

CATHOLICISM  
AND THE LITERATURE  
OF NEW ENGLAND  
(1815 - 1865)

A THESIS PRESENTED  
BY  
JEREMIAH KINSELLA DURICK, A.B., M.A.

AS PARTIAL REQUIREMENT  
FOR THE DEGREE  
OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS

AT THE  
ANNEXE DE LA BIBLIOTHEQUE  
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA



MAY 1943

UMI Number: DC53500

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI<sup>®</sup>

---

UMI Microform DC53500  
Copyright 2011 by ProQuest LLC  
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

---

ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

FOREWORD.....	1
CHAPTER I, - VOICES SAD AND PROPHEIC: THE SEVEN- TEENTH CENTURY IN NEW ENGLAND.....	10
1. Conceptions and Misconceptions.....	10
2. Who Then Were the Puritans?.....	15
3. All or Nothing: The Religion of the Puritans....	22
4. The Intellectual Heritage.....	32
5. Theocracy and the Voices of Dissent.....	41
6. Conclusions: Looking Forward to the Golden Day.	48
CHAPTER II, - THE GENESIS OF YANKEEDOM.....	52
1. Transitions and Wonderful One-Hoss Days.....	52
2. The Making of the Yankee.....	68
3. Englishmen into Yankee-Men.....	74
4. "Romanism" in New England.....	81
5. Transition Again.....	87
CHAPTER III, - SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE RENAISSANCE..	89
1. New England and the Romantic Revival.....	89
2. New England Discovers Europe.....	93
3. The Religious Setting.....	103
4. Winds from the East.....	112
5. Action and Reaction: The Social Setting.....	123
6. New England Catholicism and Renaissance.....	129

CHAPTER IV, - THE ETERNAL VERITIES: TRANSCENDENTAL

AND CATHOLIC.....132

1. Transcendentalism: A Catholic Viewpoint.....132
2. Half-Way House on the Road to Rome.....145
3. Emerson and the Catholic Church.....156
4. Thoreau and the Catholic Church.....172
5. Afterthoughts.....186

CHAPTER V, - HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW: POET

AND PILGRIM.....187

1. The Genteel Poet.....187
2. The Young Pilgrim.....189
3. The Catholic Poetry of Longfellow.....203

CHAPTER VI, - HAWTHORNE: PURITAN SCEPTIC ON THE

ROAD TO ROME.....230

1. About Hawthorne.....230
2. Hawthorne and Theology.....235
3. The French and Italian Note-Books.....238
4. The Marble Faun.....257
5. Conclusion.....272

CHAPTER VII, - THE GENTEEL BRAHMIN LOOKS AT THE

CATHOLIC CHURCH.....275

1. Two Genteel Brahmins.....275
2. Medicine and Theology.....277
3. Gentleman, Scholar, and Poet.....299

CHAPTER VIII,- LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD.....318

1. Backward Glances.....318

2. Forward.....324

3. Postscript.....330

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....332

-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-

CATHOLICISM  
AND THE LITERATURE  
OF NEW ENGLAND  
(1815 - 1865)

---

FOREWORD

The origins of this thesis are largely personal. They go back unquestionably to early schooldays when I was often more than slightly perplexed to discover such obviously Protestant poets as Longfellow and Lowell using Catholic materials in their poems and at times writing in, what seemed even to my immature mind, the spirit of the Catholic tradition. These early perplexities were partly resolved as I grew older and more widely read in American literature and in the writings of its critics, particularly of the commentators and teachers who shared my own religious beliefs. My interests in the Catholic backgrounds of the leading writers of New England were still further increased in visits, while a summer school student at Harvard, to Craigie House, Elmwood, and the Old Manse, where there still are numerous relics attesting to the influence of Catholicism upon the minds of Longfellow, Lowell, and

Hawthorne. One study in the Lowell house at Elmwood resembled at the time of my visit nothing quite so much as a museum of ecclesiastical vestments and religious "primitives"; and the Prophet's Chamber (ironically reserved for visiting Protestant divines) had on its walls the picture of Pope Pius IX! In the garden back of Craigie House (Longfellow's celebrated home) there was a little arbor still dedicated to Our Lady. Here indeed in the shrines preserved to honor the memory of three great men of letters were outward and visible signs of that same interest in and devotion to things Catholic which I had earlier discovered in their works.

These personal experiences are scarcely worth recounting, for they can be duplicated hundreds or thousands of times by readers of the poetry and prose of the writers of New England's own Renaissance and by other Catholic pilgrims who visit their shrines. In themselves these experiences seem hardly to warrant more than a pleasantly informal essay or two, - of which we have had already much more than enough. There have been, to be sure, a number of short scholarly studies of the Catholic influences upon Longfellow and Hawthorne, and recently one full length study of Emerson's attitudes towards the Catholic Church. None of these studies, with the possible exception of the still unpublished dissertation on Emerson, pretends to be definitive; and there has been as yet no serious attempt to examine the influences of Catholicism on the literature

of mid-nineteenth century New England comparable to the authoritative work of Dr. Arthur Christy on The Orient in American Transcendentalism.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, who is to be one of the subjects of this thesis, once said that a boy's education should begin with his grandfather. Now all of the major writers of the New England Renaissance, who were touched at all deeply by the Church, were the intellectual and spiritual as well as the biological descendants of men and women well known for their hostility to Catholicism. Hence, any thoroughgoing study of the New England writers of the nineteenth century who were affected by Catholic influences must go back and examine their family tree and its Puritan and Yankee taproots. The importance of such an examination as preliminary to the present thesis cannot be exaggerated, especially now when a new generation of American scholars is beginning to see ancestral Puritanism more dispassionately and even more sympathetically. It has been a commonplace of American literary history and criticism to acknowledge the tremendous debt owed especially by the writers of New England's Golden Day to their Puritan forbears, but this debt has been generally either misunderstood or travestied by scholars who have long since lost not only the faith of their grandfathers but also any belief whatsoever in the supernatural or the religious.

