh! that I may be "duped" into that perfection of character which makes his example beckon me ever onward and upward'" (p. 162). Miss Evans thus initiates a strategy of conversion that appeals to an unique, unparalleled ethical stature which bespeaks divine origin and suggests an empirical verification of the realities of faith. It is with this logic that the Reverend Hammond early in the novel urges Edna "'to make your life an exposition of your faith; let practice and profession go hand in hand . . . and your influence for good in Mrs. Murray's family may be beyond all computation'" (p. 104). Later, when trying to coax Edna to marry St. Elmo, Hammond recurs to this

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same point, arguing that "'Far, far beyond all computation is the good which a pious, consistent, Christian wife can accomplish in the heart of a husband who truly loves her'" (p. 334). Even though Edna does not marry St. Elmo until the novel's close and her immense literary success, Edna's ethical witness to faith and Hammond's forgiveness prove efficacious. St. Elmo's heart is softened, and he chooses to atone for past sin by entering the ministry.

The author seems to have had two distinct reasons for introducing the pattern of St. Elmo's experience into her fiction. The first results from her desire to amend the social and political tendency of her time.

The old venerated barriers and well-guarded outposts, which decorum and true womanly modesty had erected on the frontiers of propriety, were swept away in the crevasse of sans souci manners that threatened to inundate the entire land; and latitudinarianism in dress and conversation was rapidly reducing the sexes to an equality, dangerous to morals and subversive of all chivalric respect for woman.

A double-faced idol, fashion and flirtations, engrossed the homage of the majority of females, while a few misguided ones, weary of the inanity of the mass of womanhood and desiring to effect a reform, mistook the sources of the evil, and, rushing to the opposite extreme, demanded power, which as a privilege they already possessed, but as a right could not extort (p. 464).

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Feminism in particular drew the author's ire because it disturbed the traditional vital role of the female in the home, the bulwark of social practice. Consequently, Miss Evans, through Edna Earl's purpose in writing, offers a justification for St. Elmo and its straightforward appeal to the feminine reader:

Believing that the intelligent, refined, modest Christian women . . . were the real custodians of the national purity, and the sole agents who could successfully arrest the tide of demoralization breaking over the land, she addressed herself to the wives, mothers, and daughters of America; calling upon them to smite their false gods, and purify the shrines at which they worshipped. Jealously she contended for every woman's right . . . to be learned, wise, noble, useful, in woman's divinely limited sphere; the right to influence and exalt the circle in which she moved . . . the right to modify and direct her husband's opinions, if he considered her worthy and competent to guide him . . . (pp. 465-66).

St. Elmo, then, constitutes the author's explanation of the province of the female and the sanctity of romantic love.

Miss Evans' second motive for St. Elmo perhaps undergirds her first. For the writer who had discredited metaphysics and still respected the findings of science and biblical criticism, a new way had to be found for the verification of traditional Christian orthodoxy. This new

perspective emerges in the method of St. Elmo's conversion. Edna Earl and the Reverend Hammond oppose and confute St. Elmo's misanthropy by proving, in Edna's words, "'that human nature, sublimated by Christianity, is capable of attaining nobler heights than pagan philosophers and infidel seers ever dreamed of'" (p. 456). Thus, in a time when traditional rational-empirical proofs for Christianity were widely discounted, Augusta Evans pointed toward a different kind of empirical substantiation. In exemplary Christian conduct, there emerges a moral witness which springs from and illuminates the reality which faith perceives. Other late-century defenders of the faith, Elizabeth Phelps Ward and E. P. Roe, would repeat this approach to the tension between faith, ethics, and doubt, but Augusta Evans deserves credit for its inception early in the half-century.

Augusta Evans published over novels before and after St. Elmo, although none came close to its popularity. Macaria (1863), an elaborate exposition of the Southern position in the Civil War, won the distinction of being banned among Yankee troops by at least one Northern

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general.⁷ Between the publication of St. Elmo and Vashti (1869), she married Colonel Lorenzo Madison Wilson, a

⁷Fidler, p. 107.

wealthy, elderly (aged sixty) businessman of Mobile, Alabama. The new Mrs. Wilson took her marital duties seriously, and her productivity slackened. Vashti; or, Until Death Do Us Part, as its title suggests, warns against hasty and loveless marriages. Six years passed before Mrs. Wilson's next work, Infelice (1875), a highly melodramatic tale of upper-crust degeneracy and personal revenge. The Mercy of Tiberius (1887) features a murder mystery which includes heroic sisterly affection and an uncanny scientific denouement (the murdered couple was struck by lightning which cast a photographic image on a pane of glass). Mrs. Wilson's last major effort, A Speckled Bird, appeared in 1902 when she was sixty-seven. Set amid labor unrest and talk of women's rights and communism, the novel expounds the author's belief that, as biographer Fidler has summarized, "women who permit themselves to be 'corrupted' by association with the impersonal, materialistic forces of commerce can expect to lose their indentivity as women, because the hardened practices

of business will destroy the delicate, superior moral 'fibres' of feminine character."⁸ Devota (1907), a thin,

⁸Fidler, p. 107.

disjointed discussion of contemporary topics, ended Mrs. Wilson's writing career just two years before her death in 1909 at age seventy-four.

In contrast to Mrs. Evans' early fiction, none of the above novels contains characters whose beliefs are altered by new currents of religious thought. The author's opinions on contemporary religious questions are on occasion inserted into characters' discussions or in direct lectures to the reader, but never are they central to the outcome of the story. The most frequent theme in these instances focuses on the nature of science and its impact on religious faith. A look at two of these novels will suffice to illustrate her attitude toward science and indicate her understanding of its role in modern culture.

The first significant mention of science occurs in the closing pages of Beulah. There the heroine assures her husband that while "'the torch of science will never pierce and illumine the recesses over which Almighty God has hung his veil,'" she does hope that some day "'Science

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and Religion shall link hands.'" Beulah reveres "'the tireless laborers who toil in laboratories . . . hunting for footsteps of Deity,'" believing "'that every scientific fact will ultimately prove but another lamp, planted along the path which leads to a knowledge of Jehovah!'" (p. 509).⁹ Infelice (1875), which came well after the

⁹ Mrs. Wilson tried to steer a careful path between materialistic and pantheistic views of nature. Her clearest exposition of her view comes in Beulah. Speaking directly to the reader, the author states,

There is an ardent love of nature, as far removed from gross materialism or subtle pantheism on the one hand, as from stupid inappreciation on the other. There is such a thing as looking "through nature up to nature's God," notwithstanding the frightened denials of those who, shocked at the growing materialism of the age, would fain persuade this generation to walk blindfold through the superb temple of a loving God has placed us in . . . it may safely be proclaimed that genuine aesthetics is a mighty channel, through which the love and adoration of Almighty God enters the human soul. It were an insult to the Creator to reject the influence which even the physical world exerts on contemplative natures Because one false philosophy would defy the universe, startled opponents tell us to close our ears to these musical utterances, and shut our eyes to glorious nature, God's handiwork. Oh! why has humanity so fierce a hatred of medium paths? (p. 276)

It should be noted that when Beulah does return to faith one of her highest pleasures is again contemplating a nature infused by God's love. For a nature lover, the scientific attack on nature was to have special significance.

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impact of Darwinism, repeats essentially the same attitude expressed in Beulah but takes care to emphasize the epistemological limits and the emotional inadequacy of the new science as a system of thought. An elderly bishop cautions a young enthusiast to be certain that the new science

"is not merely old error under new garbs,--only a change of disguising terms. Science has its fetich, as well as superstition, and abstruse terminology does not always conceal its stolid gross proportions Scientific research and analysis, nobly brave, patient, tireless and worthy of all honor and gratitude,--have manipulated, decomposed, and then integrated the universal clay,--but despite microscope and telescope, chemical analysis and vivisection,--they can go no further than the whirring of the Potter's wheel,--and the Potter is nowhere revealed the Clay and the Potter are still distinct,--and He who created cosmic laws--cannot reasonably or satisfactorily be confounded with, or merged in His own statutes."¹⁰

¹⁰Infelice (New York, 1903), pp. 135-36. Future references will be given in parentheses.

As with abstract philosophy in Beulah, Mrs. Wilson connects "the vexing riddles that sit open-mouthed at our religious and scientific cross-roads" to the emotional needs of the individual (p. 187). She questions her reader as to whether scientific theory can "cure spiritual starvation" (p. 185). As Elizabeth Phelps Ward, she poses

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her question from the emotional urgency surrounding death and the possibility of an afterlife.

Among the multitudinous philosophic, psychologic, biologic systems that have waxed and waned, dazzled and deluded,--from the first utterances of Gotama,--to the very latest of the advanced Evolutionists, is there any other than the Christian solution of the triple-headed riddle--Whence?--Wherefore?--Whither? that will deliver us from the devouring Sphinx Despair;--or yield us even shadowy consolation when the pinions of gentle yet inexorable death poise over our household darling,--and we stand beside the cold silent clay, which natural affection,--and life-long companionship render so inexpressibly precious?
(p. 184).

It is to Mrs. Wilson's credit that, recognizing the agnostic thrust in most late nineteenth-century science, she could still allow for cooperative efforts between science and religion. A character in A Speckled Bird (1902) probably states her final attitude.

"Revealed religion lets down a ladder from heaven; natural sciences are the solid rungs by which men . . . build and climb. Side by side these ladders rise, never crossing at sharp angles, both ending, resting at the feet of God. Up one spiritual faith runs easily; along the other some souls of a different mould toilsomely ascend, each and all seeking and finding the same goal--the eternal Ruler of the universe."¹¹

¹¹ A Speckled Bird (New York, 1902), p. 180.

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Later religionists and secular thinkers would more stringently abjure the cognitive arrogance of science. Holding to the private certainty of faith, Augusta Evans Wilson was content to withhold judgment until all facts had been submitted.

Although she never rivalled the consistent popularity of Augusta Evans Wilson, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps did on occasion receive a warm, broad reception from the American public. The daughter of Austin Phelps, a distinguished theologian, and the granddaughter of Moses Stuart, probably America's greatest biblical scholar, Miss Phelps was amply prepared for the eschatological ponderings of her first novel, The Gates Ajar (1868). Although exact statistics do not exist, the novel sold in excess of 100,000 copies within in a few years of its publication and was soon translated into numerous foreign languages.¹² The author later wrote other variations on

¹²James D. Hart, The Popular Book, p. 121.

the same theme, The Gates Between (1887) and Within the Gates (1901), but they failed to capture the popular imagination as had her initial treatment of the Christian afterlife. The year following The Gates Ajar saw the

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publication of Men, Women, and Ghosts (1869), a collection of short stories which mixes the author's impulses toward the mundane, the religious, and the spiritualistic. A second novel appeared in 1870. Hedged In, a mawkish tale of a factory girl's life, introduces Miss Phelps' social concerns which would culminate in her best-selling A Singular Life (1896). In any case, within three years of her first novel, Elizabeth Phelps established a pattern of fictional interests and forms which would typify her long, prolific career.

Through the years Miss Phelps' fiction would turn to subjects ranging from women's rights to antivivisection and the mixed blessings of the automobile. Yet, none of these novels drew the attention stimulated by her fiction which possessed contemporary religious relevance. Whether this popular response resulted from superior artistic quality or sensitivity to the audience's concerns is impossible to say with certainty. What appears clear, however, is that Elizabeth Phelps' religious fiction sought to understand the nation's religious anxiety and to offer messages of hope and faith.

Her first attempt in this direction was The Gates Ajar (1868), the immensely popular consolation to widespread

mourning that followed a national conflict. Published when the author was twenty-four years old, the novel does not question the existence of God but debates the mysterious nature of divine goodness in the caprice of death and the post-mortem routine of the soul. Specifically, the last days of the Civil War have claimed the heroine's brother, a close companion and only surviving family member. Mary Cabot's grief quarrels with a "dreadful God," who "'has dealt very bitterly with me'" and sent her brother to a "dreadful Heaven."¹³ Her anger at the injustice of the event is almost outweighed by sadness at the consignment

¹³The Gates Ajar, ed. Helen Sootin Smith (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 10, 13, 17. Future references will be given in parentheses.

of the energetic, carefree brother to a staid, stereotypical heaven of golden harps and obligatory, unrelenting singing. In a spiritualistic impulse, the bereaved sister prays for "a touch, a sign," from the farther world, but, as Howells also was to discover, "there is no answer, none" (p. 17).

To Mary's spiritual rescue comes a middle-aged Kansas aunt, the widow of an exemplary Christian "home missionary." During her stay with Mary in her small New

England village, she confides the lessons of sorrow and her hopes of the future life. Aunt Winifred Forceyth, showing her creator's awareness of theological issues, diverges widely from the usual rural matron--

A woman who knows something about fate, free-will, and foreknowledge absolute, who is not ignorant of politics, and talks intelligently of Agassiz's latest fossil, who can understand a German quotation, and has heard of Strauss and Neander, who can dash her sprightliness ably against . . . old dry bones of metaphysics and theology, yet never speak an accent above that essentially womanly voice
(p. 74).

Her uniqueness also affects her exposition of the details of heaven with which she seeks to quiet Mary's worst fears. To Aunt Winifred, it seems likely that in heaven the saved are aware of those left behind and are allowed to carry on their favorite occupations. In short, life continues much the same there as on earth, except that all capability for sin and guilt has been removed (p. 91). Perfect felicity between people and between people and God results.

In one important way, The Gates Ajar initiated a pattern that would persist through Miss Phelps' other religious fiction. In all of Aunt Winifred's speculations about the experiential particulars of the afterlife, she is guided by one theological norm. That is, God's love

for man as clarified in the life of Jesus. Early in her visit, the aunt reasons with Mary, asking "'do you think He could have lived those thirty-three years, and be cruel to you now? Think that over It may be the only thought you dare to have,--it was all I dared to have once'" (p. 37). Similarly, Aunt Winifred disapproves of popular Sunday-school lore about heaven, stating that "'Never, never, if Jesus Christ had been Teacher and Preacher to them, would He have pictured . . . blessed endless years with Him in such bleak colors. They are not the hues of his Bible'" (p. 99).

Winifred's picturing of God's solicitude in the gentle details of heaven alters Mary's conceptions of God from "'abstract Grandeur'" to a "living Presence, dear and real," from "inexorable Mystery" to loving "Father" (pp. 129, 130). Thus, the nature of Christ and Christ's love becomes pivotal. Mrs. Forceythe explains that "'It is on the humanity of Christ . . . that all my other reasons for hoping for such a heaven as I hope for rest for foundation. He knows exactly what we are, for he has been one of us . . . not the less humanly, but only more intensely'" (p. 133). The full measure of Jesus' "'brooding love'" is seen in the fact that "'in the mystery of an

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intensity which we shall perhaps never understand [Jesus] could choose death and, what is more than that, could live life for us three-and-thirty years'" (pp. 133, 131).

From the example of Christ's love for man, Mrs. Forceythe simply applies "'common sense'" to the actualities of heaven, conjecturing that it would "'be like'" a God of love to provide all considerations for his servants (pp. 56, 51). Although at times it is texturally uncertain, further proof of heaven's environment exists in the Bible, where promises are held "'in hints or assertions, in parables or visions'" (p. 53). Assuming God's love and symbolic vagueness in scripture, Aunt Winifred's only restriction in imagining the future life is "'that nothing in the Bible contradicts" her hypotheses (p. 95).

While the aunt's many expositions on heaven do much to console Mary, the widow's personality and conduct perform an equally important role in clarifying the spiritual reality of which she speaks. Here, as in Phelps' later novels, the extraordinary ethic moves from and illuminates the heart of trust and love and the divine source of its inspiration. Mary Cabot's small farming village harbors a sanctimonious Deacon Quirk and an erudite, dispassionate Reverend Dr. Bland, but only a warmly

human and Christlike person can effectively dispel doubt or hostility. Aunt Forceythe comes to Mary with patience in compassion and good cheer: "with her serene smile and rapt, saintly eyes . . . refined not only by birth and training, but by the long nearness of her heart to Christ" (p. 104). To Mary's further surprise, her aunt "is a thoroughly busy Christian, with a certain 'week-day holiness that is strong and refreshing" (p. 98). Her ethic draws simply and directly on Christ's model of openness and humility: "'the better we do Christ's work, the more the uneducated, neglected, or debased mind will be drawn to try and serve Him He sought out the lame, the halt, the blind, the stupid, the crotchety, the rough, as well as the equable, the intelligent, the refined'" (p. 106).

In her third novel, The Silent Partner (1871), Miss Phelps redirects the theme of The Gates Ajar, turning from God's love manifested in heaven's arrangements to "'Christ's work'" among the industrial poor of mid-century America.¹⁴

¹⁴The Silent Partner (Boston, 1871), p. 256.
Future references will be given in parentheses.

An insulated, idle society girl, much like Howells' Annie Kilburn two decades later, finds herself discomfited by

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a chance encounter with a tattered factory girl who works in her father's mills. Gradually the debutante becomes, as she puts it, "'wrapped in'" "the world of the laboring poor as man has made it . . . a world deaf, dumb, blind, doomed, stepping confidently to its own destruction before our eyes" (pp. 183, 277-78). When Perley Kelso falls into partial control of the mills after her father's death, his partners humor her desire for reform. Not to be put off, she protests that "'there is something about the relations of rich and poor, of master and man, with which the state of the market has nothing whatever to do. There is something,--a claim, a duty, a puzzle, it is all too new to me to know what to call it . . .'" (p. 141).

Perley does find an explanation and focus for her "puzzle" as she "feels" her way, "'groping purposes'" in a world that falls "'into the dark once in a while'" (p. 241). Her refined friends are bemused and a little shocked when Perley's "'superb house'" begins to resemble "'a hospital or a set of public soup rooms.'" To this "'morbid'" behavior is added a schedule of teas and musicales, libraries and model tenements for the poor (p. 236). Perley also withdraws from the church with "'the best pew-list in Five Falls, on the ground that the

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mill-people do not frequent'" the building (p. 237). She finally dispels her friends bewilderment by providing a rationale for her concern with the poor, which had at first been only a vague dissatisfaction with her conventional life. She quotes the unimpeachable Isaac Taylor:

"To insure, therefore, its large purpose of good-will to man, the law of Christ spreads out its claims very far beyond the circle of mere pity or natural kindness, and in absolute kindness, and in absolute and peremptory terms demands for the use of the poor, the ignorant, the wretched, and demands from every one who names the name of Christ, the whole residue of talent, wealth, time, that may remain after primary claims have been satisfied.'" (p. 242)

The force of Perley's compassion and faith appears consistently in her acts and those she influences. One of her business partners, a self-made man who cares only for the less fortunate, falls in love with her as their paths cross on errands of mercy. "Wherever people were cold, hungry friendless, desolate, in danger, in despair . . . wherever there was a soul for which no man cared, he found her footprints" (pp. 255-56). Because of Perley, the mill-girl who had first disturbed Perley's conscience becomes a night-time, street-corner preacher to her impoverished neighbors, declaring that "'the religion of Jesus Christ the Son of God Almighty is the only poor folk's religion

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in all the world'" (p. 296). Throughout, admitting always that she is only a "'feeler'" toward new ways, Perley Kelso stands in stark contrast to the sterile "dream-life" and facile religion of her social equals (pp. 241, 127). Again, Miss Phelps declares the value of an extraordinary ethic of selflessness, a claim which will assume vital significance as the Gilded Age's threats to faith multiply.

From the religious seriousness of these two early novels, Elizabeth Phelps turned to lighter fare in short stories and sentimental tales of love and marriage. Not until 1883 with the publication of Dr. Zay does Miss Phelps' fiction again show the desire to surpass solely entertainment value. Dr. Zay is still a story of love and romance, but it draws on the movements of feminism, homeopathy, and science for its dramatic setting.

Yorke, an aristocratic Boston lawyer, comes under the care of Dr. Zay, a female homeopath, when his buggy falls from a bridge in rural Maine. In addition to getting well, he must contend with "this new and confusing type of woman" who attends his injuries."¹⁵ A tireless

¹⁵Dr. Zay (Boston, 1883), p. 186. Future references will be given in parentheses.

physician, Dr. Zay cannot reconcile herself to human suffering for which "'there is no excuse'" (p. 113). As a doctor, she is happy in her "terrible work," a ministering "'seraphim'" to her impoverished patients (pp. 110, 85). A female in a man's profession, she walks self-consciously in the vanguard, acting "'for the whole,--for the sex, for a cause, for a future'" (p. 122).

With the doctor's unusual views on medicine and the female's role in society come parallel views on human nature and religion. When Yorke notes the difficulty of religious belief for scientists, she responds that she is "'a seeker, still'" (p. 170). Throughout the novel, the author hints that the doctor attributes all thought and emotion to a physiological base. Thus, love, in her eyes, is "'pathological sentiment'" (p. 211). Yorke first suspects that, like biblical miracles, the doctor considers the possibility of romantic love to be so improbable that it amounts to denial (p. 207). Yet, she later confesses that love alone speaks of mystery and deserves reverence, stating that "'Love is a miracle. All laws yield to it'" (p. 242). She admits that "'Next to love between man and his Creator (if there is such a thing, and I believe . . . there is), the love of one man and one woman is the

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loftiest and most illusive ideal that has been set before the world'" (p. 241). When Yorke repeatedly professes that his love meets such criteria, Miss Zay begs his patience on the ground that to a scientific mind, "'The supernatural doesn't come easily'" (p. 256). Her own emotion convinces the doctor that she loves, as emotion earlier convinced Yorke of a "power so mysterious . . . as if he only out of the world had ever come into helpless and beautiful contact with it'" (p. 208).

Miss Phelps' treatment of science and religion in Dr. Zay serves to preface a more hostile attitude in later novels. A more pointed portrait of her fears appears in Within the Gates (1901), which follows the soul into the next life. An enlargement of an earlier novel, The Gates Between (1891), Within the Gates relates the death and afterlife of Dr. Esmerald Thorne, a successful physician who has given "'All his life . . . to science.'"¹⁶ The

¹⁶Within the Gates (Boston, 1901), p. 17. Future references will be given in parentheses.

doctor's confidence in his skill and a scientific materialism informed by evolution prompt him to discount the truth or necessity of religion. As a patient explains,

"'he works the miracles himself'" (p. 6). Needless to say, the doctor has difficulty in recognizing his state as a disembodied spirit after his death in a carriage accident. He attempts to speak to the living, but they neither see nor hear him. Even as he progresses through a desolate purgatory and then the beauties and mysteries of heaven (the author fails to explain why Thorne is not in hell for his unbelief), the doctor continues to refer to Christianity as "'superstition'" and "'that ancient myth that men were wont to call Almighty God'" (pp. 67, 62).

In heaven at last, Thorne remains, as anatomist William Harvey informs him, "'out of harmony with your atmosphere'" and "'very ignorant--for a man of your gifts'" (pp. 86, 113). Sullen scepticism persists until the Christ passes one day, and all kneel except Thorne who sees no one. When all returns to normal, Thorne's empirical temper examines Christ's apparent path to discover a footprint and that "'There was One passing'" (p. 133). Recognizing his previous blindness to the Invisible, Thorne's eternal felicity in faith appears certain.

Probably Miss Phelps' worst work of any sort--the story was intended for the stage--Within the Gates

emphasizes the dangers of perceptual exclusiveness and scientific hubris. A similar, only more stringent characterization enters centrally into the antivivisection novel Trixy (1904). From a sensitive, delicate youth, Olin Steele matures into a research physiologist, "'one of the most brilliant . . . who ever came back from Berlin and Vienna.'"¹⁷ Like Thorne, Steele is secure and confident in the suppositions of a scientific materialism. As

¹⁷Trixy (Boston, 1904), p. 42. Future references will be given in parentheses.

a physiologist and empiricist, he believes in the physiological origin of all human activity and reflection. Consequently, the human intangibles of art and love are deemed the same as "Christianity, homeopathy, or psychical research: one of the inevitable delusions of an uneducated class of minds" (p. 45). Thorne's special project "was to locate the brain-cells wherein dwelt the sense of maternal affection of the higher animals, and to see whether the mother's instinct could be destroyed or not" (p. 54). Although he discovers that "love was too evasive . . . to be cut out by a scapel or grasped by a pincers," Steele nevertheless contends that love

"was only a Greek hypothesis, a psychic disease, the dream of the past, the illusion of the present" (p. 55).

As might be expected, the author sets out to confound Steele's suppositions through the events of the novel. The sceptic of love soon falls prey to the "mysterious and beautiful force" in response to a wealthy, "beautiful being on fire with a divine self-oblivion,-- she, pity, personified, mercy made magic" (pp. 60, 57). The liaison prospers until the betrothed discovers that the researcher's chief specimen has been her missing pet dog. As the purveyor of "ingenuities of a decadent science upon small, speechless creatures," Steele suffers condemnation from his lover's "passion for humanity" and "womanhood" (pp. 85, 213). Morally chastened by the loss of love and compassion for his misspent life, the physiologist ponders the reality of love that somehow transcends physical explanation. He perceives "a theory beyond theory, and a law beyond a law . . . he found himself hurled to the conclusion that a man has his share of the mutual surrender of the loving" (pp. 214-15). The author saves her last blow for the cognitive arrogance of science. The heroine writes the dying researcher that "'the worst thing about the scientific error that has misled

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you [is] that it should delude the moral nature of such a man as I thought you were born to be'" (p. 275). In a too convenient ending, the doctor dies of infection from a disease on which he has experimented.

The author's attack on the moral insensitivity of Olin Steele also accuses the essentially amoral nature of materialistic modern science. Dr. Esmerald Thorne of Within the Gates exhibits a similar tendency, for he abuses his loving wife and neglects his child, whom he soon meets in heaven. In spite of their claims of service to humanity, both Thorne and Steele overlook the more immediate wrongs of a saddened wife and animal cruelty (and thus to the people who love the animals). Only Dr. Zay finally overcomes the pattern, apparently redeemed by her womanly sensitivity. In pointing to this inconsistency in the practice of scientific humanism, Miss Phelps shares a theme that dominates the later fiction of her contemporary James Lane Allen.

Elizabeth Phelps most forceful rebuff to the claims of science came a decade before Trixy. In 1894, she published the social gospel novel, A Singular Life, which finished fourth on the best-seller list for 1896, one place ahead of Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron

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Ware. A Singular Life reverses the author's usual alignment of religious roles. In this instance, it is the hero who doubts his inherited Calvinistic orthodoxy and subsequently has difficulty obtaining his denomination's license to preach and securing a call to a pastorate. By opposing a mild heterodoxy to rigorous traditionalism, Miss Phelps dramatizes the experiential center to the Christian faith which disputes the criticisms of orthodox and sceptical alike. Through extraordinary ethical action and spiritual character, the believer can illuminate the heart and source of faith and convince the reticent.

A Singular Life takes place in the last decade of the nineteenth century in a hotbed of theological controversy. The opening scene locates a group of senior seminary students warmly arguing heredity, Huxley, and Darwin. References to these, the higher criticism, and heresy trials abound throughout. Even the daughter of Caesarea Seminary's most noted professor, a "warm, rich, human girl," reads Herbert Spencer and thinks Augustine an "interesting monomaniac."¹⁸

¹⁸A Singular Life (Boston, 1904), pp. 39, 38).
Future references will be given in parentheses.

While fellow seminarians equivocate in pre-graduation reviews of their theological correctness, Emanuel Bayard refuses to withhold his views on verbal inspiration and eternal punishment and thus has difficulty in licensure. In the inquiry that precedes his installation in a sea-port town, Bayard demurs on the inerrancy of scripture, confessing instead to "'the sacredness and authority of the Bible, which contains the lesson and the history of His [Jesus'] life'" (p. 73). In answer to a question on damnation, a doctrine which provides "'an easy way of making the Christian religion intolerable,'" Bayard makes reference only to heaven, stating that "'its happiness and holiness are the gifts of Jesus Christ to the race; to such of us as prove fit survivors, capable of immortality'" (pp. 47, 73). In submitting to the theological committee's decision, Bayard humbly admits the existence of sacred "'mysteries'" which he does not understand but accepts. He declares, however, that he will "'teach . . . none which I do not believe'" (p. 73). Otherwise fully orthodox, Bayard's candid dissent on the two points disqualifies his candidacy for the post.

The council's divided decision prompts some members of the still pastorless congregation to organize independently and to call Bayard, for the young man possesses eminent gifts for the ministry. Besides physical beauty, eloquence, and personal warmth, he demonstrates "an extreme sensitiveness of nature" and a "spiritual supremacy" that impresses even his detractors (pp. 11, 12). With the "clean, sober . . . respectable families . . . of uninfluentia citizens," Bayard unites to minister to the "'misery and shame in Angel Alley,'" the sea-port's bowery where "whiskey ran in rivers" (pp. 137, 167, 178).

In a dangerous political move, Bayard and "his poor and humble people who, in fear and faith, had tremblingly organized the experiment," challenge the influence of the town's liquor interests over the thirsty sailors (pp. 94-95). As Bayard explains to a classmate who never expected him to lead "'such a singular life,'" "'If it isn't the business of a Christian church . . . to look after these fellows--whose is it? . . . the best people are responsible for the worst, or there's no meaning in the New Testament, and no sense in the Christian religion'" (pp. 152, 154).

Over the course of years, the religious work makes steady progress. Bayard impresses the sea-going mass with his physical courage (he leads the rescue of a storm-blown ship) and his selfless conduct. As one sailor refers to Bayard's mission church, "'They've got a man up there. He ain't no dummy in a minister's choker'" (p. 135). For his simple sermons to the fishing folk, Bayard struggled "harder than he had ever worked at any time in his life. To make them one half hour's talk, he read, he ransacked, he toiled, he dreamed, he prayed" (p. 98). Like Whitefield, he "'forgot all else about the men before him, but their immortality and their misery'" (p. 99). In daily contact and weekly in public talks, Bayard esteemed the needy "in some divine scales into which no dust or chaff of weakness or care for self could fall" (p. 140). To his meetings come the "homeless . . . and the hopeless, the sinning, the miserable, the disgraced, the neglected, the 'rats' of the wharves, and the outcasts of the dens" (p. 137). Later in his tenure, the narrator comments that "Obscurity, poverty, religious doubt, sin and shame and repentance jammed the ailses to hear 'the Christman' [as Bayard became known by the lowly] interpret decency and dignity and the beauty of holiness" (p. 346).

To replace a rented building destroyed by arson, Bayard and his people build a sanctuary that has, in addition to a prayer room, a library, gymnasium, bowling alley, lounges, and smoking rooms--all designed to entertain and uplift the weak and unfortunate (p. 402). From the start and when a local paper accuses Bayard of associating with prostitutes for other than evangelical reasons, his original followers stay with him. The author identifies their trust with the fidelity of "Peter and the sons of Zebedee when they put their nets to dry upon the shores of Galilee, and tramped up and down Palestine at the call of a stronger and diviner mind, wondering what it meant and how it would all end" (p. 137).

Despite the congregation's collective effort for others, it is Bayard's personality and love that dominates and attracts the unchurched many. His sermons seem more "the cry of a spirit . . . than the eloquence of a man," pleading "as no man pleads who has not forgotten himself, as no man can plead who is not remembered of God" (p. 265). The author can only approximate the source and nature of his magnetism. She poses the problem directly.

Was it magic or miracle? Was it holiness
or eloquence? Did he speak with the tongue
of man or of angel? Where was the secret?

What was the charm? Not a man or woman of them could have answered, but not a soul of them could have gainsaid the power of the preacher . . . (p. 264).

Invoking the model of Christ, Miss Phelps suggests that "Perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that the fishermen loved him [Bayard] because he loved them" (pp. 264-65).

The real intent of Miss Phelps' portrait of Bayard's life emerges in her handling of the theological professor's changing estimate of Bayard. Professor Haggai Carruth, whose special interest is the state of the damned, has always conceded that Bayard's "'Christianity is all right, so far as I know It is his theology that is the hitch. He isn't sound'" (p. 54). The professor seems reluctant to accept the discontinuity between apparent theological error and undeniable "'spiritual quality'" (p. 366). Within his old-style orthodoxy, the theology teacher can neither account for nor contain the dynamics or results of Bayard's life. He, like liberal sceptics, can only stand in wonder at Bayard's luminous faith. Emotion and theological humility surprise the professor when he hears Bayard preach at an ocean-front gathering that is reminiscent of the New Testament. The

professor first reflects that Bayard's sermon was "'not . . . precisely a doctrinal discourse.'" The professor checks his criticism, however, and confesses, until overcome, that "'It is written . . . that the common people heard HIM gladly. And it must be admitted that our dear young friend, His servant, seems to command that which--men older and--sounder than he, would give their lives--and fame to--'" (p. 266).

Bayard's example proves sufficient to make the teacher realize that he "had been so occupied with the misery of the next world that he had never investigated the hell of this one" (p. 384). For one evening, the professor volunteers to substitute in Bayard's pulpit. Forced to depart from his abstruse notes because of the polite incomprehension of his audience, the theologian speaks from his heart, only to have his wife afterward tell him "that it was the best sermon she had heard him preach in thirty years" (p. 394). The final measure of the professor's concession to Bayard's influence emerges in his permission for the heretic to marry his daughter. The following day the daughter explains to Bayard that "'Papa says I have never been quite sound myself, and that he supposes I will do as I please, as I always have'"

(p. 368). In any case, Bayard's singular life, which Arthur Hobson Quinn calls "representative of the spiritualized, the distilled essence of Christianity," confounds the limits and preconceptions of everyone in the novel.¹⁹ The theological professor can no more account

¹⁹ Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction (New York, 1936), p. 368.

for Bayard than his theologically bemused daughter or the seafaring folk to whom Bayard ministers.

Although Miss Phelps did not venture into the complex, varied thought of Augusta Evans Wilson, her discussions of science clearly show that she assumed the intellectual background that her contemporary took pains to spell out. Insofar as she sought the proof and substance of Christianity in its social presence, Elizabeth Phelps Ward (she married Herbert D. Ward in 1888) shared the direction of late nineteenth-century American Protestantism. Having lost the argumentive struggle with the new science and its metaphysic, Protestant clergy, as James Ward Smith has pointed out, generally "fastened on the claim that metaphysics was not their baliwick anyway." Instead, they concluded that "the essence of Christianity

lies in its ethical and social teachings." While this turn to the social introduced, again as Smith states, "a period of disillusion with theological metaphysics," it at the same time obviously served as a strategy some writers employed to counter the epistemology of science which had forced the retreat from metaphysics.²⁰ As in

²⁰James Ward Smith, "Religion and Science in American Philosophy," in The Shaping of American Religion, eds. James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton, 1961), p. 424.

Augusta Evans Wilson and E. P. Roe, for Elizabeth Phelps Ward, the untypical, extraordinary life of selflessness not only redeemed its social setting but made transparent the heart of faith that motivated it. Thus, unique ethical action, very probably unparalleled by secular and many churchly counterparts, offered a different kind of empirical datum that testified to the essential reality of faith and its source. Faith, as romantic love in Dr. Zay and Trixy, composed a mystery inaccessible to the gaze of science which would explain all things with the logic of material causation.

Mrs. Ward's fiction never again considered theological problems with the directness of A Singular Life.

She wrote with her husband several biblical romances, such as Come Forth! (1891) and The Master of the Magicians (1890), but these works do not approach any significant theological issues. Only The Supply at St. Agatha's (1896), a brief tale of divine mystery in a modern metropolis, moves toward theological pertinence, only to be lost in fully inexplicable coincidence; the only possible explanation of the story has an angel in contemporary dress filling a vacant pulpit. Mrs. Ward continued to write novels and short stories, some of which, as "Jack the Fisherman" and "Madonna of the Tubs," contain poignant touches in their psychological and social realism. After slowly deteriorating health and an unhappy marriage, Mrs. Ward died at age seventy-six in 1911.

Another chief indication of the spiritual temper of the Gilded Age came in Margaret Wade Deland's first novel, John Ward, Preacher (1888), which became an immediate best-seller. A native Pennsylvanian, in 1876 Margaret Wade moved by herself to New York at age nineteen to study design at Cooper Union. There she came in contact with religious free-thinkers, feminists, and

intellectuals, who helped her shed her childhood Presbyterianism. In 1880, she married Lorin Deland, a successful publisher and advertiser, to whom she dedicated her many volumes. Mrs. Deland more or less stumbled upon her writing career through the encouragement of her husband and many friends. Her popularity with Americans continued into the next century, but, as J. C. Levenson has noted, her fiction soon left behind "the conflict of ideas that had characterized John Ward and its complex society whose working people lived by their vigorous preacher and his stern, dramatic theology." Most of Mrs. Deland's remaining fiction, especially her "Old Chester" tales, picture "a closed-off world of domestic or, at most, parochial problem comedy and sometimes even of minor tragedy."²¹ In the

²¹ "Margaret Deland," in Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary, ed. Edward T. James (Cambridge, 1971), p. 454.

considerable tragedy of John Ward, Preacher, however, there exists a quality of seriousness and emotional urgency that has no parallel in late nineteenth-century religious fiction. Aware of her novel's potential controversy, Mrs. Deland gained the approval of Phillips Brooks, her good friend and noted pastor, and Dr. William Henry Campbell,

a Presbyterian minister and an ex-President of Rutgers. With their admiration, she gave the book to the public.

The interest of John Ward, Preacher arises from its theological disagreement within marriage. The husband of the pair, a Presbyterian minister, accepts and preaches his "Angry-God" Calvinism without diluting its more unpleasant doctrines. As the narrator explains, John Ward "was an intellect which could not hold a belief subject to the mutations of time or circumstance . . . granting his premise that the Bible was directly inspired by God, he was not illogical in holding with a pathetic and patient faith to the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church."²²

²²John Ward, Preacher (Boston, 1888), p. 41. Future references will be given in parentheses.

Thus, "Once acknowledged by his soul," Ward goes forth, as one character explains, to express his Presbyterianism "with utter truth, without shrinking from its conclusions'" (pp. 41, 188).

Ward's convictions and the necessity for theological conformity within his church conflict with his bride's religious disinterest, which, in the course of the story, turns to active scepticism. With pain and sorrow, John

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Ward wrestles with the Presbyterian dichotomy between faith and good works, recognizing that his wife, "whose gracious, beautiful nature stirred him with profound admiration, was in the darkness of unbelief" (p. 41). An orphan raised by her Episcopalian cleric-uncle, Helen Ward took "her belief for granted, and giving no more thought to problems of theology than girls usually do" (p. 42). In response to John Ward's first anxious questions during their engagement, Helen moved to formulate her own creed: "Love of good was really love of God Heaven meant righteousness, and hell an absence of what was best and truest; but Helen did not feel that a soul must wait for death before it was overtaken by hell" (p. 42). In debating the wisdom or morality of marrying an unbeliever, John Ward concludes that "it was a sacred right and duty to win her and marry her, that he might take her away from the atmosphere of religious indifference in which she lived, and guide her to light and life" (p. 43).

After marriage, however, Helen continues her religious disinterest. For Mrs. Ward, religious differences are a "'matter of temperament,'" telling her husband that "'it does not make any difference to me what you believe. I wouldn't care if you were a Mohammedan . . . if it

helped you to be good and happy . . . different people have different religious necessities'" (pp. 99, 98). Correspondingly, she explains that she "'must believe what my own soul asserts, or I am untrue to myself. I must begin with that truth, even if it keeps me on the outskirts of the great Truth'" (p. 99). Helen lives open-mindedly "in religion as in everything else," content "to have the realization of God in one's soul." Consequently, although she is not certain of the nature of God, "'the form of belief is of . . . little consequence'" (p. 140).