Since the major portion of this thesis is to be concerned with the revival - and/or survival - of the Ca-



tholic tradition amid alien and hostile peoples, a brief survey of the religious heritage behind New England's Renaissance is most certainly in order. This survey is the purpose of the first chapter of this thesis, "Voices Sacred and Prophetic," a title borrowed from Longfellow's Evangeline and here used in a conveniently accommodative sense. This survey will be continued in the second chapter which will trace "The Genesis of Yankeedom" during that transitional phase in New England history when English blood and early Protestant beliefs were still pure, if already somewhat defiled. This chapter will deal with the decline of ancestral Puritanism and with the origins of the deification of Yankee thrift. It will also touch very briefly upon the modest beginnings of Catholicism in provincial New England.

The third chapter will propose the difficult task of "Setting the Stage for New England's Renaissance" by attempting ~~inttentative~~ tentative fashion to indicate the more immediate concurrences of those forces responsible for the literary revival which began about 1815. I say "in tentative fashion" because there is still nothing like unanimity among scholars as to the precise origins or nature of the several religious, philosophical, social, economic, and literary phenomena which almost miraculously brought about New England's "Flowering". I can, nevertheless, isolate certain of these phenomena which did have a more or

less obvious bearing upon the presence of strong Catholic elements in the revival.

In selecting the authors to be treated in the main body of this thesis I have been guided by several important considerations. Naturally little attention is to be given in these pages to writers who show no concern with the Church. Among these Whittier seems to be a conspicuous example; save for one exceptional anti-Catholic outburst, he was too deeply absorbed in Abolitionism and his own Quaker faith to have either any time for or curiosity about the Catholic Church. I have also decided to exclude Melville, a man whose scepticism and bitter hostility to the activities of Protestant missionaries in the South Sea islands won for himself the odium of the reading public of his own day - an odium which was unbelievably oblivious to the undeniably great literary gifts of the author of Moby Dick. Melville's one important contact with the Church came through her missionaries in the South Seas to whom he paid a just tribute, especially by contrasting them with the busy-bodies he found among the Protestant evangelists. With even greater regret I have seen fit to exclude New England's historians, Parkman, Motley, Bancroft, and Prescott, all of whom played a more or less unconscious part in perpetuating some of the traditional anti-Catholic historical prejudices. Dr. William Thomas Walsh in some of his recent studies in Spanish history such as Philip II has done a pretty thorough job of correcting some of Prescott's worst errors. Parkman,

who tried hard enough to be fair to the early French explorers and missionaries, did not always succeed, although his Jesuits in North America is a surprisingly sympathetic work. I shall not treat, except in passing mention, the work of these writers, however, because I feel that I have no special competence to handle writings so definitely belonging to the field of the historiographer.

Nor shall I include any full length treatment of the works of the two great Catholic converts, Father Isaac Hecker and Orestes A. Brownson, both of whom were important by-products, so to speak, of the New England Renaissance. Father Hecker has been recently subjected to a definitive study of his early years by one of his spiritual sons among the Paulists, Father Vincent F. Holden, and Brownson's life has been retold for modern readers by the pens of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Doran Whalen. I shall utilize, however, some of the light thrown on the relationships between the Church and New England literature by all of these studies, particularly in connection with the attitudes of the Transcendentalists. Brownson's own writings and the monumental, if somewhat formless, biography by his son will also serve useful purposes in this connection and in others. Neither Brownson nor Father Hecker left behind them much writing that can be today regarded as anything but first-rate polemics or high-toned journalism. This is another reason for excluding here any lengthy consideration of their work. For the same reason I am exclu-

ding, except for incidental mention, such New England notables of the day as Margaret Fuller (Blue-stockings among the Transcendentalists), Bronson Alcott, Theodore Parker, and George Ripley. There is still greater justification for disregarding similarly such comparative nonentities as the somewhat crazy mystic, John Very.

With these exclusions clearly in mind, I shall confine the more significant chapters of this thesis to a fresh appraisal of major writers of the Renaissance, although in the final chapter I shall look beyond the 1865 date in the direction of our own time. The fourth chapter will deal with "The Eternal Verities: Transcendental and Catholic", in which I shall treat of the Transcendentalists and the Brook Farmers as groups and of Emerson and Thoreau as individuals. This will be followed by a chapter devoted exclusively to "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Poet and Pilgrim". The sixth chapter will likewise be given over to the study of a single author "Hawthorne, Puritan Sceptic on the Road to Rome". Chapter Seven will be called "The Genteel Brahmin Looks at the Catholic Church", in which Lowell and Holmes will be the central figures. The final chapter, "We Look Before and After" will draw some general conclusions about the effects of the Catholic tradition on New England Literature and will look beyond 1865 in the direction of Henry Adams and Mr. T.S. Eliot.

The dates selected for this thesis merit a few words of apology or explanation. Although none of the

major authors treated in the last four chapters was old enough to be writing in 1815 and all of them, except Thoreau and Hawthorne, lived on long after 1865, these fifty years include the fairest seed-time of the "Flowering" and reaped the richest as well as the most abundant harvest. Then, too, with some few exceptions, included and duly noted, the works most marked by Catholic influence were either published or written before 1865. In the final chapter, I do intend to enter briefly into what Mr. Van Wyck Brooks has called New England: Indian Summer, I am following in this the scholarly example of Prof. Francis O. Matthiessen, whose American Renaissance looks both before and after. No writers of a later day better illustrate both the peak and the decline of Catholic influence so well as Henry Adams and the Missouri-born expatriate, Mr. Thomas Stearns Eliot.