Ward repeatedly postpones contending with Helen's unbelief, judging her "not ready for the strong meat of the Word" (p. 101). His sermons substitute "'the tenderness of God as it is found in Christ'" for their previous usual theme of God's judgment and the terror of damnation (p. 228). The story's crisis occurs when Helen repudiates any belief in hell in an argument with a church elder and the elder complains to the minister. Helen begins to regret "this hideous shadow of Calvinism," as she and John spar on the issues (p. 178). She "'cannot believe God punishes people eternally; for if He is good, He could not be so cruel . . . no human being would be so cruel as that'" (p. 168). John, in turn, cannot concede a

point on which rests his whole theological system. In the inexorable logic of his Calvinism, Ward reasons that if one doubts reprobation, "'Christ need not have died, a man need not repent, and the whole motive of the gospel is false; revelation is denied and we are without God and without hope. Grant the eternity of punishment, and the beauty and order of the moral universe burst upon us'" (p. 308). In addition to the cruelty of the doctrine, Helen accuses the motives out of which John's congregation seeks salvation: "'For people to be good for fear of hell . . . seems selfish to me somehow'" (p. 303). Discarding expedience, Helen prefers goodness to arise from a love of "the beauty of holiness," in which John's "whole life was a lesson" (p. 255).

The matter of the Wards' intellectual incompatibility is compounded by their deep mutual love. Ward's concern about his wife's beliefs transcends any desire for scholastic correctness or public approval. In short, he fears for her salvation. As Helen explains to her uncle, "'In denying reprobation, I deny revelation . . . and also the Atonement, upon which salvation depends'" (p. 389). Fearing this outcome, Ward makes the ultimate sacrifice and separates from Helen until her scepticism alters.

Again, Helen explains to her uncle that "'He has tried all that he knows . . . argument, prayer, love, tenderness, and now--sorrow.'" Knowing his love for her, Helen understands and accepts John's motive, reasoning that "'If a man believes his wife will be damned for all eternity unless she accepts certain doctrines, I should think he would move heaven and earth to make her accept them'" (p. 389).

A similar motive, only less in degree, informs John Ward's ministry and explains Helen's love for him. In Lockhaven, the slum-ridden industrial town where Ward has his church, he is at once "love and feared" (p. 146). Given the habitual drunkenness of the town's workmen, Ward fends for goodness with sermons of brimstone and damnation. The narrator explains with reference to one particular inebriate that "Not love, nor hope, nor shame, would move Tom Davis, but fear stung him into a semblance of sobriety" (p. 148). Similarly, the children of Lockhaven love the minister, "as most of them loved nothing else in their meagre, hungry lives. And he loved them; they stirred the depths of tenderness in him" (p. 93). The fear that they might follow their parents' dissipation (and damnation) "lent a suppressed passion to the fervor

with which he tried to win their love, that he might lead them to righteousness" (pp. 93-94). One character relates an incident in which Ward sacrificed propriety to aid a drunken woman on a busy city street. Helen's uncle, in contrast, wonders why Ward did not call a policeman (p. 91). When the uncle condemns Ward for giving his salary to the poor because his wife's endowment provides for their needs, a friend suggests that Ward simply follows "'Christ's example rather more literally than most of us'" (p. 192). The same friend understands that Ward's separation from Helen represents the "'height of love that is ideal'" (p. 412). Perhaps no comment reveals Ward's humanity than Helen's reflection on the role of John's harsh doctrines in his emotional composition. She suggests to him that he needs their "'sternness and horror . . . as a balance for your gentleness. I never knew any one as gentle as you, John'" (p. 98).

The extremity of John Ward's theological and ethical posture contrasts with the religious milieu of Helen's native Ashurst. The rector's chief concern in his talk with Ward after he separates from Helen focuses on how "'the world will regard your action'" (p. 425). When Helen turns to her uncle for religious counsel, he can

offer nothing but formulas and cliches for he had always avoided "those doubts which may lead to despair, or to a wider and unflinching gaze into the mysteries of light" (p. 87). When Dr. Howe had contemplated doubt, he found "the way was too hard, and the toil and anguish of the soul too great; he turned back into the familiar paths of the religion he knew and loved" (pp. 87-88). Although kindly and conscientious in his parish duties, the rector's ministry proves ineffectual and limited, as the genteel complacency of most of his parishioners indicates.

The lack of an unambiguous religious model in the rector or John Ward is not amended in the novel's conclusion. John Ward does call his wife to him some months later, but he lies near death from pneumonia. Either out of convenience or good taste, their last conversation is concealed from the reader. Helen returns to her uncle's home following the funeral, but she is now without any religious faith whatever, unable to find any clear indication of God's action in the world.

"One goes in, and in: Why is sin, which is its own punishment, in the world at all? What does it all mean, anyhow? Where is God, and why does He let us suffer here, with no certainty of a life hereafter? Why does He make love and death in the same world? Oh, that is so cruel,--love and

death together! Is He, at all? Those are the things, it seems to me, one has to think about We can't get away from it, can we?" (p. 303).

Helen does, however, maintain, her characteristic openness, stating that "'Perhaps light will never come to my eyes, but I will wait, for I believe there is light somewhere'" (p. 460).

Apart from John Ward's pre-modern dogmatism, the rector's timid faith, and Helen's agnosticism, the author provides two alternative views of contemporary religion and the significance of the Ward's marriage, although one cannot be sure that Mrs. Deland endorses either. One perspective comes from Helen's long-time friend Gifford Woodhouse, a religious liberal who counseled Helen when her religious questions were still "only a sort of intellectual exercise" (p. 141). An apparent evolutionist, he explains the debauchery of Lockhaven workers as "'one stage of development: to live up to the best one knows is morality, and the preservation of self is the best some of these people know'" (p. 69). Gifford also understands John Ward's anachronistic theology with a similar strategy, stating that "'there are stages of truth; there's no use knocking a man down because he is only on the first step of the ladder, which you have climbed into light. I

think belief in eternal damnation is a phase in spiritual development'" (p. 180). Mrs. Deland does not allow Gifford to announce the nature of his spiritual fulfillment, however. His definition of God resembles Helen's early attempt at theology, naming God "'the power and the desire for good in ourselves. That seems to me to be God. Sometimes I feel as though all our lives were a thought of the Eternal, which would have as clear an expression as we would let it'" (p. 413). Yet, Gifford does not explain or try to understand the logic of Helen's suffering. He simply reassures her that faith is not beyond her reach, for to Gifford faith "'is not the holding of certain dogmas; it is simply openness and readiness of heart to believe any truth which God may show'" (p. 459).

A more definite interpretation of Helen's experience comes from another of her Ashurst uncles, the elderly Dr. Dale who plays but a slight role in the novel. Only Gifford Woodhouse and he respect John Ward for his decision. "'Love like his inspires reverence,'" he consoles Helen. "'It is almost divine,'" and insofar as it is, man gains insight "'into the mysteries of God when we see how divine a human soul can be'" (p. 447). The integrity of the Wards' convictions and their love work to

"'rouse us out of our sleepy satisfaction with our own lives, and make us more earnest'" (p. 450). Her experience and her lasting devotion to her husband form a kind of testimony to the Ultimate:

"You have taken a stand for a vital principle, and it must make us better. Truth is like heat or light; its vibrations are endless, and are endlessly felt . . . you and your husband, from absolutely opposite and extreme points, have yet this force of truth in your souls. You have both touched the principle of life,--he from one side, you from the other. But you both feel the pulse of God in it!" (p. 451).

Mrs. Deland does not supplant the views of John Ward, Helen, or the rector, with any definitive religious analysis. The only assurance she provides for her reader, and the only remotely theological concept, lies in the necessity of honesty in a period of intellectual chaos. John Ward's relentless dogmatism is not approved, nor is the inconsequential religion of decorum that characterizes Helen's native Ashurst. Mrs. Deland seems to advocate a kind of theological, creedal neutrality until some later time when theological issues might again be clear-cut and no longer subject to the bias of individual temperament. Other than her membership in Episcopalian Phillips Brooks' church of social concern, Mrs. Deland gave her

public no solution to the conflict of John and Helen Ward.

The author died at age eighty-seven in 1945.

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CHAPTER THREE

"THE RIDDLE OF THE PAINFUL EARTH": THE RELIGIOUS QUEST OF WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

From 1867 when he became assistant editor of the Atlantic Monthly to his death in 1920, William Dean Howells lived at the center of American letters. There, in his own fiction and his criticism, he led the way in the school of "realism" which by the turn of the century had shifted the mode of serious literature in America. Friend and literary advisor to Henry James and Mark Twain, he also provided the inspiration for disciples Crane, Garland, Frederic, and Dreiser, to name a few. But Howells was not a less noteworthy presence outside literary circles. As perhaps no other contemporary, he announced and attempted to come to terms with the social transformation of America into an urban and industrial nation. Amid the national blood-thirstiness that followed the Chicago Haymarket Square bombing of 1886, Howells stood virtually alone among prominent Americans in speaking for sanity and justice. In addition and as might be expected, the "Dean," as Howells

became known, was no less involved, though less conspicuous, in the intellectual and religious currents of the late nineteenth century.

Born in 1837, Howells was the son of a Swedenborgian newspaper man of rural Ohio. Although as an adult he did not retain William Cooper Howells' particular creed, he did inherit his father's religious and moral seriousness.¹ In 1872, the year Howells became editor of the

¹The extent of William Cooper Howells' interest in Swedenborgianism can perhaps be measured by the fact that in 1879 he wrote and published The Science of Correspondences, a book explicating key Swedenborgian doctrines. Also valuable is James W. Taylor, "The Swedenborgianism of W. D. Howells," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1969.

Atlantic, he wrote to his father about his religious attitudes, stating that "Underneath all my literary activity [mainly reviews at this time] there is a strong current of spiritual thought--or trouble, and I shall yet end a violent believer or disbeliever."² As Kermit Vanderbilt has

²The unpublished letter of November 19, 1871 (Harvard), is quoted in Kenneth S. Lynn, William Dean Howells: An American Life (New York, 1970), p. 241.

shown, Howells during his Atlantic association, a total of fourteen years, willingly immersed himself in religious

problems by reviewing an extraordinary number of books with religious relevance.³ Through the time that Howells

³Kermit Vanderbilt, The Achievement of William Dean Howells: A Reinterpretation (Princeton, 1968), p. 52. Vanderbilt is also useful for his study of Howells' attitudes toward organized religion; see pp. 51-57.

devoted to writing fiction, from 1881 on, he continued his interest in religious subjects which he from time-to-time expressed in his magazine writing.⁴ As one observer of

⁴In "Howells' Opinions on the Religious Conflicts of His Age as Exhibited in Magazine Articles," American Literature, XV (November, 1943), Hannah Graham Belcher surveyed Howells' periodical writing from the year 1860 to his death in 1920. In her essay, she observes two strains in Howells' religious concerns during this period -- "the religion-science controversy and . . . the place of religion in American life" (p. 264). On the former point, which provides the chief interest of this chapter, Belcher noted a consistent mixture of elements in Howells' religious conflicts:

temperamental tendencies to faith in an intuitive and subjective religion, struggling with a rational recognition of facts which seemingly denied the validity of such a faith; confidence in mankind's control over his destiny, in conflict with the theory of an impersonal and harshly deterministic cosmos; hope vying with despair (p. 270).

Belcher also concludes that Howells never surpassed an "intuitive, unreasoning, and . . . inadequate faith," a judgment that reflects the author's own epistemological bias and her neglect of Howells' understanding of the nature of faith. While the general interpretation does not generally conflict with the evidence of Howells' novels, the fiction does produce a clearer and more consistent

focus and movement in Howells' religious concerns. For example, Belcher suggests that in the main Howells' eventual awareness of the limitations of science in discerning truth did not assume shape until the late 1880's and 1890's. Yet, The Undiscovered Country (1880) shows Howells fully aware of the limits of a strict empiricism.

The unreliability of Howells' periodical opinions is pointed out by Harry Hayden Clark in his thorough "The Role of Science in the Thought of W. D. Howells," Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, XLII (1953), 263-303. Clark notes that Howells, as a prolific journalist, "did not always find it necessary to make his early and later book reviews entirely consistent." Rather, his ideas must be reconstructed "from many sources, balancing one against the other when necessary" (p. 263). Wisely, Clark seeks to balance Howells' journalistic expressions with the comments of his fictional characters. But here, as in Belcher's article, nothing is added that is not expressed more clearly in Howells' fiction. Clark gives short space to Howells' basic attitudes toward Darwinism (pp. 273-275)--that he was open to it--and dwells primarily on its literary and social implications. While chronicling Howells' agreements with contemporary science, Clark neglects to explore the sources of Howells' dissent from its prevalent points of view, only stating that Howells never reconciled his confidence in "scientific methodology with its inability to determine truth in its psychical and spiritual realms" (p. 299). Nevertheless, Clark is correct in assessing that "while Howells never became a complete rationalist or materialist, science did in one way or another help to inspire much of his thought" (p. 301).

Also taking Howells' periodical writing into account is Arnold B. Fox's "Howells as a Religious Critic," New England Quarterly, XXV (June, 1952), 199-216. Although Fox accurately surmises that Howells' "religion lacked the firm foundation necessary for true stability," Fox's essay is not specific about the sources of Howells' doubts and often errs in interpretation of Howells' novels, The Leatherstocking (1916) in particular (p. 199).

the Gilded Age has noted, Howells was "a writer who left his mind (and thus his novels) open to the wide sweep and

swing of the winds of doctrine, and knew, at his best, that they blow all ways at once. He was prepared to accept and dramatize ambiguity."⁵

⁵Jay Martin, Harvests of Change: American Literature 1865-1914 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967), p. 47.

The record of that fiction does not depart significantly from the ambivalent attitude he revealed to his father in 1871. Yet it was Howells' fate to be unable to believe or disbelieve with either violence or finality. He always struggled with the feeling that life was, in George Carrington's words, "a pointless mystery, to be endured patiently."⁶ Howells' gestures toward faith were

⁶George C. Carrington, Jr., The Immense Complex Drama: The World and Art of the Howells Novel (Columbus, Ohio, 1966), p. 40. Perhaps the evidence most often cited in support of this view, although Carrington does not use it, is Howells' sonnet "The Bewildered Guest" in Stops of Various Quills (New York, 1895), V.

I was not asked if I should like to come.
 I have not seen my host here since I came,
 Or had a word of welcome in his name.
 Some say that we shall never see him, and some
 That we shall see him elsewhere, and then know
 Why we were bid. How long I am to stay
 I have not the least notion. None, they say,
 Was ever told when he should come or go.
 But every now and then there bursts upon
 The song of mirth a lamentable noise,
 A sound of shrieks and sobs, that strikes our joys
 Dumb in our breasts; and then, some one is gone.

They say we meet him. None knows where or when.
We know we shall not meet him here again.

not, again as Carrington has argued, merely "forms of psychological self-defense."⁷ Rather, they represent a hard-won hope amid confusion and despair. As we shall see,

⁷Carrington, pp. 44-45.

Howells' fiction does show frequent concern with the two-sided question that resided at the core of nineteenth-century thought--the nature of final reality and man's proper mode of knowing. On one level, Howells' inquiry takes shape in the metaphysical problem of an afterlife. On another and more profound, it emerges in his effort to discern an underlying moral order in man's private and communal experience. Together, these facets focus on Howells' lifelong debate over the purpose of man's existence, both individually and cosmically. Initially optimistic about man's nature and rational capabilities, Howells became increasingly cognizant, as biographer Edwin Cady has shown, of the "mysteries" of man and his world.⁸

⁸Edwin H. Cady, The Realist at War: The Mature Years 1885-1920 of William Dean Howells (Syracuse, N.Y., 1958), pp. 112, 117.

But the nature of this spiritual-intellectual journey is revealed best in the fiction itself. It should be noted that because innumerable incidental references to Darwinism and the higher criticism abound throughout Howells' fiction, attention will be given only to those novels in which the problems of belief or unbelief have dramatic and thematic relevance.

Howells' first extensive fictional mention of religious problems occurs in A Foregone Conclusion (1875). This third novel in Howells' lengthy canon of fiction--forty-three volumes in all--relates the experience of Henry Ferris, an aspiring artist who, in the first days of the American Civil War, immediately preceded the novel's narrator as the American consul in Venice. (Howells himself held the post as patronage for his successful campaign biography of Lincoln.) By this time under the technical influence of Turgenev, Howells restricts his story to the relationships between four characters: Ferris, an American widow and daughter temporarily sojourning in Venice, and a Venetian priest. With Ferris' help, the priest, Don Ippolito Rondinelli, is contracted to tutor Florida Vervain, the daughter. Over a period of weeks, the priest, who dreams of inventing, falls in love with

Florida, a malady that visited most of her tutors. He eventually confesses to her the "'life-long habit of a lie'" which the priesthood has been to him, for he has faith in neither Catholicism nor God.⁹ Rather, the living

⁹William Dean Howells, A Foregone Conclusion (Boston, 1873), p. 147. All subsequent references in parentheses are to the first editions of Howells' novels.

provided by the church has been "'a means to gratify the passion that has always filled my soul for inventions and works of mechanical skill and ingenuity'" (p. 141). Apparently irredeemably a "'mundane spirit,'" Don Ippolito entered the priesthood at the insistence of his family which had always given one member of each generation to service in the church; the priest now views himself as hopelessly enmeshed in an unwanted vocation, bound to it by "'an inexorable and inevitable law'" (p. 144).

Florida sympathizes with the priest's plight, and she and her mother provide for his passage to America where the inventor hopes to win the love of Florida. The quixotic charity of the Vervains is disrupted, however. Don Ippolito announces his love to the unsuspecting Florida who, in turn, reveals that she loves not Don Ippolito but Ferris. The Vervains hurriedly depart Venice without

seeing Ferris who himself has despaired of Florida's love. Two months later a chastened Don Ippolito summons Ferris to his deathbed where he informs Ferris of Florida's love for him. The lovers finally meet after two years of separate wanderings, she through Europe after her mother's death and he as a cavalry officer in the American Southwest. The novel closes with the fact of their marriage and their reflections on the character of Don Ippolito.

In the concluding retrospect, Ferris continues to regard Don Ippolito's character as a "'puzzle'" (p. 264). On the one hand, the priest seemed an innocent dreamer so invention-minded that he effectually insulated himself from the complexities of the real world. Yet, at other times, Don Ippolito's facial expression hinted a calculated, "lurking duplicity" that surfaced in the fact of his religious hypocrisy (p. 82). To Florida, the priest always exhibited "'the simplest and openest look in the world'" whose genuineness was confirmed by his straightforward relations with his American friends (pp. 76, 262). Amid these contradictions, any analysis of Don Ippolito's

character must be stated, as one critic has noted, "as an approximation."¹⁰

¹⁰ George N. Bennett, William Dean Howells: The Development of a Novelist (Norman, Oklahoma, 1959), p. 58.

The same approximation must be applied to the logic of Don Ippolito's religious views. Don Ippolito's agnosticism--he replies "'I do not know'" to Florida's question about the existence of God--remains largely unexplained, although Howells does include some possible influences (p. 147). One cause refers to Italian anti-clericalism during the Church's support of Austrian occupation of Italy. Howells also emphasizes Don Ippolito's isolation from his fellow priests who suspect and ridicule his experiments (pp. 43, 81-82). Another factor that receives much attention is the general atmosphere of good-natured materialism among Italy's educated classes (pp. 153, 157). Lastly, Don Ippolito recalls the comment made by his uncle, who is also a priest, that focuses on Catholicism's long conflict with science, suggesting that "'all the wickedness of the modern world has come from the devices of science'" (p. 145).

Yet, all these suggestions are possibly undercut by Ferris' closing observation that Don Ippolito lacked the depth of character that would permit the acceptance of his religious statements at face value. Ferris theorizes that when Don Ippolito finally recognized the failure of his inventor's dream, he sought refuge in an equally illusory romantic love and, failing that, turned again to the church. For Ferris, a consistent anti-romantic, the decisive fact in his assessment is that Don Ippolito, "'for a man who lived in doubt so many years . . . certainly slipped back into the bosom of the mother church pretty suddenly'" (p. 263). In the end, however, Don Ippolito's infidelity seems no more than Howells' concession to Victorian objections to a cleric who would maintain religious convictions and harbor a secret passion for a seventeen-year-old.

The vagueness surrounding Don Ippolito's agnosticism applies as well to Ferris' assertion of religious belief. At one point, in a statement as orthodox and undoubting as any issued by a major Howells' character, Ferris counters Florida's religious doubts, stating that "'I don't think it [that God exists] . . . I know it'" (p. 166). But again, as in Don Ippolito's skepticism,

the origins of faith await clarification in Howells' more mature fiction. Howells is aware of religious problems and makes dramatic use of them in this early novel, but he fails to confront the logic and effects of either belief or unbelief.

Howells' most direct and lengthy treatment of the metaphysical aspect of religion occurs in The Undiscovered Country (1880) which followed A Foregone Conclusion by five years and one other novel. Howells' question here, one that he would return to periodically, focuses on the ability of empirical science to alter man's traditional understandings of the nature of reality. With the historical authority of the Bible under scrutiny by Darwinism and the higher criticism, Howells urges the trustworthiness, if not the necessity, of subjective and non-rational modes of experience in arriving at religious faith. Significantly, this assurance includes Howells' caution that faith's cognitive bias is not without limitations and uncertainties in its knowledge of religious reality.

The thematic center of The Undiscovered Country lies in the experience of the elderly spiritualist Dr. Boynton, who is "one of the great figures in Howells' world of fictional characters," according to Swedish

critic Olav Fryckstedt.¹¹ During his early medical training, Boynton exchanged his native New England Calvinism

¹¹Olav W. Fryckstedt, In Quest of America: A Study of Howells' Early Development as a Novelist (Cambridge, 1958), p. 184.

for a materialism that believed in nothing that one "could not see, hear, touch, or taste" (p. 178). The post-pregnancy death of his wife brought Boynton to suspect dimensions to reality for which his empiricism could not account, stating that his wife's passing "was attended by occurrences so intangible, so mysterious, so sacred that I do not know how to shape them in words In the moment of her passing I was aware of something, as of an incorporeal presence, a disembodied life, and in that moment I believed!!" (p. 179). Subsequently, as "merely as inquirer" and "experimenter" in the wave of spiritualism that swept America following the Civil War, Boynton has set out to deliver the skeptical from doubt by making contact with the afterlife, thus providing "evidences through which thousands [can] cling to . . . belief in God" (pp. 6, 50, 56). Beyond the anguish of personal doubt, the spiritualist physician also fears future social

calamity once the new science has displaced the religious authority supporting traditional moral standards (p. 236).¹²

¹²Howard Kerr, in his study of late nineteenth-century American spiritualism, Mediums, and Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900 (Urbana, 1972), identifies The Undiscovered Country as the "first sustainedly serious novel about American spiritualism" (p. 122). Kerr agrees that Howells meant Boynton to be "more than a crank deluded by grief. His aim was to resolve the conflict between religious faith and scientific agnosticism by providing an experimentally verifiable alternative to doubt" (p. 123). In this respect, Boynton confirms Kerr's thesis that the impetus behind the spiritualist movement was desire for "an empirical demonstration of the soul's immortality in an age of growing doubt" (p. 3). Kerr is also useful for his description of the biographical sources for Howells' characters (pp. 129-39).

Boynton's actions well illustrate the urgency of late-Victorian religious concern. Loquacious and exuberant, he engages wholeheartedly, much like a Rappachini, in an idealistic quest for demonstrable proof of an after-life that, as George Bennett has noted, "makes the means of his search secondary."¹³ This has consequence for his

¹³Bennett, p. 100.

nineteen-year-old daughter Egeria who has from childhood served as her father's medium and hypnotic subject. Suffering from psychic exhaustion at the start of the story,

she is further unnerved when a test seance runs awry. Boynton disregards her shaken condition to proclaim to his consorts that man now stands on "'the verge of a great era'" because the "'key to the mystery [of spirit communication] is found'" (p. 33). Discovering later that he and his daughter were duped on the occasion, Boynton abandons the assistance of Boston's professional mediums. He leaves behind "'shameless swindlers'" and "'sorcerers'" to return to the quiet disinterest of his native Maine (pp. 8, 218). A series of misadventures befall the pair on their journey, and they end up in a small socialist community of Shakers. Egeria falls seriously ill on their arrival, but her father is nevertheless buoyant about the possibilities for spiritualist research among these honest and gentle people. They are, in his estimation, "'the only people who have conceived of spiritism as a science, and practiced it as a religion'" (p. 181). However, as Egeria regains physical health with the returning Spring, her father's mesmeric influence over her proportionately decreases. A discouraged Boynton finally suffers a stroke while confronting the sceptic he believes responsible for Egeria's disinterest.

Throughout, Boynton's efforts "'to place beyond question the truth of a future existence'" waver "between the sublime and absurd, the tragic and comic," and, in the end, he seems but a "sincere fool" (p. 358).¹⁴ Boynton

¹⁴Fryckstedt, pp. 190, 185.

does not die without self-knowledge, however. Before a fatal relapse, he retreats from spiritualism when he comes across a scientific explanation for the mysterious "raps" that invariably accompanied his daughter's presence in buildings. Although he does not preclude spiritualism, this new information prompts him to reconsider its value (p. 370). He recognizes that his obsession with it exacted an unjust psychological toll from his daughter (p. 371). On a related point, he notes that, unlike "'other systems of belief, all other revelations of the unseen world,'" spiritualism lacks a "'rule of life . . . for our use here.'" Inasmuch, its claims will never convince the masses because "'it has not shown its truth in the ameliorated life of men'" (p. 367). In its insistence on immediate revelation and a personal afterlife, spiritualism ignores man's communal dimension to appeal to the egoistic (pp. 217-18, 368-69). As Boynton apologizes to Ford, the

sceptic who will marry Egeria, the old physician calls himself "'a lunatic who fancied that he was seeking truth when he was only seeking himself'" (p. 371). Further, spiritualism, despite its religious pretensions, offers only another form of atheism that neglects any consideration of God, "'the great thing which it never included,-- which all research of the kind ignores'" (p. 370). Lastly, Boynton observes that spiritualism absolutized a particular mode of perception that "asserts and affirms, and appeals . . . to purely physical phenomena'" (pp. 366-67). It constructs only "'a grosser materialism'" than "'the spirit of science, which has beaten down the defenses and razed the citadel of the old faith'" (pp. 366, 326).

This latest displacement of religious belief by materialism prepares the way for Boynton's acceptance of a gentler version of his youthful Calvinism. Both Boynton and Ford, a young skeptic and amateur scientist, agree that the findings of the new science reveal little meaning in life. Consequently, Boynton "'stands at death's door . . . without a sense of anything but darkness and the void beyond'" (p. 363). Their discussion then turns, as Ford suggests it, to the hope repositied in eighteen-hundred years of Christian tradition. At first, the fact that the

Christian legacy still constitutes man's best and only hope seems unreasonable to Boynton's rational, empirical mind, stating

"Then that is the only hope,--that old story of a credulous and fabulous time, resting upon hearsay and the witness of the ignorant, the pedantic wisdom of the learned, the interest of a church lustful of power, and that allegory of the highest serving the lowest, the best suffering for the worst" (p. 365).

But Boynton warms to his subject, confessing to Ford that he has been reading the Bible during his convalescence and has found "'a great many new ideas in Job, in David, and Ecclesiastes, and Paul,--a great many in Paul'" (p. 368). The Bible leaves the question of an afterlife unanswered, "'as if it were too trivial for affirmation,'" choosing instead to emphasize the individual's preservation in the moral legacy he leaves behind. Boynton also finds "'proof of its [the Bible's] truth" in the conformity of man's experience to the biblical dictum that "'We shall reap as we have sown'" (p. 369). And finally, Boynton recalls an instance from Paul's writing that speaks to the skeptic's demand for rational and empirical authority. Religious hope or faith--the most that Christianity aspires to--is by its very nature not certitude; unanswerables persist, and doubt accompanies them. Boynton grasps the Pauline

paradox that "'We are saved by hope. But hope that is seen"--that is seen--"is not hope; for what a man seeth'" . . . (p. 372).¹⁵

¹⁵The reference is to Romans 8:24. The King James version reads: "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"

Boynton thus reverts to a particular religious attitude that rests, first, on a cognitive humility before both science and religion, and, secondly, on the moral and spiritual relevance of the Christian ethic of self-sacrifice. Consequently--although the Bible "'keeps the veil drawn . . . close, and lets the light . . . glimmer sparsely in a few promises and warning, against the agonized passion of the Cross'"--Boynton can claim that "'I have come in sight of him'" (pp. 368, 371). He entrusts his fate to God's forgiving love which "'will take care'" (p. 371). The practical efficacy of Boynton's "'trust'" emerges in new humility and the desire to ask the forgiveness of those he has offended. Final Reality, as Boynton discovers, is not solely metaphysical in nature, but also moral.

Howells' conclusion to The Undiscovered Country seems no more certain than Boynton's. Following Boynton's death, Ford's abrasive cynicism is softened in his marriage to Egeria. She regains mental and physical health and attends the Episcopal church to which she hopes someday to bring her husband. They live comfortably in a Boston suburb on the profits from a household convenience of Ford's discovery. Together, they seem to have found something of the meaning of love, much as Egeria's father belatedly discovered its redemptive mystery. Boynton's spiritualist "illusions, if they were illusions," and "the dusky twilight through which he hoped to surprise mortality" are never discussed between them. Rather, "Ford feels it a sacred charge to keep Egeria's life in the full sunshine of our common day." Boynton has given them no sign from the grave, and they "do not question his silence. They wait, and we must all wait" (p. 419).

Boynton's final emphasis on the ethical dimensions of Christianity at the expense of its metaphysics marks Howells' own shift from the abstruse to the practical in religious understanding. Howells does not forswear, as Boynton phrases it, the "'question whether we came from the Clam or the Ancient of Days,'" but seeks to gauge the

truth of religion by its consequences in the "ameliorated life of men," a standard derived from Howells' Swedish background (pp. 288, 367).

In A Modern Instance (1882), Howells' seventh novel, the religious interest lies in his presentation of the conflict between two opposing views of man's moral activity: a scientifically-based determinism denying human choice and the traditional Christian concept of moral freedom and human accountability. Howells casts his debate around the experience of a young New England couple whose marriage ends in an Indiana divorce. Their case forms the "modern instance" which is symptomatic, as one critic has put it, of "larger disruptions in American civilization that produce undisciplined marriages, which, in turn lead to divorce."¹⁶ Olav Fryckstedt explains that

¹⁶Vanderbilt, Achievement, p. 88.

both Bartley Hubbard and Marcia Gaylord come from "a small village where the old theology has lost its hold on people's minds." They are "left without moral standards in the new, highly mobile, urban and industrialized

America with its brutal competition and its nervous, restless pace."¹⁷

¹⁷Fryckstedt, p. 227.

An orphan, and thus without a heritage, Bartley Hubbard embodies Howells' worst fears about the future of America. As one character describes Hubbard, he is a "'fellow with no more moral nature than a baseball'" (p. 243). Fryckstedt summarizes Bartley as representative of Howells' pessimistic estimate of first generation post-war Americans: "He is gay, optimistic, enterprising, vigorous . . . an altogether self-made man who . . . has few principles and few scruples because he has no traditions. Culture and fine manners are but a thin veneer overlaying an essentially egotistical and brutal nature."¹⁸

¹⁸Fryckstedt, p. 237.

A slow moral decay culminates in the desertion of his wife. Failing to obtain a fraudulent divorce, the newspaperman, much like preacher Theron Ware, heads westward, to die in Whited Sepulchre, Arizona, at the hands of a victim of his gossip column.

His wife fares little better. Marcia Gaylord, as Edwin Cady points out, is a "lushly emotional creature whom the decay of up-country religion . . . has left with no resources of civilization to discipline or channel her passions."¹⁹ Her marriage to Bartley involves a cycle of

¹⁹Cady, p. 209.

contention and forgiveness in which neither partner possesses the strength or love to transcend habitual pride, jealousy, and pettiness. As Howells makes clear, their mutual inability to cope with the complexities of marriage characterizes the rest of the moral life as well. After Bartley wins a dubious promotion, Howells comments that Marcia was "too ignorant to feel the disgrace, if there were any . . . and he had no principles, no traditions, by which to perceive it" (p. 229).

While the Hubbards lack the insight and will to correct the deficiencies of habit, the worlds in which they dwell are equally unable to provide "the vital resources to save the Hubbards from themselves and each other."²⁰ In the inherited Calvinism of Equity, Maine,

²⁰Cady, p. 213.

Marcia Gaylord's home-town and the scene of Hubbard's first newspaper venture, spiritual aspiration has been exchanged for social distinction, and economic self-concern has replaced moral seriousness. In short, religion in Equity "largely ceased to be a fact of spiritual experience"; rather, it now serves the needs of its sponsors. The once rigorous Calvinist theology now temporizes, hoping to win sinners "to heaven by helping them to have a good time here." No longer critical or concerned, "the church embraced and included the world" (p. 27). Equity's sole link with past rigor appears in archly satirical old-fashioned deist who is the town lawyer and Marcia Gaylord's indulgent father. Old Gaylord takes iconoclastic delight in swiping both ways on religious questions. On the one hand, he takes pleasure in quoting the Bible and Jonathan Edwards to those within "the Mammon of Righteousness, as he called the visible church in Equity." But his ridicule also targets zealous evolutionists who expound "Darwinism and the brotherhood of all men in the monkey" (p. 37).

The Hubbards' associations with Boston prove no more satisfying. There Bartley finds confirmation of his worst instincts in the standard of "counting-room journalism," although when he becomes too flagrant he loses

his position. The Halleck family of proper Boston that has retained its ancestral Calvinism cares for the Hubbards but proves unable to impart their sense of discipline and self-sacrifice. Ben Halleck, an only son and a college classmate of Bartley, only manages to fall in love with Marcia and, failing her love after Bartley's death, seeks refuge in the ministry of an unreconstructed Calvinism. Others in proper Boston repeat the ineffectiveness of the Halleck family. The wealthy Clara Kingsbury, who had "not yet found a religion that exactly suited her," occupies herself with a self-conscious philanthropy that patronizes whomever it befriends (p. 255). As the Founder of the Indigent Children's Surf-Bathing Society for Boston's immigrant unclean, she finds "'indigent children . . . personally unpleasant to her'" (p. 244). Even on a personal level she cannot emerge from her fatuous temperament. As one friend describes her, "'Clara Kingsbury can say and do, from the best heart in the world, more offensive things in ten minutes than malice could invent in a week'" (p. 215).

Finally, the wealthy lawyer Atherton, who is Marcia Hubbard's legal advisor and seems to be Howells' raisonneur on occasion, can do nothing either to redeem

Marcia's plight or console the lovelorn Ben Halleck. A probable self-parody by Howells, Atherton is an intellectually confused character given to criticizing his economic and social inferiors. As he tries to evaluate the Hubbards' own role in their somber fate--Bartley murdered and Marcia an embittered widow--he is forced to acknowledge the uncertain distinction between the environmental determination and individual choice in character formation, stating in the last lines of the novel, "'Ah, I don't know, I don't know'" (p. 514).

Howells sharpens his focus on the displacement of traditional morality in The Rise of Silas Laphan (1885). As George Bennett has summarized, the novelist "deals with the potential moral corruption of a man . . . [who] attempts to buy his way into social acceptance with a costly house and to buy his way out of moral responsibility through a deliberately unwise loan to a former partner and victim."²¹ The issue of Silas Lapham's resistance to

²¹Bennett, p. 150.

corruption points again to a question posed in A Modern Instance: from what source, at a time of disarray in traditional religion, will America find moral leadership

amid an uncertain future? Kermit Vanderbilt answers this question by pointing to the potential renewal of New England's moral forces in the marriage of Tom Corey, the son of Boston aristocrat Bromfield Corey, and Penelope Lapham, the paint manufacturer's elder daughter. Their union offers hope by "mingling the best of the Laphams (Penelope—a mixture of new native vigor with the old respect for intellect and morality) with the best of the Coreys (Tom—a mixture of the old culture and the new enterprise)."²²

²²Vanderbilt, p. 137.

Neither the older generation of the Coreys or Laphams seems to offer resolution to the "social eruption in a new Boston, leaderless and morally adrift."²³ Per-

²³Vanderbilt, p. 101.

ceptive and trenchant, Bromfield Corey has never mustered the moral energy to participate in, as he phrases it, "'the common feelings of commonplace people'" (p. 285). He has, with a stance of ironic detachment, held aloof from social equals and inferiors alike.

Mrs. Corey has transferred her youthful moral fussiness to the demands of taste--"'the airy, graceful,

winning superstructure'" that distinguishes Society from other people of "'good sense and right ideas'" (pp. 194, 138). Similarly, Mrs. Lapham of Vermont Calvinist stock, while losing active belief, is plagued with a residual moral stringency that seeks causes for "the mystery of pain and loss" and to "have someone specifically suffer for evil in the world, even if it must be herself" (pp. 324, 390).

Silas Lapham, on the other hand, is a man of "burly simplicity" who has accepted the "'business chance'" for his ethical standard (p. 27). As his wife reminds him, his paint company forms a kind of surrogate for his displaced religion, stating that "'You had made paint your god, and you couldn't bear to let anybody else share in its blessings'" (p. 63). Even Bartley Hubbard who interviews Silas for the "Solid Men of Boston" series recognizes Silas' devotion to his paint, suggesting that "'He makes it a religion; though he would not imply it is his religion'" (p. 26). Silas' attitudes in business and paint characterize his family's in living "richly to themselves"; they did so "not because they were selfish, but they did not know how to do otherwise" (p. 35).

Silas' "rise" in the novel involves a recognition of the ambiguity and complexity of man's moral experience. As Silas' sometime moral guide, Mrs. Lapham's Puritan equation which, like Boynton's, sees the good prosper and the evil suffer, is confounded on separate occasions. First, there is the inadvertent confusion arising from Tom Corey's unsuspected love for Penelope, and, secondly, Silas bankrupts executing honest business practices (p. 324). After he has risked his solvency to help a spendthrift former partner, Persis tells him, "'I know you won't be allowed to suffer for doing him a kindness'" (pp. 228, 391). But Silas does carry out his kindness, and he does suffer. The paint company goes to creditors, and his family must return to a modest life on their rural Vermont homestead. Even in his assertion of his moral energy, Silas' "reward for standing firm for right and justice" is "to feel like a thief and the murderer" because he has inadvertently hurt the swindler's family (p. 468).

But Silas' suffering does prove beneficial in an intangible effect, the narrator explaining that "Adversity has so far been his friend that it had taken from him all hope of the social success for which people crawl and

truckle, and restored him, through failure and doubt and heartache, the manhood which his prosperity had so nearly stolen from him" (p. 506). In a closing discussion with Silas, the Reverend David Sewell, who proves as much of a friend as the Laphams have, leaves the ways and causes of Silas' misfortune, and by implication his moral renewal, to the reader's reflection, stating that "'We can trace the operation of evil in the physical world. There its course is often so very obscure; and often it seems to involve, so far as we can see, no penalty whatever'" (p. 514). The question posed by Bromfield Corey's reference at the Lapham dinner party to the "'riddle of the painful earth'" is not answered in Silas Lapham, if indeed Howells answers it anywhere (p. 285). Silas' moral courage does demonstrate that on occasion, in the midst of Howells' uncertainty about the fate of America, a man can by uncertain ways--it is never revealed how Silas arrives at his decisions, just that he does--show forth the best that is in him and concern himself with the plight of others.

With the appearance of the Reverend David Sewell in The Rise of Silas Lapham, Howells initiates a series of clerical figures that offer an answer of sorts to the

vacuum of moral leadership in America. A clerical personage, again the Reverend Sewell, appears centrally in The Minister's Charge, or The Apprenticeship of Lemuel Barker (1887), where Howells first names and explains his doctrine of complicity. Mr. Peck, a social radical, plays a major role in Annie Kilburn (1889). In A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890), Conrad Dryfoos wishes to become an Episcopal priest, and the wealthy Margaret Vance eventually enters a Protestant sisterhood. The Shadow of a Dream (1890) includes a young cleric in a disastrous love triangle. The setting and legacy of Annie Kilburn's Mr. Peck, now deceased, provide a thematic backdrop for the story of a defalcator in A Quality of Mercy (1892). A minister also appears, this time as Howells' raisonneur, in The Son of Royal Langbrith (1904). Mr. Homos of A Traveller from Altruria (1894) must explain the social meaning of Christian ethics to a pagan and materialistic America. Finally, an elderly Howells focuses on the religious self-delusion of a backwoods Ohio preacher in his classic The Leatherwood God (1916). In short, Howells' use of ministerial figures in significant roles reflects insofar as each is admirable, Howells' changing religious and ethical opinions.

The Reverend David Sewell appears in The Rise of Silas Lapham as a Corey dinner-party guest and then as the Laphams' counsel in the romantic misunderstanding between their daughters and Tom Corey. In both instances, Sewell echoes Howells' exasperation with the "'ruinous'" effects of the "'false ideal of self-sacrifice'" and love found in popular sentimental fiction (pp. 162, 198). In advising the Laphams on their daughters' problem, he urges an "'economy of pain'" which prescribes that "'One suffer instead of three, if none is to blame'" (p. 197). Inordinate self-sacrifice is only a devious form of egotism, as emphasized in Howells' portraits of philanthropists Clara Kingsbury and Annie Kilburn. Such quixotic behavior derives, Sewell reiterates, from "'novels that befool and debauch almost every intelligence in some degree'" (p. 339). Fiction of the kind obscures common sense and goes against Christian justice.

The reader has to await a subsequent novel, The Minister's Charge, or The Apprenticeship of Lemuel Barker (1887), to get a fuller picture of Sewell, the person and thinker. Yet, even in this novel, Howells cautiously leaves specific aspects of Sewell in question. For example, the denomination in which Protestant Sewell serves,

a matter of some importance, is never mentioned, and the theology behind his ethics remains undelineated save for random comments Howells allows. Sewell does seem, however, to be fully aware of the heterodox theological and intellectual climate of his day. He defers the literal meaning of hell, tending toward metaphor or universalism, and complains of the difficulty of getting people "to be good for reasons not immediately connected with their present or future comfort" (pp. 5, 117). The greatest threat to Christianity lies in a Darwinian-inspired determinism which would severely limit man's freedom. Consequently, Sewell's office has portraits of Lincoln and other notables who outstripped their hard beginnings. Such examples remind him that "'God is creative as well as operative'" (p. 22). It seems a part of Sewell's thought that man can in ethics transcend his natural inclinations and prove "'defiant of all law . . . independent of causation'" (p. 245).

Beyond noting the opposition of determinism to Christian concepts of moral freedom, Sewell hesitates to conclude very much about the nature of God independent of his grace to man. In Silas Lapham, Sewell stresses that an adequate concept of "'God has never been imagined at

all,'" but his predilections can be intimated from man's moments of noblest self-sacrifice (p. 285). Sewell repeats the same sentiment in his concluding sermon on complicity in The Minister's Charge. The most man can know or imagine of God resides in "a witness from everlasting to everlasting of the spiritual unity of man" (p. 458). Far from denying the objective existence of God, Howells at this point leaves it an open question, suggesting that, because of man's perceptual limitations, God can be known only in the concrete compassionate ways of men. "The gospel--Christ--God" provides a "lesson, a type, a witness," "for God was but the impersonation of living responsibility, of infinite and never-ceasing care for us all" (pp. 458-59).

The members of Sewell's "oddly assorted" Boston congregation--composed of liberal, middle-class, and a few blue-blood adherents--appreciate his eloquence and honesty only slightly less than his warm "personal" ministry (p. 426). Both his preaching and parish work express "his belief that you can have a righteous public only by the slow process of having righteous men and women" (p. 458). With this goal in mind, Sewell seeks to enact and spread "the old Christ-humanity" which offers man's

most profound and trustworthy guide to personal and social wholeness. God's creative purpose is best realized by each individual's recognition that, in what became known as Howells' doctrine of complicity, "no one for good or evil, for sorrow or joy, for sickness or health stood apart from his fellows, but each was bound to the highest and the lowest by the ties that centred in the hands of God" (p. 458). Only those that recognize this ethical and spiritual interdependence, which constitutes the substance and raison d'etre of Sewell's religion, will live "usefully, fruitfully" (p. 458).

The worth of Sewell's profession appears in its effects on Lemuel Barker, a rude country boy who comes to Boston on Sewell's unfounded but well-intentioned encouragement of his literary ambitions. By a series of odd coincidences, Sewell witnesses his own often reluctant involvement with Lemuel's misfortunes and growing maturity. Their relationship provides an inspiration for Lemuel and occasion for Sewell to articulate his own sense of social responsibility. After spiritual growth and bad luck, Lemuel leaves Boston to teach in a rural school where he hopes "to pass along the good that has been done me" by Sewell and several of his parishioners (p. 450). He

departs Boston, as the aging Bromfield Corey relates, "'a thorough believer in Sewell . . . [who] could formulate Sewell's theology a great deal better than Sewell could'" (p. 387).

The Minister's Charge marks Howells' last thin hold on the moral and social optimism that characterized his early fiction. Beginning two years later with Annie Kilburn (1889), confidence in the future becomes a much more tentative attitude, a hope won out of an increasing pessimism about man's nature and his moral and perceptual limitations. Sewell suggests that mankind gradually grows "in grace, in humanity, in civilization" as his willingness for self-sacrifice increases (p. 458). The minister concedes that sin composes "a terrible mystery" with which one hardly knows how to deal or how "to determine its nature," but he entertains the hope that it often amounts to "good in disguise." (p. 133). Insofar as a person is aware of the real consequences of his harmful action, he is not likely to commit the same error again; thus, the original evil has the potential of working for good. In Silas Lapham, he consoles Silas with the fact that his consciousness of a possible misdeed probably put him on guard against future offenses (p. 514). After The

Minister's Charge, good and evil wear a less ambiguous face, and Howells is less patient with the unrighteous. Sewell's belief, conservative and almost evangelical in tone, that a "righteous public" can be achieved by "the slow process of having righteous men and women" changes to the Reverend Mr. Pck's demand for a radically altered economic structure where "all share alike, and want and luxury and killing toil and heartless indolence shall all cease together" (Annie Kilburn, p. 240).

As in A Modern Instance, Howells in Annie Kilburn seems especially conscious of setting in terms of its religious significance. The town of Hatboro, Massachusetts, as Howells' satiric commentator Putney points out, is in a state of transition from a New England village to "'a sprawling American town,'" and its religious circumstance is no less chaotic. The once dominant Unitarians, who gave the town's life an intellectual flavor, have been supplanted by less cerebral Methodists, Baptists, Orthodox, and an increasing immigrant Catholic population that work Hatboro's industry. With the proliferation of denominations, the social life of the community has "become much more ecclesiastical in every way, without becoming more religious" (p. 154). The orthodox church, whose

minister Mr. Peck forms a chief interest in the story, includes both the working and middle class with some few possessors of wealth. The church seems, as its name implies, moderate theologically, although it has several noted doubters in regular attendance and Mr. Peck does make approving reference to evolution.

The drama of the story arises when Mr. William Gerrish, a self-made, self-righteous dry-goods merchant, protests Mr. Peck's "'one-sided gospel'" that neglects explication of the means of salvation for emphasis on "'mere conduct'" (pp. 273-74). Peck himself, however, seems an uncommon type of biblical literalist who takes the Bible's ethical injunctions as seriously as its assertions about the centrality of faith. (He later admits the probable correctness of Gerrish's accusations about theological laxity.) Gerrish, on the other hand, insists on theological stringency while following the gospel's ethics in "spirit"; that is, "'as far as . . . circumstances will permit'" (pp. 317, 273).

Mr. Peck objects to the mounting socio-economic inequity of America, and by the story's end, he has chosen to live and teach among the poor in a nearby factory town. In his eyes, the "superfluous charity" of the rich most

often amounts to a "'palliative'" to the poor, marked by a condescending sense of superiority (pp. 59, 65). Real charity and love between classes is rare because the rich fail to make sacrifices which they "'would really feel'" (p. 65). With an acute social sense, Peck demands "'something holier yet than charity, something higher, something purer and further from selfishness . . . and that is justice'" (p. 24). Eventually, Annie Kilburn, the young spinster from whom the novel draws its title, comes to share Peck's view after trying through philanthropy to escape her own "idle and vapid" life, stating that "'Those who do most of the work in the world ought to share in its comforts as a right, and not be put off with what we idlers have a mind to give them from our superfluity as a grace'" (pp. 113, 261).²⁴

²⁴Annie Kilburn probably marks the fruition of Tolstoy's oft-mentioned influence on Howells. Howells himself compared his reading of Tolstoy "'to the old-fashioned religious experience of people converted at revivals'" (quoted in Louis J. Budd, "William Dean Howells' Debt to Tolstoy," American Slavic and East European Review, IX [December, 1950], 292. In spite of Howells' reference to the purely spiritual or religious, Tolstoy's effect emerges largely in Howells' social-ethical thinking. If Tolstoy did influence Howells with regard to belief, it was probably in convincing Howells of the possibility of accepting Christ's moral teachings literally, much as both Tolstoy and the fictional Mr. Peck strived to do. Both Louis Budd and Clare R. Goldfarb agree that Tolstoy's

thought was the "catalytic agent" that moved Howells down a path he was already following (Budd, 292). In Goldfarb's words, Howells "used Tolstoy to define his terms and ideas" and to "direct those experiences that caused Howells to write novels" in the first place ("From Complicity to Altruria: The Use of Tolstoy in Howells," University Review, XXXII, Summer, 1966, 312, 311.

It is Peck's final hope that the church "'may become a symbol before the world of the peace of Christ.'" Of greater concern to Christendom than "the godlessness of science" should be the widespread doubt that "'the disparity between the Church's profession and her performance'" has always inspired (p. 242). Only by bringing about the congruity of aspiration and practice can the church dissuade the skeptic's rational doubts which themselves come from God. Again, Howells concludes that if the nature of reality is preeminently moral and redemptive, as Christianity contends, ethics and not abstruse metaphysical and doctrinal wrangling should be the church's chief expression.

This equation receives support from the experience of various characters in the novel. Both Dr. Morrell, the town physician and Darwinian, and Ralph Putney, occasional drunk and a mildly skeptical lawyer, admit the benefits of Peck's "'moral influence.'" Under Peck's care, Putney

recovers more rapidly than ever from a debauch, which brings Morrell to admit the probability of "'spiritual mysteries'" inaccessible to scientific explanation (p. 255). Annie Kilburn, whom Morrell eventually marries, underwent inward change, although she "never could tell by what steps she reached her agreement with the minister's philosophy" (pp. 328-29). Even though all Peck's various disciples were somewhat puzzled by his "cold and passive" demeanor--a mystery his death in a train accident leaves unanswered--they nonetheless respected his religious uniqueness and left the idiosyncracies to his own care. With regard to Peck's imperfections, Putney intimates the perceptual mystery that centers in all efforts to express or understand absolute truth, stating that

"I suppose the truth is a constitutional thing, and you can't separate it from the personal consciousness, and so you get it coloured and heated by personality when you get it fresh. That is, we can see what the absolute truth was, but never what it is" (p. 302).

Even Peck, for all of his good deeds and better intentions, lacks certainty and final repose, stating to Annie before he leaves Hatboro that "'Now I feel sure of nothing, not even of what I've been saying here'" (p. 291).

In A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890), the difficulties of perceiving truth of any kind, and then trusting in it, measurably increase amid urban social disruption.

Basil March, a middle-aged litteratus, accepts an invitation to forsake his Boston insurance work (he was about to be dismissed anyway) and accept the editorship of a new periodical to be based in New York City. Until this time, the Basil Marches lived a comfortable, satisfied life to themselves--she in her two teen-aged children and husband, and he in his "dream of intellectual achievement" which afforded "a sacred refuge" from the task-work of business life (I, 27). Although they looked upon the less refined not "so much with contempt as with amusement," both congratulated themselves on their "democratic instincts" (I, 28). They abhorred "social cruelty" of all kinds and imagined that "if it had ever come into their way to sacrifice themselves for others . . . they would have to do so, but they never asked why it had not come in their way" (I, 28).

Content at first in the life of the liberal mind, Basil undergoes a gradual awakening to the limitations of his social sympathies. He discards his habit of viewing experience through a glass of aesthetic distance and, as

Kermit Vanderbilt has named it, the "protective irony" of a self-deprecating wit.²⁵ New York's cultural heterogeneity, squalor-ridden slums, well-dressed gutter scav-

²⁵Vanderbilt, p. 150.

engers, widespread labor unrest, and ostentatious wealth--all these provoke March to an awareness of the incongruities and looming chaos of life in modern industrial America. The architectural randomness of the commercial city occasions a Darwinian vision of potential meaninglessness. The "frantic panorama" about March seemed

in wanton disregard of the life that dwelt, and bought and sold, and rejoiced or sorrowed, and clattered or crawled, around, below, above Accident and then exigency seemed the forces at work to this extraordinary effect; the play of energies as free and planless as those that force the forest from the soil to the sky; and then the fierce struggle for survival, with the stronger life persisting over the deformity, the mutilation, the destruction, the decay, of the weaker. The whole at moments seemed to him lawless, Godless; the absence of intelligent comprehensive purpose in the huge disorder and the violent struggle to subordinate the result to the greater good penetrated with its dumb appeal the consciousness of a man who had always been too self-enwrapped to perceive the chaos to which the individual selfishness must always lead (I, 243-44).

Eventually, after some months of exploring the by-ways of New York, March arrives at the point where he could no

longer "release himself from a sense of complicity . . . no matter what whimsical, or alien, or critical attitude he took. A sense of striving and the suffering deeply possessed him . . . as he gained some knowledge of the forces at work--forces of pity, of destruction, of perdition, of salvation" (I, 74).

With sadness and guilt, Basil surmizes that he and his wife "had got their laugh out of too many things in life" and had lived, in fact, a "death in life" (I, 74). As Everett Carter has noted, March's deepening sense of social responsibility spills over into the religious. (We are told in The Shadow of a Dream [1890] that the Marches were Unitarians.) Early in their travels of New York, Basil and Isabel retreat momentarily into a downtown cathedral to escape the noontime bustle and to admire its art. After a pleasing moment of religious solemnity, Basil must remind Isabel that they came in simply to gratify an aesthetic sense, and, as such, their presence "'was a purely pagan impulse'" (I, 66). However, as Basil's social sense increases, he begins regular attendance at various churches where he "listened to those who dealt with Christianity as a system of economics as well as a religion" (II, 74).

Basil's religious interest reveals not only an urgency to find a practical solution to the problems of social and economic injustice, but Howells' effort to discern a beneficent intent beneath the suffering and pain he sees about him. On a pragmatic level, several alternatives are represented in the people March encounters while editing Every Other Week. The view most directly affecting March belongs to the periodical's owner, a Gospel of Wealth natural-gas millionaire whose "moral decay began with his perception of the opportunity of making money quickly and abundantly." Once an example of "conservative good citizenship," Jacob Dryfoos has come to New York to make more money and to sponsor a periodical that will employ his son who would prefer being a minister (II, 16). A radical perspective comes from the now elderly Lindau, a friend from March's youth who Edwin Cady describes as "an Anarchist . . . tortured immigrant, poet, scholar, crippled veteran, idealist crazed with disillusion."²⁶ Like Lindau, Colonel Woodburn,

²⁶Cady, The Realist at War, p. 105.

a Southerner in New York for its publishing opportunities, laments "'the virus of commercialism.'" But the two differ

in that Woodburn would return to a pre-Civil War society of interdependent castes and aristocratic privilege (I, 230; II, 125-26).

Still other characters offer less explicit views. March's associate Fulkerson embodies an unthoughtful business standard that, without concern for social effect, would "'make things hum'" for the sake of "unalloyed prosperity" (I, 121; II, 144). Nor does a pure aestheticism prove satisfactory. Angus Beaton, the art editor of Every Other Week, possesses talent, but the lack of a moral vision superior to egoism renders his art attractive but inconsequential. The source of greatest impact on March is found in young Conrad Dryfoos, the millionaire's son who hopes to become a preacher. A businessman in deference to his father, Conrad spends his spare hours working in New York settlement houses, reasoning that if the poor are to be helped each person must expend himself for the less fortunate. His mother recalls Conrad's Christian socialism, explaining that money alone is not enough and that, in her paraphrase, "'You got to give yourself, if you expect help 'em'" (I, 308). Conrad's death in the act of expressing his ethic--he was shot trying to protect Lindau from a policeman's club--poses both a mystery and

a promise to March in his effort to grapple with the social and religious nexus of late-nineteenth century America.

Here the mystery, the "riddle of the painful earth" from Silas Lapham, centers in the perennial problem of why good men suffer and the evil prosper. Conrad Dryfoos dies--innocent and selfless, if somewhat ineffectual--while less earnest and good, often evil men go on as before, men as the elder Dryfoos, Beaton, Fulkerson, and March himself. In Conrad's death March recognizes "'a principle in the world'" that has been "'felt more or less dumbly . . . ever since Calvary,'" although it constitutes "'as great a mystery as the mystery of death.'" That is, "'that old doctrine of the Atonement . . . The life of Christ,'" says March, "'wasn't only in healing the sick and going about doing good; it was suffering for the sins of others.'" (II, 272-73). For March, Conrad's life and death suggest "'somehow, somewhere the order of lovingkindness, which our passion or our willfulness had disturbed'" (II, 276). Imitation of Conrad's and Christ's, way offers hope for social reconciliation and opportunity for the personal resolution that comes as a by-product of following a model of selflessness. As Margaret Vance, an

accomplished society girl, suggests to the narcissistic Beaton, "'There is no comfort for us in ourselves It's hard to get outside, but there's only despair within. When we think we have done something for others by some great effort, we find it's all for our own vanity'" (II, 298). Later, when the Marches encounter Miss Vance on the street, she has become, partly inspired by Conrad's example, an Episcopalian Sister of Charity. Although she does not stop to speak, "she smiled joyfully, almost gaily on seeing them," and they "felt that the peace that passeth understanding had looked at them from her eyes." Reflecting on the lifestyle she represents, March concludes to his doubting wife, "'Well, we must trust that look of hers'" (II, 332).

In spite of this affirmation of the efficacy of Christian ethics, March cannot, in an age of science and self-conscious modernity, accept traditional Christian orthodoxy. For example, when considering the cause of the old Dryfoos' softening after Conrad's death, March states that "'it won't do to say, the Holy Spirit indwelling. That would sound like cant at this day. But the old fellows that used to say that had some glimpses of the truth.'" Grace, March suggests further, is subtle

and most often imperceptible, working in "the still, small voice that the soul heeds, not the deafening blasts of doom" (II, 318). Certain knowledge of God, or grace, or right, at last, is impossible, just as its converse of denial. March can only conclude that, in the absence of miraculous proof, "I don't know what it all means . . . though I believe it means good" (II, 319). The events of Christian myth, which also appear symbolically in the story, seem to conform to Basil March's perception of experience, but his "trust," as Howells' later fiction shows, is tentative and open-ended; March knows that, as Kermit Vanderbilt points out, "he has gained only the germ of an ideology, the hint of an explanation."²⁷

²⁷Vanderbilt, p. 186.

Everett Carter has concluded that after A Hazard of New Fortunes, with "the fund of his experience of social evil exhausted," Howells "returned to tepid reworkings of the themes of his earlier periods."²⁸ This

²⁸Everett Carter, Howells and the Age of Realism (Philadelphia, 1950), p. 223.

judgment of Howells' later fiction as inconsequential and unimaginative fails to appreciate an important shift of direction in Howells' interests. As Howells in his early fiction focused on the problems of the individual's moral decision-making, he returns, with The Shadow of a Dream, to the dilemma of the individual--only now to concentrate on the relation of the self's non-rational modes of perception to "reality." For the aging Howells--he was fifty-three in 1890--the locus of the real becomes increasingly ambiguous. He finds that it is often fully as much determined by unseen and unsensed vagaries of the private psyche as by the complex of social forces that create the realist's usual world.

Perhaps part of this shift can be accounted for by the Howellses' experience with their talented daughter Winifred who for years was thought to suffer from a debilitating psychosomatic illness. The parents' long agony over her mysteriously deteriorating health and her sudden death may have been somewhat allayed by an autopsy that proved her illness organic, but their daughter's experience, as Edwin Cady suggests, may have shown to Howells "that the ancient lore of humanity concerning the shadowy, elusive life within the depths of the heart and soul

contained wisdom not dreamt of in the realist's philosophy."²⁹ In any case, Howells' next novel, The Shadow of

²⁹Cady, p. 113.

a Dream (1890), departs from social and economic concerns to dwell on the ambiguous epistemological relation between the conscious self and the suggestions of the unconscious. In short, the question Howells asks here, and will recur to periodically in his remaining fiction, has to do with the ability of the psyche to have an adequate grasp on the essential truth of the world in which it must dwell.

In The Shadow of a Dream, this problem finds expression in the difficulty of one man in isolating the import of his dreams from the conclusions of his conscious observations. After his death, the legacy of his perceptual uncertainty affects the happiness of his widow and best friend who, wishing to marry, cannot themselves be sure of their mutual disinterestedness during the husband's life. Yet, Howells' interest in non-rational forms of cognition does not begin with The Shadow of a Dream. As suggested in the discussion of A Hazard of New Fortunes, Basil March's Christian hope for personal and social tranquility is little more than wishful, especially when

understood in light of the forces of self-interest rampant in competitive, industrial America. Christianity may seem reasonable within the profounder logic of the heart, but a social Darwinism seems no less accurate in its description of final reality. Even more striking than March's hope is the circumstance of Annie Kilburn's final acceptance of Mr. Peck's message of honest charity. In a mild transcendent experience, Annie finds conciliation with the quixotic and self-satisfying in her philanthropy. Standing on her doorstep, she looks at the morning sky which

had an immeasurable vastness, through which some crows flying across the pasture above the house sent their voices on the spacious stillness. A perception of the unity of all things under the sun flashed and faded upon her, as such glimpses do. An inexorable centrifugality had thrown her off at every point where she tried to cling she felt nothing withal had been lost; a magnitude, a serenity, a tolerance, intimated itself in the universal frame of things, where her failure, her recreancy, her folly, seemed for the moment to come into true perspective, and to show venial and unimportant, to be limited to itself, and to be even good in its effect of humbling her to patience with all imperfection and short coming, even her own. She was aware of the cessation of a struggle that has never since renewed itself with the old intensity (pp. 319-20).

Howells spells out the logic of Annie's experience, as perhaps Basil March's hope, some years later in an

uncharacteristic paragraph in An Imperative Duty (1892), a novel centering on miscegenation and the future of the Negro in American society.

We suppose, when we are experienced, that knowledge comes solely from experience; but knowledge, or if not knowledge, then truth, comes largely from perception, from instinct, from divination, from the intelligence of our mere potentialities The materials of knowledge accumulate from innumerable unremembered sources. All at once, some vital interest precipitates the latent electricity of the cloudy mass in a flash that illumines the world with a shadowless brilliancy and shows everything in its very form and meaning (pp. 77-78).

Here Howells emphasizes the distinction between knowledge and truth that Basil March only intimated. As well, in the description of the process of recognition offered, Howells describes, as in Annie Kilburn, a level of experience that centers in the non-rational and adjoins the religious. Beginning with A Shadow of a Dream, which will be considered next, Howells increasingly highlights the conflict between the insights and province of the non-rational in perception and the adequacy of modern science's empirical approach to reality.

Basil March reappears in The Shadow of a Dream to narrate an experience that spans his Ohio youth and Boston insurance work, although the reader is not sure exactly

when the story is being told. While a youthful Columbus, Ohio, newspaper reporter, March met Douglas Faulkner, a fellow reporter on a rival newspaper. Their brief intimacy, mostly on Faulkner's part, ended over a political dispute. Despite this conflict, when Basil moves east, Faulkner continues to send March occasional information about himself and his new wife. Approximately ten years after their first acquaintance, March learns of Faulkner's presence in the Boston area through the "nervous specialist" Dr. Wingate, who asks March to visit his patient (p. 12). Faulkner, it seems, suffers from a perilous heart condition that gives him great pain and makes his future uncertain. His physical debility is compounded by a mysterious recurring dream that causes enmity toward his wife and a long-time friend, the Reverend James Nevil, who has accompanied the Faulkners during Douglas' convalescence. On the day of the Marches' visit to the Faulkner's seaside cottage, Faulkner dies of a heart-attack in the act of striking out, for some unknown reason, at Nevil. His wife Hermia returns to Ohio to live with her widowed mother-in-law, and Nevil, an effective Episcopalian proponent of the Social Gospel, assumes the leadership of a distant church.

The Marches maintain correspondence with Hermia and are surprised when two years later the widow announces her engagement to James Nevil. Shortly before the marriage, Hermia discovers a note among her dead husband's possessions that suggests that she had in some way been the cause and subject of her husband's mysterious, hostile dreams. She decides to journey to New York to have Dr. Wingate, her husband's physician and confidante, reveal the content of the dream.

Unaware of her engagement to Nevil, Wingate reveals that Faulkner dreamed, as his mother later informs March,

"that she [Hermia] and James were--attached, and were waiting for him to die, so that they could get married. Then he would see them getting married in church, and at the same time it would be his own funeral, and he would try to scream out that he was not dead; but Hermia would smile, and say to the people that she had known James before she knew Douglas; and then both ceremonies would go on, and he would wake" (pp. 174-75).

Stunned by the implication of the dream--Hermia had thought that Faulkner had probably feared some physical violence from her--the widow falls into remorse and guilt that Nevil shares when informed of the nature of Faulkner's paranoia. Unable to decipher their own motives and

emotions during Faulkner's life, the pair painfully part. Hours later, Nevil is killed in a train accident which Hermia interprets as judgment. Her death follows Nevil's by a few years.

Basil March's occasional comments and concluding reflections bring into focus two crucial questions in the novel: the justice or worth of the suffering that the principals undergo, and secondly, the accuracy of Faulkner's dream-derived suspicion. On the second point, even as a young man, Faulkner "sometimes had dreams, humiliating, disgraceful, loathsome, that followed him far into the next day with a sense of actual occurrence" (p. 5). When March visits the ailing Faulkner, the invalid, always something of a romantic, has come to absolutize the content of a recurring dream, accepting it, and dreams generally, as "'truth.'" When Faulkner counters March's cautious skepticism, he acknowledges and then discounts the suspicions of pre-Freudian psychology about the unconscious, stating that

"There's a whole region of experience--half the map of our life--that they tell us must always remain a wilderness, with all its extraordinary phenomena irredeemably savage and senseless. For my part, I don't believe it. I will put the wisdom of the ancients before the science of the moderns, and I will say with Elihu, 'In

a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bad; then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction'" (pp. 55-56).

Faulkner supports his idea with the Emersonian question of "'Why should God be farther from man in our days than He was in Job's?'" (p. 31).

Opposing Faulkner's "wisdom of the ancients" are the "moderns" Wingate, March, and Faulkner's mother. March respects Wingate as a physician possessed of "a sympathy for human suffering unclouded by sentiment, and a knowledge at once vast and accurate" (p. 12). However, as an empirical scientist who deals "only with the facts of experience," Wingate does not regard the "'spiritual element'" in Faulkner's forebodings, but insists that "'the less medicine meddles with our immortal part, the better'" (p. 62). As such, Wingate finally views Faulkner's dreams as, in Edwin Cady's words, "the products of organic conditions," Wingate stating that Faulkner's paranoia "'was an effect rather than a cause of his condition . . . his disease caused his trouble of mind: the physical affected the moral, and not the moral the physical'" (p. 85).³⁰

³⁰Cady, p. 119.

Although he would adhere to Wingate's objective view of Faulkner's "'maniacal delusion that was gradually overshadowing his waking consciousness,'" March never brings himself, as his final remarks show, quite in line with Wingate's analysis (p. 128). Reluctant to "'return to the bondage of the superstitions that cursed the childhood of the race,'" March defends civilization against Faulkner's reverence for the trustworthiness of dreams (p. 57). Throughout the novel March tacitly agrees with Wingate's conclusions, but in reflection he cannot restrain from speculating to his reader that "there is always the human possibility that the dream of Faulkner was a divination of the facts; that Hermia and Nevil were really in love while Faulkner lived, and were untrue to him in their hearts, which are the fountains of potential good and evil . . ." (pp. 217-18). March's final conjecture, like his argument in behalf of civilization, neither confirms nor denies the narrative facts which are consistently ambiguous and inconclusive. The tension existent in March's thinking in this regard, as the ideological tension between Faulkner and Wingate, is summarized nicely in an incidental phrase March applies to the thought of

Faulkner's mother--"a mixture of mysticism and matter-of-fact" (p. 169).

The major part of March's reflections are devoted, however, to the justice of the mental anguish that Faulkner's dream. At times, the trio seem the innocent "victims of fate in a Greek trilogy" (p. 180). Throughout March must struggle against the feeling that existence offers "a miserable chance, a series of stupid, blundering accidents" (p. 108). The question returns Howells to his persistent uncertainty about the moral order of the universe, the existence of the "order of loving-kindness" on which his doctrine of complicity rests. In discussing Faulkner's agony, Nevil presents a desperate, hard-won confidence that is very similar to March's conclusion in A Hazard of New Fortunes. It is as clear a statement as Howells ever offers and merits quoting at length:

"I used to groan in despair when I could see no other reason for it [pain] Is it wasted, suffered to no end? . . . Shall man work wisely, usefully, definitely, and God work stupidly, idly, purposely? It's impossible! Our whole being denies it; whatever we see or hear, of waste or aimlessness in the universe, which seems to affirm it, we know to be an illusion But I could not reason to the reason, and I owe my release to the suggestion of a friend whose experience of suffering had schooled him to clearer and deeper insight than mine. He had perceived,

or it had been given him to feel, that no pang we suffer in soul or sense is lost or wasted, we shall know sometime; and why. For the present the assurance that it is so is enough for me Sometimes it seems to me the clew to the whole labyrinthine mystery of life and death, of Being and Not-being" (pp. 42-43, my italics).

March's response to Nevil's faith in the purposefulness of suffering remains as inconclusive as his ambivalence toward the "truth" of Faulkner's non-rational insight. March cannot admit the aimlessness of suffering "for our very souls' sake; and for our own sanity we must not" (pp. 108-09). Though men will strive to know the logic, or illogic, of the universe, March concludes that "We who were nowhere when the foundations of the earth were laid . . . could only feel that our little corner of cognition afforded no perspective of the infinite plan" (p. 109). For March, the balance of suffering and happiness is "'all a mystery, and one part no more a mystery than another'" (p. 142). The disproportionate suffering of the trio is not guessed at, except in the illogic of overbearing evil. But here, contrary to romantic convention, suffering does not ennoble, but only destroys. For its cause, Howells arrives at a vision of existence more complex than he had previously expounded,

recognizing that the subtle and devious operation of the unconscious compounds the complexity of human motives and actions. As he confides to the reader in the novel's last lines, Mrs. March "does not permit it to be said, or even suggested, that our feelings are not at our bidding, and that there is no sin where there has been no sinning" (p. 218).

Howells later made other ventures into the non-rational with the same openness and questioning evidenced in The Shadow of a Dream. In 1903, Questionable Shapes appeared, a collection of three novelettes that deal with the comparative weight of objective and subjective modes of knowing.³¹ "His Apparition" tells the story of "an

³¹Edward Wagenknecht states that "on at least one occasion, and, according to Van Wyck Brooks, he [Howells] told S. Wier Mitchell that all the psychic 'Romances' in Questionable Shapes and Between the Dark and the Daylight were from his own experience; William Dean Howells: The Friendly Eye (New York, 1969), p. 257.

average skeptical American, who denied no more than he affirmed," and the "weird figure" he observed in his bedroom early one sleepless morning (pp. 30, 36). Hewson is a mild-mannered and well-to-do middle-aged bachelor devoted to the creation of a "leisure class." He never doubts in "his inmost" that the apparition constituted a "veridical

phantom." Yet, his experience fails to recur "to confirm his belief that he had been all but in touch with the other life, or to give him some hint . . . why this vision had been shown him" (p. 27). Further, the apparent purposelessness of the vision is never dispelled for Hewson, and the best guess he can offer is that it boded the day on which he met his future wife. She shared Hewson's acceptance of its reality, and, as her father suggests to Hewson, one should "'believe it [the vision] was innocent till it proved itself guilty'" (p. 102). Proof of its existence remains indefinite and personal, much as, Howells suggests, the subjective reality of love or fear. The subjective, the private psyche, appears to carry as much weight in human motives as, and often surpasses, the logic of rational, objective explanation. Perhaps Howells' real attitude toward his story is given by the psychologist Wanhope, a less skeptical successor to Wingate of The Shadow of a Dream. After hearing Hewson's tale, he thoughtfully replies, "'Curious'" (p. 45).

Wanhope narrates the other story of interest in Questionable Shapes, "The Angel of the Lord." Wanhope's patient Ormond, who like Faulkner suffers from a serious

heart ailment, finds sudden and unexpected relief from a fear of death. Ormond, it seems, suddenly found himself with a "solemn joy" which "he could not account for by anything in their lives [his own and his wife's]" (pp. 134, 128). His wife regards her husband's change in mood as "the effect of a mystical intimation from another world that was sacred, and could not be considered like an ordinary fact without sacrilege" (p. 125). For Ormond himself, his new outlook results from having sensed or "'found out the reason of things, though I don't know what it is. Maybe I've only found out that there is a reason of things. That would be enough, wouldn't it?'" (p. 135). In his changed state, Ormond begins reading poetry and the Old Testament in which he is especially struck by the idea of a divine messenger, "the angel of the lord," which, he concludes, attends man "in every great moral crisis, in every ordeal of conscience" (p. 141). One morning on his rural estate, Ormond, to his wife's disgust, feeds a tramp, explaining that the fellow might be the angel of the Lord. When out riding with his wife later that day, Ormond suddenly runs into the woods yelling "'I'm coming'" (p. 152). He trips over a tree root, plunges over a cliff, and falls dead at the feet of the same, now startled tramp.

The logic of the affair is left unexplained, except to suggest that Ormond had come to view death positively and to desire it. Wanhope's attitude throughout his narration is noncommittal. He does suggest with regard to Ormond's new attitudes that, "'in the absence of proofs to the contrary,'" such a turnabout should be allowed "'the chance to evince a spiritual import'" (p. 125). Yet, in spite of his openness, Wanhope does experience the empiricist's difficulty in discussing Ormond's subjective realities which are "'facts which we are not in the habit of respecting very much, or that we relegate to the company of things that are not facts at all'" (p. 136). On the same note, Wanhope acknowledges semantic obstacles, stating that with regard to Ormond's religious intimations or "'hallucinations,'" "'There ought to be some other word that doesn't accuse his sanity in that degree. For he . . . didn't show any other signs of an unsound mind'" (p. 137). Again, without discernible irony, Howells through Wanhope states his own conclusion, which is "'I haven't formulated it yet'" (p. 156).

The final story in Questionable Shapes, "Though One Rose from the Dead," tells of the Alderlings, a couple so closely knit that they read each other's thoughts and

imagine the other's presence. When the wife dies the husband hears his wife calling him to the sea. He follows the voice from their ocean-side cottage, again yelling "I am coming," into the fog-shrouded ocean, and his row-boat is found abandoned at sea the next morning. The story is complicated by a disagreement between the husband and wife over the probability of an afterlife. After his wife's death, the skeptical Alderling judges that their previous telepathy and a post-mortem promise to return for him were delusions. Wanhope, who is again the narrator, remains typically uncommitted, although somewhat abashed by the events. He admits that "though all psychology is in a manner dealing with the occult . . . its grosser instances . . . are apt to bring one's scientific poise into question" (p. 215). Wanhope can only concur with the "'greater tolerance'" of eminent scientists toward renewed notions of an afterlife and mental telepathy, stating that "'Men like James and Royce, among the psychologists, and Shaler, among the scientists, scarcely leave us at peace in our doubts, any more, much less our denials'" (p. 204).

Howells backs away from the connection between the psychological and the spiritual in Between the Dark

and the Daylight, Romances (1907), a series of stories about the quirks of the mind. One story, "A Sleep and a Forgetting," deals with the strange world of a continual amnesiac who is gradually brought to memory by romantic love. Another, "The Eidolons of Brooks Alford," dwells on one man's recurring hallucinations of past experiences which prove to be mental aberrations cured by love and marriage. The mental slip of a man's forgetting a package when all the while he was sure he had it with him is told in "The Memory that Worked Overtime." The collection also includes Howells' famous short-story "Editha." On the whole Howells seems to have chosen to return, as he put it in The Undiscovered Country, to "the full sunshine of our common day."

Paralleling Howells' inquiry into the subjective and non-rational is a continued interest in America's social realities and what they might say of the moral order of the universe. The Quality of Mercy (1892), which shares many characters with Annie Kilburn, centers on exactly this problem. As another common kind of "modern instance," a wealthy defalcator of Hatboro absconds to Canada with company funds with which he expects to speculate and repay the money he has already stolen. Plagued with homesickness

and old-age, he returns to face justice in America and reunite his family. In a last misfortune, shortly before arriving in Boston, he dies of a heart-attack. In the closing pages of the novel, two interested parties--Putney, the witty, inebriate lawyer, and Darwinian Dr. Morrell, Annie Kilburn's husband--discuss whether the defalcator's end can be accounted for by Fate or Law. Putney, who contends for Fate, decides to "'split the difference . . . and call it Mercy'" (p. 474).

A similar effort to discern moral order motivates The Son of Royal Langbrith (1904). This time Howells focuses on the idealized memory of a wealthy private scoundrel who has effectively bound his wife, his son James, and others to the reluctant preservation of his legend. In various ways, the sufferings of Royal Langbrith's contemporaries expiate for his offenses against them, or such is the conclusion of Howells' clergyman raisonneur. Howells acknowledges the uncertain ways of "'that mystical legislation, as to whose application to our conduct we have to make our own guesses and inferences,'" but the novel does reveal his persistent concern with deriving the logic of human suffering and joy (p. 369).