In concluding this Foreword I must say something about the methods of my approach. The first three chapters will be mainly historical excursions in the fields of religious and philosophical ideas. They will attempt to explain, as far as such explanation is now possible, how the New England writers, who brought American letters to their first Golden Day, "got that way" - to borrow James Harvey Robinson's famous vernacular definition of history. The last four chapters, while not ignoring intellectual and social history, will attempt to present all of the important available documentary evidence to show the Catholic influences

at work upon the major writers. This evidence shall include journals, letters, essays, poems, novels, and so forth as well as my pertinent information contained in biographical and critical studies of these writers. This evidence will be presented generally in chronological order, and I shall let the record speak for itself, except in drawing less obvious inferences.

Someone accused Barrett Wendell of turning his Literary History of America into A Literary History of Harvard University, with Incidental Glimpses of the Minor Writers of America. Lest anyone accuse me of falling victim to the same Harvardomania, I must say that whether we like it or not, all of the major writers treated in this thesis were Harvard graduates or professors, except Hawthorne. After all, is it so very strange that the Catholic tradition did touch the lives of men who were alumni of a college, dedicated however ironically today or yesterday, "Pro Christo et Ecclesiae"?

## C H A P T E R I

### VOICES SAD AND PROPHEIC:

#### THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN NEW ENGLAND

##### 1. Conceptions and Misconceptions.

Every American schoolboy can probably tell you when the Puritans first came to America, what motives impelled them to settle on this "stern and rock-bound coast", how they dressed, and something of the dangers and difficulties they faced in their early New England homes. Mature scholars, chief among them the lineal and spiritual descendants of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonists, can very naturally tell you much more about their forefathers - about their determined efforts to set up a New Jerusalem here in New England and especially about their adherence to a religious creed as stern and as rockbound as the shores of their settlement. These same scholars have been filling large and well-documented tomes now for several generations with lurid but antiquarian pictures of the bigotry and superstitions of their ancestors. Even the schoolboy can tell you how benighted were our first New Englanders, how naive in their faith in God, how zealous and persuasive their piety. And the scholar, with a sneer

on his lips and with neither understanding in his head nor sympathy in his heart, can look back from the "superior" heights of his own unbelief, and scoff at the childish "ignorance" of men and women; who once believed in the Providence of God. With a few notable exceptions, almost any book or article on the Puritans in my bibliography will bear witness to these misconceptions.

This attitude of the scholars of our own day to the faith of their great-great-grandfathers is not a new one. It goes back well beyond the days of New England's Renaissance to the deistic eighteenth century. It found expression in the writings of the Transcendentalists, in the pages of Lowell and Holmes, and in the sceptical stories in which Hawthorne re-created the Puritan past. In subsequent chapters in this thesis there will be plenty of evidence to show that much of the literature of the Renaissance was conceived in reaction against ancestral beliefs, although a surprisingly large share of it sprang directly, if more or less consciously, from Puritan sources.

Neither the great writers of nineteenth-century New England nor the generations of scholars who have followed them have been wholly oblivious to some of the virtues of the seventeenth-century Puritans. They have all been ready to admire, somewhat grudgingly the moral qualities that could enable the Puritans to endure the bitterness of northern winters and the constant dangers from



hostile savages. The scholars, with startling unanimity, have always had a good word for the rugged individualists among the Puritans, for those who dared to defy the established order and to go running after strange and heterodox opinions. They have been only too willing to canonize such heretics among the Puritans as Roger Williams and to smile tolerantly at the immoralities of Morton of Merrymount, arch-enemy to Puritan ways and welfare. Scholars have been ever quick to see in all the dissenters from Puritan theology, like the antinomian Ann Hutchisin, the first American martyrs in the cause of religious or civil liberties. They have admired Congregational church polity as a step in the direction of liberalism and they have seized upon every sign of incipient, or alleged Arminianism as the portent of Unitarianism or, better still, of modernistic Protestantism. Sometimes these scholars can even admire the dogged adherence of any of the Puritans to what they regarded, however mistakenly, as the good life, even when the world, the flesh, and the devil held out almost irresistible enticements.

It has been only within the last two generations that there have emerged any number of reputable historical or literary scholars who can read the lives and works of the earliest New Englanders with anything like a real understanding of Puritan theology and piety. The great majority of scholars are still so illiterate in theology that one of their number can comment on Michael Wigglesworth's famous and often-quoted line, "the easiest room in Hell";

(an obvious reference to Limbo) by hastening to explain: "This was a great concession on Wigglesworth's part, as there is no theological justification for it."<sup>1</sup> None perhaps in Calvin, little in St. Augustine, but there is almost the whole Christian tradition behind the "easiest room" doctrine that goes back as far as St. Gregory of Nazianzus. The author of the Day of Doom knew this, even though his modern commentators do not.

Similar misconceptions, founded largely on the theological illiteracy and anti-Christian bias of the modern mind, need to be corrected, if we are ever to understand the fullest significance of the religious and moral heritage bequeathed by the Puritans to the writers who made New England's Renaissance possible. We may never be able wholly to disabuse the modern mind of its anti-Christian bias, except by a great miracle of God's grace, but something can be done and is being done to correct the colossal ignorance about Christian theology of men who claim some pretension to scholarship. Professor Howard Mumford Jones is emphatic on this point in his essay on "The European Background"<sup>2</sup> when he writes: "A careful study of American church history is one of the prime requisites for the historian of American letters, for the American Protestant churches have been the nurse and mother of our culture". This sentence was written in 1928, and since then conside-

---

1. Spiller, Robert E., The Roots of National Culture, p.698.

2. See Foerster, Norman (Ed.), Reinterpretation of American Literature, pp. 76, 79.

rable progress in this direction has been made by at least a dozen historical and literary scholars, men like Professors Morison, Murdock, Miller, and Jones himself (all of Harvard, cradle of New England Puritanism). These men and an increasingly large number of their colleagues are learning to read the history and literature of early New England against its theological backgrounds, particularly of the Christian tradition which goes back well beyond John Calvin and the Protestant Revolt, through the Ages of Faith, to the days when the early Fathers of the Church were laying the foundations of Catholic theology. My bibliography will indicate my indebtedness to this new "school" as well as to a few earlier students of the New England mind and its literature, who tried, according to their lights, to recognize the vestigial remains of true Christianity, even when these remains suffered the very essence of Christ's teachings to be perverted by the Puritan heresy and its even more deadly consequences - infidelity, for example.

I should also make clear right here and now that I hold no special brief for the faith of the Puritans. I recognize that many of their faithless descendants among the scholars have often been quite sound in their condemnation of the intolerant and distorted "brand" of Christianity which the Puritans held - and even tried to foist on others. I am also aware that some of the members of the "new" "school" are bending over backwards to defend Puritanism in some of its more objectionable characteristics.

But if we expect to see the most noted literary descendants of the Puritans (Emerson, Thoreau, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Lowell, and Holmes) vainly attempting to come to terms with the true Christianity of the Catholic tradition, we need to understand that their ancestors still retained even in their heresy many of the cultural, moral, and spiritual remains of the Mother Church. These remains had not of course entirely vanished by the nineteenth century, but the true custodian of them, the Catholic tradition, had to be re-discovered. And the main part of this thesis is concerned largely with the evidence of that re-discovery.

## 2. Who, then, Were the Puritans?

The Puritans of seventeenth-century New England were Englishmen who had immigrated to America in their largest numbers between 1630 and 1642. There had been since 1620, a small group, of Puritan extraction, in the Pilgrim colony at Plymouth, but the really important waves of Puritan migration to New England occurred during the twelve years preceding the reforms of the Long Parliament, when the Laudian persecutions were at their height. The Civil War put an almost definite end to the need for emigration, and the unenviable reputation which Massachusetts early acquired for intolerance discouraged still further any desire even among Puritan lords and gentlemen of England to try their fortunes in the New World.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. See Andrews, Charles McL., The Colonial Period of American History: The Settlements, Vol. I, p.496 and ff.

These Puritan immigrants to New England were the products of a large and not easily defined movement in Elizabethan and Stuart England which soon became a curious commingling of religious, political, economic, and social forces. In religion they were, according to Professor Morison,

"a party in the Church of England that arose in Elizabeth's reign, with the purpose of carrying out the Protestant reformation to its logical conclusion, to base the English Church both in doctrine and discipline on the firm foundation of Sacred Scripture; or, in the words of Cartwright, to restore the primitive apostolic church 'pure and unspoiled' by human accretions or inventions."<sup>1</sup>

It is especially important to note that Professor Morison calls the Puritans "a party in the Church of England", which would indicate that originally the Puritans were neither sectarian nor separatist. This point is significant even after the migration to New England, where many of the Puritan leaders protested too much, methinks, that they were loyal to the King and to the Church by law Established.<sup>2</sup> An important part of the development of the Puritan churches here in New England tells the story of how what had been originally a party within the Church of England gradually became definitely sectarian and, once the New England Way began to assert itself, actually separatist. This emergence of the New England churches out of the Establishment

---

1. Morison, Samuel Eliot, The Puritan Pronaos, p. 7.

2. Wertenbaker, Thomas J., The First Americans, p.89; also Parrington, Vernon L., Main Currents in American Thought, Vol.I, The Colonial Mind, p.16.

need not concern this thesis, but I shall have occasion to touch upon it briefly in this chapter with special reference to questions of church polity and organization.

The political aspects of Puritanism in England did not become evident until Puritan and Parliamentary joined hands in the Civil War. But even before the War, Puritanism, which, as Edmund Burke has described it, was the "dissidence of dissent", began to divide itself into two politico-ecclesiastical groups, the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists. The difference between these two groups in the beginning was chiefly a matter of church polity; the former standing for government through representative synods, while the latter believed that each congregation should be an autonomous democracy of the "visible saints". In England these two groups were represented by the Presbyterian and by the Independents, a miscellaneous collection of separatists. The New England Puritans, although pretending to give lip-service to the Established Church, which was in power during their migrations, belonged to the more democratic wing of the Congregationalists. The settlers at Plymouth were really Brownists, and hence extremely separatist in their politico-ecclesiastical principles. Later in this chapter I shall, as I have said above, give a more complete account of the New England Way and the quarrels over church organization and control. Now, here in America, as in England, both parties were united in one thing at least - their hatred of the Established Church,

partly because it stood for entrenched civil power. Consequently the Puritans of all theological shades were quite willing to play the political game, so willing in fact that before the Civil War it was often hard to distinguish between religious and political dissent.

Puritanism was also born in a period of tremendous economic upheavals. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed the breakdown of many other great medieval institutions besides the Church. The Holy Roman Empire, although not completely shattered, was giving way to nationalism, with the strong and competitive reaching out for new riches, especially beyond the seas. Feudal society was breaking up, and, when the natural processes of disintegration did not move rapidly enough, they were quickened by avaricious kings and their robber barons such as those who despoiled the monastic estates in the time of Henry VIII. Capitalism gradually came on the scene to usher in the new economy. Ever since the time of Max Weber a number of modern economists have been busy studying the intimate relationship between the rise of the capitalistic system and Protestantism. All agree that the connection between these new "isms" was close, but there is wide disagreement as to the explanation of this intimacy. In the second chapter of this thesis I shall summarize the conclusions of these scholars in connection with my examination of the emergence of commercialism and Yankee thrift among the Puritans. Some historians, committed in prin-

ciple to an economic interpretation of history, goes so far as to claim that the dominant motive for Puritan migrations was economic - land-hunger.<sup>1</sup> This contention is certainly far-fetched, but Mr. Adams does prove conclusively that at least some of the immigrants to New England came here with religious and economic motives rather badly mixed.