One aspect of Howells' fiction not to be neglected is his utopian romance, A Traveller from Altruria (1894). Through the eyes of Mr. Homos, a visitor from a lost Christian socialist island originally evangelized by St. Paul, Howells contrasts industrial America's grotesqueries and injustices with an ideal of social harmony. Although Altruria is officially and administratively Christian, little is said about its theological suppositions or state of belief among its citizens.

Mr. Homos does state that "'we have several forms of ritual, but no forms of creed, and our religious differences may be said to be aesthetic and tempermental rather than theological or essential'" (p. 300). The Altrurians are not quietistic in their thinking, however. They enjoy the life of the mind, examining "'natural laws, open and occult,'" and warmly disputing "'questions of aesthetics and metaphysics'" (pp. 288, 294). One thing all Altrurians agree on is the efficacy of their Christian communalism. With the radical reform of society, they have arrived at what is known among them as the "Evolution." The term remains vague as Howells treats it, though it seems connected with the Altrurians' gradual

recognition of the power of individual and social generosity.

In the harmony and richness of Altrurian life, Howells intimates a social approach to the still persistent enigma of an afterlife. Mr. Homos states that "'Having come to live rightly upon earth . . . or at least ceased to deny God in our statutes and customs, the fear of death . . . has been lifted from our souls If we do not know yet the full meaning of death, we know that the Creator of it and of us meant mercy by it'" (pp. 302-02). Howells is aware of the difficulties in the way of Mr. Homos' confidence. With spiritualism in mind, the traveller admits, that although "'no externalization of the supernatural, no objective miracle,'" came to verify the Altrurians' claim to an afterlife, they nonetheless, on a social level, "'had the faith to do what we prayed for, and the prescience [of the afterlife] of which I speak has been added unto us'" (p. 303). At last, Homos appeals to the proof of private judgment--in the case of Altruria, national experience--which conforms to the biblical view of reality: "'the presence of the risen Christ in our daily lives is our assurance that as one ceases to be, and that we shall see our dead

again. I cannot explain this to you; I can only affirm it'" (p. 302).

Here, as in A Hazard of New Fortunes, the figure of Christ plays a decisive role. As Edward Wagenknecht has suggested, it provided one of the main reasons, along with the doctrine of immortality, for Howells' attraction to Christianity.³² Never certain of Christ's divinity, a

³²Wagenknecht, p. 249.

synthesis of Mr. Homos' orthodoxy and March's theological hesitancy suggests where Howells probably stood. It seems safe to say that, as Howells grew older, the figure of Christ became increasingly connected with his efforts to discern proof of immortality and moral purpose in the universe.

In his next to last novel, The Leatherwood God (1916), Howells at age seventy-nine made his most direct approach to the problem of the Incarnation. His finished work stands among the most estimable among his own and in American religious fiction. The story transpires about 1830 in the mildly evangelical frontier settlement of Leatherwood, Ohio, an area roughly similar to Howells' native locale. Its citizens, "orderly and diligent,"

enjoy a prosperity that has "relaxed the stringency of their several creeds" and effected a mutual toleration of doctrinal differences (p. 4). The sectarian harmony of the community suffers disruption by an interloper, one Joseph Dylks, who successively passes himself off as, in his words, "'first exhorter, then prophet, then disciple, then the Son, then the Father'" (p. 102). As the community divides over Dylks' authenticity, he himself becomes confused about his actual nature. On the one hand, it seems probable that he is God. As he tells the wife he deserted twelve years before, "'You would be struck dead if you said the things I do; but why ain't I struck dead? Why, either because it ain't so, at all, or because I'm God'" (p. 95). Besides other examples of similar logic, Dylks has the encouragement of Leatherwood's prominent citizenry. As Dylks explains, their eager credulity, "'Their faith put faith into you. If they believe what you say, you say to yourself that there must be some truth in it'" (p. 173).

The phenomenon of imposter and disciple, as Dylks himself states, arises from "'a kind of longing, that's always been in the world, and you know it's in others because you know it's in you, in your own heart, your own

soul.'" That is, "'the hunger and thirst to know what's going to be after you die; to get near to the God that you've always heard about and read about, near Him in the flesh, and see Him and hear Him and touch Him'" (p. 172). Thus Howells again returns, some thirty-six years later, to the lure of the undiscovered country and the agonizing limits of human cognition. Matthew Braile, the Leatherwood justice of the peace and Howells' raisonneur, largely agrees with Dylks' analysis, only adding some sociological understanding: "'life is hard in a new country, and anybody that promises salvation on easy terms has got a strong hold from the start. People will accept anything from him'" (p. 232).

Matthew Braile seems a composite of Howells' various religious attitudes through his many novels. After a mock trial for Dylks, Braile gives sound Howellsian counsel to the conflicting factions of Leatherwood Creek, believers and scoffers alike. To those men who embrace the pretender, he advises the perspective gained by time, suggesting that they "'look after your corn and tobacco; and you women, you go and get breakfast . . . and leave the Kingdom of Heaven alone for awhile'" (p. 152). And to the young rowdies who chastize Dylks' believers and

would punish their leader, the squire commands that they "'let these folks worship any stock or stone they're a mind to; and you find out the true God if you can, and stick to Him and don't bother the idolators. I reckon He can take care of Himself'" (pp. 152-53). While on the one hand, Braile wisely perceives the folly of encapsulizing God, he nonetheless sympathizes with their aspirations, however distorted, in his challenge to the dissenters to do better if they can.

Edwin Cady describes Matthew Braile as a "Tom Paine free-thinker among the pious folk of Leatherwood," which he no doubt is, although by turn-of-the-century standards his skepticism is mild (p. 266). With Braile, Howells faced the problem of locating late nineteenth-century religious insight in a Jacksonian era character. Consequently, Braile reads Tom Paine--the infidel's trademark in religious fiction--but he seems to have absorbed little from Paine other than his rationalist's criticism of the Bible. He tells a troubled neighbor, the deserted wife of Dylks who had remarried after his rumored death, that he believes "'As much as the Bible'll let me.'" With regard to the credibility of miracles, Braile accepts them insofar as the moral character of the

performer would justify the miraculous, stating that the miracle "'would depend on who did it'" (p. 108). He is also careful to distinguish between true and false prophets, in both the Bible and elsewhere. Braile's sole statement of belief in the novel more closely resembles orthodoxy, both in imagery and thought, than Tom Paine's deism:

"He [God] thinks it's best for mankind to let them have their swing when they choose to do evil He's made man, we'll say, made him in His own image, and He's put him here in a world of his own, to do the best or the worst with it. The way I look at it, He doesn't want to keep interfering with man, but lets him play the fool or play the devil just as he's a mind to. But every now and then He sends him word. If we're going to take what the Book says, He sent him Word and flesh, once, and I reckon He sends him Word made Spirit whenever there's a human creature comes into the world, all loving and unselfish" (pp. 110-11).

When Dylks is brought to trial by his skeptics and no legal offense can be determined, the pretender responds when Braile asks him if he is God by replying in biblical fashion "'Thou sayest'" (p. 148). Enraged by "the desecration of the hallowed words," Braile refuses to find Dylks guilty of anything, and thus makes him a buffoon rather than a martyr (p. 149). Braile's respect for the passion of Christ is shared by the narrator. Earlier

when the captured Dylks is abused and mocked by his opponents, the narrator sees the affair as "a squalid travesty of the supreme tragedy of the race" (p. 143). Rather than a strict adherent to Paine's skepticism, Braile's most obvious tie to Paine lies in his devotion to reason. The squire's caustic wit reduces the sentimental and ludicrous to its proper proportions. As one credulous character tells him, "'You do beat all . . . the way you take the shine off of religious experience'" (p. 15). Braile, having apparently made a study of the differences between true and false prophets in the Old Testament, quickly sizes up Dylks, whose special traits are a horse-like "mane" and "snort," for what he is: "'a man . . . worshipped for a God because he snorted like a horse'" (p. 78). Indeed, as Howells repeatedly makes clear, the pretender's pretty masculinity appeals to the sublimated sexuality of the townswomen. Thus, the village's religion turns from "the orderly worship of the Most High to the riot of emotions" that becomes an end in itself and obscures the ethical dimension of Christianity (p. 112). The same strategy forms Braile's long-standing objections to sectarian Christianity whose "religion" amounts to doctrinal hair-splitting and an easy sociality (pp. 32, 68). Worst of

all, the sectarianism of Leatherwood sanctions the excessive subjectivity that effectively complicates, like the sentimental in literature, a firm and difficult grasp of the real which, as Howells' canon illustrates, has an elusive and shifting center. Braile is fond of deferring to the "real God" that lies beyond or is different from the cultural appropriation of the "people of the backwoods [who] longed to feel themselves near the greatest world of all, and well within the radius of its mysteries" (pp. 82, 56).

Howells' fiction readily makes clear the deep and agonizing religious concern that persisted throughout his life. Nonetheless, in James Taylor's words in his study of Howells' Swedenborgianism, "it is considerably more difficult to say what Howells' religious beliefs were. Nowhere in Howells' writing is there a fully developed systematic statement of his religion."³³ A child of his

³³Taylor, "The Swedenborgianism of W. D. Howells," p. 12.

time, Howells absorbed Darwinism and empirical science and contended with its reduction of criteria for truth and final reality. These contemporary intellectual movements compounded the difficulty of approaching Matthew

Braile's "real God" and the mystery of the divine relation to man. Basil March's uncertainty about the operation of an "intelligent comprehensive purpose in the universe" is never definitely dispelled: the logic of the material, social-economic, and spiritual worlds remains impenetrable to man's efforts. Reality remains so, save for occasional glimpses, as Annie Kilburn experiences, of "the unity of all things . . . in the universal frame" Howells never finally departs from the Reverend Nevil's, not to mention Basil March's, confidence that "'no pang we suffer in soul or sense is lost or wasted.'" The protagonist of The World of Chance (1893), Howells' novel about the caprices of literary success, speaks perhaps for all of Howells' characters of hard-won faith, stating that, like the physical world,

in that world where we lived in the spirit
 We must own that we often saw the
 good unhappy, and the wicked enjoying them-
 selves. This was not just; yet somehow we
 felt, we knew, that justice ruled the uni-
 verse. Nothing, then, that seemed chance
 was really chance. It was the operation of
 a law so large that we caught a glimpse of
 its vast orbit once or twice a lifetime.
 It was Providence (p. 375).

Howells' desire to affirm an afterlife resembled the subjective mode of his hope for cosmic purposefulness.

In an essay printed in In After Days (1919), a collection of essays on the after life by prominent Americans, Howells stated that he could not "speak . . . from the absolute faith which some others can speak from There are many things that I doubt, but few that I deny: where I cannot believe, there I often trust" He counsels the bereaved, "as all faith is mystical," to trust their mystical experience "for much truth which they cannot affirm" (p. 5). As in Howells' fiction, the sources and implications of non-rational intuitive experience are ambiguous. Howells acknowledges the sceptic's contention that intimations and visions might be the

figments of an overwrought brain, but Whether they are natural or supernatural, they are precious, whether they are the effect of causes quite within ourselves, or are intimations to us from the sources of all life . . . somehow, they are . . . not to be cast out . . . as idle and futile. They may be the Kaleidoscopic adjustment of our shattered being; they may be the prismatic rays of celestial light: who shall say from knowledge (p. 6).

Both these lifelong concerns, the enigmatic moral purpose of man's universe and the possibility of an after-life, converge in Howells' wrestlings with the idea of Christ. In the face of the illogic and pain of the moral world, "the riddle of the painful earth," in which the

good suffer and the evil prosper, Howells eventually displaced Boynton's and Mrs. Laphams' insistence on clear and just moral desserts as a necessary indication of Providence. As Sewell notes in The Rise of Silas Lapham, cause and effect may be discernible in the physical world, but that pattern breaks down when applied to the moral dimensions of man's spirit and will. Instead, Howells turns to Christianity as a religion which approaches the problem of suffering. In the selfless love and mercy of the life of Christ, personal suffering is directed away from the ego to the common cares of humanity. Within this awareness of human mutuality or complicity, suffering itself is transmuted, as in the death of Christ. For Howells, the passion of Christ, as the narrator of The Leatherstocking God points out, constitutes the "supreme tragedy of the race." Although Howells never made a definitive statement about the divinity of Christ, the doctrine itself seemed, much as the idea of the afterlife in the Bible, irrelevant to the person and meaning of Jesus. In A Modern Instance, Howells has Ben Halleck, a selfless but psychologically uncertain young man, admit that "'if Christ never lived on earth, some One lived who imagined him, and that One must have been a God. The historical fact oughtn't to

matter'" (pp. 408-09). To Howells in an age of sceptical science, the Christian moral paradigm and assertion of spiritual reality still seemed the best summary of man's experience and, in the spiritualist Boynton's words, "'the only hope,--that old story of a credulous and fabulous time . . . that allegory of the highest serving the lowest, the best suffering for the worst.'"

Richard Foster's conclusion that Howells always remained agnostic seems a marked overstatement.³⁴ Where

³⁴Richard Foster, "The Contemporaneity of William Dean Howells," New England Quarterly, XXXII (March, 1959), p. 67.

Howells stood, exactly, at any one time is hard to tell. What is clear, however, are the tendencies and directions of Howells' own doubt and tentative "trust." Knowledge of experience, especially scientific knowledge, did not necessarily yield truth, which was qualitatively different from fact and whose province was the spiritual nature of the human psyche. In recognizing this rift between the empirical consciousness and the intangible promptings of the unconscious and the soul, Howells delineated the main

conflict of the twentieth century which Eliot named "the dissociation of sensibility."³⁵

³⁵Howells' clearest statement of this disposition comes in his poem, "Statistics," Stops of Various Quills (New York, 1895), XXIII.

Burglaries, arsons, thefts, and forgeries
Had their own averages as well as these;
And from these figures science can discern
The future in the past. We but return
Upon our steps, although they seem so free.
The thing that has been is that which shall be.
Dark prophet, yes! But still somehow the round
Is spiral, and the race's feet have found
The path rise under them which they have trod.
Your facts are facts, yet somewhere there is God.

CHAPTER FOUR
EMPIRICISM AND FAITH:
THE NOVELS OF E. P. ROE

During his visit to America in the mid-1880's, English critic Matthew Arnold received the impression that "The Western States are at this moment being nourished and formed . . . on the novels of a native author called Roe."¹ Arnold, in spite of his high-culture con-

¹Quoted in Edward Payson Roe, "A Native Author Called Roe: An Autobiography," in Taken Alive and Other Stories (New York, 1902), p. 24.

descension, appears not to have greatly exaggerated the case. Among all late nineteenth-century fiction writers, none surpassed the popularity of religious novelist Edward Payson Roe, a Presbyterian minister turned story-teller. At the time of his death at age fifty in 1888, Dodd and Mead, Roe's publishers, estimated that over "1,400,000 copies of all his novels had been sold, not counting

pirated editions in many foreign languages."² Alice Payne Hackett includes Roe's first and most popular novel,

²Fred Lewis Pattee, A History of American Literature Since 1870 (New York, 1917), p. 387.

Barriers Burned Away (1872), among those novels which have through the years sold a million copies or more.³ The

³60 Years of Best Sellers 1895-1955 (New York, 1956), p. 219.

records of an unidentified book wholesaler in the Mississippi Valley reveal Roe outselling his nearest competitor by three times during the mid-eighties. (On a scale of a thousand, William Dean Howells earned fourteen and Henry James one.)⁴ Perhaps the best indication of Roe's real

⁴Clarence Ghodes, "The Later Nineteenth Century," in The Literature of the American People: An Historical and Critical Survey, ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn (New York, 1951), p. 591.

success in the days before well-kept sales records is economic. While the average author earned \$200 on a book,

Roe, according to James D. Hart, eventually accrued royalties amounting to \$15,000 a year.⁵

⁵The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste (Berkeley, 1963), p. 121.

E. P. Roe stumbled on his writing career during a visit, prompted by compassion and curiosity, to the aftermath of the great Chicago fire. While there on leave from his New York congregation, he came upon the idea for his first novel, Barriers Burned Away, which was serialized in the New York Evangelist and then taken by Dodd and Mead. Other than some war correspondence as a Union chaplain, he had done little writing prior to his first venture into fiction. He claims, nonetheless, to have had a natural inclination for it. On the one hand, he had the influence of his invalid mother who had committed Paradise Lost and most of the Bible to memory. As an added benefit, early in life Roe "had formed the habit of beguiling the solitary hours in weaving crude fantasies around people who for any reason interested me."⁶ Consequently, when Roe

⁶"Author," p. 20.

struck upon the Chicago fire for the setting and central metaphor for his religious tale, the novel "grew as naturally as a plant or weed in my garden."⁷

⁷"Author," p. 21.

The results of this easy disposition toward fiction were less than satisfactory artistically. Roe's prose always remained wooden and formal, except for his action sequences where he achieved pace and directness. His stories, while often original in conception, were weighted with melodrama, sentiment, and pious preachment. Carl Van Doren amply summarized Roe's novelistic formula:

First, some topical material, historical event, or current issue; second, characters and incidents selected directly from his personal observation or from the newspapers; third, an abundance of nature descriptions with much praise of the rural virtues; and fourth, plots concerned almost invariably, and never too deviously, with the simultaneous pursuit of wives, fortunes, and salvation.⁸

⁸The American Novel 1789-1939 (New York, 1940), p. 113.

Much to his credit, Roe never made any literary claims for his fiction. He admitted equal bewilderment before the spectacle of his popular success and the critical disapproval that increased with each new work. To

his mind, in one of his rare flashes of humor, the success indicated that "It may be that we at least have an instance of an effect without a cause."⁹ Any critic, he judged,

⁹"Preface," Without a Home (New York, 1902), p. 4.

who would credit his work with classic stature would have to be "daft."¹⁰ He further confessed that if the time

¹⁰"Author," p. 29.

came when the public indicated that "they had had enough of Roe, I shall neither whine nor write."¹¹

¹¹"Author," p. 25.

A practical man, Roe was probably saved from illusions about the value of his work by a clear understanding of his audience and purpose. As early as his second novel, What Can She Do? (1873), which came before the brunt of critical disrepute, Roe proclaimed that his fiction "was not written to amuse, to create purposeless excitement, or to secure a little praise as a bit of artistic work

It was written with a definite, earnest purpose, which I trust will be apparent to the reader."¹²

¹²"Preface," What Can She Do? (New York, 1902), p. 5.

For Roe, fiction became a way of extending the work of his pastoral vocation, stating that "my object in writing, as in preaching, is to do good" When Roe chose writing over preaching because of deteriorating health, he took consolation in the fact that "I know my books are read by thousands: [before] my voice reached at most but a few hundred."¹³ Recognizing that his efforts

¹³Quoted in Mary A. Roe, "E. P. Roe: Reminiscences of His Life," in He Fell in Love with His Wife (New York, 1902), p. 403.

left much to be desired, he surmised that "Many things may have good and wholesome uses without exciting the world's admiration. A man who cannot model a perfect statue may yet erect a lamp-post, and place thereon a light which shall save many a wayfarer from stumbling."¹⁴

¹⁴"Preface," Near to Nature's Heart (New York, p. 3.)

Whatever merit or success Roe did achieve he attributed to his knowledge of "what is closely related to the people," in particular to "the young and to the common people, whom Lincoln said 'God must love, since He made so many of them.'"¹⁵ Roe was "en rapport" because, from his

¹⁵"Author," p. 23.

experience as a war chaplain, he knew "the nature that exists in the human heart."¹⁶ Knowing the variousness of the public, he estimated that his "only chance of gaining

¹⁶"Author," p. 29.

and keeping the attention of men and women was to know, to understand them, to feel with and for them in what constituted their life."¹⁷ Human nature, he conceded, "may be

¹⁷Ibid.

inartistic, or my use of it all wrong," but sales indicated that, unless Americans were generally "an aggregation of asses," he was striking a responsive cord somewhere in the populace.¹⁸

¹⁸"Author," pp. 24, 22.

In spite of his sensationalism and idealized characters, Roe did come close to the problems of the "common" reader in late nineteenth-century America. His frequent praise of nature and the rural life is matched by an equally persistent awareness of the loneliness and poverty of agrarian existence, as What Can She Do? (1873) and He Fell in Love with His Wife (1886) amply illustrate. In Without a Home (1881), Barriers Burned Away, and other novels, the precarious existence of middle- and lower-class urban life is portrayed. There, tenement housing, harsh working conditions, and poor sanitation, give rise to the special dangers of alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution, and police courts. The strains of the new industrialism on the traditional family unit furnish a constant undercurrent in many Roe settings, upper and lower class, rural and urban. Financial failure, is depicted as often as Horatio-Alger-style success. Turning often to the enmity and grief lingering from the Civil War, Roe sought to reconcile and to explain the sincerity and best intentions of both sides. The ever-present problem of love and marriage exists less for sentimental interest than to spell out a proper basis for both romantic and non-romantic relationships. Perhaps the largest factor in Roe's success

was that the reader always found a voice of understanding and sympathy for the foibles and sufferings of mankind.

Always a moralist, Roe was not vindictive or self-righteous. Amid life's perplexities, his counsel urged the acceptance of a biblical Christianity of consolation, hope, and love.

Insofar as most of Roe's canon depicts the discovery and choice of Christianity by a main character, his work is best denoted by the motif of conversion that forms a division within the larger category of religious fiction. In treating this aspect of Christian experience, and Roe always contended that it was only one aspect, he approached a concern of late-century America that was at least as pressing as its social and economic problems. According to church historian Martin E. Marty, the threat of infidelity had traditionally been no more than a convenient straw-figure for the American preacher.¹⁹ With, Roe, however, a distinct change of attitude takes place. Judging

¹⁹The Infidel: Freethought and American Religion
(Cleveland, 1961), pp. 139-41.

from his sensitivity to the common experience of his readers, the frequency in his novels of the dilemma of faith and doubt suggests that the possibility of

widespread unbelief had become suddenly an urgent concern to much of the American public. Amid this new religious uncertainty, brought about mainly by the new science and biblical criticism, Roe produced a body of thought that, in spite of limitations and its format, is honest, consistent, and sometimes trenchant. His attempt to understand and dispel the Gilded Age's religious problems treated specific obstacles to faith and discerned, as superior novelists like Howells and Frederic did, the new epistemological uncertainty underlying most questions.

As Roe's protagonists espouse their creator's religious affirmations and judgments, his infidels and unbelievers, before they are typically converted, offer his perspective on contemporary doubt about Christianity. One circumstance that frequently deters belief appears in the ethical imperfections of the visible church. The specific complaints of the doubters were usually endorsed by Roe, but he never granted that the gap between Christ's ethical and spiritual example and the church's performance provided conclusive ground for disbelief. Far more often than not, he accused the church of presenting a face of self-concern, social insensitivity, and doctrinal rigidity to the chaotic, suffering world around it.

Christine Ludolf of Barriers Burned Away (1872), Roe's first doubter-turned-Christian, arraigns the religion of her upper-crust friends for its idolatry and perpetuation of social distinctions. In her friends' hands, the cross had become a "'mere pretty ornament,'" symbolizing affluence and self-concern rather than a redemptive selflessness.²⁰ Numerous instances throughout Roe's novels

²⁰Barriers Burned Away (New York, 1902), p. 182.

confirm Christine's judgment of the church and of the undeclared caste system of America's "'Bible civilization,'" as another Roe character names it.²¹ In What Can She Do?

²¹A Knight of the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1902), p. 185.

(1873), Roe lamented that "the shifting code of fashion is coming more and more to govern the church" to the extent that "multitudes of wealthy churches . . . will no more admit association with that class among which our Lord lived and worked They seem designed to help only reputable, well-connected sinners"²² The unkempt, down-and-out Egbert Haldane of A Knight of the Nineteenth

²²What Can She Do?, pp. 108-09.

Century (1877) is directed at the door of a wealthy urban church to its mission branch, which for the wealthy resemble religious "'second class cars.'"²³ After the

²³Knight, p. 273.

father's bankruptcy, the Jocelyn family in Without a Home (1881) is made to feel uncomfortable amid the snobbery and lush surroundings of their former church. A large part of Walter Gregory's cynicism in Opening a Chestnut Burr (1874) results from being jilted for financial reasons by a pious fiancée and then swindled by an upstanding churchman. Similarly, in Near to Nature's Heart (1876), Theron Saville cites "the absurd, cruel, and monstrous acts" of professed Christians as one cause for his scepticism.²⁴ Roe, as did

²⁴Near to Nature's Heart, p. 328.

his hero in Barriers Burned Away, could only condemn and mourn "the worldly, inconsistent life of the multitudes in the church who do more to confirm unbelievers than all their sophistries."²⁵

²⁵Barriers, p. 162.

At least some of the church's hypocrisy could be attributed to ministerial preoccupation with doctrinal prerequisites and theological systems. In this respect, as Ralph Carey has pointed out, Roe shares an anti-theological, anti-doctrinal bias with other late nineteenth-century novelists.²⁶ Even with good intentions, ministers, especially those in affluent churches, often have little knowledge of human nature and actually discourage the earnest seeker with sermons heavy in theology and philosophy. While the curious are put off, the congregations themselves are

²⁶"Best-Selling Religion: a History of Popular Religious Thought in America as Reflected in Religious Best-Sellers 1850-1960" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1971), pp. 60-61.

"'spiritually smothered,'" as seminary student Frank Hempstead tells Lottie Marsden in From Jest to Earnest (1875).²⁷ Significantly, the only sectarians of whom Roe ever unreservedly approved, although one can question his portrayal

²⁷From Jest to Earnest (New York, 1902), p. 66.

of them, were the non-theological Quakers. To Roe, their tranquil goodness was the "inevitable reflection of a fuller, richer spiritual life" which "had come from

Heaven, and not from the dyspeptic creeds of cloistered theologians."²⁸

²⁸A Day of Fate (New York, 1902), p. 108.

An emphasis on dogma created a "'theological phantom'" or, as one minister confesses, a "'Christ of theology and philosophy'" rather than "'a living and personal power.'"²⁹ The theologians' Christ formed but an obstacle

²⁹A Young Girl's Wooing (New York, 1902), p. 249; Knight, pp. 284-274.

to "'the Christ of the Bible,'" a distinction of kind that Roe always vigorously maintained. Edith Allen of What Can She Do? (1873) explains that "'the Romish Church puts the Virgin, saints, penances, and I know not what, between the sinner and Jesus, and we [Protestants] put catechism, doctrines, and great mass of truth about them, between Him and us.'"³⁰ Often in real practice, the distressed in

³⁰What Can She Do?, p. 352.

body and mind turn away from a religion of dreary formalities and vague, uncomprehended mental processes." By an unknown authority that is not Christ's, theologians and

dogmatists "lead the suffering through . . . a round-about, intricate, or arid path of things to be done and doctrine to be accepted before bringing them to Christ."³¹

³¹Knight, p. 231.

Nor do individual clergy do much to stem increasing unbelief. Both Ludolph in Barriers Burned Away and Theron Saville in Near to Nature's Heart (1876) have adopted European suspicions of clerical motives. Ludolph, a German exile who hopes to return a baron, thinks the clergy cunning and self-interested--a logical leadership for a self-interested religion which has the heavenly preservation and reward of the individual as its chief object.³² And

³²Barriers, pp. 119, 117-18.

young Saville, a Revolutionary War officer recently returned from schooling in France, regards religion as "'absurd and antiquated beliefs and systems of the past, originated by shrewd old schemers who constructed and maintained them for their own advantage.'"³³

³³Near to Nature's Heart, p. 129.

While Roe never presents a clerical figure with such attributes, he does offer examples of ineffectual or plainly incompetent clergy. An inner-city mission worker in Without a Home (1881) so demonstrates "his mannerisms, his set phrases, his utter lack of magnetism and appreciation of the various shades of character with which he was dealing, [that he] repelled even those who respected his motive and mission." To compound the faults of personality, the man dispensed economic aid only to those who played to his taste for maudlin religiosity. Roe concludes that if he were in business, his associates would soon bankrupt.³⁴ Almost as harmful are the aloof, stern clerics

³⁴Without a Home, pp. 213-14.

whose demeanor gives the wrong impression of the loving deity whose emissaries they are. Effective clergy exist as well in Roe's fiction, but discussion of their merits must wait until later.

From the above dissents which are practical in their focus, Roe moves to more purely intellectual difficulties. A natural transition lies in his treatment of the problem of evil. We have already seen the doubter's disdain for the frailty of the earthen vessels of church

and clergy. In the face of evil and disorder, the sceptic extends his criticism to cosmic proportions, questioning the nature of reality itself. The enigma often arises of "'What kind of a God is he that permits . . . horrors?'"³⁵

³⁵Near to Nature's Heart, p. 99.

or more specifically, asks cousin Amy in A Knight of the Nineteenth Century (1877), "'If Christ is so strong to help and save, why is he not strong to prevent evil?'"³⁶ As already suggested, in Roe's world, evil and horrors are often

³⁶Knight, p. 428.

considerable. Without a Home (1881) presents a relentless series of personal and social disasters that leaves its survivors with, at best, a somber resignation. In A Face Illumined (1878), the kindly, faithful Jennie Burton suggests to an artist friend that

"you have never realized how shadowed humanity is, Within a mile of your studio . . . there are thousands who are perishing in slow, remorseless pain. It is this awful mystery of evil--this continuous groan and cry of anguish that has gone up to heaven through all the ages ---that appalls my heart and staggers my faith."³⁷

³⁷A Face Illumined (New York, 1902), p. 386.

Sensational and melodramatic Roe's novels were, but frequently, unlike other sentimental novelists of his day, such events possessed a significant thematic relevance, not existing alone, as Roe himself noted, for the reader's titillation.

In any case, the sceptic's attack on the evil permitted by a supposedly benevolent God gained force from a negative interpretation of evolution, which enters into the Civil War Novel, His Sombre Rivals (1883). After the death of her husband, who was agnostic and evolutionist, Grace Alford gradually concludes that "she could not turn to a God who permitted such evil and suffering," stating that "'It's the same blind contention of forces in men as in nature . . . and only the strong or fortunate survive.'"³⁸

³⁸His Sombre Rivals (New York, 1902), p. 283.

Roe himself seems not to have been able to make up his mind about the significance of nature in God's universe. In the early novels Opening a Chestnut Burr (1874) and From Jest to Earnest (1875), he expressed a Wordsworthian or Christian romantic view of nature. Nature, "in her rarest and purest beauty," offers "a glimpse into the more

beautiful world of truth, where God dwells."³⁹ To the hero of From Jest to Earnest, "'all of the countless forms

³⁹Jest, p. 68.

in nature prove an infinite mind gratifying itself. They are expressions of creative thought.'"⁴⁰ By A Face Illumined (1878), which contains Roe's only mention of Darwin by name, resistance to evolutionary ideas is obvious. When

⁴⁰Jest, p. 74.

trying to understand the mindless levity of an attractive young girl, the novel's hero comments that "'the Lord from heaven breathed the breath of life into the first fair woman, but this girl might seem to have been the natural product of evolution, and her soul to be as truly of the earth as her body.'"⁴¹ Similarly, the girl's cousin excuses his own unashamed pleasure in looking at women by

⁴¹A Face Illumined, p. 20.

saying that on the average, "'Mr. Darwin has not got us very far along yet.'"⁴²

⁴²A Face Illumined, p. 24.

Optimistic views of the directions of nature and man's progress seemed unrealistic to Roe. In his social novel, Without a Home (1881), he comments that its bruised and forsaken heroine, in her dire physical and spiritual need, "was not ready for a system of theology or for the doctrine of evolution; and if any one had begun to teach the inherent and self-correcting power of humanity, she would have shown him the door" ⁴³ Much the same

⁴³Without a Home, p. 188.

lesson is taught to Theron Saville in Near to Nature's Heart (1876) whose confidence in mankind's certain advance falters when the moral restraints of Christianity are removed. Yet by 1885, in the preface to An Original Belle, Roe unexpectedly takes a positive tact in his view of evolution, stating that as

men reach levels above the animal, other qualities take the lead. It is seen that the immaterial spirit wins the greater triumphs--that the brainless giant, compared with the dwarf of trained intelligence, can accomplish little. The scale runs on into moral qualities, until at last humanity has given its sanction to the divine words, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." ⁴⁴

⁴⁴"Preface," An Original Belle (New York, 1902, p. 3.

For an unknown reason, Roe's apparent acceptance of evolution never enters into the fiction itself, as it would for Celia Parker Woolley, Helen H. Gardener, and other contemporaries. The findings of evolution and their threat to faith form an important intellectual backdrop in Roe's fiction, although he never becomes involved in debates about their accuracy or meaning. Rather, he judged the questions of evolution to be secondary to the individual's experience of Christ, which was always a potent weight for counterbalancing doubt before the insoluble, circumscribing mystery of life. The most Roe sacrificed in the evolutionary debate was his ardent love of nature, an enthusiasm confirmed by his successful avocation in horticulture. A character in A Face Illumined (1883) relates Roe's probable view of nature and romance, which offer, each in its own way, a potential object of devotion. Though often marvellous and inspiring, neither can supplant the unique gift of the Christian faith: "'We cannot find in nature nor in the happiest human love that which can satisfy our deep spiritual need; but we can find all in Him who came from Heaven in our behalf.'"⁴⁵

⁴⁵ A Face Illumined, p. 333.

The reasons for Roe's restraint in argument with the merits of evolutionary theory, as with the issues of comparative religion and biblical criticism, can best be understood in view of his approach to empirical sciences. Roe's real position on biblical criticism, for instance, is difficult to identify. He often acknowledges its existence in characters who express doubts about the authority of scripture, thus placing the burden of proof on the Bible's defenders. Near to Nature's Heart (1876) provides his only comment on the specific issues of authorial inspiration and historical, geological accuracy. After much study and re-reading of the text itself, sceptic Theron Saville finally grasps "its wonderful unity in the seeming diversity and he saw that the verbal husk in the early parts of the Old Testament had a kernel of rich, spiritual meaning, and that the New Testament clearly taught a philosophy too lofty for a merely human origin" ⁴⁶ In several other novels, one of the faithful suggests to the doubter that his investigations have been one-sided, all on the critic's side and

⁴⁶ Near to Nature's Heart, p. 375.

that the Bible's scholarly friends have not received equal attention. Thus, in one novel, Tom Paine, a frequent

whipping-boy for Protestants, is accused of criticizing the Bible without having read it.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Jest, p. 48.

Roe was more specific with regard to the assertions of comparative religion. Under its critical stare, the Christian God became an obscure Hebrew divinity, another form of myth that has no more truth than other myths and one which like them, man eventually outgrows.⁴⁸ Most religions have origins and develop similarly, be it Christian or Greek:

⁴⁸Near to Nature's Heart, p. 375.

"Some conception of the mind is embodied, or some object is idealized and magnified until the original is lost sight of, and men come to worship a mere fancy of their own. Then some mind, stronger and more imaginative than the average, gives shape and form to this confused image: and so there grows in time a belief, a theology, or rather a mythology."⁴⁹

⁴⁹His Sombre Rivals, pp. 203-04.

The fact that there are earnest believers in other world religions gives further credence to the probability that all

religious practices are matters of "'education and temperament,'" "custom and fashion, or an accident of birth."⁵⁰

⁵⁰A Face Illumined, p. 498.

As with the higher criticism, Roe's response to comparative religion was not very extensive or convincing. About the best he could do was to argue that there existed a qualitative contrast between the Greek pantheon, whose acts would today land them in a penitentiary, and the Christian God of mercy and love.⁵¹ Once beyond specific rebuttals, Roe turned to a general strategy based on common-sense

⁵¹Jest, p. 48.

empiricism and wonder. The Bible was significant and unique because it had outlasted each age's attacks on its validity.⁵² Additional proof arose from its conformity to man's profoundest perceptions of the complexion of human experience. For Vera in Near to Nature's Heart (1876),

⁵²Jest, pp. 89-90.

whose only books were a collected Shakespeare and the Bible,

the two agree on the essentials of man's nature and predicament.⁵³

⁵³Near to Nature's Heart, p. 340.

By thus appealing to the logic of the reader's observations on life, Roe initiated an empirical and experiential approach that dominates his advocacy of the Bible's and Christianity's truths. Beginning with his first novel where Baron Ludolph believes only "'what I see and know,'" Roe gradually recognized that the main threat to Christianity was a rigorous empiricist definition of reality.⁵⁴ In

⁵⁴Barriers, p. 119.

the face of the new science which would "'often apply gross material tests to matters of faith and religious experience,'" Roe contended that there "is a power, a force, an agency, that the materialist cannot calculate, weigh or measure, or laugh scornfully out of existence."⁵⁵

⁵⁵Opening A Chestnut Burr (New York, 1902), p. 232; Jest, p. 156.

It is through Christian experience, which is largely subjective, that this intangible agency is mediated

and made known. Consequently, much of Roe's rhetorical effort argues for the trustworthiness of subjective experience. Often his characters' responses are common-sensical assertions of subjective self-confidence, such as "'rich, lasting, rational, spiritual experience is as much a fact as that stone there,'" or "'I know it as I know I exist.'"⁵⁶

⁵⁶ A Face Illumined, p. 308.

Other characters justify their beliefs on the unusual clarity and immediacy of their religious experience. In Opening a Chestnut Burr (1874), Annie Walton states that "'Religion is a matter of revelation and experience . . . [and] my religion is a matter of fact, of vivid consciousness.'"⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Opening a Chestnut Burr, p. 196.

Ida Mayhew in A Face Illumined (1878) refers to a similar strategy in her certainty of answered prayer, stating that "'if I do not know this to be true, I cannot know anything to be true'; for never before had her consciousness made anything so distinct and real."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ A Face Illumined, p. 352.

In two novels, Roe apparently felt it necessary to be more elaborate and reasoned in his effort to establish respect for subjective experience. Annie Walton, the opener of the chestnut burr, responds to Walter Gregory's epistemological question, stating that

"if you should ask me how I know it [that God exists], I in return ask how you know that you are ill, or well, that you are glad or sad, or tired, or anything about yourself that depends on your own inner consciousness Suppose I should say I want mathematical proof that you do feel an interest, or physical proof--something that I can measure, weigh, or see--should I be reasonable?"⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Opening a Chestnut Bur, p. 231.

Again Ida Mayhew pleads that her inner "'hope, patience, peace, when the world would give no peace,'" are not to be dismissed easily for they are as real to her as any object, form her primary reality, and bespeak something beyond rational, empirical experience.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ A Face Illumined, p. 499.

Roe often supported his characters' private reasonings with an appeal to proofs of history and consensus, thus utilizing a kind of modified empiricism. Egbert Haldane, the nineteenth-century knight, cautions a doubter that "'I and myriads of others have had proof of God's

power and willingness to help. If wide and varied experience can settle any fact, this one has been settled.'"⁶¹

⁶¹A Face Illumined, p. 499.

So also, the elderly counselor Mr. Eltinge states that God "'has helped me when and where there was no human help. I have often seen His redeeming work in the lives of other faulty, sinful people like myself.'"⁶² In the same novel,

⁶²A Face Illumined, p. 308.

A Face Illumined, Roe debates his reader directly, stating that

To say that . . . multitudes of others are mistaken is begging the whole question. It is badly taking the ground of everything outside of personal understanding and knowledge The facts of Christian experience and Christian testimony are as truly facts as those which are discovered by people who are hostile or indifferent to the Bible.⁶³

⁶³A Face Illumined, p. 62.

Beyond the private experience of Christian consolation and faith, Roe found some confirmation in the public effects of Christianity, the evidence of changed lives and social charity. He referred to "the One who developed

Peter the fisherman, Paul the bigot, Luther the ignorant monk" ⁶⁴ As is the case in most of Roe's novels,

⁶⁴Knight, p. 338.

selfish, egotistical fops and belles become charitable, self-forgetting Christians who often violate decorum and reputation to minister to others. It is this public proof that Roe thought most convincing to sceptics. By observing a slum minister who cared for his parishioners' bodies as well as souls, Roger Atwood gains a "thorough respect" for Christianity, "seeing its practical value worked out in the useful busy life of one who made his chapel a fruitful oasis in what would have otherwise been a moral desert.'" ⁶⁵ Similarly, Christine Ludolph, watching Dennis

⁶⁵Without a Home, p. 387.

Fleet's heroism during the Chicago fire, "realized more and more vividly that he was sustained and animated by some mighty principle that she knew nothing of, and could not understand Though it all remained in mystery and doubt, she could not resist the logic of true Christian action." ⁶⁶ Roe best clarifies the purport of Christian

⁶⁶Barriers, p. 396.

activism in A Knight of the Nineteenth Century (1877),
stating that

not the wrath of God, but his love, is the
most effective in separating men from the evil
which would otherwise destroy them
The love of God is ever best taught and best
understood, not as a doctrine, but when em-
bodied in some large-hearted and Christlike
person,

in "a personal and human ministry."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Knight, p. 388. Roe's attitudes toward the so-
cial dimensions of Christianity appear to have changed in
the course of his writing career. In What Can She Do?
(1873), his second novel, he ventured that the only way in
which to make respectable citizens of the lower class was
through a "'merciful, patient, personal Saviour. He had
wonderful power over them when He was on earth, and He
would have the same now, if His people could make them
understand Him'" (p. 352). A Knight of the Nineteenth
Century (1877) shows an increasing discontent with the
established church in its efforts, or lack of them, to
reach the unaffluent and dispossessed in society. To one
cantankerous old man in the novel, "'respectable people
and the devil were in partnership'" (p. 192). While it
still seemed to Roe that "The love of God as manifested
in Christ of Nazareth is doing more for humanity than all
other influences combined," too often "the wondrous story"
was not being "told as it should be" (p. 338; also see the
text above, pp. 254-255). In Without a Home (1881), he
continues his attack on the upper classes, stating that

If, instead of harsh judgments, they would pro-
vide for the poor places of cheap and innocent
resort; if, instead of sighing over innate de-
pravity, they would expend thought and effort
in bringing sunshine into the experiences of
those whose lives are deeply shadowed by the
inevitable circumstances of their lot, they
would do far more to exemplify the spirit of
Him who has done so much to fill the world with
light, flowers, and music (p. 203).

In the same novel, Roe talks of the necessity, and practicality, of lightened working conditions for the factory-worker and the shop-girl: "Multitudes would . . . live better, do more work and die much later, could they find some innocent recreation to which they could often give themselves up with something of the whole-hearted abandon of a child" (p. 284). From this specific example, he goes on to offer a general principle of reform, stating that

If the truth could be appreciated that circumstances color life and character just as surely, marring, distorting, dwarfing, or beautifying and developing, according as they are friendly or adverse, the workers in the moral vineyard, instead of trying to obtain fruit from sickly vines, whose roots grope in sterility, and whose foliage is poisoned, would bring the richness of opportunity to the soil and purify the whole atmosphere (p. 325).

Ralph Carey places Roe in proper historical context as "an early example of the native middle-class revolt against the corrupting influence of urban industrialism, with its unethical business practices and 'foreign' laboring masses" (*Best-Selling Religion*, p. 61).

Necessary to Roe's defense of Christianity was some dilution of the mounting authority of empirical science in late nineteenth-century America. He seems to have disapproved of scientists more than of their endeavors. To Roe, the scientist's faith in his special approach to reality, trusting only in what he can "measure, weigh, or see," seemed at once inordinate and partial.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Opening a Chestnut Burr, p. 233.

The scientist's pejorative view of religion, Roe further suspects, results from preconceived bias which, not having tried religion, is clearly unjust. In a like manner, the scientist makes assertions that he cannot support, even by his own scientific criteria. As such, when his conjectures are used to displace the dearly held truths of religion, he proves irresponsible, "'however gently or scientifically it might be done.'" For example, on the subject of immortality in A Face Illumined, Jennie Burton argues "'How can they know that [death is final]? How can they know what shall be in ages to come?'"⁶⁹ Roe even has one of his characters apply the lessons of relativity to science

⁶⁹A Face Illumined, p. 208.

itself, suggesting that "'Science to-day laughs at the absurdities believed by the learned a hundred years ago; and so will much that is now called science, and because of which men doubt the Bible, be laughed at in the future.'"⁷⁰

⁷⁰Opening a Chestnut Burr, p. 233.

For Roe, placing faith in the right of enquiry,

The broad, liberal man is he who accepts all
truth and humbly waits till the fuller wisdom
of coming ages reconciles what is now apparently

conflicting. The bigot is he who shuts his eyes to truth he does not like, or does not understand; and he is as apt to be a scientist as a man who has learned that the God who made him can also speak to him, through His inspired word and all-pervading Spirit.⁷¹

⁷¹A Face Illumined, p. 352.

One of Roe's counsellors even prescribes the virtues of the scientific method as a likely paradigm for disciplined Christian enquiry, stating that "'He who would enter upon the Christian life, must come to Christ as the true scientist sits at the feet of nature--docile, teachable, eager to learn the truth that existed long before he was born, and not disposed to thrust forward some miserable little system of his own.'" ⁷²

⁷²Knight, p. 332.

Without question, Roe faced a difficult choice in attempting to negotiate between conflicting modes of knowing, between tradition and innovation. His nineteenth-century knight probably summed up his appeal to private sense and consensus, concluding that "'Believers in Jesus Christ have been verifying his promises in every age, and in every possible emergency and condition of life, and if

their testimony is refused, human consciousness is no longer a basis of knowledge.'" ⁷³ It is in this reasoning on the necessity of subjective knowledge that Roe's underlying sense of wonder surfaces, which itself then becomes an argument for belief. Throughout his discussion of

⁷³ Knight, p. 331.

knowledge, Roe finds it impossible to think of a cautious subjectivity as untrustworthy because consciousness must of necessity believe in itself.

This undercurrent becomes explicit in his treatment of immortality. Again Egbert Haldane, the nineteenth-century knight, counsels a sad maiden that "'this life is not all; the belief that human life ends at death is revolting to reason, conscience, and every sense of justice.'" ⁷⁴ While Roe went on to insist on the last element

⁷⁴ Knight, p. 428.

in Haldane's rationale, six years later in His Sombre Rivals, he refers repeatedly, as one character reflects on a feminine friend, to "marvel of marvels . . . that mere clay could be so highly organized." ⁷⁵ The fine

⁷⁵ His Sombre Rivals, p. 64.

sensibility of Grace St. John leads Warren Hilland to regard his belief in an aimless evolution as a "'profanation'" of her character.⁷⁶ Through the agency of Grace, Hilland concludes that "'Mere corruption, chemical change,

⁷⁶His Sombre Rivals, p. 108.

ought not to be the end of a man.'" ⁷⁷ When the child of Grace and Hilland dies suddenly, the father proclaims to

⁷⁷His Sombre Rivals, p. 246.

his wife that "'You can't believe it [that death is final], any more than I.'" ⁷⁸

⁷⁸His Sombre Rivals, p. 375.

In wonder at the quality of man's consciousness and potential for moral grandeur that exists even in a child, Roe's contemplation of non-existence suggests that man can neither comprehend his own mortality nor believe in it. Found in the predicament where he must wonder at the existence of personality or soul, man concludes that behind life cannot be, states Warren Hilland, just "'law or force. It's either God, who in some way that I can't

understand, will bring good out of all this evil, or else its all devilish, fiendish.'" ⁷⁹

⁷⁹ His Sombre Rivals, pp. 375-76.

Using this perspective of wonder, Roe suggests that for man, regardless of science's suppositions (and Warren Hilland was a scientist), the horror of life comes to be as intolerable as religious hope once seemed. This either-or position, wondering at life's fullness and horror, seems Roe's final statement--it is hardly a rationale in a logical sense--on the limits of faith and doubt in late nineteenth-century America. Balancing human nature and the century's epistemological questions, he concluded through Warren Hilland that "'Reason is a grand thing, and I know we once thought we settled this question [of mortality negatively], but reason fails me to-night, or else love and the intense longings of the heart teach a truer and deeper philosophy.'" ⁸⁰

⁸⁰ His Sombre Rivals, p. 325.

Because Roe backed away from religious problems to write adventure and romance in his last six novels, His

Sombre Rivals (1883) no doubt represents the depletion of his resources for debate. The strategy of wonder employed in this novel, while new in its religious application, previously found a role in his treatment of romantic love. Infidel suitors or belles are always taken aback by the quality of character which they find in the unique Christian. While their reason is stymied by wit, vivacity, or charity, their hearts are disarmed by sympathy and understanding. In this way, with an insistent emphasis on the practical consequences of Christianity, the conventions of romance and sentiment--"'the intense longings of the heart [that] teach a truer and deeper philosophy'"--are turned to religious ends. In an unsophisticated form, this application surfaced in Roe's dictum that, as they can be damned, men can also "'be beguiled from ruin by smiles.'"⁸¹

⁸¹Knight, p. 49.

Yet, at times amid romance, Roe's lovers received a glimpse that beauty could "become so enlarged that the world would be transfigured, 'radiant with purple light,'" thus encountering an unforeseen complexity and depth to life.⁸² In

⁸²His Sombre Rivals, p. 31. Frank Hemstead's experience in From Jest to Earnest (1875) provides some

clarification of this pattern. After winning the love of Lottie Marsden, Roe comments that "As he entered the pulpit that morning his face was radiant with the purest human love, as well as the love to God. So far from being incongruous, the one seemed to kindle and intensify the other" (p. 347). In the case of Arden Lacey in What Can She Do? (1873), the believer initiates trust in the doubter, thus making another kind of faith more feasible. After Edith Allen accepts Lacey, he tells her that "'I now feel sure that, through my faith in you, I shall learn to have faith in Him'" (p. 389). And such is the case with Warren Hilland in His Sombre Rivals (1883): "His wife's faith has become his. She has proved it true by the sweet logic of her life" (p. 378).

their charity and faithful love, Roe's protagonists served as imitations or vehicles, though imperfect, of the mystery of divine love. Romantic love in the context of Christian felicity has the potential to transform the prosaic for the loved one and to enrich his experience in a way, as in conversion, that deterministic science could not explain. When Roe put the strategy of romantic attraction to other purposes, the results were less than satisfactory ethically. For example, in An Original Belle (1885), which provides a likely occasion for Howells' satiric short story "Editha" (1905), the heroine uses her considerable charms for patriotic ends--to enlist men for the front lines of the Union army--while she finally marries one who stays home.

With regard to sentiment and romance, Roe thought of his work as distinct from the excessive sentimentality of much contemporary fiction. Although his stories always end happily, his heroines are on occasion homely, plain, or very faulty in character, as Annie Walton in Opening a Chestnut Burr (1874). In one instance, a character in Without a Home (1881) derides a novel "'in which the hero and heroine are sentimental geese and blind as bats. They misunderstand each other so foolishly that I'd like to bat their empty heads together.'"⁸³ A Young Girl's Wooing

⁸³Without a Home, p. 174.

((1884) drew fire from the Saturday Review critic because it broke with propriety in detailing how a young girl set out, with Roe's approval, to steal away the suitor of a coquette.⁸⁴ In He Fell in Love with His Wife, Roe's most

⁸⁴Saturday Review, LVIII (December 27, 1884), 821.

realistic and best novel comparatively speaking, he describes the processes of love and misunderstanding in a bleak rural environment. In Barriers Burned Away, Dennis Fleet sadly learns that a pretty face has no necessary connection with fine character. And Mildred Jocelyn of

Without a Home (1881) comes to know, after much sorrow, the difference between romantic passion and mature love.⁸⁵

⁸⁵Roe's most explicit comment on negative patterns in contemporary courtship comes in From Jest to Earnest (1875).

In some minds the ideas of love and passion seem inseparable, and they regard religion as something far removed. These are but the right wing of that sinister class who jumble their passions and religion together, and, in pious jargon and spiritual double entendre, half conceal and half convey the base meaning of their hearts. In others, love, or what with goes by the name, is equally inseparable from management and match-making, trousseaux and settlements--concerns pertaining to earth, and very earthy, it must be admitted (p. 346).

While Roe never portrays the former, the concerns of finance and marital spectacle often receive his disapproval.

A similar attempt at realism informs Roe's treatment of the religious life. Emotion and sentiment had their place, but, as Frank Hemstead tells Lottie Marsden, "'religious feeling is something that comes and goes, and cannot be depended upon.'"⁸⁶ Egbert Haldane mistakenly

⁸⁶Jest, p. 246.

expected that, after conversion, emotion would "bear him forward, and through and over the peculiar trials of his

lot" ⁸⁷ When his zeal subsides, the long-suffering Mrs. Arnot must explain that while Haldane's emotional experiences in religion

⁸⁷ Knight, p. 320.

"were evidences of God's love and favor The trouble has been with you . . . that you have been consulting your variable emotions instead of looking simply to Christ Besides, the power is not given us to maintain an equable flow of feeling for any considerable length of time. . . . Our feelings depend largely also upon earthly causes and our physical condition, and we can never be sure how far they are the result of the direct action of God's spirit upon our minds. It is God's plan to work through simple, natural means, so that we may not be looking and waiting for the supernatural." ⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Knight, pp. 333-34.

In the same vein, the elderly Mr. Eltinge admonishes convert Ida Mayhew not to be "'superstitious or sentimental The life of a Christian means honest, patient work" ⁸⁹ Seemingly for Roe, the only sure proof of the Christian faith lies in the patient study and

⁸⁹ Knight, pp. 333-34.

discipleship since "'the more closely and faithfully

we follow him, the more surely do fear and doubt pass away.'" ⁹⁰

⁹⁰ A Face Illumined, p. 335.

The kind of work Roe had in mind was what he identified in his first novel as "'real practical belief'" in the ethics and meaning of Jesus. ⁹¹ True Christians were

⁹¹ Barriers, p. 164.

to give sympathy and aid to others as Jesus himself did and as they received from him. A positive ethic of love, not judgment, emulated God's own action who "At last . . . came among men, and shared in their lot and nature. He taught them, he sympathized with them, he loved them, and he died for them" ⁹² In all aspects of life, private and social, Roe stressed "'the accessible Jesus of

⁹² Knight, p. 338.

Nazareth'" in contrast to, as suggested earlier, the stern, doctrinal, and aloof Christianity emanating from the "'costly refrigerator'" climate of affluent urban churches. ⁹³ To

⁹³ Knight, pp. 264, 266.

counteract this later image, some guilty members of the wealthy church in A Knight of the Nineteenth Century undertake an In His Steps-like experiment in Christian vocation. Roe always emphasized that Christ came to save and serve the distraught and the poor, the "publicans and sinners."⁹⁴ Consequently, all of Roe's exemplary Christians spend time in charity work, giving their compassion

⁹⁴Knight, p. 265.

and often considerable skills to the needy wherever they are found, in resort hotel or slum. True followers helped others materially and spiritually, and in doing so, their own doubts and guilt were dispelled as his "'all-pervading Spirit'" became evident in the effects of selfless, healing love.⁹⁵

⁹⁵Knight, p. 428.

If concern for others was the real work, a decisive public indication of genuine Christianity, the meaning and import of the gospel was only revealed in the inmost depths of the self, in private encounter with Christ's "Presence." It is this experience, Roe often suggested, that provides

"just what our poor human nature needs.'"⁹⁶ In his isolation and guilt, the unconverted or the hard-pressed

⁹⁶A Face Illumined, p. 308.

Christian was often blessed with a sense, always subjective in nature, of Christ's "living, loving, spiritual Presence that uplifts and sustains the sinking heart when the whole great world could only stand helplessly by.'"⁹⁷

⁹⁷A Day of Fate, p. 271.

To Edith Allen in Roe's second novel, What Can She Do? (1873),

that Presence without which all temples are vain had come . . . as freely, as closely, as truly as when it entered the cottage at Bethany Even to her . . . as to God's trembling servant of old, a ladder of light was let down from Heaven, and on it her faith would climb up to the peace and rest that are above, and therefore undisturbed by the storms that rage on earth."⁹⁸

⁹⁸What Can She Do?, p. 277.

Amid the many intellectual doubts provoked by Darwinism, the higher criticism, and comparative religion, the final measure of Christian certainty and verification came to the individual through the unique sufficiency, fully unlike any human agency, of Christ's love. Always

"a living, loving, personal presence, human in sympathy, divine in power," the "practical truth" of divine concern satisfied the "intense longings of the heart."⁹⁹ In this way, through the unique personal effects of Christ's active care and its historical trustworthiness, Christianity

⁹⁹Without a Home, p. 188; His Sombre Rivals, p. 325.

found its justification which, in moments of need, could override the new science's accusations of subjective illusion.

As discussed above, Roe was not sanguine about the ease of the Christian life. Doubts and hardships were ever-present realities. Whatever his personal certainties, man was always "'surrounded by mystery on every side . . . humanity, left to itself, is a hopeless problem. But . . . we are not responsible for questions beyond our ken.'"¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰Opening a Chestnut Burr, p. 129.

Yet, the Christian could take some comfort in the fact that these unanswerables were the same questions of cosmic purpose and human significance that "'the scientists may

as well give up at the start.'" ¹⁰¹ The aged Mr. Eltinge, contemplating his death, admits that "'There has been much

¹⁰¹ His Sombre Rivals, p. 101.

that was dark and hard to understand; there is much still; but there is plenty to prove that my Heavenly Father is leading me home as a little child.'" Eltinge affirms his heavenly hope on "'the ground of simple, downright experience, through all these years,'" and poses a single question to others, which was also Roe's question:

"Therefore which you must each decide is not whether you will ever belong to this church or that, not whether you will believe this or that doctrine, or do what this or that man teaches. The question is this--Here is a tender, merciful, Divine Friend."¹⁰²

¹⁰² A Face Illumined, pp. 307-08.

The closing remarks to the story of sceptic Warren Hilland and Grace St. John in His Sombre Rivals (1883) include the standard elements of Roe's approach to the consequences and role of Christianity in relation to the questions of modern thought and the traditional mystery of evil, Of Warren Hilland, Roe writes,

to the poor and sorrowful he gives increasing reason to bless his name. His wife's

faith has become his. She has proved it true by the sweet logic of her life The dark mysteries of evil are still dark to them--problems that cannot be solved by human reason. But in the Divine Man, toward whose compassionate face the sorrowful and sinful of all the centuries have turned, they have found One who has mastered the evil that threatened their lives. They are content to leave the mystery of evil to Him who has become in their deepest consciousness Friend and Guide. He stands between them and the shadows of the past and the future.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ His Sombre Rivals, p. 378.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOME SCEPTICS: THE WAYS OF DOUBT

AND NEW FAITH

Among popular novelists, if numbers alone provide any indication, scepticism seems to have fared less well than orthodoxy. Only James Lane Allen and Margaret Deland, depending if one determines their fiction to be indeed an advocacy of scepticism, reached the popularity of such orthodox writers as Augusta Evans Wilson, Elizabeth Phelps Ward, and E. P. Roe. Either because sceptics preferred the lecture platform or the essay, as the famous agnostic Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll, or because their numbers were in fact few, they seldom chose the novel for a vehicle of religious debate. This chapter will examine three notable exceptions from this tendency. Celia Parker Woolley, for a while an Unitarian clergywoman, published two popular novels in the late 1880's that offer alternatives to orthodoxy. In the early nineties, Helen H. Gardener contributed two novels in the cause of free-thought and its favorite

social concerns. The Reverend Minot Judson Savage, a Congregationalist-turned-Unitarian, published Bluffton in 1878, a novel that introduced the major issues of the religious conflict in late nineteenth-century America. While these three writers do not differ from orthodox novelists in their perception of underlying causes for doubt, each suggests the possibility of an enlightened religious faith that allows for new scientific findings and that mediates between the stark opposition of traditional faith and atheism usually set forth by popular orthodox novelists.

Celia Parker Woolley was born in Toledo, Ohio, in 1848, dying at age sixty-nine in Chicago where she had served as a Unitarian minister and a settlement worker. The daughter of religious liberals, she graduated from the Coldwater, Michigan, female seminary and married Jefferson A. Woolley, a dentist, in 1868. Following an apprenticeship of short stories in Lippincott's Magazine, she published her first novel, Love and Theology (1887), which passed through five editions in its first year when its title was changed to Rachel Armstrong. A Girl Graduate (1891) achieved similar success. A third and last novel, Roger Hunt, appeared a year later. In 1894, Mrs. Woolley was ordained a minister in the Unitarian Church, filling

two pastorates before resigning in 1898 to devote more time to lecturing and wifely duties. In 1904, she established an inter-racial settlement house, the Frederick Douglass Center, on Chicago's south side, where she lived until her death in 1918.¹

¹"Mrs. Celia Parker Woolley," in A Woman of the Century, Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore (Buffalo, 1893), pp. 500-01. See also, George B. Utley, "Celia Parker Woolley," in Dictionary of American Biography, XX (New York, 1937), p. 515.

Love and Theology (1887) narrates the long travail of a couple whose romance is disrupted by theological differences. When theological student Arthur Forbes confesses growing scepticism to fiancée Rachel Armstrong, the humorless orthodox maiden promptly dismisses him with the epithet "'infidel.'"² Allowed to find his own opinions by

²Love and Theology (Boston, 1887), p. 47. Future references will follow in parentheses.

a free-thinking older sister-guardian who has raised him, Arthur purposed to enter the orthodox ministry. Slowly, however, he recognized that the "old doctrines . . . now appeared as so many dead and useless dogmas" (p. 45). At last, after much struggle, Arthur committed himself to "a

bold investigation" of the new thought "with the result of reaching, as he deemed it, higher and more tenable ground" (p. 46).

This new perspective enables Arthur to affirm the Bible's historical and literary value, the nobility of Jesus' ethics, the individual's right of inquiry, the rational base of truth, and the immanence of God in natural law and the evolutionary process. For Forbes, the orthodox err in "'separating the universe from God, and then require a miracle to bring them together again. We [liberals] deny the separation, look on man's imperfections as the necessary means of growth, teach that ignorance is the worst form of wickedness, and trust to nature for the cure'" (p. 289). The unremitting constancy of natural law inspires a superior faith that is "'content to take things as they are, and bases itself on the present integrity of things,'" thus foregoing a childish "'constant expectation of the miraculous'" (p. 424). "'Trust and aspiration in the thought of an orderly universe, controlled by an unchanging law,'" imparts a "'sense of safety,'" that is roughly similar to traditional "'religious dependence'" (p. 424). Because this "'continuous unfolding of divine

energy"" is universal, glimpses of it are afforded to all men, and, hence, all religions are valuable (p. 391).

Apparently expecting her audience to be aware of its times, Mrs. Woolley only hints at the process of Arthur Forbes' doubt. Her tactic is explained in relation to the scepticism of a defrocked Methodist, stating that "there was little to tell that, in the light of modern theological events, cannot be surmised" (p. 282). At least part of Arthur's free-thought, as for most sceptics, can be attributed to the disparity between Christian ideals and practice. Borrowing from science the theory that effects reveal the reality or nature of their causes, Arthur contends that "'the best way to estimate Christianity or any religious system is as a guide to a man's conduct, by its power to make the world happier and better'" (p. 418). By this standard, the "'natural tendencies'" of orthodox Christianity pose serious questions about the truth or usefulness of its key doctrines (p. 286). The novel's prominent representative of old-time creedalism is Deacon Armstrong, the father of Arthur's lover. A leading force in his church, he is a smug, selfish man of "unctuous piety" who has exacted fealty from his wife and three children (p. 70). Added to Armstrong's example is the

religion of Bishop McFarren, an obese egoist and snob. His "Religion, so far as he defined it at all, was a matter of pleasing form and sentiment, something that, aside from the future benefits it promises to man, serves to impart a certain patrician grace and solidity to his present existence" (p. 349). The author herself endorses this cause for doubt when noting the factiousness of sectarian Christianity. Her only statement of faith in the novel asserts that it is only respect for others' religious views that allows us to "get nearer the heart of goodness than in any other way; emulating the divine wisdom and charity that have created the differences for some grand reconciling purpose He best understands" (p. 406).

Arthur Forbes' dissents from traditional religion rest on more than Christianity's ethical failure. Equally significant is his confidence in evolution by virtue of the new science. In its light, the Old Testament record loses its special status of revelation to become human history and "'literature, not dogma'" (p. 214). The same revaluation informs Arthur's interpretation of Jesus, stating that the New Testament offers "'only a scanty traditional account . . . enough, doubtless, to lead us to believe that sometime in Judea a great light shone out and

passed quickly out of sight again. We know less of Jesus than of any other great religious leader, Buddha, Confucius, or Socrates . . ." (p. 288). Knowledge of comparative religion brings Arthur to value the "'natural and universal [in] religion'" (p. 186). The celebration of Easter is preserved in his pastorate because a like-festival "'antedates Christianity by hundreds of years, and was part of every ancient worship'" (pp. 185-86).

Mrs. Woolley's exposition of rationalism in religion is not without its reservations, however. Man's religious yearnings are an uncertain commodity that demand more than the satisfaction of reason. The tendency of liberal religion to elevate reason to the exclusion of emotional and imaginative needs troubles the author. For example, a friend of Arthur's cautions that "'if the really sinful and suffering did come [to Arthur's services], it would only be dry husks you could give them. What has modern liberalism to say to a lost soul, compared with the message Christianity has to offer?" (p. 106). Composed of "'A mere hope and implication, a few thin, intellectual speculations,'" rationalism extends--insofar as "'the majority of people, theologically speaking, are still in their swaddling-clothes'"--"'no cure . . . for the real

sinner'" (pp. 106-07). Arthur later fears this when seeking to reform Rachel Armstrong's delinquent brother, asking himself if "the plain but remote principles of modern liberalism" could transform the untaught and hardened "as the old ideas of sin and judgment" continued to do (p. 331).

Judge Hunt, the leading lay-figure in Arthur's liberal church, represents the dangers of a liberalism which recognizes only "a few intellectual propositions, the main purport of which lay in their denial of somebody else's belief" (p. 211). The judge's free-thinking, the author stresses,

was of a type that abounds in our day, where pride of intellect and devotion to a high, but narrow, ideal usurp the whole domain of thought and feeling in the discussion of questions whose settlement requires the combined action of reason, a cultured understanding, and . . . historic imagination (p. 177).

Arthur, on the other hand, is saved from liberalism's prejudice by his "poetic temperament," and by the fact that he was, as a friend puts it, "'a natural believer and worshipper'" (pp. 34, 236). Consequently, it is under Arthur's tutelage that Judge Hunt's daughter first learns "to admire and reverence" "religious sentiment, that upward-springing

feeling of the heart towards a living ideal of goodness and beauty . . ."(pp. 212, 211).

Much the same criticism of late-century liberalism comes from the Reverend Chase Howard, the young Episcopal cleric in Arthur's hometown. The priest sympathizes with the new thought, but he laments that "'we cannot put this boasted modern reason of ours to some better purpose than wholesale destruction'" (p. 153). Recognizing the limits of the empirical and rational, he notes that science "'cannot measure the aspirations of the soul with a square and compass . . . the logical faculty is well enough in its place; but it is by no means the highest'" (p. 154). The higher category of intelligence, an Emersonism ideal, "'includes sentiment and imagination.'" The moral and cognitive relevance of the heart's longings finds ample proof in the nobility and centrality of a man's "'feeling . . . for his mother, or . . . for his Maker'" (p. 154).

As one of "a progressive clergy, with minds continually open and eager to proclaim the new knowledge to the world," Howard sought to humanize "the cold world of the rational intellect." An integration of the old and the new,

retaining those helps to the imagination and faith which lie in consecrated form and symbol, leaving the mind free to adapt where it cannot wholly adopt the new teachings of science and philosophy, satisfied both heart and judgment (p. 350).

The logic of Howard's view finds support in the experience of Virginia Fairfax, a wealthy and attractive spinster with whom the minister eventually falls in love. A disciple of feminist, free-thinking Hester Forbes, Virginia's flippant, good-natured scepticism encounters unsuspected depths of experience amid Episcopalian ritual:

As Virginia listened, wonderingly, her heart began to tremble and melt with a new feeling of religious awe and tenderness . . . it bore her soul along with it . . . and it seemed to her that no form of worship could be more beautiful and more appropriate than this (p. 167).

A final instance of the tension between rationalism and the needs of the heart appears in Arthur's reunion with his estranged sweetheart. When Rachel Armstrong's fervent orthodoxy finally softens to admit doubt, she must still wrestle with the remoteness and impersonality of Arthur's "divine energy." She confesses a desire for "'something different from that--something nearer. . . one that I can see sometime, and . . . pray to'" (p. 391). Arthur concedes her need, affirming that "'your feeling

. . . shall correct my definition'" (p. 392). After their marriage, the wife's still "morbid and exacting conscience stood ready to impose some new check on every new process of mental and spiritual growth." With time, however, the

old beliefs and standards were brought to a new bar of judgment, face to face with the needs and conditions of her new life. Where they failed she sorrowfully but unreservedly laid them aside . . . but such losses enrich the nature more than the choicest possessions of faith and knowledge (p. 431).

In their place, she gained "a faith larger than any she had known before . . . as wide and loving in its scope as the bending heavens, owning proud and grateful fellowship with every soul that struggles, suffers, and aspires" (p. 430). Rachel never fully shares "the more radical convictions of her husband, remaining . . . midway between the rejection of the old and the acceptance of the new" (p. 436). Her greatest discomfort in her new religious allegiance is the "slighting tone . . . with which they [her fellow liberals] discuss the most sacred themes . . . and the complacent patronage with which they speak of other sects less advanced than their own . . ." (p. 436).

In A Girl Graduate (1889), Mrs. Woolley repeats most of her criticisms of orthodoxy and increases her emphasis on the non-rational in religion. A prominent role

is played by a pusillanimous Episcopalian cleric who is cast in the mold of Deacon Armstrong and Bishop McFarren. An intelligent and talented man, the Reverend Fay is nonetheless a snob, fop, and dilettante with the temperament of a "fractious child" (p. 193).³ His social sneers and

³A Girl Graduate (Boston, 1889), p. 193. Future references will follow in parentheses.

sexual advances discontent the heroine with traditional religion. The feminist cause which enters Love and Theology only slightly with Hester Forbes here finds full emphasis in tyrannized wives and the energetic Miss Graham, founder of the local Emerson Club which reads John Fiske and Herbert Spencer. The better traits of ministers Arthur Forbes and Chase Howard are combined in the Unitarian cleric John Norton.

The story itself narrates a young girl's path to maturity. Maggie Dean, a shopman's daughter, must overcome adolescent romantic silliness and social aspirations to find usefulness and deeper meaning in life. While interesting, Mrs. Woolley's treatment is finally unsatisfactory because she neglects her heroine's consciousness whenever it is time to explain the causes for her increasingly noble actions. Again, as in Love and Theology,

influences and causes are merely approximated, expecting the reader to fill in gaps with apparently commonplace contemporary knowledge.

Mrs. Woolley's unsystematic and undetailed presentation of free-thought tends to expand her previous reservations about rationalism. The Reverend John Norton, like the author the child of religious liberals, transcends typical liberal contentiousness and condescension toward others' beliefs. He prefers "'to find the points of likeness between two opposing views, and not the points of difference'" (p. 304). As a lifelong habit, Norton has "opened his being on all sides to receive whatever light of truth or spiritual blessing the universe contains" (p. 302). In doing so, he places the insight of the non-rational on the same par with the knowledge of reason. When Maggie Dean asks if "'we have any proof of immortality,'" Norton adopts a rationale of wonder in his assent, stating that "'We have the proof that lies along side the knowledge we are now alive That fact is as wonderful and difficult to explain as the problem of a future existence can be'" (p. 312). Norton's openness, honesty, and selflessness provide a paradigm for heroine Maggie Dean to emulate.

Miss Graham, the town feminist and an admirer of Norton, serves somewhat the same function for Maggie. Her greatest compliment comes from the hypocritical rector who thinks of her as "'a free-thinking Amazon, a crack-brained fanatic and revolutionist in petticoats'" (p. 207). Despite a rough exterior--she is homely, ill-dressed, and gruff--"the brave and kindly spinster" is undogmatic and humble in her liberalism (p. 458). Her "independent views on the Trinity and the first chapter of Genesis" do not preclude belief in spiritualism and immortality (p. 196). With some inspiration from Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, her hope for an afterlife "sprang solely from her passionate love of justice, the need to project in imagination some future state of existence which should atone for the ills and hardships of the present" (p. 267). Her most significant contribution to Maggie's growth comes in teaching through music that "'feeling is always larger than thought'" (p. 280). In listening to Miss Graham play her adored Beethoven, Maggie "gained entrance to a new world, where truth, freed from the didactic bonds of special formula and text, is presented in the form of vivid emotion." Art performs a function that excels rational analysis. For Maggie and Miss Graham, as with all "sensitive souls

the main office of music is always the same, ennobling the heart and exalting the imagination" (p. 285).

Mrs. Woolley's most pointed criticism of the excessive rationalism of her adopted liberalism comes in her portrait of kindhearted Thomas Dean, Maggie's uneducated, slow-thinking shopman father. In an intuitive, semi-mystical religion which is reflected in aspects of Episcopalian ritual, Dean can affirm that

"religion ain't made to scare you; it's what keeps you quiet and steady like. It gives you the feelin' o' bein' at home in the world. Religion makes you see how things are put together that elswise you might think had just happened. They all belong--little and big. They're all His. He takes care of 'em" (p. 233).

Roger Hunt (1892), Mrs. Woolley's last novel, offers her most trenchant criticism of rational dominance in liberalism. In brief, Roger Hunt is a brilliant, learned egoist who utilizes "an insidious kind of reasoning" to remove himself from all moral responsibility.⁴ Hunt inveighs against 'all man-made regulations'" in order to obtain

⁴Roger Hunt (Boston, 1892), p. 16.

"'what does belong to me, what nature and reason say I have a right to . . .'" (pp. 52, 53). The novel's merit lies in the handling of Hunt's self-delusion which to some

extent resembles Frederic's technique in The Damnation of Theron Ware. Like the Methodist preacher, Hunt passes through a number of crises that might disturb his self-love, but he too remains unreflective and undoubting. The author does not deal with matters of belief or unbelief because Hunt's thorough scepticism is an accomplished fact. The novel stresses the dangers of rampant egoism notwithstanding any pretensions to intellectual justification. As Mrs. Woolley explains in her memoir, The Western Slope (1903), Hunt's personality falls victim to a

too personal point of view which hinders understanding all around; a tyrannous and insistent ego which brings every matter to be judged, all human values, to the bar of some pre-conceived wish or opinion.⁵

⁵The Western Slope (Evanston, Illinois, 1903), p. 214.

Woolley's criticism of Roger Hunt, as of religious rationalism in general, focused on its disproportionate reliance on reason or "intelligence" at the expense of "spirit" or "soul," whose province is sentiment and imagination (pp. 111, 200). These comments in The Western Slope make clear the criticism implicit in her fiction.

Noting the knowledge and insight given by modern "reason and a sound scholarship," she recurs to "the primal need of the human heart" for religious assurance, finally concluding that "Truth is divined, chiefly, by the heart needing its ministrations" (pp. 126, 199). For these assurances, she points to "intimation" amid "a multitude of casual incidents, fleeting glimpses of things and people, which our daily march along the common roadway" (pp. 200, 203). As an example of this potential in experience, she recalls the grandeur of a lustrous Indiana sunset during which it seemed the "commonplace was lifted to the sublime" (p. 220). A sense of wonder on such occasions prompts faith more readily than scientific estimation of progress through evolution. Resting on the fact of man's self-consciousness and the beauty of the external world, the author asks, "How can we spell the lesson of the world's beauty on other terms than those of divine good will to man, the only creature who can note the beauty and guess its meaning?" Faith, "the right angle of vision," comes to the heart's deeper needs of hope and love (p. 224).

As is obvious in Woolley's novels, evil exists in the unfair "distribution of life's benefits" by man and

nature which challenge one's faith, but at the same time, "Human need is accompanied by human helpfulness in the world round, and God is proved forever incarnate in the loving deeds of men" (pp. 212, 223). Hence, evidences for pessimism are countered by instances of goodness, much as the reason's doubts are softened and balanced by the heart's promptings. Mrs. Woolley's optimism that "life on the whole is proved good" rests on hints of nature's beneficence--"why not judge nature by her best"--and man's spirituality and helpfulness.

The observations of her own experience are added to by science's evolutionary hope and the slow spreading of the "spirit of truth" which was manifest in the ethics of Jesus and appears now in "the growing mind of man" (pp. 119, 113). In man's "coarse and ready common-sense," a higher religion and clearer ideals are clumsily making their way (p. 110). Progress is often faltering and sporadic. The lesser, ignoble aspects of man, the "animal, is being slowly refined away; the spirit, through a study of natural law, is coming in closer, because less sensuous, relation with the physical world, so the differences tend to become one of words chiefly . . ." (p. 111). Retrospect on man's history is necessary "to show God--and

that it is God--working through man and nature to bring into harmony and accomplish designs aiming at the highest good of both" (p. 111). For example, in religion, the "hard shell of a dogmatic creed has been cracked and we feed on the sweet kernel within. Once we thought the shell was the kernel, or rather that the kernel was safe only in the shell" (p. 119). The "unknown and inscrutable" still pervades knowledge of all kinds, but amid the late nineteenth century's "unrest, all its disturbed beliefs, its half-realized hopes and ideals," science's testimony of man's progress and the heart's own urgings and evidences give some cause for hope.

A less reserved endorsement of reason comes in the fiction of Alice Chenoweth who wrote under the pseudonym, Helen Hamilton Gardener, a name she eventually legally adopted. A native of Virginia, in 1875, at age twenty-two, she married Charles Selden Day, then school commissioner of Ohio. When the Days moved to New York in the early 1880's, the wife met the well-known lecturer on agnosticism, Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll. It was at Ingersoll's insistence that his new friend joined the

lecture circuit as an advocate of free-thought. Her earnest and energetic efforts led to the publication of Men, Women and Gods, and Other Lectures (1885), which was followed in 1893 by a similar collection, Facts and Fictions of Life. Helen Gardener's greatest renown came from her venture into fiction, which proved a more efficacious way of conveying her controversial opinions. Her first novel, Is This Your Son, My Lord? (1890), sold 25,000 copies in its first five months. Pray You Sir, Whose Daughter? (1892) attempted to repeat its predecessor's success. Two volumes of topical short stories and a nostalgic novel of her father's life were added to her earlier fiction. After these efforts, Miss Gardener wrote no more fiction, although she continued to contribute actively to movements for women's rights and social justice. A successful lobbyist for women's suffrage, she became well-known in Washington social circles and a friend of President Woodrow Wilson. The real measure of her success in these areas appears in her appointment in 1920 to the United Nations Civil Service Commission as its first female member. She died in Washington in 1925 at age seventy-two.⁶

⁶ Adelaide Washburn, "Helen Hamilton Gardener," in

Notable American Women 1607-1950, II, ed. Edward T. James (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 11-13.