There can be little doubt, however, that Puritanism as a movement was tied up with the rise of the middle classes, upper and lower, to political and economic power. Before the seventeenth century ended this rise, largely identified with non-conforming sects, achieved in the Mother Country a social revolution which was to shape the destiny of English history for the next century, at least until the Industrial Revolution should in turn become dominant.<sup>2</sup> In America the rise of the middle class was at first not so noticeable, for the Royalist immigrants were away in the Virginia plantations. In Massachusetts the "emigrants came mostly from the middle classes in town and country... they came in small family and neighborhood groups, often following some popular non-conformist preacher such as Cotton or Shepard; or Ezechiel Rogers who brought a colony of Yorkshire clothiers to Rowley, or Richard Mathew, who brought a Lancashire group to join the West Countrymen at Dorchester."<sup>3</sup> A number of the leaders were, as Professor

---

1. See especially Adams, James T., The Founding of New England, passim.

2. See Wingfield-Stratford, Esme, The Rise of British Civilization, p. 501, ff.; also Trevelyan, George M., English Social History, p. 233, ff.

3. Morison, S.E., Builders of the Bay Colony, p. 342.



Charles A. Beard has pointed out, "people of substance",<sup>1</sup> The official Puritanism, based on Calvinistic conceptions of the social order, was aristocratic enough, representing the aristocracy of the upper middle classes, but the leveling influence of pioneer life and the absence of any really wealthy men among them, together with the fact that the greater majority of colonists represented the petty bourgeoisie, kept New England internally from marked social stratification. Later in the chapter we shall see the "class struggle", without benefit of Marx, playing its part in determining both the civil and ecclesiastical polity which came to prevail in New England before the close of the seventeenth century. I should also emphasize at this point the significance of the struggle of the seventeenth century colonists to live as independently as possible under their somewhat dubious Royal Charters. This tended at one and the same time to distinguish them as a class from the ruling powers (up to the time of the overthrow of Charles I) in England and to unite all groups within the Colony in a common cause, although, as Mr. Adams points out, the loss of the charter was really a death blow to the theocracy.<sup>2</sup> This same common cause or one very similar to it was to bring all the Colonies together, however conflicting their ideals, in the American Revolution.

---

1. Beard, Charles A., and Mary R., The Rise of American Civilization, p. 52.

2. See Adams, James T., The Founding of New England, especially chapter XV.

It is clearly impossible to reduce the multifarious and often seemingly contradictory aspects of Puritanism to a single definition or formula. Modern interpreters of the movement here in America have been usually theory-ridden as well as anti-religious in their attempts to describe it. They have tended, for example, to explain everything about the Puritans in terms of Calvinistic theology or, they have, like Parrington, sought to explain the New England mind of the seventeenth century by politico-economic standards of another day and another region. One excellent service of the "new school" of Puritan historians is their well-documented evidence to show that Puritanism, born as it was of dissent, did not remain static even in seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Some of its ministers and magistrates did almost succeed in establishing what was to be a fixed and permanent mould for the religious, political, and social lives of their people, but, as I shall show later in this chapter, they did not succeed even in the realm of pure theology. Hence, it is extremely difficult to generalize about the seventeenth-century Puritans, who stood for one thing, say, in 1636, the year of the founding of Harvard, and quite something else at the end of the century.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of "defining" or describing New England Puritanism, I am going to use the remainder of this chapter to delineate certain of its traits which, mutatis mutandis, did manage to persist throughout

the religious and political vicissitudes of seventeenth-century New England life. I shall emphasize those characteristics, which, for good or ill, have left a more or less indelible mark on the American way of life, especially, those characteristics which helped to make the writers of the New England Renaissance look upon the Catholic Church as they did, because they were the descendants, however reluctant, of their Puritan forefathers.

3. All or Nothing: The Religion of the Puritans.

Theologically the Puritans in the beginning belonged to that large group within the Church of England who took their Protestantism from Geneva. It has now been very definitely established by historians that the Protestantizing of the Established Church resulted from that Monstrous Regiment of Genevan refugees under John Knox, who, in spite of the wily and compromising tendencies of Queen Elizabeth, turned the Establishment farther and farther away from Rome and in the direction of Calvinism. The numerous contentions of anti-Catholic historians that the English mind was only expressing a "natural Protestantism" that dates back to Lollard days are now generally dismissed as absurd and unhistorical. English Protestantism, except for such comparatively negligible offshoots of German pietism as the Quakers, was Calvinistic in its origins both within the Established Church and among the numerous separatist groups.

It is quite a different thing, however, to describe the Puritans, English or American, as Calvinists. This has been the common mistake of most of the historians of New England. Knowing, for example, Calvin's notorious doctrine of predestination, they have contended, falsely, as we shall see, that most American Puritans were predestinarian Calvinists. However simon-pure the Calvinism of these unfortunate enough to be living in the holy city of Geneva, the teachings of Calvin were quickly modified by his followers in other lands. Canon Barry in his very scholarly and objective article on Calvinism in the Catholic Encyclopedia writes:

"...unlike the Lutherans, those Churches which looked up to Calvin as their teacher did not accept one uniform standard,... The three Helvetic Confessions, the Tetrapolitan, that of Basle, and that composed by Bullinger, belonged respectively to 1530, 1534, 1536. The Anglican 42 Articles of 1553, composed by Cranmer and Ridley, were reduced to 39 under Elizabeth in 1562. They bear evident tokens of their Calvinistic origin, but are designedly ambiguous in terms and meaning."<sup>1</sup>

This lack of uniformity, as Canon Barry goes on to point out, led to a conflict between the Supralapsarians (High Calvinists) and the Remonstrants or Arminians in regard to the doctrine of predestination as set forth in Calvin's Institutes. The Remonstrants objected to the doctrine of election before merit, contending that such a teaching

---

1. Hollis, Christopher, The Monstrous Regiment.

made Christ's work superfluous and inexplicable. In fact, the Five Articles of Arminian Theology bearing on foreordination are very close to the formulas of the Council of Trent. Now in general the Puritans and all other non-conforming groups in England were Supralapsarian in tendency; whereas, the Anglicans followed the Dutchman Arminius in his un-Calvinistic interpretation of the doctrine of pre-election.