The first of Helen Gardener's novels, Is This Your Son, My Lord? (1890), occasioned much public controversy and the author's greatest sales. As the preface to the second edition reveals, the novel sought to provoke opposition to legalized prostitution and low age-of-consent laws. Miss Gardener's thesis, however, extends beyond topicality to indict Christian thought and practice as fundamental causes of the social wrongs under consideration.

To accomplish its multiple purposes, the story follows the career choices of three college classmates. The novel's chief object lesson comes in the experience of Preston Mansfield, a dissolute, guilt-ridden young man who eventually commits suicide. After expulsion from prep school for general rowdiness (and masturbation?), Mansfield's father, a respectable businessman, proceeds to initiate his son by sending him to a brothel and later by serving as procurer of early adolescents for the boy's growing sexual appetite. The elder Mansfield excuses his behavior on two grounds which emerge from his deep faith in Christianity. Introducing her chief objections to

Christianity, the author points first to the doctrine of the vicarious atonement. The father, "a thoroughly selfish man, with an undeveloped ethical nature," represents a type of men "who are thorough believers in religion and do not know the meaning of morality."⁷ The father does

⁷Is This Your Son, My Lord? (Boston, 1890), p. 202. Future references will follow in parentheses.

The father does not struggle against his own well-hidden dissolution, rather accepting and relishing the impulses of his "poor weak humanity, unable to save itself, incapable of resisting temptation, whose feet slip by the way, whose sinful passions overcome . . ." (pp. 204-05). Thus happily enmeshed in sin, the rascal turns for solace to the doctrine of vicarious atonement, Miss Gardener's special bête noire. Mansfield and other pious scoundrels utilize their religious belief to "purge themselves of any lapse from rectitude, which lapse they believe, with the faith of childhood, is a necessary part and parcel of depraved human nature" (pp. 202-03). He concludes to "Let Christ bear the burden as he volunteered to do" (pp. 203-04). Insofar as such self-serving interpretations give rise to public chaos and suffering, Christianity

becomes a hindrance to social progress which rests on individual moral responsibility.

Mansfield's doctrinal orthodoxy also sanctions his abuse of the women who are the victims of his dissipation. With original sin, which he well exemplified, as his starting point, the father reasons that "Eve was the active agent in that sin. Therefore it was only just that Eve's sinful daughters should suffer most and be the victims of men, since all men were first her victims" (p. 203). Besides, the vicarious atonement provided equal exoneration for the women Mansfield might debauch. As the author comments, Mansfield "had not used his religion as a cloak. His religion was his cloak" (p. 205).

Preston Mansfield, the scoundrel's son, must contend with this moral legacy. With honesty inherited from his unsuspecting mother, Preston discards the possibility of ever reforming his licentious ways. Guilt and self-knowledge cancel future respectability and marriage; he cannot "'look any decent woman in the face without remembering that if I married her I would have to lie to her every hour of my life as long as we both lived. I hate to lie It gives me a sense of disgust and physical discomfort'" (p. 100). Caught between compulsions

for dissipation, as his father, and for honesty, as his mother, and unable to accept religion, Preston solves his impasse by self-murder.

A second figure in the story, young Fred Harmon, illustrates Miss Gardener's dissatisfaction with Christianity's intellectual and moral base. Like Preston Mansfield, Harmon lives strongly under the influence of a parent--in this case a snobbish, self-seeking woman whose religion resembles aesthetic hedonism. She urges her reluctant, sceptical son to enter the ministry for practical reasons, stating that "'the rector of a fashionable parish stands firm on the top of the social edifice . . .'" (p. 29). With regard to "'those unpleasing religious notions expressed in the creed of our beloved church,'" she rejects their literal content for an "'interpretive meaning'" which clothes them "'in a garb of poetry'" (pp. 26, 29). With reference to Jesus, although she fervently prays to him, Mrs. Harmon confesses that "'of course I believe that he was the son of Joseph, and that he is dead in the same sense that all of us are, or will be dead; but really . . . I fail to see what that has to do with it [faith]'" (p. 241). Thus, by draping language "'to a certain extent when used to express

spiritual things,'" "'You can close your eyes and drift into a realm of spiritual exaltation where questions and doubts are impossible; where the dear Christ touches your heart and illumines your understanding'" (p. 27). Besides, she tells her son, the Reverend Phillips Brooks and other clergy can "'explain all those points you object to so entirely away, and in such choice language that the most fastidious can not fail to be satisfied'" (p. 29).

Fred Harmon does follow his mother's wishes but not without some hesitation. He spends some months travelling about looking for a wealthy wife to replenish his family's depleted finances. At last, he decides to take orders and to accept intellectual duplicity as a way of life. As one of the author's mouthpieces explains, Harmon "'had not gone far in his college course, till he found his science and his Scripture conflicting in places.'" After discrediting the mental integrity of his college religion professor, Harmon and his fellow fledgling sceptics turned to a noted minister for counsel on the seven-days creation, "'the sun standing still, and the Red Sea's antics'" (p. 136). If the cleric "'happened to be a "reconciler" he manipulated, evaded, and patched up, and

jumped over, and construed, until a good many of the boys were completely mystified.'" Awed by the minister's eloquence and self-confidence, many students "'could not follow his arguments to the conclusions he reached,'" supposing only that "'they missed a link, and that he had it all there, only they were not clever enough to see it'" (p. 137).

Harmon, on the other hand, noted the theological obfuscation and "'saw very distinctly that the link was gone,'" concluding that "'what are called the advanced ministers didn't believe, and didn't have to believe the creeds they vowed to teach'" (p. 137). As a consequence, Harmon forsakes all personal integrity. It seems that "'the moment his belief in dogmatic religion was shaken, he had no foothold. Natural morality had no meaning to him. Goodness had none apart from its creed-bound, society defined limits. The outcome is, that he absolutely doesn't know the moral difference to-day between a lie and the truth'" (p. 138). Whereby orthodox defences of the Bible appealed to its long-term reliability as a moral-spiritual guide, the commentator inverts this strategum, stating that

"it isn't safe, to base morality and goodness on such shifting sands It [the Bible] belongs to the past, and its present pretence of readjustment to the needs of this generation is simply turning out a lot of Fred Harmons-- and worse--if that is possible" (p. 138).

To supplant the Christianity she has construed, Miss Gardener offers the character and thought of Henry Ball, an enterprising and earnest young man. Ball's initial discontent with Christianity centers in his understanding of the Bible which he considers to be no "'different from any other old book'" (p. 176). In college, he tells his orthodox parents, "'reasoning and information led me to form certain conclusions about the Bible and religion'" (p. 178). The author gives some indication of the nature and scope of Ball's intellectual experience in a catalogue of common influences on college students. Her major points refer to the findings of the new science and comparative religion and "the fact that . . . morality had no necessary connection with religion" (p. 160). In advising his younger brother against entering the ministry, Ball utilizes the logic an older rationalism rather than specific reference to the new thought, explaining that "'the final appeal of any Orthodox clergyman must be to the Bible. He cannot doubt the justice

of Jehovah . . . [or] the goodness of the Jewish God . . .
 [or] what may shock or pain him in the New Testament; he
 cannot maintain his mental integrity in discussing the
 miracles and be an honorable minister'" (p. 120).

Another criticism, pointing to Miss Gardener's
 evolutionary optimism, results from Christianity's neces-
 sary allegiance to the past. A "'relic of barbarism,'"
 theology, like war, belongs "'to the infancy of the race.
 . . . Theology [is civilized] to the verge of sealing
 hell over, and reading the vicarious atonement and orig-
 inal sin out of good society. But in the nature of
 things, Theology must get its light from the past. It
 is based on a revelation long since closed'" (p. 119).
 The future belongs to Medicine, Law, and Journalism,
 which Ball hopes will become the arbiters of the public
 weal. A related deficiency arises from Christianity's
 concern with the future life. In contrast, Henry con-
 tends that

"Man's highest duty is here If He
 wanted them [Christians] to look after some
 other world He would have put them
 nearer their post of duty . . . if a man is
 a good healer of bodies, he is in a far nobler
 business than if he is a talker about souls"
 (p. 122).

Henry's views receive support from Gardener's occasional commentator, John Stone, who is to become Henry's father-in-law. In defending Henry's scepticism to the boy's parents, Strong agrees with the young man's religious suppositions and places them in their historical-social context, stating that "'The birthmark is no longer faith; it is doubt, more or less open. It is agnosticism plain or on the half-shell . . . these days'" (p. 230). As an example of his contention, Strong cites the "'reconcilers'" who "'give away their whole case, and then vow they have got it, only it is covered up. Beecher did that . . . and so does Phillips Brooks . . . and all those progressives over at Andover'" (p. 231). With a mixture of logic and empiricism, Strong summarizes the author's case against Christian belief, stating that when theologians

"lay down their premises, argue their case and then begin to draw their conclusions, it is enough to make a dog laugh If you believe without a doubt, the story of the creation, the Garden of Eden legend, the snake tale,--which is necessary to the fall of man, --and the 'In Adam all men died' theory; if you accept the possibility of vicarious atonement, and can think it not a vicious idea; if you believe Christ was a God and had no human father, and that his death could in any way relieve you of your own responsibility, or make an All-wise God change his mind about damning you; if you

are sure of such a God, such a creation, such a temptation, such a fall, such a Christ, such an atonement, and that it could have the results claimed,--then you are able to argue with some show of consistency. But drop one single link; admit one single doubt or question, and you are gone. Your whole system is worthless" (p. 232).

As in the sentimental novel of faith, the hero Henry Ball, in competition with the likes of Fred Harmon, wins the admirable daughter of John Strong, who has not finally been deceived by Harmon's sophistry and pretention. Unconventional in its thought, Miss Gardener's novel does not escape the pitfalls of popular orthodox religious fiction. As Adelaide Washburn has summarized, the technique of Is This Your Son is "melodramatic in tone, loose in construction, unsubtle and didactic in drawing its moral," in addition to being slightly lurid.⁸

⁸Washburn, p. 12.

Unfortunately, Miss Gardener's next novel, Pray You Sir, Whose Daughter? (1892), compounds these faults in its attempt to capitalize on the fame of its predecessor. The novel repeats the same social concerns, although it is more articulate in its depiction of unequal marriage and in its opposition to a ten-years-of-age consent law

for girls. Again, the author's themes are dramatized in a heavy-handed fashion. A wealthy young girl turns down one polite, condescending suitor to accept an idealist who shares the author's innovative conceptions of marriage. The subplot features the sexual victimization of a young girl whose father, a state legislator, supports the bill to lower the age of consent.

Miss Gardener's sentiments on the place of the woman in modern society emerges more clearly in Pray You Sir than in her previous, more popular work. Regardless of social and economic caste, the woman is the most fully oppressed member of society. Among the affluent and aristocratic, marriage--mainly because of the husband's economic dominance--means "a physical possession of a toy more or less valuable" that is "to be set under glass, whenever his real life, his real thoughts, his deeper self were stirred."⁹ Thus, marriage most often "rests on a physical basis for those who refuse to allow it root in

⁹ Pray You Sir, Whose Daughter? (Boston, 1892), p. 26.

common sympathy and community of thought" (p. 29). Among the laboring poor, who earn their food "'a hundred times

over, and the miserable rags they are allowed to wear instead of the broadcloth they have earned,'" women are doubly oppressed--first by their poverty and then by "'the added outrage of sex subjugation and legal disability'" (pp. 124, 126). For "'no matter how poor a man is, his wife and daughter are poorer . . . for she is the dependent of a dependent, the serf of a slave, the chattel of chattel!'" (p. 125). The female's "'absolute financial dependence on men'" has had especially deleterious effects on the moral stature of men and society generally. In short, it "'has made sex maniacs of men, and peopled this world with criminals, lunatics, and liars'" (p. 121).

Miss Gardener's feminism has religious consequences because her proponents of sexual equality are also free-thinkers. In Pray You Sir, Whose Daughter? the author's chief advocate does not accept "'the Bible as an altogether admirable. Some of the prophets and holy men of old, as I read of their doings in the scripture, always impress me as having been long overdue at the penitentiary'" (pp. 122-23). As might be expected, the major perpetrators of masculine dominance are wealthy and affluent Christians who live sordid lives behind a

shield of polite respectability. Although it is not an obvious thesis in Pray You Sir, Miss Gardener objects to Christianity's theological and ecclesiastical manipulation of the female suppliant. As the author states in her essay "Men, Women and Gods," "This religion and the Bible require of women everything, and give her nothing. They ask her support and her love, and repay her with contempt and oppression."¹⁰ Since it was not long ago

¹⁰"Men, Women and Gods," in Men, Women and Gods and Other Essays (New York, 1885), p. 9. Future references will follow in parentheses.

that "the Church decided that a woman who learned the alphabet overstepped all bounds of propriety,"

Women are indebted to-day for their emancipation from a position of hopeless degradation, not to their religions nor to Jehovah, but to the justice and honor of the men who have defied his commands. That she does not crouch to-day where Saint Paul tried to bind her, she owes to the men who are grand and brave enough to ignore St. Paul, and rise superior to his God (p. 30).

Miss Gardener forsook her directness and social concern in her next and last novel, An Unofficial Patriot (1894), a slightly fictionalized biography of her father's courageous and tolerant life as a Methodist minister. In the same years as her novels, Miss Gardener published

volumes of short stories, A Thoughtless Yes (1890) and Pushed by Unseen Hands (1892). None of the stories venture toward the detailed attack on Christianity contained in Is This Your Son, My Lord? "A Lady of the Club" in A Thoughtless Yes does, however, emphasize the social insensitivity and apathy of Christianity as the poor starve next to its opulent churches. "The Boler House Mystery" in the same volume highlights its author's novelistic themes, again paying attention to the otherworldly unconcern and hypocrisy of Christianity. The stories in Pushed by Unseen Hands deal with the effect on the personality of social conditions and especially heredity, "strange manifestations which we have made little intelligent effort to comprehend."¹¹ Men unfortunately still

¹¹Pushed by Unseen Hands (New York, 1892), p. 9. Future references will follow in parentheses.

"grope within the same dark walls and draw the window-shades of habit and inherited forms of thought against the sunlight of science and a rational tomorrow" (pp. 9, 10). Of special and representative interest are "An Echo from Shiloh," which flirts with extra-sensory perception in a spiritualist setting, and "How Mary Was Converted,"

which exposes the social and emotional coercion that influence a girl's insincere adoption of Christianity. The majority of the stories return to Miss Gardener's usual themes of social injustice and exploitation.

Perhaps the most reasoned of sceptical novelists is Minot Judson Savage, whose Bluffton (1878) reflects his own movement through orthodoxy to a theology of evolutionary optimism. One of the first American ministers to confront the national public with the religious implications of Darwinism, Savage entered the Congregational ministry in 1864 at the age twenty-three. While serving a church in Hannibal, Missouri, of which Bluffton seems a fictional counterpart, the young minister found himself moving rapidly toward heterodoxy under the influence of late nineteenth-century scientific thought. In 1873, Savage accepted the pastorate of Chicago's Third Unitarian Church, although he also had invitations to the pastorates of prominent Congregational churches. He soon moved to the Church of the Unity in Boston, and then, in 1896, to the Church of the Messiah in New York City. Ten years later failing health forced Savage's retirement from

public life. More than his single novel, his many collections of sermons and expositions of his new theology won him a large audience and influence. He died in Boston in 1918.¹²

¹²Charles H. Lyttle, "Minot Judson Savage," in Dictionary of American Biography, XVI, eds. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (New York, 1937), pp. 389-90.

As a prominent minister and well-versed theologian, Savage's Bluffton offers the late century's most detailed picture of the issues and logic which influenced contemporary theological liberalism. Bluffton differs from Augusta Evans Wilsons' Beulah (1859), the century's other novel of elaborate scepticism, in two significant respects that probably make the later novel a more satisfactory exposition of doubt. With two decades separating Beulah and Bluffton, the later adopts an evolutionary optimism that had not yet developed at the time of Mrs. Wilson's venture, although she did foresee the negative impact Darwinism would have on orthodoxy. Secondly, while Mrs. Wilson's Beulah eventually returns to faith, Bluffton's hero, Mark Forrest, journeys into doubt to remain there and to construct a more rational and hopeful version of man's religious situation. In any case, Bluffton

provides an explanation of doubt by a knowledgeable theologian who helped shape the major issues and trends of late nineteenth-century religious thought.

In the year 1863, Mark Forrest comes to Bluffton, a large town on the Mississippi River, to assume the pulpit of its Congregational church. A new seminary graduate, Forrest's first sermon contains a gentle Arminian message of ready faith and ethical necessity. Well-received by the congregation, the sermon offends the old-style Calvinism of the church leaders who find in it "'too much of tenderness towards sin.'"¹³ Indeed, the "'five

¹³ Bluffton: A Story of To-Day (Boston, 1878), p. 37.

points of Calvinism' embodied in the unsympathetic, unyielding angularities of real people" soon bring Forrest to the recognition that this rural, parochial Calvinism "was not the kind of religion he believed in" (p. 63). Forced then to reconsider his beliefs, the fledgling minister painfully admits to himself that "the gospel he held was not what was popularly held as orthodox" (p. 64). Particularly disturbing to Mark are doctrines, especially the vicarious atonement and justification by

faith, which put "'a premium on immorality'" and lower the ethical stature of church members (p. 66). When Forrest bridges this subject with a church leader, the elder argues that while "'morals are desirable, even necessary, in a true Christian . . . they are worth nothing to a man who is not converted'" (p. 64). If the value of morality alone is admitted, argues the elder, "'You make the whole gospel of no effect. What's the need of the cross, if such things are true?'" (p. 67). Such responses only prompt Mark to open his mind to broader, more fundamental questions.

The Reverend Forrest's uncertainties find support in the opinions of Tom Winthrop, an old college friend who now practices law in a neighboring town. A "somewhat fearless and independent thinker," Winthrop followed religious questions in his spare time and "had even written an occasional article of local scientific importance, or had contributed to some theological reviews." The narrator flatters Forrest's confidante with a "keen logical mind, and--what is very rare in this world--a keen insight as to the value of proof" (p. 69). Although an "out-and-out rationalist" in religion, Winthrop "had the tolerance of a wise believer in evolution toward the past; and would

no more think of quarrelling with it than of . . . finding fault with the twilight because it wasn't noon" (p. 70).

It is Winthrop's advanced views that point the intellectual path which Forrest will follow. Through a long discussion in which the preacher poses many problems, Winthrop effectively defends his liberal point of view. Throughout, in lawyer fashion, Winthrop holds closely to his standard of careful substantiation. Consequently, the creative history of the Pentateuch falls to the findings of geology. When Forrest cites the spiritual and moral consolation and durability of the Bible over the ages, Winthrop counters with the logic of comparative religion, stating that also "'have the Veda . . . and Confucius and the Koran held their own; all but the last one, longer than the Bible'" (p. 75). In spite of its long history as a moral guide, Winthrop argues that "'the average tone of society to-day is infinitely above the ordinary levels of the Old Testament. The character of Yahweh himself is such that he could not make a respectable citizen of Bluffton to-day'" (p. 79). Because of the "'veil of superstitious reverence'" through which the Bible's partisans read, they miss the fact that "'if a

heathen nation were found practicing Old-Testament morality, there would be new activity in the Bible society to send them a new religion'" (pp. 80, 79-80).

In a like manner, when Forrest identifies the Bible as the moving force in Western civilization, Tom looks at anthropology and probable racial rather than religious causes. Besides, Christianity had unfailingly opposed science. When new findings are no longer deniable, states Winthrop, the church "'re-interprets the Bible, and finds it all there, and benevolently takes it under the wing of revelation.'" Within ten years, he predicts, "'a fast and firm alliance will be patched up between even Darwin and Moses . . . [who] will be made out the original Darwinian'" (p. 76). Through such syntheses the concept of the Bible's verbal inspiration loses all credibility. The creational theory that makes the six days periods of indefinite length would change the essential meaning of words to the extent that one could not be sure "'what any other word means'" (p. 75). While not conscious pretenders to inspiration, biblical writers "'were mistaken They took for divine what we now know to be natural: that is all'" (p. 78). In addition, recent biblical criticism shows that Moses'

books reveal "'the highest and latest thought of the Hebrew race . . . the highest peak of Jewish civilization, and not the low starting point'" (p. 78). In short, historical study shows that Moses did not write the Pentateuch which is a national literature--"'a mass of traditions, national legends, and wonder-stories, wrought into its present shape by unknown hands'" (p. 79).

Similar findings undercut the authority of the New Testament according to lawyer Winthrop. The uncertain authorship of the Gospels and obvious Gnostic influence throughout offer two weighty examples. Like the Old Testament, the morality of the New Testament often departs from sound common sense. The Sermon on the Mount contains "'a beautiful ideal; but much of the best of modern civilization has come from not obeying it'" (p. 80). Christ's call for non-resistance abdicates political liberty, and Paul's "'doctrine of women is thoroughly degrading'" (p. 81). Winthrop does not despair over the loss of the Bible, however. Rather, seeing its fully human character occasions hope for the future: the fact that much of the Bible is "'noble and inspiring gives the grandest promise for humanity The humanity that makes a Bible in its infancy, what may it not be in its fully-developed

manhood?'" (p. 82). The clerical inquirer admits many of the points of his mentor, but he for now continues to affirm "'the ever-present spirit and everlasting love of God,'" preferring to let time settle some of the ferment in his mind (p. 83).

Unable to repose ever again in his old faith, Forrest decides "to press forward until he gained that other calm that comes to intelligent conviction" (p. 84). Like his comrades in doubt in other Gilded Age novels, the young minister finds solace in the observation that "every man ought to be a Christian, because that means loving God and your fellow-men" (p. 85). Although successful in drawing large crowds, Forrest's subsequent sermonic appeals to rationality and good character further alienate his congregational leaders who do not like "'to see lawyers and doctors, and so many moral men, present and approving'" (p. 99). Forrest also suffers because of his association with Winthrop, a noted infidel, and Mrs. Grey, a kindly, but unbelieving widow in Bluffton.

It is to the unbelieving Mrs. Grey that Forrest confides many of his new opinions, the growths of the seeds Tom Winthrop had planted. After some months of

patient study, the doubting pastor had discarded belief in the Trinity, considering it a motion taken from Gnosticism. Jesus, who "'never claimed to be God,'" becomes "'only a manifestation of this [God's] unseen spirit in the sphere of humanity'" (p. 116). The contention of Jesus' divinity made by certain New Testament writers proves only that they "'believed it, not that it is true '" (p. 116). Both Mrs. Grey and Forrest view the incarnation as an indignity, a "'most stupendous absurdity,'" heaped on God by earlier, less knowledgeable "'grades of civilization'" (p. 118). Another concern of the friends focuses on traditional ideas of hell which caused them much anguish in childhood. Forrest explains that the concept results largely from

"ignorance, mistranslation, and change in the meaning of words . . . [for] there isn't a trace of everlasting punishment in the Old Testament. Indeed, the Jews had no fixed or clear belief in a future life at all. It is a late growth, and largely received from the Persians at the time of captivity" (p. 120).

While Forrest rejects everlasting damnation, he does still believe, adopting the consistency of natural law, "'in future punishments. For the same laws of right and wrong, of reward and penalty, are everywhere.'" The application of simple logic to the moral quality of God leads

to the conclusion that "'the whole doctrine is . . . blasphemy toward God. He either can, or can't some time save all. If he can't, he isn't God; for his power is limited. If he can, and will not, then he's not God, but a devil'" (p. 121).

When Mrs. Grey dies helping Bluffton's poor during a cholera epidemic, Mark Forrest preaches her funeral eulogy, wherein he claims that the departed sceptic, "'since a tree is known by its fruits,'" lived "'a noble Christian life,'" and thus, lives still in heaven (p. 141). Forrest's decision to display his heterodoxy in Mrs. Grey's defense draws the consternation and wrath of his critics. A public inquiry into his theology soon follows. A rumor that Mark visited "'certain house of notorious character'" during a recent visit to New York compounds his theological offenses, and Mark is tried on both charges (p. 183). While he is convicted on the first charge, the second also proves true, but his visit resulted from a disinterested inquiry that rescued a kidnapped young lady, the exiled sister of Mark's chief opponent. The minister's heroism in the affair renews the trust and affections of his congregation, and he is asked to remain. He feels, however, that if he leads

"churches into new truth, he should do it with open colors, and not uniforms that are stolen" (p. 127). His decision to leave the ministry is complicated by his romance with the daughter of one of his chief accusers. Because she cannot understand his thought or leave her elderly father, Mark departs for a solitary world tour. Three years later, Mark and his lover are accidentally reunited; she has since read widely enough to share Mark's advanced views, and her father has died. They agree to marry, and Mark accepts a call to a liberal society in the East.

Savage does not allow Mark's passage to heterodoxy to be an easy one. The early events and recognitions are greeted with ambivalence. With guilt that he cannot abide in the old faith, Mark reasons that "all who, like Abraham, like Jesus himself, like Paul, like Luther, had left a past dear to sentiment and rich in precious memories, must have gone through substantially the same struggle of forboding, of doubt, of misgiving" (pp. 64-65). As Mark proceeds in inquiry, he becomes more certain of his path and beliefs, but doubt of his course still persists. Savage explains Forrest's conflict in evolutionary terms, stating that such strife occurred in

every live and earnest human heart. Progress fought reaction; freedom struggled with

tradition . . . the faith of Abraham, that 'went out, not knowing whither,'--only knowing that God had called,--was met by timidity that doubted whether God ever led into new lands . . . (p. 124).

Ready for the challenge, Mark nevertheless reflects that "if there be a God,--why must one so doubt and suffer in trying to find thee, and the way of thy truth?" (p. 125). Mark takes hope in the observation that the price of progress "'has been one long agony and martyrdom The thinkers, the inventors, the prophets, they who have tried to give something to mankind . . . have paid for it by endless vulture-gnawings at their vitals'" (p. 125). Regardless of personal suffering, Mark will "be true to himself at any cost," realizing that "'some one must do the work of to-day for the future'" (pp. 126, 199).

Like fellow liberal Helen Gardener, Savage dislikes and rejects efforts to reconcile orthodoxy with the new science. In a discussion with two noted theological professors, Mark explains his objections, which also form the basis of his theological rationalism:

"If one believes in the Garden of Eden and the fall of man, then, of course, the incarnation, the atonement, heaven and hell, logically follow. It is a linked chain; it is a complete logical arch. But Liberal Orthodoxy knocks the keystone out, and thinks the rest will stand. It snaps out one link, and thinks

the chain will still hold the clear-headed thinkers of the world. It knocks the foundations out from under its house, and then proceeds calmly up stairs and sits down as if nothing had happened" (p. 215).

For example, modern science and geology, as well as the higher criticism and comparative mythology, have made impossible any rational belief in a literal fall. Thus, "'if there wasn't any fall, there isn't need of any incarnation or atonement; and the whole scheme of orthodoxy tumbles like a card house'" (p. 215).

In place of the Bible and traditional creedalism, Mark will trust "'All ascertained truth, however and wherever found'" (p. 216). In doing so, he places a careful empirical standard between knowledge and belief, stating that "'I believe a lot of things I do not know: so I call those things beliefs. I am not aware that I know anything that I don't know. I don't know much; but I keep the word knowledge for that little'" (p. 218). Mark's three years of world travel reinforce this approach to truth. The practice, consequences, and highest teachings of other world religions put them on the same level with Christianity (p. 234). Logical considerations of this equality suggests

that all religions are the natural growth of the religious nature of man: that no one is

supreme above all others by virtue of any supernatural pre-eminence; but, if it be supreme at all, it is so only as one man or one nation surpasses another . . ." (p. 237).

Consequently, "'God is the God of the whole earth, and of all religions'" (p. 247). In accepting a call to the liberal New York pulpit, Forrest reminds his wife-to-be that his new ministry will operate

"on the broadest basis. We shall not put in our creed any thing we do not know. It will be a church of and for this world, which is God's world. We shall only try to make men and women noble here; to build up and purify society; to build God's kingdom out of solid truths, on solid ground. We shall trust the future to Him who alone knows any thing about it. We shall have faiths and hopes and sentiments and poetry; but we shall try and remember that they are such, and not make our guesses and imaginations and wishes into sharp stones with which to strew the path of life, and make the feet bleed that travel over them" (p. 248).

The three sceptics of the chapter--Woolley, Gardener, and Savage--have in common basic approaches to the questions of Christianity's historical truthfulness and its spiritual-moral transparency to the Divine. First, each utilizes the findings of geology, evolutionary biology, and the higher criticism to discredit the authority of Scripture as revelation. Secondly, they separately apply a pragmatic, cause-and-effect ethical criterion to judge the faith underlying Christian conduct. In this

test, Christian faith, as reflected in Christian ethics, is found wanting, thus confirming the judgment of recent science and scholarship on the historical inaccuracy of the Christian faith. Lastly, the three agree that a careful study of world religions as made available by the new discipline of comparative religion shows their essential equality in spiritual worth and ethical nobility. Religion is a universal prompting of men, and no one religion reveals supernatural reality more directly than any other. Helen Gardener and Minot Savage add a criticism not echoed by Woolley; that is, a largely rationalistic judgment on the less than admirable moral stature of much of the Bible, and, in particular, of Christian doctrine, especially the vicarious atonement. In both instances, Christian paradigms of ethics and expression reveal inferior, debased standards for man's trust and conduct.

Given these reservations about Christian orthodoxy, these religionists face the challenge of posing alternatives to orthodoxy. Each agrees that the empirical and the rational must form the starting point of any such new religious vision. Only Mrs. Woolley seriously dissents from this norm, not denying it but

suggesting that reason must be balanced with the needs and insights of the non-rational. In this regard, she concurs with orthodox objections to religious liberalism, especially those of E. P. Roe and Augusta Evans Wilson. She also anticipates the reservations James Lane Allen would voice throughout his later fiction. As Woolley, Savage and Gardener advocate a broad religion of humanity which finds its focus and verification in an optimistic understanding of the evolutionary process. The two differ from Mrs. Woolley insofar as they adopt the values of science, rationality, empiricism, and their requisite objectivity, as an exclusive model for the perception of truth and ethical correctness. By such criteria, the upward journey of mankind toward universal truth and felicity can be best facilitated. The stringent rejection of traditional Christianity which characterizes these novelists results in part from, as Paul Carter suggests, the nineteenth century's insistence on monistic systems of truth.¹⁴ Thorough consistency dictated that if one "link"

¹⁴The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age (Dekalb, Illinois, 1971), p. 19.

in a philosophic construct proved false, justifiable
cause for discarding the entirety existed.

CHAPTER SIX

KNOWLEDGE AND THE FUTURE: HENRY ADAMS

AND JAMES LANE ALLEN

Amid the vehemence and confusion of the late nineteenth-century American debate over religion, only scattered, infrequent individuals displayed sufficient courage and insight to view conflicting claims dispassionately. These few issued a verdict against the solutions of the partisans and for the still surpassing, insoluble mystery of man's existence. Henry Adams posed his unanswerable query in his pseudonymous, unnoticed novel Esther (1884). James Lane Allen, on the other hand, considered the same theme through thirty years of fiction-writing that made him for a time one of America's most famous artists. In each instance, Adams and Allen looked at man's potential for knowledge within the age's new understanding of natural process called evolution. Insofar as their answers to this problem were sceptical or negative, the pair represent the few who did not see in evolutionary thought simple, single explanations of

man's life. For both, the passage of time provided the sole possibility of clarifying the limits and antinomies of late nineteenth-century thought.

Of the many who doubted in late-century America, perhaps no one engaged in a more self-conscious search than the journalist, historian, and some-time novelist Henry Adams. A fourth generation member of America's foremost political family, Adams recorded his quest for certainty in his posthumous autobiography The Education of Henry Adams (1918), which treats a lifetime's failure in inquiry. Yet, of the many stages and tactics of Adams' pursuit, perhaps the most indicative of Adams' struggle is his novel Esther (1884), Adams' second and last venture into fiction.

While religious conflict clearly provides the dominant focus in Adams' novel, interpreters have differed over the extent to which this conspicuous debate constitutes the story's real theme. Several critics have contended that Adams' intent was to study the uniqueness of the female character--according to D. S. R. Welland, "woman and her nature," or, "a woman's quest for truth,"

as William Jordy has stated.¹ Noting the resemblance in character between the heroine and Adams' wife Miriam,

¹D. S. R. Welland, "Henry Adams as Novelist," Renaissance and Modern Studies, III (1959), 37; William H. Jordy, Henry Adams: Scientific Historian (New Haven, 1952), p. 276.

biographer Elizabeth Stevenson agrees with these suggestions, stating that the novel celebrates "the integrity of the lonely human individuality, even when most lost in a world it doesn't understand."²

²Elizabeth Stevenson, Henry Adams: A Biography (New York, 1956), p. 184.

George Hochfield, on the other hand, feels that Esther goes beyond the nature of "sexual distinction" to consider the "reality . . . upon which the spiritual life is founded."³ Still, for Hochfield, the novel's purpose is not "an examination of religion's claim to impersonal

³George Hochfield, Henry Adams: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York, 1962), p. 54.

ideality." Rather, Esther's theme "is the discovery of moral identity, and the establishment of the value of integrity . . . upon an impersonal, philosophic

principle."⁴ Millicent Bell more or less concurs, stating that the novel deals with the "fundamental question

⁴Hochfield, p. 45.

of the relation of conscience to its traditional source--religion."⁵ Adams' latest biographer, Ernest Samuels,

⁵Millicent Bell, "Adams' Esther: The Morality of Taste," New England Quarterly, XXXV (June, 1962), 149.

thinks Esther expands this problem to wrestle with "the grounds of religious belief, involving that perennial of metaphysics, the freedom of the will."⁶ Fol-

⁶Ernest Samuels, Henry Adams: The Middle Years (Cambridge, 1958), p. 229.

lowing this lead, Michael Colacurcio sees both of Adams' novels as flirtations with Jamesean pragmatism that eventually conclude in favor of the biological determination of life attitudes.⁷ In a related manner, J. C.

⁷Michael Colacurcio, "Democracy and Esther: Henry Adams' Flirtation with Pragmatism," American Quarterly, XIX (Spring, 1967), 68.

Levenson sees Esther firmly enmeshed in the "nineteenth century struggle for belief," declaring finally

"the emotional bankruptcy of both religion and science."⁸

Similarly, noted critic R. P. Blackmur thinks Adams

⁸J. C. Levenson, The Mind and Art of Henry Adams (Boston, 1957), p. 199.

intended Esther to be a symbol or fable of his age's religious uncertainty, of the individual caught between untenable belief and a still-to-come secularism.⁹ As

⁹R. P. Blackmur, "The Novels of Henry Adams," Sewanee Review, LI (April, 1943), 282, 294.

will be shown, it is not an evasion to say that Adams' Esther properly includes all these variegated elements.

A simple story, the novel turns on the romance between Esther Dudley, a wealthy sophisticate, and the Reverend Stephen Hazard, a young, charming Episcopalian cleric roughly modeled after Adams' cousin the Reverend Phillips Brooks. As Blackmur describes Esther, she "is a young woman with a high taste in art and a high achievement in humanity, serious, with a conscience, an intelligence, and an infinitely malleable sensibility."¹⁰ The

¹⁰Blackmur, 299.

novel's crisis arises when Esther falls in love with the Reverend Hazard but is unable to accept his religious orthodoxy. The reasons for Esther's rejection of the minister are numerous and complex, as the critics amply illustrate. The artist Wharton, who is the novel's best critic of character, calls attention to several of Esther's unique qualities which will influence her decision. First, she belongs to a new variety of woman, still indeterminate in nature--"one of the most marked American types I ever saw."¹¹ Beyond the customary age

¹¹Esther, in Democracy and Esther: Two Novels by Henry Adams (Goucester, Mass., 1965), p. 212. All subsequent references to Esther and to Democracy will be in parentheses and will be to this edition.

of marriage, her self-sufficiency piques Wharton's curiosity. He observes that he wishes "'to know what she can make of life. She gives one the idea of a lightly-sparred yacht in mid-ocean She sails gayly along, though there is no land in sight and plenty of rough weather coming'" (p. 223). While this habit of independence also attracts clergyman Hazard, it proves bothersome when she must conform to his meticulous creedalism. The author explains that "Esther had all her life been used

to act for herself and to order others rather than take orders of any sort She could no more allow him [Hazard] to come into her life and take charge of her thoughts than to . . . take charge of her cook" (p. 306).

Wharton also isolates the modernity which helps decide Esther's relation with Hazard. While the minister sides with the theology of the middle ages, Wharton observes that "'There is nothing medieval about her [Esther]. If she belongs to any [world] besides the present it is to the next world which artists want to see, when paganism will come again and we can give divinity to every waterfall'" (p. 223). From beginning to end, Hazard's elaborate, not uneloquent theologizing fails to stimulate or convince Esther's mind. In her first exposure to him, Hazard's inaugural sermon in St. John's of New York City meets with scepticism--"'I hope he believes it all'"--and mild thankfulness that it was "'very entertaining'" (pp. 213, 214). Similarly, when Esther observes Hazard's story-telling talents with hospital children, "She could not help thinking that if he would but tell pleasant stories in the pulpit . . . church would be an agreeable place to pass one's Sunday mornings in" (p. 239). Although Hazard takes her attendance at his second sermon

as a compliment, in Esther's mind it is a "mere . . . piece of civility" which "she did not enjoy . . ." (pp. 244, 243-44).

This religious indifference is repeated in Esther's inability to grasp the religious intent in the early Christian art that is imitated in Hazard's new church building (p. 260). Thus, her painting of St. Cecilia on the transept of St. John's lacks, in Hazard's mind, "spiritual earnestness" and in Wharton's view, "religious feeling" (pp. 261, 274). Esther's agnostic cousin George Strong, who thinks her "'the sternest little pagan I know,'" explains that her approach to the painting is mistaken. The necessary element for good work in the medium is faith, which is more than an intellectual position: "'Faith is a state of mind, like love or jealousy. You can never reason yourself into it'" (p. 318).

As forceful as Esther's independent, secular impulses might be, they are not, however, exclusive factors in her refusal of Hazard and his dogmatism. Michael Colacurcio argues that Adams real concern in Esther lies with "the biological sources of consciousness" which makes "Hazard's orthodoxy and Esther's paganism . . .

biases of nature."¹² Esther herself asserts this very conclusion, stating that "'Some people are made with

¹²Colacurcio, 67.

faith. I am made without it.'" (p. 364). Yet, several instances in the narrative belie this self-estimate. Following the death of Mr. Dudley, the narrator states that the daughter "had a vein of mysticism running through a practical mind" (p. 290). In her mourning and mysticism, "nothing seemed real except the imagination, and nothing true but the spiritual." While in this mood, "the purity of the soul, the victory of spirit over matter, and the peace of infinite love" became conversation between Esther and the minister, "a mystic of the purest water" who could find "peace in the soul of a dandelion" (p. 296).

Similar emotions recur the morning after Esther's betrothal, but they are soon disturbed by the intrusion upon Esther's mind of Hazard's creedal and public obligations. Emotion-laden as these experiences were, religious awe first transfixes Esther on her visit to Niagara Falls where she contemplates the awesome, indeterminate force of nature in the cataract. The Falls tells "her a story

which she longed to understand," which intimated "a different secret from any that Hazard could ever hear" (p. 348). Adams leaves the exact content of Esther's perception indefinite, except to say that "eternity, infinity, and omnipotence seemed to be laughing and dancing in one's face" (p. 349). In turning to the falls as a "confidant," in hearing its story, Esther expresses a non-rational trust in the numinous that is not qualitatively unlike the content of Hazard's mysticism (p. 348). Esther objects, however, to any parochial interpretation which circumscribes the force she intuitis. Thus, she reflects if Hazard were to see the spectacle, he would "'think it is the church talking'" (p. 348). That Adams intended Esther's response to assume a religious dimension seems probable in light of Wharton's early insight that Esther in fact belonged "'to the next world . . . when paganism will come again and we can give divinity to every waterfall'" (p. 223).

Another part of Esther's protest against the church aims at the ethical stature of its constituents. Esther grew up in an atmosphere that embodied the attitude of Madeleine Lee in Adams' earlier novel, Democracy (1878): she "had not entered a church for years; she said it gave

her unchristian feelings" (p. 12). The author's first comments in Esther describe St. John's affluent congregation, which "showed no victory over the world or the flesh" but "a display of human vanities that would have called out a vehement Lamentation of Jeremiah or Song of Solomon . . ." (p. 209). Esther's father and her lawyer-uncle condemn the church but contribute to it because in their view society still needs "'that sort of police'" (p. 321). This attitude subsequently enters into Esther's jealousy of Hazard's congregation, "'a stupid crowd of people,'" who "had rights of property in him, soul and body, and called their claim religion" (pp. 304, 303).

To make his point, Adams allows Hazard to share the impulse behind Esther's attitude. After delivering his first sermon in the wealthy St. John's, he half-jokingly tells George Strong that he "'felt like St. Paul preaching at Athens the God whom they ignorantly worshipped'" (p. 220). Indeed, as the narrator comments, Hazard's parish members associate their identities far more with social and economic status than with any inclusion in the mystic, "'supreme I AM, of which the church is the emblem'" (p. 213). In Esther's last debate with Hazard, such ethical shortcomings in the contemporary church figure prominently

in her decision to send Hazard away. She catches the church in a self-contradiction of thought and action, telling Hazard that ultimately there is "'nothing spiritual about the church. It is all personal and selfish'" (p. 369).

Esther's dissatisfaction with the church's practical posture leads to a more fundamental criticism of Hazard's ecclesiasticism, of which his character and self-understanding is a reflection. To a large extent, Hazard's vocations and his private self are indivisible, and Esther is correct when she tells him that "'you and your profession are one'" (p. 367). George Hochfield strikes some of the complexity of this unity when he suggests that Hazard "is basically an egotist whose religion, however sincerely he may feel it to be true and necessary, is an expression of his will to dominate and possess others."¹³

¹³Hochfield, p. 46.

It is not difficult to illustrate that more ambiguity exists in Hazard's character and religion than Hochfield's oversimplification allows. As most clergymen, Hazard lives in a perilous profession wherein success is often

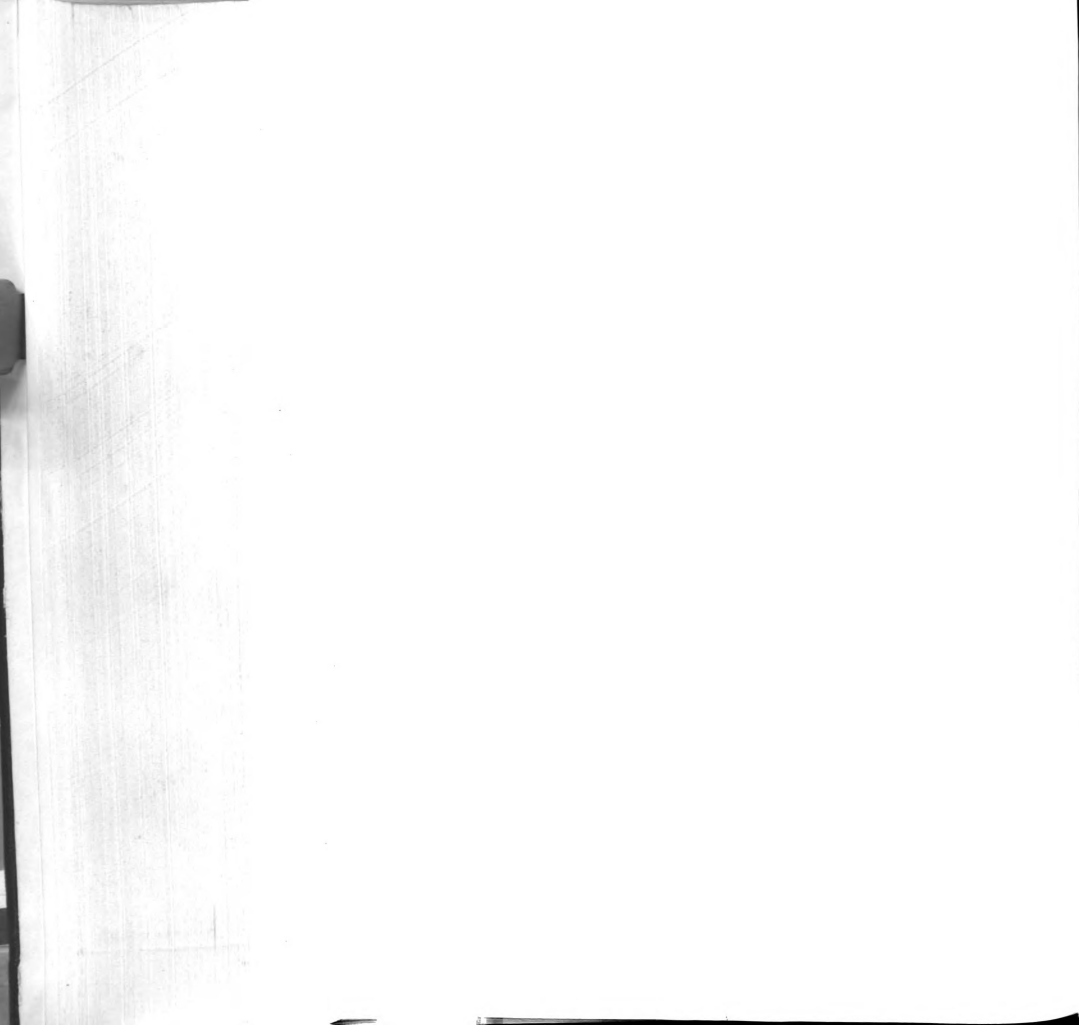
bound up with personal charm, as Horton Davies has said of the paradoxes of the ministry.¹⁴

¹⁴Horton Davies, A Mirror of the Ministry in the Modern Novel, p. 183.

To understand Hazard's psychology, one must first perceive his view of theology and the church. His inaugural sermon sketches the starting point for his theological system. That is, "'behind all thought and matter'" lies "'one central idea . . . I AM! Science like religion kneels before this mystery; it can carry itself back only to this simple consciousness of existence.'" The church's unique status derives from its solitary proclamation that the miracle of self-consciousness originates and participates in the divine, "'the supreme I AM, of which the church is the emblem'" (p. 213). Knowledge of its province comes through "'eternal truth handed down by tradition and revelation'" (p. 368). Hazard accepts both vehicles "'outright,'" thinking "'it wiser to receive a mystery than to weaken faith'" (p. 365).

Hazard's belief is not without its awareness of late nineteenth-century threats to faith, however. There is rumor in his congregation that he is not a literalist

with regard to aspects of the Pentateuch (p. 321). Still more discontent results from his "secular flirtation" with scientists and artists (pp. 259, 322). Hazard's first St. John's sermon announces that religion need no longer fear science, for the "church now knows with the certainty of science what she once knew only by the certainty of faith" (p. 212). The novel soon makes clear, however, that Hazard's measure of certainty is not very great. It is this fact that calls in question the motivation behind his ardent ecclesiasticism. Midway through the story, Adams pauses to explain that Hazard, "Like most vigorous-minded men, seeing that there was no stopping-place between dogma and negation . . . preferred to accept dogma" (pp. 321-22). Having committed himself, Hazard "would rather have jumped at once pure denial . . . than yield an inch to the argument that a mystery was to be paltered with because it could not be explained" (p. 322). In their last debate, Hazard confesses to Esther that "'if I could have removed my doubts [about God] by so simple a step as that of becoming an atheist, I should have done so . . . I studied . . . and found that for one doubt removed, another was raised, only to reach a result more inconceivable than that reached by the church'" Complete negation



and faith at last return "'to a confession of ignorance: the only difference between us is that my ignorance is joined with a faith and hope'" (p. 365). At the impasse between atheism and religion, Hazard tells Esther, "'You must at last trust in some mysterious and humanly incomprehensible form of words'" (p. 366).

The accuracy of Hazard's philosophic perception and the nature of his impulse toward faith is clarified by Adams' presentation of Esther's paleontologist cousin, George Strong, a "'full-fledged German Darwinist . . . [who] believes in nothing . . . unless it is himself'" (p. 321). Strong is a long-time friend of Hazard with whom he has "'had it out fifty times, and discussed the whole subject [of religion] till the night reeled, but . . . never got within shouting distance of each other'" (p. 214). It is to Strong that Esther turns with her question, "'Is religion true?'" (p. 316). To this Strong responds that he does not know, but he adds that science is certainly untrue, although he pursues it so he might "'help in making it truer'" (p. 317). As for Esther's reservations about "'miracles and mysteries,'" he consoles that "'There is no science which does not begin by requiring you to believe the incredible.'" Thus, "'the doctrine

and faith at last return "to a conflict
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joined with a faith and hope"
between atheism and religion, and
most at last time in some space
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The accuracy of history
and the nature of his inquiries
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her: "There is no science which does not begin by requir-
ing you to believe the incredible." Thus, "the doctrine

of the Trinity is not so difficult to accept for a working proposition as any one of the axioms of physics'" (p. 317).

"'Mystery for mystery,'" Strong tells his aunt, "'science beats religion hollow. I can't open my mouth in the lecture-room without repeating ten times as many unintelligible formulas as ever Hazard is forced to do in his church'" (p. 313).

Yet, Strong's fideism is not total. In his discussion with Esther before her last dismissal of Hazard, he does admit "'evidence amounting to strong probability'" of the existence of "'mind and matter'" (p. 354). He further concedes the possibility of an impersonal God and immortality, especially as a Darwinist in the church's thought that "'this life is nothing and the future everything.'" Allowing this, he then proceeds to isolate the epistemological dilemma at the center of nineteenth-century doubt and faith: "'If our minds could get hold of one abstract truth, they would be immortal so far as that truth is concerned. My trouble is to find out how we can get hold of the truth at all.'" Unable to comprehend "the use of human existence in any shape," Strong laments that if the individual was to get ahold of some truth or another, he would absolutize his insight, thinking "'his thought

the true one'" (p. 355). Apart from such people, Strong holds to a strict impartiality and openness. As he tells Esther, "'I don't want you to believe in mine [my system], because I've not got one which I believe in myself'"

(p. 355). "'I prefer almost any kind of religion. No one ever took up this doctrine who could help himself'" (p. 354).

Strong's philosophic neutrality despite a wish to believe is notable and points to Hazard's religious motives and their apologetical weaknesses. These deficiencies, hinted at throughout the novel, culminate in the last talk between the betrothed. Hazard's earnest pleas only convince Esther that religion, for all its claims to spirituality, "'does nothing but pursue me with self even into the next world'" (p. 369). Indeed, throughout their discussion, Hazard's appeals are directed toward self-interest. At the start, he implores Esther "'not to turn from all that has been the hope and comfort of men, until you have fairly learned what it is!'" (p. 364). In defense of faith against doubt, he argues that "'the atheists offer no sort of bargain for one's soul. Their scheme is loss and no gain.'" "'What do you gain by getting rid of one incomprehensible [the church] only to put a greater

in its place, and throw away all hope besides?"¹⁵ Esther is "staggered" by this view, but she finds herself further

¹⁵ Ernest Samuels traces this line of thought back to Pascal's famous wager. He also locates its effect in William James, quoting James' defense of religion: "'If you win, you have infinity; if you lose,--if atheism is right,--you lose nothing'" (p. 255).

confounded by the stratagem Hazard deems his most persuasive (p. 365). That is, the individual's desire to meet loved one's in a future existence. Esther resents the implied self-concern of the hope, responding "almost fiercely" that "'I ask for spiritual life and you send me back to my flesh and blood as though I were a tigress you were sending back to her cubs'" (p. 370).

By his consistent reference to self-interest, Hazard in effect circumscribes the mystery and function of the church and religion. As we have seen, in contact with Niagara's cataract, Esther apprehends the numinous in the "eternity, infinity, and omnipotence [that] seemed to be laughing and dancing" before her (p. 349). This perception differs little, is not qualitatively dissimilar from Hazard's own response to the Falls. He explains to Esther that it has "'the air . . . of being something final. You can't go beyond Niagara. The universe seems

made for it . . . for the sight of it suggests eternity and infinite power'" (p. 363). The cataract becomes for Hazard a suggestion of the divine which he subsequently particularizes in dogma; Esther, on the other hand, sees the waterfall as divinity itself, immediate, incontrovertible, and insuperable. Consequently, she can tell Hazard "'What difference does it make to me whether I worship one person, or three persons, or three hundred I can't understand how you worship any person at all'" (p. 369).¹⁶

¹⁶George Hochfield has gone further into the content of Esther's reflection on the Falls than any other critic. He attributes more to Esther's perception than is actually given in its indeterminate form:

The cataract symbolizes to Esther the vast and steady flow of an ultimate energy, of life itself, that satisfies its transcendent purpose through the fullest possible realization of itself within its individual particles. Life is its own end so far as the individual is concerned, but each life has its unique truth, or principle of integrity, which it contributes to the total and eternal meaning of life as a whole. There is no single abstract faith by which eternity is circumscribed; eternity is the mysterious wholeness of life comprising the innumerable particularities of living truth (p. 52).

While the latter part of Hochfield's statement concurs with this writer's, both Esther and Strong leave the purpose of nature's function unspecified. To do so would be to fall into the same trap in which Hazard is mired.

Esther's objection to Hazard is the cleric's appropriation and containing of mystery within his private perspective. Esther and Hazard share a mystical respect for the extra-human, but Hazard mistakenly submits it to the uses of dogma. Or, as George Strong has it, Hazard resembles those who think their limited grasp on truth the only view, their "'thought the true one'" (p. 355). The same theological imperialism applies to Hazard's view of the church. Not only did all history represent "emanations of divine thought," but all "human energies belonged to the church" (pp. 21, 322). George Strong half-jestingly testifies that even in college Hazard "'would have sent us all off to the stake with a sweet smile, for the love of Christ and the glory of the English Episcopal Church'" (p. 213). In Hazard's mind, everything, including his love for Esther, subserves the church of which he is a representative. It is not inconsistent, then, for Hazard to see the conversion of Esther as a "'test'" of his ability to "get a hold on the rebellious age" which she represents (pp. 322, 243). When Hazard finally wins her pledge, he utilizes the content of their relationship for his next sermon. In response, Esther feels only chagrin:



It was beautiful, simple, full of feeling and even of passion, but she felt that it was made for her, and she shrank before the thousand people who were thus let into the secret chambers of her heart. It treated of death and its mystery, covering ignorance with a veil of religious hope, and ending with an invocation of infinite love so intense in feeling and expression, that, beautiful as it was, Esther forgot its beauties in the fear that the next word would reveal her to the world (p. 303).

A related factor in Esther's decision is that in Hazard's hands, the church becomes an unsuccessful mediator of the Mystery it professes. For Esther, the church in its ethical stature and its poor approximations of mystery in ritual and dogma fall short of the eloquence and immanent Transcendence of Niagara. In meditating on Niagara, she reflects that "Hazard spoke with no such authority; and Esther's next idea was one of wonder how, after listening here, any preacher could have the confidence to preach again" (p. 349). Even before the Niagara experience, Esther sensed an air of artificiality in the approach of the church toward God. On her first visit to St. John's, she feels it is "'just a little near being an opera-house'" (p. 215). Months later when she paints St. Cecelia on the transcept, she states that the silent, empty church "'has a terribly grotesque air of theater even now'" (p. 262). Artist Wharton readily agrees,

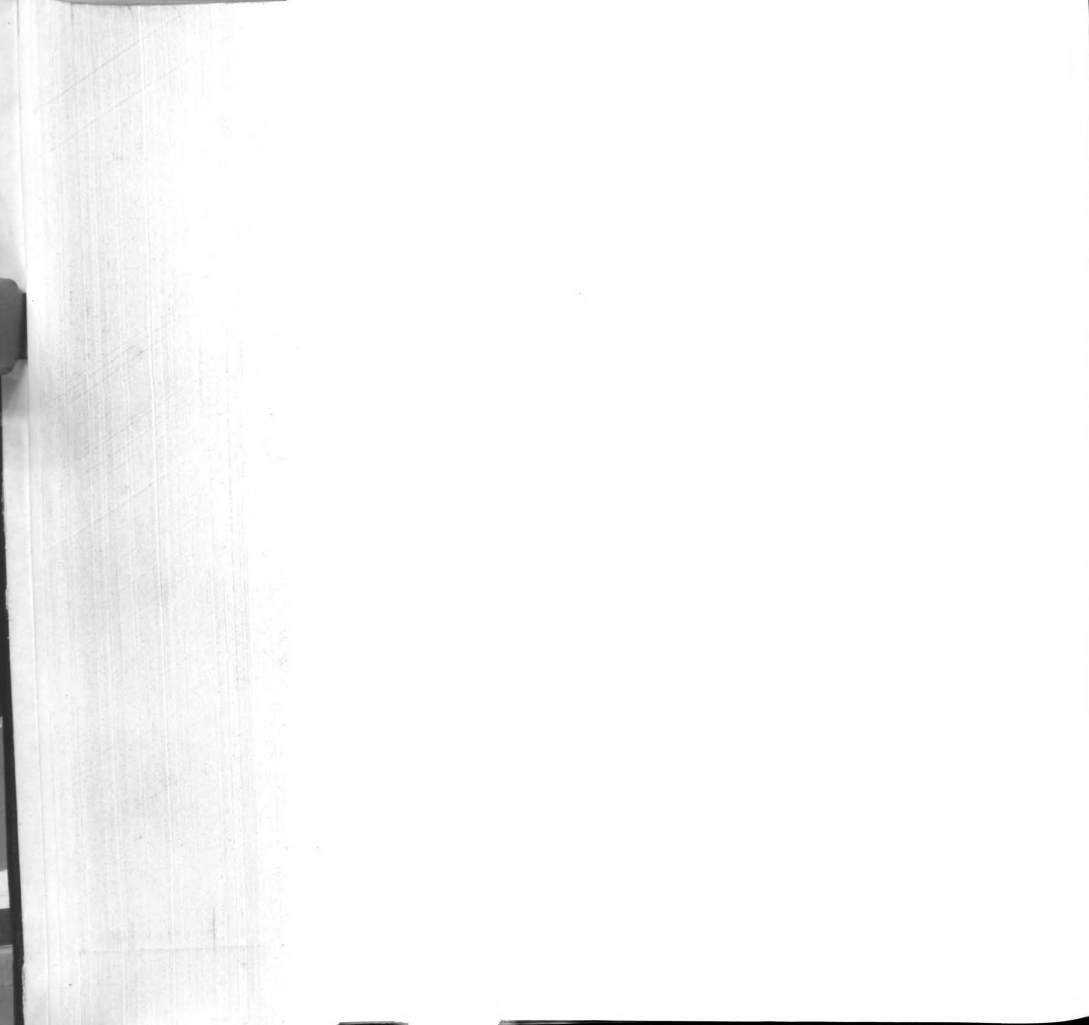
stating that "'It is a theater That is what ails our religion The place has not heart'" (p. 262). Similarly, Esther is unable to find ready solutions for her doubts in Hazard's books of abstruse exposition on the atonement, the apostolic succession, "the nature of the trinity and the authority of tradition" (pp. 313, 314, 307). Thus, after Niagara, she suspects even more that the rituals and dogmas of the church embody oblique, if not irrelevant and distorted modes for the representation of Mystery (p. 368).

In summary, Esther dismisses Hazard for a variety of reasons that relate to the character of the church and Hazard's inadequate, perhaps egoistic ground for belief. The lovers share a mystical perception of extra-human sublimity, but Esther cannot accept Hazard's arbitrary, if not self-serving containment of Mystery within the church which in turn usurps and at best approximates the Inviolable. The reasons for Hazard's fidelity to the church, either egoism or religious despair, remain inconclusive. Adams does conclude in favor of Esther's reluctance to ecclesiastize Mystery. Instead, she follows the intellectual honesty of cousin George Strong whose impartiality and openness prescribe the way to whatever elusive

Truth might lie still in the future. Perhaps Adams clearest comment on the dynamics of thought in the story lies in the names of the novel's male intellectual antagonists--strength and Hazard. As Adams' biographer Ernest Samuels has commented, in Esther's intellectual honesty and openness to the future, one finds "marked out for Adams the highway of thought which he would henceforth follow."¹⁷

¹⁷Samuels, p. 258.

In contrast to Henry Adams' Brahmin upbringing, James Lane Allen shared the poverty of his once-noted Kentucky family which had lately fallen on bad times. Born in Lexington in 1849, the youngest of seven children, Allen worked his way through Kentucky University (now Transylvania College) to teach in preparatory schools and, briefly, in colleges. After ten years in the profession, discouraged by meagre salaries and perhaps temperamentally unsuited, Allen determined to pursue a literary career, first publishing critical articles and then poems and short stories in national periodicals. Finally, at age forty-one, he found popular and financial success with his first volume of short stories, Flute and Violin



and Other Kentucky Tales and Romances (1891). His popularity steadily increased through the next twelve years, until he became one of America's most acclaimed writers. Admirers diminished, however, when Allen's often controversial fiction began to meditate pessimistically on man's place in nature, a theme which had always been an implicit concern in his work.

Despite critical disapproval and waning popularity, Allen largely followed his sombre vision until his death in 1925, reduced by then to living on earnings from past success. As surprising as Allen's later pessimism was to some readers, it has a role even in his earliest work. The stories in Flute and Violin (1891), his first volume, tell of mismatched or ill-timed love, of large tragedy following small errors, of conflict between ideal purity and passional necessity. His characters do not recover from their calamities, or, if they do, their later hopes are tempered by the griefs of the past. It is not, however, until Allen's first novella, A Kentucky Cardinal (1895), that the reader is introduced into what becomes his dominant theme--the question of man's place in an enigmatic universe.

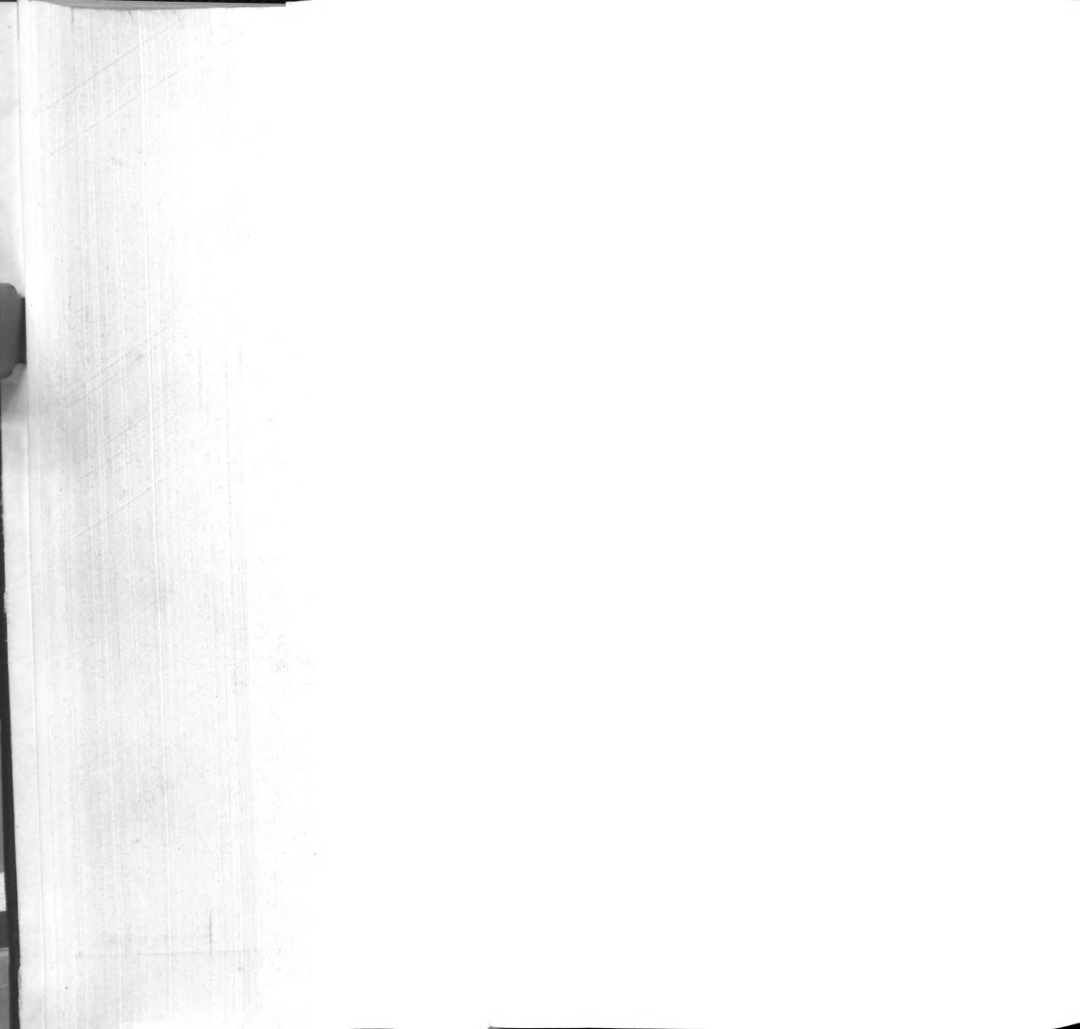
In this early novel, called a "minor masterpiece" by Allen's critics, the author emphasizes the conflict between the hero's worship of nature's beauty and a new, disturbing passion for a pretty female neighbor.¹⁸ One

¹⁸William K. Bottorff, James Lane Allen (New York, 1964), p. 60. See also, Grant C. Knight, James Lane Allen and the Genteel Tradition (Chapel Hill, 1935), pp. 97, 254.

of the few in the South aware of Thoreau's writings, Adam Moss' usual communion with nature, "a glad current of feeling," is disrupted by the attractiveness of a comely new neighbor.¹⁹ The relationship prospers erratically, culminating when the girl asks Adam to cage a cardinal with

¹⁹James Lane Allen, A Kentucky Cardinal: A Story (New York, 1895), p. 4. Subsequent references will be in parentheses and to first editions.

which he has established a bond of trust. Adam first refuses to betray the bird, which he considers a special "messenger of beauty, bearing on his wings the light of his diviner home" (p. 14). Eventually he concedes, and the caged bird dies. Adam exchanges communion for guilt, but he wins the girl, knowing that "the woman dearest to him must be pardoned--pardoned as long as he shall live" (p. 119). As Adam's allegiance gradually shifts to the



human, the character of nature becomes more elusive and problematic, losing the old rapport.

Always antagonistic toward humanity, Adam's view of experience deepens. Nature, no longer an occasion for joy, now reflects man's sufferings. The birds' voices seem "to be lifted up like the loftiest poetry of the human spirit with sympathy for realities and mysteries past all understanding" (p. 134). Moss and his birds are "Henceforth . . . like poor little foolish children, so sick and so lonesome in the night without one another," the couple shares "the long, long silence of the forests" which no longer confide their beneficent secret to Adam (p. 138). As critic William K. Bottorff has suggested, a fall of mythic stature has taken place.²⁰ While man's

²⁰Bottorff, p. 57.

wholeness in nature has disappeared, it is not supplanted by the comforts of marriage which at best prove an artifice of defense against self-isolation in an indifferent universe.

Allen's next novel, Summer in Arcady: A Tale of Nature (1896), expands and complicates this view of man and nature. From the dated transcendentalism of Adam Moss,

Allen moves to the timely issues of determinism and freedom, nature and the self, and the nature of nature. The "Preface" informs the reader that Allen intended the novel as a "protest" against the "downward-moving fiction of manifold disorder" characteristic of the literary school of naturalistic determinism (p. ix). Given this purpose and Allen's previous flirtation with transcendentalism, Allen surprisingly concedes much argument to his opponents, thus making the freedom and "moral victory" he claims for his characters a narrow victory indeed. Allen further professes to lay bare the same "veiled and sacred mysteries of life" his foes treat, heredity and sex in this instance, but with "full and far greater reverence" (p. x).

Daphne and Hilary are mutually-attracted late adolescents in their native farming community. Both hero and heroine are subject to forces which they do not suspect. Contending with the unconscious, instinctual force of sex, Daphne becomes restless "for reasons of which she knew nothing but of which Nature could have given a reasonable account . . ." (p. 12). Similarly, with Hilary, Allen explains that

Nature quietly asks room for the operation of her laws; if it is not given, she takes it, and you take the consequences. If the young

man's life had overflowed the innocent banks of childhood . . . you could not have gotten from him any intelligent account of what he was doing. You would have to question nature and his forefathers, and some of the people who had always influenced him (p. 77).

Blatant or subtle in its action, natural force as sex mounts disruptive obstacles for the innocent. When Hilary and Daphne are surprised by passion almost to unchastity (they are ironically disturbed by a bull who wanders into their forest retreat), Allen explains that they had mistakenly trusted "nature, who cares only for life and nothing for the higher things that make life worth living" (p. 144). Impersonal natural force moves only to self-expression without concern for particular life or death. Only as the couple recognizes their "helplessness" before the consuming energy on which they have stumbled are they brought to a humble maturity which will undergird their marriage (p. 147).

Against the passional element active in man, Allen adds another which makes his view of man and nature multifaceted if not fragmented. Echoing the Christian duality between the flesh and the spirit, Allen posits in man a capacity for spiritual purity--its origins unexplained--which he identifies with the progress of humanity through



evolution. When Hilary marries Daphne out of love and responsibility after their tryst, Allen explains that the farmboy's choice surpassed his meagre moral inheritance and surroundings, somehow sharing "intimations from the wisdom of everlasting law, from the perpetuity of the species, and from the growing, triumphing movement of the world" (p. 167). Thus, although its origins and workings remain unclear, Allen constructs a dialectic between man's inherited retrogressive, passionate instincts and a higher, spiritual aspiration. That the "moral victory" forecast in the "Preface" results in part from the chance intrusion of a lost bull indicates the slimness of freedom's action in man's affairs.

Allen's third novel, The Choir Invisible (1897), was his first great popular success, finishing second on the best-seller list for 1897.²¹ An enlargement of the

²¹Alice Payne Hackett, 60 Years of Best Sellers 1895-1955, p. 97.

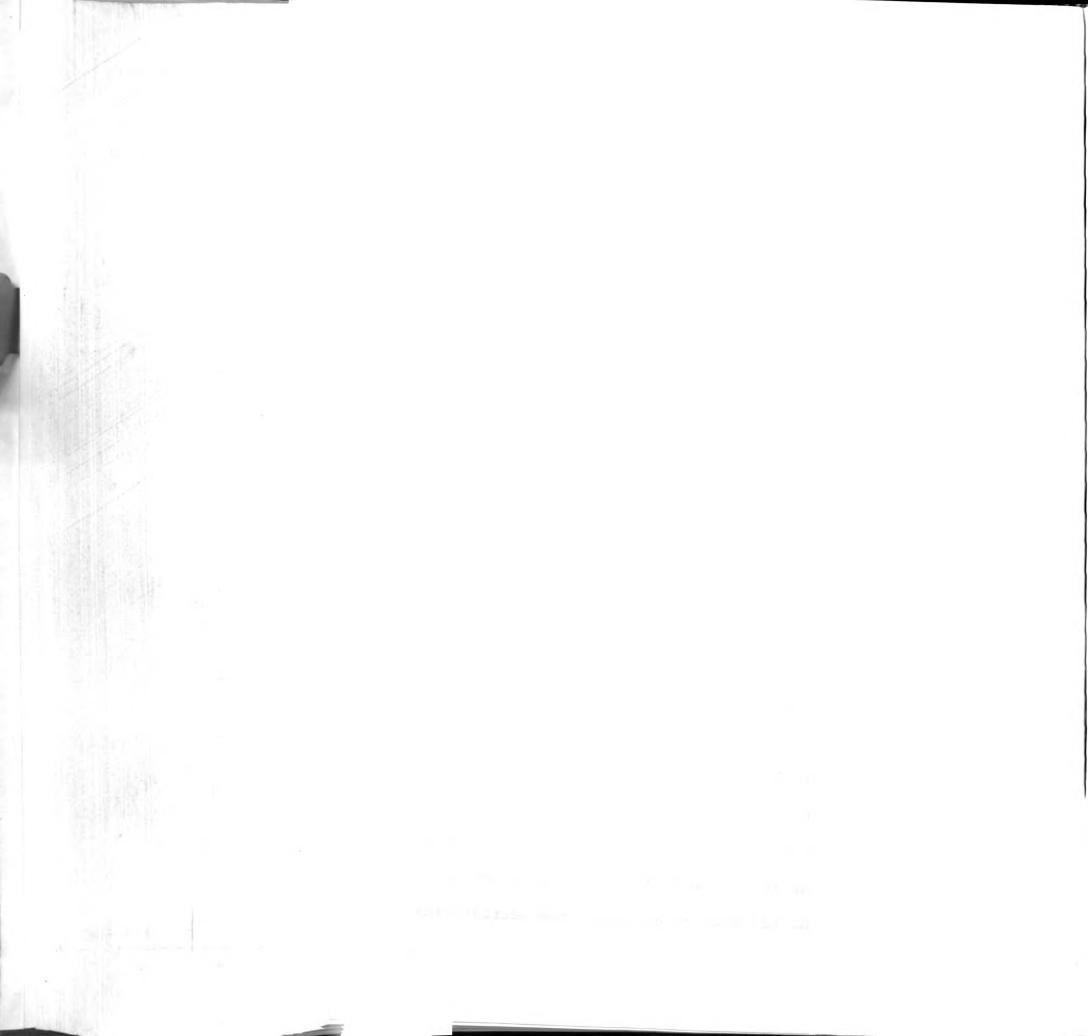
earlier novella John Gray (1893), the tale continues the duality between spiritual and passional forces in man. The story takes place about 1800 in the prospering frontier town of Lexington, Kentucky. To those who know him,

John Gray, the local schoolmaster, exhibits "moral loftiness and intellectual power" which is "disciplined to the higher nature of control" (p. 9). His moral worth is qualified by a "stark audacity of faith" in himself and the probability "that Heaven was blessing him" (pp. 80, 81). Gray's expectation that "he should rise in the world and lay hold by steady degrees upon all that he would care to have" suffers reversal when life proves more contingent than anticipated (p. 78). A first rebuff comes in the fickleness of human nature. The girl he wished to make the "lamp" of his life pledges herself to another while Gray is delayed by a practical joke. Realizing that he "had been beaten, routed, and by forces how insignificant," Gray faces the further humiliation of having misread the girl's character, a "honeycomb of self-love" (pp. 94, 130).

Nature administers a second defeat when a starving panther mauls Gray early one morning. While the incident is unsuccessful thematically, it introduces Gray's major struggle--the effort to suppress his illicit sexual desire. During his convalescence, the aunt of his ex-lover who warned him of the girl daily attends his wounds. A long-time friend of Gray's, Mrs. Jessica Falconer respects the "religious purity of his nature and life," "the effect of

the unfallen in him, of the highest keeping itself above assault" (pp. 44, 45). Her platonic attraction to this "shining white life" compensates for a spiritual lack in her own marriage, but Gray must soon confront a consuming passion that overcomes his platonic affections.

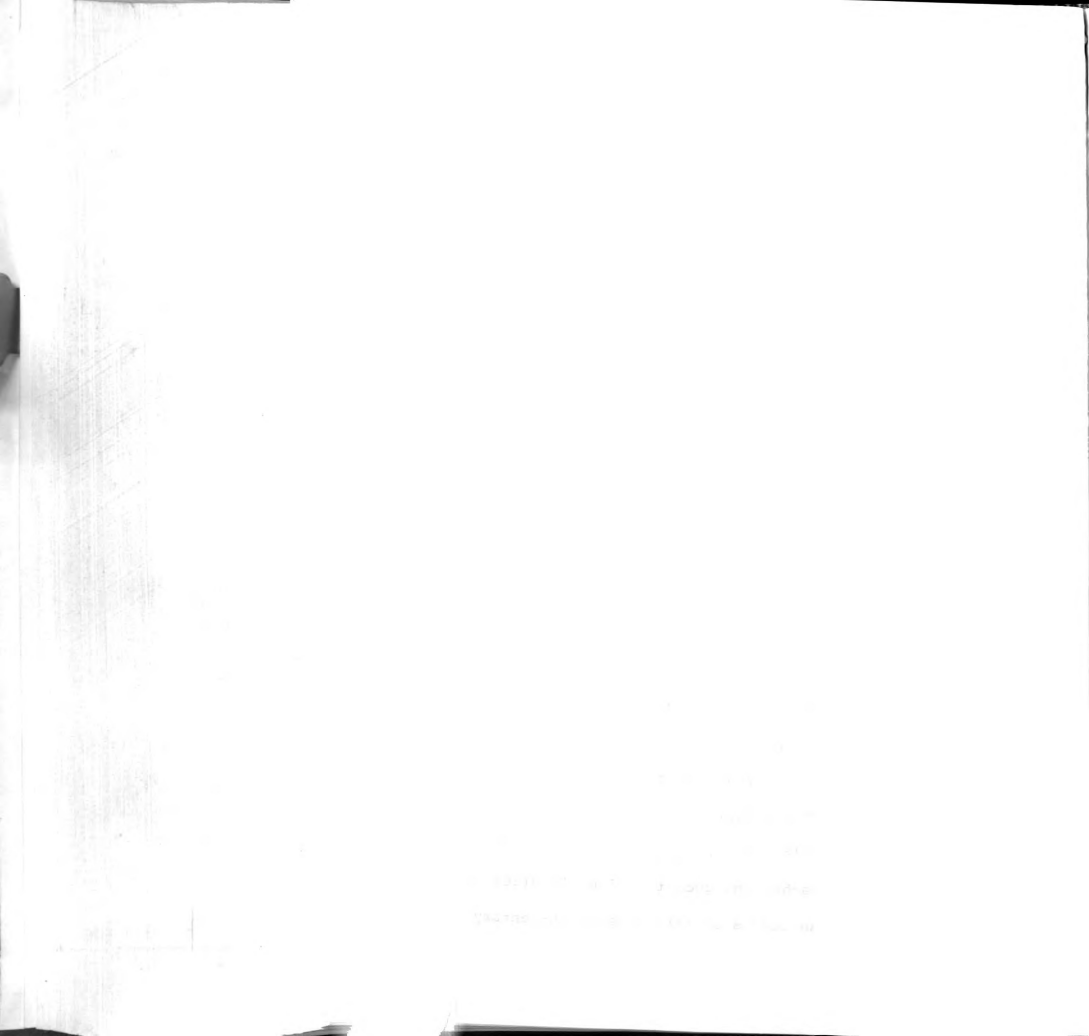
Whether Gray will concede to what both he and Mrs. Falconer deem the ignoble, or devote himself to service in a promising law career in Philadelphia, becomes the novel's central interest. Gray's task is to respond to and to fulfill Allen's dictum for the novel: "All growth, all strength, all uplift, all power to rise in the world and to remain arisen, comes from the myriad hold we have taken upon higher surrounding realities" (p. 77). As in Summer in Arcady, Allen only vaguely identifies the "higher surrounding realities" which Gray must seek out. One support comes from the Reverend James Moore, Gray's friend and "the dreamy, saintlike, flute-playing Episcopal parson of the town" (p. 52). Moore had subdued his private evil and disorder, and "aflame with holiness," he counsels others to struggle for inner peace and public good (p. 270). A second inspiration for Gray's eventual victory is Jessica Falconer herself. As the minister states, "'she holds in quietness her land of the spirit; but there are battlefields



in her nature that fill me with awe by their silence"
(p. 284).