Unfortunately this generalization, which implies the Calvinistic orthodoxy on predestination of all the Puritans, has been almost universally accepted as representing the beliefs of those who settled in Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> But such recent scholars as Professors Samuel Eliot Morison and Perry Miller now present considerable and weighty evidence to show that pure Calvinism was rarely found among the seventeenth-century Puritans of New England. Says Morison:

"...after reading some hundreds of puritan sermons, English and New English, I am about ready to deny that the New England puritans were predestinarian Calvinists. John Cotton was wont to sweeten his mouth with a bit of Calvin before retiring (rather a sour bedtime confection, one would think), but in general the New England puritans quoted their revered Ames and Perkins and the church fathers much more than they did Calvin;...The Puritan sermons assume (when they do not directly teach) that by Virtue of the Covenant of Grace, and through the efforts of the churches, salvation lay within the reach of every person who made an effort. Christ

---

1. This mistake, among others, dominates Professor Vernon L. Parrington's book, The Colonial Mind. He uses such phrases as "It is reasonable to suppose that as strict Calvinists," etc., p. 16. (italics mine.)

helped those who helped themselves. Fatalism is completely wanting in the New England view of religion or of life."<sup>1</sup>

Professor Miller, admitting that the adjective Calvinist is used to describe the creed professed in early New England, makes this rather significant remark:

"They (the Puritans) went to Calvin for information or insight in about the same spirit as a modern Shakespearean scholar might go to Coleridge; they esteemed the text (the Bible) more highly than the annotation."<sup>2</sup>

In their enthusiasm for absolving the seventeenth-century Puritans of New England from believing in some of the more forbidding doctrines of Calvin, Professors Morison, Miller, and their followers even go so far as to claim that there was no simon-pure Calvinist in New England until Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) appeared on the scene. And even Edwards, according to Professor Miller, presented a Calvinism which he vainly tried to harmonize with the logic of John Locke, unlike the Ramean logic which Miller contends gave a framework to the earlier Puritan theology.<sup>3</sup> They are undoubtedly correct in seeing Puritan theology in New England as a variant of Calvinism, less dogmatic and anti-rational. This variation found its fullest expression in the famous "Half-Way Covenant", drafted by Richard Mather

---

1. Morison, S.E., The Puritan Pronaos, p. 10.

2. Miller, Perry, The Puritan Mind, p. 93.

3. Miller, Perry, and Johnson, Thomas H., The Puritans, see footnote on p. 30; consult also all references to Calvinism in the index of this work.

and approved by the Synod of 1662, which proposed to extend the privilege of church membership to the children of second-generation members, even when these members had never publicly confessed any experience of conversion. Here indeed the framework of Calvinistic theology was strained to the breaking point.

This is not the time, nor is there space in this thesis to enter into the lists of controversy on the question of how truly Calvinistic were the early Puritans. The question is raised only to show that there is good reason to believe that from its very beginnings Protestantism in New England had already asserted, even within the limits of seeming orthodoxy, its logical prerogatives of dissenting from dissent. To put the same thing in another way, these Puritan protestants were following in the footsteps of their English brethren-in-revolt by reasserting their right to be Bible Christians even at the expense of their adherence to the obviously uninspired words of John of Geneva. In England they had parted company with the Established Church over the question of the authority of the Bible, and here, in their own new Jerusalem, they were prepared to set up both a church and a state in which the Word of God would prevail. Professor Miller states their viewpoint very clearly when he writes:

"The Puritan held that the Bible was sufficiently plain and explicit so that men with the proper learning, following the proper rules of deduction and interpretation, could establish its meaning and inten-

tion on every subject, not only in theology, but in ethics, costume, diplomacy, military tactics, inheritance, profits, marriages, and judicial procedure."<sup>1</sup>

Religion, then, at least as they discovered it in the Bible, was to touch all of their lives or no part. It was to be everything or nothing. But it was to be a religion founded upon the crassest kind of bibliolatry.<sup>2</sup> For an infallible Church, they had substituted an infallible book, whose teachings, even in the most minute detail, were to be the guide of all their conduct. Through their belief in the sufficiency of the Scriptures, as they, the godly, read them, they secured quasi-unity of thought and action, the counterparts for which can be found only among the ancient Hebrews. Such doctrine soon led to the Hebraic emphasis on the observance of the Law, and the sermons and commentaries of their ministers became a kind of new Talmud. Is it surprising, then, that such a perversion of Scriptural authority should have incited the rebels in their ranks and ultimately nearly all their descendants to reject all religious authority in favor of the natural reason?

While the reign of the "saints" lasted in New England, however, religion and piety were pervasive in

---

1. Miller, Op. cit., p.43.

2. The Puritans did not, it should be clearly understood, reject the teaching of all theologians, either within or outside their own ranks. They often quoted approvingly not only their own divines, Ames and Perkins, but also the Fathers of the Church and even some passages from St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Robert Bellarmine. In this connection see the works of Morison listed in the bibliography.



their influences. If we make all due allowances for the degenerative effects of their heretical doctrines, the Puritans were unquestionably men of true religious zeal. No one can question the terrible sincerity of their convictions. Superstition did find its sinister way into their religious lives, but the superstition of the Puritans has been greatly exaggerated by their historians, who sometimes confuse a child-like belief in God's special Providence with the animism of primitive religions or even with "black magic". The Puritans did believe in God and in the Blessed Trinity. They believed in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, even though they were badly mixed up as to the character of His work in Redemption. They believed in the immortality of the soul and in Heaven and Hell, in spite of their confusion about God's foreordination of men to a state of eternal bliss or of eternal suffering. They believed in the objective existence of good and evil, and sin was not, as it is to their descendants, a mere figure of speech. I need not cite specific or copious evidence of Puritan assent to these beliefs; almost any page from a New England diary of the 1600's will testify to the vitality of one or more of these great Christian truths. Although mystical piety is comparatively rare among them, there are flashes of it in surprising places e.g. the writings of Janathan Edwards, who, although belonging to the eighteenth century, is, as I have said, sometimes regarded as the arch-Calvinist. The recently discovered poems of Edward Taylor are both in their subs-