After a long struggle, Gray manages to contain and transmute his passion. He reaches "that high cold table-land where the sun of Love shines rather as white luminary of another world than the red quickener of this" (p. 302). Marriage later eludes the pair when after Colonel Falconer's death Gray is found to be bound to one who knows his real love but will not release him. Two decades later, now a famous judge, Gray sends his teen-age son to Jessica to learn from her the lessons of tranquility and nobility. A letter accompanies the boy, explaining Gray's purpose and love to the aging widow. There, Gray confesses that his life's purpose, in evolutionary imagery which Allen provides, has been "'to turn with ever-increasing love from the imperfection that is in us all to the Perfection that is above us all--the perfection that is God Many a time this candle has gone out; but . . . with your sacred name on my lips--it has been relighted'" (p. 360).

Of all Allen's novels, The Reign of Law (1900) most directly approaches the question of man's place in the universe and the issues of late nineteenth-century

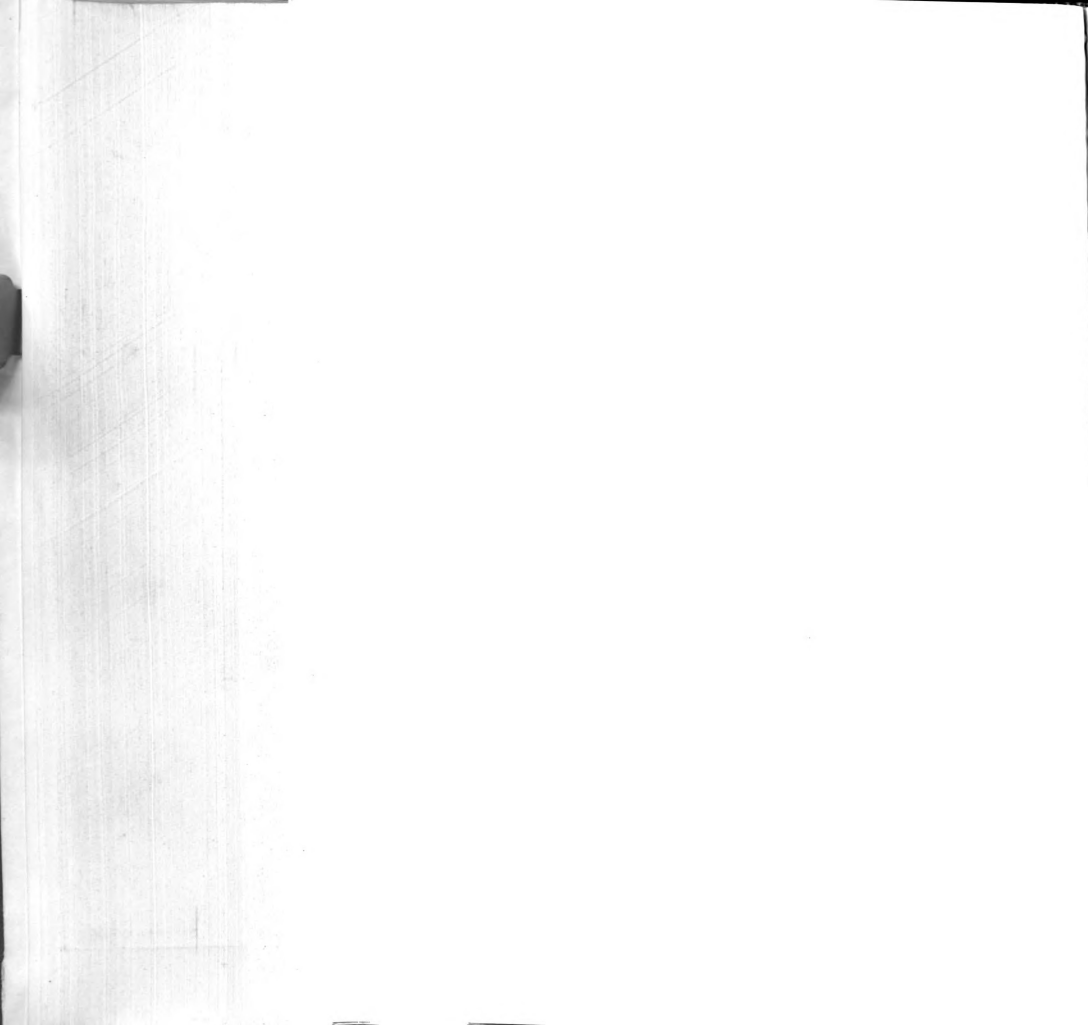


religious debate. A kind of American Robert Elsmere, which also prompted much popular controversy, this tale of post-Civil War Kentucky details the "counter-conversion," as Elmer Suderman has named the process, of a devout farm-boy to Darwinian scientism.²² David, the only son of an impoverished rural family, possesses a deeply religious

²² Alice Payne Hackett records The Reign of Law as fourth on the best-seller list for 1900; p. 100. See Suderman, "The Damnation of Theron Ware As a Criticism of American Religious Thought."

sensibility which finds expression in his inherited Christianity. By temperament "joyous and self-reliant," his locale and his parents' influence--"intense sectarians and dully pious souls"--offer neither understanding nor inspiration (pp. 35, 39-40).

When David hears a lecture by a faculty member from a new college to be opened in Lexington, he decides to enter its ministerial course. In the two years he must work to earn tuition money, David pursues a careful private study of the Bible which instills in him an outlook "nearer the first century and yet earlier ages than the nineteenth" (p. 61). Ignorant of "modern theology or modern science" and with his own soul "a temple of



perpetual worship," David absorbs a biblical view of man and nature, relating it to the events of daily life:

the most important among the worlds swung in space was the Earth, on account of a single inhabitant--Man. Its shape had been moulded, its surface fitted up, as the dwelling-place of Man Nothing had meaning, possessed value, save as it derived meaning and value from him. The great laws of Nature--they, too, were ordered for Man's service Man had only to speak properly (in prayer) and these laws would move faster or less fast, stop still, turn to the right or the left side of the road that he desired to travel (pp. 56-57).

Allen objects to this anthropocentric bias in David's interpretation but allows that such was "still, in all probability, the most important fact in the faith and conduct of the race," and, secondly, that in David it "took on one of its purest shapes and wrought out . . . some of its loftiest results" (pp. 57-58). After two years of daily toil in hemp fields and nightly Bible study, David departs for Lexington knowing "more of prophets and apostles than modern doctors of divinity" and, spiritually, "already as one who had climbed above earth's eternal snow-line and sees only white peaks and pinnacles--the last sublimities" (pp. 61, 37).

David's expectations of new learning are soon confounded, however. The school established after the war as

The school shall remain after the war.

a "pledge of the new times, [a] plea for the peace and amity of learning, [and a] fresh chance for the study of revelation" has already conceded to dogmatism and contention (p. 34). David's worshipping mind alters toward the critical as he experiences the logic behind comparative religion. Instead of toleration and "religious peace," he discovers "impassioned and rancorous" "wars of dogmatic theology" between a plethora of "wrangling, sarcastic, envious creeds" (p. 84). Among Lexington's heterogeneity, "Each of the many churches was proclaiming itself the sole incarnation of this [true religion] and all others the embodiment of something false" (p. 113). Doubts about sectarian claims to ultimacy are further compounded by divisions for purely political motives. Nor do intradenominational arguments over the morality of organ music or dancing accord with David's perception of necessary latitude for custom and personal preference in religion (pp. 86-87).

"Doubtful and distressed, not knowing what to believe nor whom to follow," David begins to doubt one of his two guides to faith--the Bible. In reaction to the higher criticism, a powerful influence in American religion by the 1860's, the new Lexington seminary made a

stringent Biblicism its cornerstone, "having cast aside the dogmas of modern teachers, and taken, as the one infallible guide of their faith and practice, the Bible simply . . . " (p. 42). While David's textual and historical studies of the Bible "enlarged enormously his knowledge," they also added questions, and "in adding to the questions . . . they multiplied those that cannot be answered" (p. 87). When at last the young doubter debates a minister and is called to account by the faculty, he must reject their insistence on the infallibility of the biblical record (p. 98).

As David decides that he can no longer accept his old belief but must nevertheless discover what he "can believe," he happens to hear a sermon warning against "modern infidelity--the new infidelity as contrasted with the old" (pp. 112, 114). As might be expected of David's earnest mind, he promptly searches out the proscribed books for what they might say of "'The Truth, the Law'" which his religious sense still reveres (p. 112). Thus exposed to Darwin and his disciples which had become "atmospheric" to his time, Allen relates that David's "investigating hands were slipping eagerly along a mighty train of truths" (pp. 115, 120). For David and innumerable

others, all new questions "met at a single point . . . at man's place in Nature, at the idea of God, and in that system of thought and creed which is Christianity" (p. 124).

David's studies in the new thought do not bring conclusions, but expulsion from his school. In a hearing by the faculty, Allen summarizes David's position, stating that "he was full of many confusing voices: the voices of the new science, the voices of the new doubt. One voice only had fallen silent in him: the voice of the old faith" (p. 140). He cannot answer any of the professors' questions positively, not even an inquiry into his belief in God (pp. 142-43). David petitions divine patience, but the faculty exiles him to the farm of his origin.

In narrating David's movement from confusion about doctrine and sectarian rivalry to basic doubt about Christianity, Allen devotes greater space and detail to initial dissatisfactions than to causes of David's profounder scepticism. Indeed, the reader knows little of David's intellectual growth until he relates its final product in the later part of the novel. As with Allen's brief mention of doubts about the Bible and of exposure to Darwin, the author ascribes David's further advance to a happy

release from parochial squabbling, making "his religious spirit more lofty and alive than ever" (p. 221).

Upon his return home, David meets and falls in love with the new elementary school teacher, for whose believing mind he at last explains his intellectual system. He begins by delineating new fields of study which have replaced theology as a touchstone for man's self-understanding. Moving from the inclusive to the particular, he enumerates instellar physics, astronomy, geology, evolutionary biology, anthropology, sociology, and comparative religion. These assorted disciplines find common purpose in their effort "'to discover and to trace Law,'" which governs the universe and offers "'all that we know of Him whom we call Creator, God, our Father'" (pp. 294, 295). For David, all religions, none more valuable than another, are a "'perfectly natural expression of the . . . human desire and effort to find God and to worship Him through all the best that we know in ourselves and of the universe outside us'" (p. 294). Spiritual aspiration is itself determined by Law innate in man: "'We obey, and our seekings are our religions'" (p. 295).

David's understanding of natural law leads to an evolutionary faith, contending that man's moral progress is a condition and quality of Law's operation:

"all things . . . are a growth, a sublime unfolding by the Laws of God. The race ever rises toward Him Its charity grows, its justice grows. All the nobler, finer elements of this spirit come forth more and more--a continuous advance along the paths of Law. And the better the world, the larger its knowledge, the easier its faith in Him who made it and who leads it on. The development of Man is itself the great Revelation of Him!" (pp. 298-99).

David must face the problem of individual freedom if progress is indeed the fabric of the natural law of which man is a product. In defense, he argues that "'Nature does nothing for Man except what she enables him to do for himself . . . she has given him his resources and then thrown him upon them. Beyond that she cares for nothing, does nothing, provides nothing, arranges nothing'" (p. 320).

This view contrasts notably with the biblical concept of man's centrality in the universe. Once believing that the "earth was a planet of provision for human consumption," David now realizes that other creatures "were no more made for Man than Man was made for them" (pp. 234, 235). Man's welfare "was not the reason of their being created: what

that reason was in the Creator's mind," David concedes, "no one knows or would ever know" (p. 235).

The last tenet in David's evolutionary faith embraces empirical science as "'the fresh path for the faith of the race,'" man's sole hope for reducing the unknown. "'For the race must henceforth must get its idea of God, and build its religion to Him, from its knowledge of the Laws of His universe'" (p. 381). Authorial comment throughout the novel endorses this position, although Allen takes care to emphasize the open-endedness and mystery of creation and man's existence. In agreement with the new thought, Allen stresses David's antiquated Bible-inspired views of man and nature (p. 61). The growth in toleration among sectarian religion is attributed to the "modern spirit which is for us the tolerant transition to a yet broader future" (p. 84). Similarly, Allen cites the seminary faculty's unpunitive, patient inquiry into David's views to indicate man's steady progress "in charity and mildness" (p. 139). The same historical perspective compliments the "latter half of the nineteenth-century" when "never perhaps was so much burned out of the intellectual path of man" (p. 121). Doubt assumes a positive agency in the progress of evolution. Questioning has led

man "always . . . from less truth to more truth; which is the inspiration of his mind, the sorrow of his heart . . . which attempts to solve the universe and knows that it does not solve it, but ever seeks . . . to clarify reason, and so to find whatever truth it can" (pp. 137-38).

The facts of man's limited knowledge and the impersonal mystery and caprice of natural law conflict with Allen's optimism, and The Reign of Law shows an increased awareness of these contingencies from previous works. In introducing David, Allen calls him an "obscure item in Nature's plan which always passes understanding" (p. 35). He also ponders the way David represents a throwback to nobler ancestors, "emerging mysteriously from the deeps of life four generations down their line" (p. 38). The unpredictable also operates negatively, as in the "vast appalling catastrophes of nature, for which man sees no reason and detects the furtherance of no plan--law being turned with seeming blindness, and the spirit of sheer wastage . . . spending its sublime forces in a work of self-desolation" (p. 205). The process of nature, whatever its final intent, does not allow the individual security or certainty in the present.

Nature goes ever about her ancient work, and we cannot declare that we have ever watched the operation of her fingers, think on we will, and reason we must, amid her otherwise intolerable mysteries, though we accomplish no more in our philosophy than the poor insect, which momentarily illumines its wandering through illimitable night by a flash from its own body (p. 184).

This same spirit informs Allen's closing paragraph which parallels the fate of man and the hemp of David's fields: "O Mystery Immortal! which is in the hemp and in our passions; by which our poor brief lives are led upward out of earth for a season, then cut down, rotted and broken--for they long service!" (p. 385).

Allen dramatizes this tension between cosmic purpose and personal insignificance and isolation with the character of Gabriella, the schoolteacher with whom David falls in love. Like her namesake, she is a ministering angel to David. Impoverished and orphaned by the Civil War, she has found solace and strength in an undogmatic, intuitive Christianity of love and compassion. Allen treats her seriously, stating that while David "had been repelled by the part [of religion] that passes and is human," Gabriella had in her travail "been drawn to that part of worship which lasts and is divine" (p. 275). She accepts David's scientific outlook until it regards

Christianity as simply another of the world's religions. To her soul of love and simplicity, David is "a maltreated Christ-neighbor whom it was her duty to succor if she could" (p. 277). She tends David through critical illness, and to his surprise, she accepts his marriage proposal although it will mean years of poverty while he studies in a Northern university. Beyond this measure of devotion, Allen injects a somber note which holds reservations about the emotional-moral adequacy of a religion of science. In the moment of their betrothal, Allen observes that while Gabriella "would give her all, she could never be all to him. Her life would be enfolded completely in his; but he could hold out his arms also toward a cold Spirit who would forever elude him--Wisdom" (p. 384).

The Mettle of the Pasture (1903), Allen's fifth novel, again utilizes late nineteenth-century, small-town Kentucky for its setting. As in The Reign of Law, Allen again emphasizes individual moral struggle within the long history of evolution. Unlike the earlier novel, however, Darwinism has already made its impact on the minds of the major characters. The perception of moral issues is also more acute than in Allen's previous work; from the harnessing of unruly passion, Allen has moved to treat the

devious actions of subtle spiritual pride. The narrative begins with the rebuff of a suitor's proposal when he confesses that he fathered an illegitimate child, the mother then rejecting his offer of marriage. His lover, the daughter of an aristocratic family, responds with "her unforgiveness and her dismissal forever," arguing that she could not "'sacrifice what is best in me without lowering myself'" (pp. 41, 191). After years of solitary global wandering, the young woman learns the lessons of humility, reverence, and self-sacrifice. She returns to marry the now sickly, scandalized man.

While the girl's decisions provide the motive force for the novel, Allen simply closes with her decision to return, neglecting to detail its logic. Instead, he concentrates on lives of the assorted characters of the town. There is an elderly judge who lost a wife and a brilliant career to the town's appetite for salacious gossip. A middle-aged, magnanimous classics professor serves the community, although harboring a life-long sorrow from the deaths of his wife and two young sons. Not the least of the admirals is the jilted suitor who has contained his youthful instincts and risked love for the sake of honesty.

The judge and the professor, the only raisonneurs in all Allen's fiction, provide interpretation of Allen's focuses. The judge heralds the "'mettle'" in the young man's honesty, calling it "'a rallying signal to human nature'" (p. 342). Giving the novel its title, the judge reflects on the uniqueness of his time in history, stating that "'What most men are thinking now . . . is of our earth, a small grass-grown planet hung in space. And, unaccountably making his appearance on it, is man, a pasturing animal, deriving his mettle from his pasture'" (p. 342). In one sense, man seems unchanging to the judge--"'wandering over that green belt for a little while . . . with the mystery of his ever being there and the mystery of his dust--with nothing ever added to him, nothing ever lost out of him.'" Yet, he observes, there is "'the side of the new.'" The American "'has had new thoughts, he has done things never seen elsewhere or before'" (p. 344). In addition, this new national type promises to develop a "mettle" peculiar to himself--"'the virtue of truthfulness'" (p. 345). A foreshadow of this appears in the action of the rejected, guilty lover who chose not "'to shirk'" the dangers of truthfulness in a deceitful world (p. 378).

To the professor's credit, through equipoise and humility, he has lived "continually in a world of much littleness and not himself become little" (p. 178). It is the professor who articulates Allen's continuing faith in the reality of moral choice in the face of contemporary claims of determinism. Regardless of circumscribing factors, for the characters of the novel and man always, "it is the high compulsion of the soul itself, the final mystery of personal choice, that sends us forth at last to our struggles and to our peace . . . there for each is right and wrong, the eternal beauty of virtue" (p. 435).

Neither the professor nor the judge can affirm of hope for more in existence than the slim consolations of moral victory amid personal freedom. The professor, for example, has searched history and world religions for proof of immortality. He finds nothing conclusive amid reason's many denials. There remains in him, nonetheless, an "unaccountable confidence that the light of human life" would not disappear with physical death (p. 431). The words of the teacher and his legal friend, like their acts, bespeak Allen's main concerns in The Mettle of the Pasture. Foremost is an ethical model of self-discipline and sacrifice. Secondly, Allen reiterated his belief in the moral

freedom which emerges from suffering and the will to live rightly. And lastly, there is a hope that human history, despite the individual's private misfortune, has meaning and direction.

Intended to form a trilogy, Allen's "Christmas" novels enlarge on the theme of personal suffering to question the ability of an optimistic Darwinian hypothesis to explain man's existence. In a manner that hearkens back to the potential isolation of Gabriella in David's devotion to wisdom, The Bride of the Mistletoe (1909) probes the relationship between a scholarly professor and his admiring wife. For a year, the professor has devoted all his time to writing a book of which he tells his wife nothing, thus causing her to suspect that she is only an "'Incident'" in his life (p. 31). At last, on Christmas Eve, their wedding anniversary, he presents the final draft for her inspection. The book, he tells her, responds to the questions she asked on the previous Christmas about the origins and significance of the holiday's symbols. With method and information paralleling Fraser's Golden Bough, Allen's professor traces the pagan meanings behind the Christianized symbols, which are "a survival of grave notes in the worship of primitive man" (p. 107).

As they sit by the fire, the husband summarizes the book's contents, excluding only the story of the mistletoe which his wife has been anxiously awaiting. She has remembered that on their wedding night years before, he had called her his "'Bride of the Mistletoe'" (p. 53). Now in his interpretation of the mistletoe will "be rendered the Judgment of the Years" (p. 106).

Christmas mistletoe, it turns out, has reference to the Druidic custom of offering a virgin to the manful Spirit of the Forest which is ceremonially embodied in the passion of a young warrior (p. 129). The story confirms the wife's suspicions of growing inconsequence when the husband becomes enwrapt in his telling, returning psychologically to "the summer woods of ancestral wandering, the fatherland of Old Desire" (p. 131). Believing that she has only been the object of his youthful "low carnal propensities" and is now displaced by his scholarship, she asks, "'Am I the only thing that you care less for as time passes?'" (pp. 164, 143). To this and other questions about their marriage, the husband returns silence. With no consolation or explanation, "wounded and stunned as by an incredible blow," the wife spends a solitary, sleepless

night, reflecting that through the years, "it was some thing--not herself--that he wanted" (pp. 158, 149).

Critic William Bottorff attributes the wife's reaction to her emotional immaturity and an inability to grasp her husband's larger vision of life, which is to be "serviceable to humanity" (pp. 22, 37-38, 61).²³ While

²³Bottorff, pp. 99-100.

there is some reason for this view, nowhere does Allen suggest that the wife's insight into the marriage is mistaken. Indeed, Allen takes pains to emphasize the accuracy of her perception of the husband's character. There still lingers in the middle-aged scholar an aspect of "brutal vitality" not unlike the "conquering nature" of a "heavy passionate animal" (pp. 47, 19, 21). All doubt about Allen's portraiture disappears in the comment that follows the professor's imaginative identification with the Forest Spirit, the narrator stating that "he may have been aware or he may not have been aware that he had revealed to her the truth about himself" (p. 132). In recognition, the wife sits as a "butterfly broken on the wheel of years: lustreless and useless now in its summer" (p. 132).

Allen further suggests that whereby previously the professor's marriage was the recipient of his instinctual energy, its focus has shifted with increasing age to the domain of the serious scholar, surveying "the wide commons where the race forever encamps at large with its problems, joys, and sorrows" (p. 23). Here, "he was brother to all brothers who join work to work for the common good" (p. 37). An evolutionist, the professor reaches for the improvement of the race in which "knowledge widens and suffering begins to be made more bearable and death more kind" (p. 22). In this ambition, the professor shares an inadequacy with David in The Reign of Law. As Gabriella, giving her all, would always remain subservient to David's pursuit of the ever-elusive "cold Spirit" of "Wisdom," so the professor has come to "those cold Alps of learning" which perhaps profit mankind but disenchant marriage (p. 26).

As in The Reign of Law and other Allen novels, an evolutionary faith contrasts with impinging personal tragedy in the expanse of time and nature. The professor's studies of man's religious history repeat Allen's dominant strain: "At the dawn of history we behold man worshipping the tree as the Creator literally present on the earth"

(p. 105). In later millennia, moving from the animism of the forest, the gods participated with man in human form. Of late, "this last panorama faded also, and civilized man stood face to face with the modern woods--inhabited only by its sap and cells." Now, in a scientific age, "the dubious oracle of the forest--its one reply to all man's questionings--became the Voice of its own Mystery" (p. 103). It is from this point of view that Allen makes his closing comment on the novel's troubled couple. The wife's night of desolation has renewed her dedication to the marriage, although on a more impersonal base. She awakens her husband, and they both shed tears, repeating the recognition of Adam Moss in The Kentucky Cardinal: "Tears not for Life's faults but for Life when there are no faults. They locked in each other's arms--trying to save each other on Nature's vast lonely, tossing, uncaring sea" (p. 184).

A year later Allen published The Doctor's Christmas Eve (1910), which continues the setting, characters, and themes of The Bride of the Mistletoe. Dr. Downs Birney, a dedicated country physician, is a neighbor and lifelong friend of the professor. Like other Allen characters, the doctor shows confused allegiances which surface conspicuously. An evolutionist and fervent believer in science,

he has devoted himself to the futurity of the race, the "World's Path of Lessening Pain" (p. 102). Amid this altruism, "for the members of his family is reserved acquaintance with the drama of his devotion to himself" (p. 45). The special victim of the doctor's egoism has been his wife. Early in his practice, the now middle-aged healer found himself in love with the professor's new bride. Unable to subdue his passion, Birney concluded that "'there is one way out for me . . . I must marry and fall in love with my own wife and with the mother of my own children'" (p. 172). Love does not come, however, and the doctor's hope for tranquility becomes his "Nemesis" (p. 79).

The doctor's private chaos is compounded by his wife's perception of his real love. The wife, "a few years after their marriage, having discovered herself to be an unloved bride, had thrown her whole agonized nature into . . . winning his love as young wife and young mother" (pp. 209-10). Failing also that happiness, slowly out of the tragedy of her own life, "she had begun to work for the success of his" (p. 210). Eventually, the persistent kindness of his wife and the understanding and sympathy of the knowing professor and wife render change in the

thwarted emotional life of the doctor. New charity and cheerful acceptance come too late, for the doctor's adolescent son has perceived the father's misplaced love. In hurt and disillusion, the boy soon dies from a serious disease.

The doctor at last confronts "guilt and shame" which he could neither "transfer to . . . another nor lay upon the mother earth" (p. 296). The measure of his self-understanding appears in the inscription, taken from Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, on the boy's gravestone--"Unto a Land Not Inhabited." "'I chose that for him,'" says the grieving father; "'it is the truth: he has been sent away, bearing more than was his'" (p. 300). Allen allows that in an uncertain future the husband and wife--the "heroic daughter of the greater vanished people"--might eventually find happiness in one another, but the logic of their son's death, as of their discordant marriage, remains impenetrable (p. 304).

The question that persists through Allen's many novels centers on the incongruity of personal chaos and suffering in a universe supposedly undergirded and directed by beneficent progress. For reasons unknown, Allen never wrote the third novel in his proposed trilogy. Yet,

some interpretive assistance does come from his last published work, The Last Christmas Tree: An Idyl of Immortality (1924). A brief work, it tells the last conversation between the last living objects on an earth engulfed by cold. Two pine trees reflect on their fate and the nature and accomplishments of absent, long-perished man. To their many queries about the past and possible immortality and man's knowledge of both, the trees must defer to "'mystery,'" which is echoed by the universe itself (pp. 24, 31). After one tree has been covered with snow, the other, feeling its approaching death, offers a closing benediction to existence: "'Power, that put forth all things for a purpose, you have fulfilled, without explaining it, that Purpose. I follow all things with their sleep'" (p. 34). Of Allen's many novels, some serious and others light, The Last Christmas Tree concludes a major theme and sounds a somber note in closing a long career.

Henry Adams and James Lane Allen gauged the thought and experience of their time and respectfully submitted that opinions on cosmic questions were premature. Allen always persisted in wonder at the mysterious ways of man's suffering and joy on "a small grass-grown planet hung in space." The more intellectual Adams debated by means of

scientist, priest, and female the nature of indeterminate
Force which moves and encompasses the universe.

CONCLUSION

The six chapters of the dissertation reveal several major patterns of doubt and faith operating during the late nineteenth century in America. Darwinism, the higher criticism, and comparative religion--the main critical studies affecting religion--constituted an unparalleled assault on the traditional sources and rationales for Christian belief. As several of our authors illustrate, these forces gave impetus to perennial dissatisfactions with traditional orthodox explanations for the presence of evil and inordinate suffering in man's experience, an unavoidable problem for all religions that posit an all-powerful beneficent deity. These four criticisms of orthodoxy notably diminished the possibility of regarding nature, the Bible, Christian doctrine, or the workings of fate as decisive or complete objective indications of divine intent in the universe. Insofar as each of these movements derived its logic and authority from the empirical methodology of science, they together contributed to

the mounting epistemological dilemma of the late nineteenth century. With the questioning of such traditional Christian arguments for belief as design in nature and the verbal inspiration of the Bible, which had their validity in objective evidences, religionists faced the problem of relocating sources for belief. Except for those few who transferred their faith to the sufficiency of reason and the empirical, most novelists studied here were forced to recognize the trustworthiness of non-rational, subjective insight and feeling as an indispensable alternative to exclusive reliance on an empirical criteria for truth and reality.

Of the various threats to orthodoxy noted by these novelists, Darwinian thought clearly played the largest role in disputing previous religious assumptions. In The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896), Harold Frederic's clergyman-protagonist fully accepts the evolutionary views expounded to him by a heterodox Catholic priest and a Darwinian scientist. The measure of the Reverend Ware's new discipleship appears late in the novel when he adopts evolutionary imagery to justify his new ethic of self-interest. While the minister sees himself on a progressive evolutionary continuum, his priestly and scientific

mentors are Darwinian pessimists, judging man to be more closely related to the monkey than the angel. For Frederic's literary mentor, William Dean Howells, Darwinian theory embodied his lifelong fears about the potential meaninglessness of experience. In the chaos of heedless natural process, as reflected in the turmoil of industrial America, Howells was unable to perceive divine intent or any just moral order which might bespeak divine concern for man's affairs. Thus, in Howells' mind, the Darwinian world view symbolized the possibility of irreconcilable, preponderate evil as the motive force in man's experience.

In Augusta Evans Wilson's Beulah (1859), evolutionary views of a vast pre-history lead the heroine to repudiate biblical accounts of creation and man's fall and, quickly thereafter, the general authority of scripture. Similar references pervade the fiction of Elizabeth Phelps Ward and help to create the atmosphere of religious uncertainty that informs her fiction. Although the heterodox heroine of Margaret Deland's best-selling John Ward, Preacher (1888) does not expound evolutionary thought, she is certainly influenced by the religious rationalism of a friend who discusses his Darwinian philosophy with her. Presbyterian minister-turned-novelist E. P. Roe first

resents Darwinian accusations about man's ancestry then seemingly accepts a vision of progressive piety.

Other novelists of the late nineteenth century welcomed Darwinism as the occasion for the reformulation of the traditional understanding of God's providence and revelation. Helen H. Gardener, a prominent feminist and disciple of well-known infidel Robert G. Ingersoll, heralded man's increasing rationality as a harbinger of greater social justice and a more accurate formulation for truth than Christian subjectivism. Similarly, Unitarian minister Minot Judson Savage maintained that a firm allegiance to the empirical and the reasonable demoted Christianity's claims to uniqueness and made way for a new cross-cultural understanding of God. Unitarian clergywoman Celia Parker Woolley shared the views of Gardener and Savage but expressed ambivalence about liberalism's inordinate insistence upon objectivity and rationalism, especially as it affected the emotional and subjective in man.

A comparable attitude appears in the fiction of James Lane Allen, a popular novelist of the turn of the century. Allen hesitated in giving complete endorsement to his heroes' optimistic allegiance to Darwinian schemes

of progress. Too often such enthusiasms of future felicity neglected grievous human problems more immediately in the purview of the hero. Also, if Darwinism did accurately reflect cosmic process, insufficient evidence prohibited any conclusion of the nature or fate of this universal tendency which seemed wrapped in impenetrable mystery. Historian and sometime novelist Henry Adams shared Allen's epistemological agnosticism in his novel Esther (1884). Although one might intuit the presence of awesome cosmic force, efforts on the part of either science or religion to define this energy seemed equally premature.

Whatever doubts Darwinism evoked about the historical accuracy of scripture were added to by the higher criticism of the Bible. In its challenge to the transhistorical character of the Christian cannon, the higher criticism pointed out its fully-human aspects and assumed the mythological origins of Jesus' divinity. Both Harold Frederic's minister and Elizabeth Phelps Ward's most prominent clergyman are influenced by the higher criticism of the Bible. The Reverend Theron Ware first finds scripture's relativity in the cultural primitiveness of the Israelites. Seminary student Emanuel Bayard cannot accept the inerrancy of the Bible or his denomination's

interpretation of the biblical hell. The marital tragedy of Margaret Deland's John Ward, Preacher (1888) results in part from the husband's biblical literalism from which springs his stern and flawlessly logical Calvinism. Unfortunately, Mrs. Ward's humane common sense cannot abide by conceptions of predestination and eternal damnation.

Free-thinker Helen Gardener also employed common sense, as did her mentor Robert Ingersoll, to devalue the moral authority of biblical characters and much Christian doctrine, especially the vicarious atonement which seemed to deny individual moral culpability. Celia Parker Woolley and Minot Judson Savage repeated Miss Gardener's rationalistic criticisms in their attack on scripture, but they also utilized the more empirical findings of the higher criticism. Popular orthodox novelist E. P. Roe, on the other hand, conceded many of these new discoveries only to argue for the unique quality and durability of the Bible's effects on the heart of man. The Reverend Stephen Hazard in Henry Adams Esther (1884) sought to accommodate biblical criticism and evolution through a metaphorical hermeneutic which would transcend literalism and subsume critics' complaints. No such alternative is available to the protagonists of James Lane Allen who discard biblical

literalism to serve, perhaps too fully, the new authority of science.

A final blow to old-style orthodoxy came in the researches of comparative religion, which noted the spiritual and ethical worth of other major world religions. A new religious awareness strikes the Reverend Theron Ware when he first views the "Christ-myth," which is repeated in numerous other world religions. Historical anthropology also discredits for Ware the authority and nobility of ancient peoples. Augusta Evans Wilson's novels see the relativistic thrust of comparative religious studies as a general threat to Christianity. E. P. Roe also notes this danger but defends the qualitative superiority of Christianity as it speaks to man's moral and spiritual nature. Among heterodox writers, novelists Celia Parker Woolley and Minot Judson Savage accept the implications of other noble world religions and speak for a non-parochial universal religion which integrates the best and common assumptions of non-Western religions. Their fellow-traveller, Helen Gardener, looks more sceptically at Christianity, suggesting its practical inferiority to other religions and, especially, to the new evolutionary rationalism. James Lane Allen's later novels observed

mythological patterns in primitive and world religions which tried in various ways, like Christianity, to approximate the on-going, pervasive mystery of the universe.

For these novelists in late nineteenth-century America, all formal intellectual inquiries culminated in the epistemological dilemma posed by modern science. Darwinism, the higher criticism, and comparative religion effectively undercut the objective authority of Protestant Christianity's traditional sources for belief--a verbally inspired Bible and, to a lesser extent, a divinely ordered nature. In any case, orthodox religionists were forced to locate new rationales for their religious faith. William Dean Howells, for example, relinquished his desire for unmistakable empirical evidence of an afterlife or a moral order in man's affairs. Instead, he relocated the origins of faith in the less tangible insight of the non-rational in man. In the mystical promptings of the heart and in the mysterious moral and spiritual efficacy of man's sufferings, as especially represented in the paradigm of Jesus, Howells found sufficient cause to trust the beneficence of transcendent mystery. The orthodox minister E. P. Roe adopted a similar strategy in his defense of Christian faith. Beset by the threat of a purely empirical criteria

for reality, Roe argued for the trustworthiness of the individual's subjective experience of Christian truth, reasoning that the subjective in man necessarily demanded as much respect as the empirical. Roe, as did Howells, applied a pragmatic test to this interior experience, looking for its consequences in a new equilibrium of the self and in benefits in the social sphere.

Popular female novelists Augusta Evans Wilson and Elizabeth Phelps Ward initiated a comparable empirical test for the authority of the subjective sphere of faith. Mrs. Wilson's heroines repeatedly attract others with their tranquil, luminous faith and their observable good deeds. So also, Mrs. Ward's Emanuel Bayard in A Singular Life (1896), after doubts about the verbal inspiration and hell, leads a life of social compassion and final martyrdom that illuminates his faith in the ethics of Jesus and the essential, ever-abiding love of God.

The epistemological conflict of the Gilded Age took on other forms as well. Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896) expresses concern about the fate of America when an incipient philosophical empiricism has fully displaced the nation's traditional Judeo-Christian resources for morality. Not only does the novel's

ministerial protagonist succumb to self-interest, but his four chief influences exhibit an intellectual and cultural elitism that foreshadows the end of American democracy. The actions and rationales of each influence result from a rigorous empiricism and demonstrate an overriding self-interest. Frederic's contemporary, James Lane Allen, also expressed ambivalence toward the moral adequacy of a strict empiricism. In numerous Allen novels, the protagonist is enamored with the empirical, especially as it is contained in schemes of evolutionary optimism. These characters fail, however, as does David in The Reign of Law (1900), by neglecting the emotional needs of their marriage partners. This same ambivalence exists in the fiction of Celia Parker Woolley, a Unitarian clergywoman. In particular, she dissents from religious liberalism's emphasis on the rational and empirical at the expense of non-rational and mystical modes of knowledge.

Two of Mrs. Woolley's fellow liberals had no such reservations. Both Helen H. Gardener and Minot Judson Savage placed a complete faith in rational understanding of the empirically verifiable in experience. Too often, the subjective self-interest of orthodoxy had distorted or inhibited the advance of science and the inquisitive

mind, two components of the evolutionary progress which seemed empirically substantiable. While generally agreeing with Savage's and Gardener's assault on the subjective bias in Christianity, historian Henry Adams opposed an inordinate faith in science and rationalism. From a thorough fideism, Adams' Esther (1884) suggested the inability of either religious subjectivism or scientific rationalism to perceive or understand the nature of the indeterminable force that moves the universe. James Lane Allen concurred with Adams' view. He admitted that an evolutionary perspective might accurately reflect cosmic process, but he maintained that man was incapable of forecasting either the direction or the nature of that process. For Allen, as for Adams, present knowledge, either religious or scientific, presented insufficient evidence for a conclusive statement on the mystery of man and his existence.

Whatever might be said of these novels, they do give some indication of the nature and experience of the problems of doubt and faith during the late nineteenth century in America. The fact that these religious novels were written and that many of them attained wide popularity suggests that America's considerable reading public had at least some awareness of the religious problems

that were transforming traditional religious understandings. Further, the novels repeatedly evidence the writer's expectation that his audience, whether popular or elite, shared some of the same knowledge and concerns which were bridged in his fiction. As stated in the Introduction, it is impossible to know the exact reasons for the popularity of some of these novels, for the more popular conformed to the public's tastes for melodrama and sentiment. Even granting this fact as a major element in the public's response, the preponderance of religious reflection in the fiction suggests that a broad segment of the American public, as did its many novelists, responded seriously to the problems of doubt and faith in the Gilded Age.

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