tance and manner strongly reminiscent of the mystical poetry of the Catholic Crashaw.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Miller and Barrett Wendell before him have attempted to do some justice to the piety of the Puritans as distinguished from their dogma, church discipline, and moral code. They have described Puritan piety as Augustinian. To me this seems to do much less than justice to St. Augustine. While it is true that there may be, in the psychological order, a kinship of "mood" between the Bishop of Hippo and Thomas Hooker; theologically speaking such comparison is odious. To contend as Professor Miller does that the Puritans could reject St. Augustine's defence of the authority of the Church and what he (Professor Miller) calls rather crudely "the magical efficacy of the sacraments" is to fall victim to the old Calvinistic trick of rending the seamless garment of Christ's teachings - and St. Augustine's. Obviously to the informed student of Christian teaching St. Augustine's theology is based upon much sounder foundations than "an effort to externalize and systematize a subjective mood".<sup>2</sup> If Professor Miller means, as I think he should, that there was a genuine intensity of religious feeling behind the theology of both St. Augustine and the Puritans, then he is correct. Professor Miller is apparently unaware of what he does when he opposes the

---

1. Several of Taylor's poems were printed for the first time in the New England Quarterly, X, (1937), 290-322 by Dr. Thomas H. Johnson, who has since brought out a collected edition of Taylor's poems in an expensive format, unavailable to the author of this thesis.

2. Miller, Perry, The New England Mind, Ch. I, esp. p. 4 & 5.

"scholastic" tradition of the Anglican opponents of Puritanism to the so-called Augustinian strains of Puritan piety. He forgets that the greatest Scholastic of them all, Thomas Aquinas, was both a mystical poet and a saint.

The Puritans, it seems to me, were in no special sense continuers of the Augustinian traditions of piety. They were Augustinian only in the broad sense in which they still partook of the faith and piety of the Church Universal. Their creed, perverted though it was by heresy, unlike that of their descendants of the New England Renaissance, was not fully or logically Protestant. It still had enough of the vitality of Catholic tradition in it to fill with zeal and devotion the minds and hearts of men who had been deprived by historical mischance of the beliefs of integral Christianity. Shaken loose from the Divine authority of the Church and hanging on precariously, if at times with arrogant self-confidence, to their own interpretation of the Bible, these New England Puritans tried their best to justify the ways of God to man. Wrestling in the dark with the problem of determining the relation between sin and regeneration, face to face with the all-too-apparent consequences of original sin, appalled by the great mystery of God's grace freely given to sinners, is it any wonder that they tended to externalize their own moods? Is it any wonder that they became morbidly introspective?

The most permanent survival of the Christian tradition among the New England Puritans was moral rather than

dogmatic or devotional. Although the "reformers" claimed to be primarily concerned with "purifying" Christian morals, they all set about at once to tamper with dogmas and to render emotionally barren the devotional life of their disciples. It is, therefore, not at all strange to discover among the Puritans a righteousness of life and an adherence to fixed, if somewhat narrow and intolerant, moral standards. This adherence to the "good life" of the Christian way was to survive either as mere habit or on some other purely natural basis long after their descendants had ceased to give much more than lip-service to the Puritan creed. This indeed was the "Legacy of the Puritans" to which His Eminence William Cardinal O'Connell referred in a sermon of that title on the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony:

"Now these sturdy men, who called themselves Puritans, were the hardy descendants of pre-Tudor Catholics. All the good qualities they had, they inherited from those Christian traits which had been taught from the time of St. Augustine (of Canterbury) to the whole English nation. They were not the traits merely of Puritans. They were the traditional qualities of all Christians alike. Fortitude, long-suffering, honesty, endurance under difficulties, all these they had, and they were high virtues, but it is a libel on Christianity to call them merely the virtues of Puritans. They are the inherited traits of all those who love and practice the Christian tradition. And upon these virtues they built whatever they constructed and because of these Christian virtues the best of that building has endured." 1

1. O'Connell, William Cardinal, "The Legacy of the Puritans," The Catholic Mind (Oct. 8, 1930) Vol. XXVII, 19---p. 385.

The moral virtues were indeed the greatest "Legacy" which the Puritans bequeathed to their descendants. It was the survival of these virtues in the early nineteenth century, which gave to the New England Renaissance the high idealism of many of its better aspirations. That idealism was to take some of the sons of New England closer to the Catholic Church than would have been comfortable to their Puritan ancestors. This "Legacy" had to be all, in a day when little or nothing else of Puritan faith had endured.

#### 4. The Intellectual Heritage

One other great portion of the Puritan heritage has also been the subject of much loose talk and misunderstanding. Even scholars who have admired somewhat dubiously the learning of the early New England Puritans e.g. the erudition of the voluminous Cotton Mather, have been inclined to label Puritan learning as "theological" and let it go at that. Quite obviously the Puritans were hostile to the "genial glorification of the natural man" which motivated much of the humanistic accomplishments of the Renaissance or Revival of Learning in Europe. It was only natural for them to cultivate theological learning of a kind. As Professor Morison says : "...he (the Puritan) was stimulated by his faith to an intellectual activity that was conspicuous in other English colonies by its absence."<sup>2</sup>

---

2. Morison, Samuel Eliot, The Puritan Presence, p. 13.

The Puritan, even before he left England, had reprobated the drama, had driven music out of his churches, and had banned, perhaps not unwisely, the erotic poetry of the pagan Renaissance. Theology, especially the searching study of the Scriptures, became a very serious and consuming business for their professional divines and an almost equally compelling pastime for their educated laymen.

Recent studies of early American culture, however, have shown quite conclusively that the Puritans of New England, like their fellow-religionists in old England, were not only men of the Reformation but also men of the Renaissance. Hence, just as their theological doctrines had survived in truncated form from the Catholic tradition so, too, their Renaissance learning was commingled with the large remnants of medieval culture which had survived the onslaught of the humanists. It is not surprising, then, that the theological and scriptural learning of the Puritans was tempered and sometimes even bolstered up both by humanism and scholasticism.

In the previous section I have already pointed out that the Puritans, even in their devotion to scriptural studies, had not altogether abandoned the study of the medieval schoolmen, notably St. Thomas Aquinas himself. Professor Morison claims that John Harvard had more volumes of the Angelic Doctor's works in his library than he had of John Calvin.<sup>1</sup> Father Arthur J. Riley in a valuable

---

1. Morison, Samuel Eliot, The Puritan Pronaos, p. 10.

appendix to his doctoral dissertation <sup>1</sup> gives us a surprisingly large list of Catholic books which were in early New England libraries, and among them are not only the works of St. Thomas but also those of Duns Scotus and St. Robert Bellarmine. The list of pre-scholastic theologians, especially of the early Fathers of the Church, is of course much longer and more imposing, but there is no reason to argue that such scholars as John Harvard and Cotton Mather possessed these books merely to refute them-- an idea at which Professor Morison himself very properly scoffs. According to Morison, "Master" Thomas Shepard in his printed sermons quotes Calvin less often than he does the great Jesuit theologian, Bellarmine. <sup>2</sup> In a very revealing footnote in this same book <sup>3</sup> Morison says: "The Summa was well known to English puritans. It was one of the recommended books at Emmanuel College. Governor Winthrop quotes extensively from it in his discourse on arbitrary government, and Ezekiel Rogers willed his copy to the library of Harvard College."

It must not be concluded, nevertheless, that there was no opposition to scholasticism among the Puritans. Like the Anglican divines and their own fellow-Puritans in England, the colonial Puritans were often outspoken in their opposition to the over-refined subtleties of the

1. Riley, Rev. Arthur J., Catholicism in New England to 1788, pp. 341-343.
2. Morison S. E., Builders of the Bay Colony, p. 128.
3. Op. cit., p. 161.

decadent scholasticism of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and in their more rebellious moments attacked all scholasticism which they regarded mistakenly as "prostitution" to the interests of the Papacy. John Cotton spoke out against "the subtilty and sophistry of the School-men, suppressing the reading of the Scriptures, and mixing Philosophy with Divinity, that they might as well have studied a point in Aristotle as their divinity, and make as good use of one as of the other." <sup>1</sup> This was the same John Cotton who four years before paid this reluctant tribute to the persistence of scholasticism among the Puritans:

"The Schoolmen (though they be none of the soundest Divines) yet of late years have crept (for a time) into more credit amongst Schools, then (sic!) the most judicious and orthodox of our best new writers (Luther, Calvin, Martyr, Bucer, and the rest:) and their books were more vendible and at a far greater price." <sup>2</sup>

The Puritans of early New England were, it seems, inheritors, in spite of their prejudices, of scholasticism both deliberately and unconsciously. Deliberately, while rejecting the substance and the conclusions of scholasticism, they admired the rational character of its method. <sup>3</sup> This is apparent in the long survival, well into the

1. Quoted from Cotton's An Exposition upon The Thirteenth Chapter of Revelation (London, 1656), p. 57 in Miller, Perry and Johnson, Thomas H. The Puritans, p. 26.
2. Quoted in Miller, Perry, The New England Mind, p. 104.
3. John Preston, who knew Scotus and Occam as well as Aquinas, was loathe to have students read the scholastics before they had studied a Protestant compendium. He himself was so devoted to the Summa that he read it while he was getting a hair-cut! idem.



eighteenth century, of the scholastic method of disputation in all the colonial colleges, especially at Harvard. <sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt, as Professor Morison and the Catholic scholar, the late Dr. James J. Walsh, have proved as conclusively as possible, that, despite the influence of Ramean Logic <sup>2</sup> of which Professor Miller makes as much, the minds of the founding fathers both of New England and of the American Republic were formed and developed by the intellectual discipline of the scholastic method. Dr. Miller believes that it was in the realm of logic that the revolt against scholasticism made its most important mark on Puritan learning. But this revolt was certainly much less apparent at Harvard than it was say, in the sermons and other Puritan treatises in which the figurative imagism of Ramus's logic helped to adorn the "plain style" of the author's rhetoric. <sup>3</sup>

Even Professor Miller admits that unconsciously the Puritans remained within the "frame of reference" of medieval thinking. His entire study of The New England Mind, for all its dallings with Peter Ramus, is really

1. See Morison, Samuel E., Harvard in the Seventeenth Century and Walsh, James J., Education of the Founding Fathers, especially Chapter II.
2. Miller, Perry, The New England Mind makes out an extensive, if somewhat debatable, case for the influence of Peter Ramus, a notorious anti-Aristotelian, on the New Eng. Puritans.
3. Op. cit. passim, but especially Chapter XII. The author of this thesis once heard two distinguished students of American literature, Dr. Norman Holmes Pearson of Yale and Dr. Theodore Hornberger of the University of Texas, contend in papers, as yet unpublished, that the Puritan style owed less to Ramus than to the style of Catholic preachers of the late Middle Ages.

one grand testimonial to this fact. Dr. Miller insists, rightly I think, on the characteristically medieval subordination of reason to faith, which the Puritans retained but with the inevitable Protestant modifications. He goes so far as to contend that in practice the Puritan philosophy was Christian in the sense in which the eminent neo-scholastic, Professor Etienne Gilson, defines Christian philosophy, when he writes that it was a belief "which, although keeping the two orders formally distinct, nevertheless considers the Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason." <sup>1</sup> The all-embracing character of scholastic influence upon the Puritan intellectual life is very well expressed by Professor Miller himself:

"So scholasticism supplied content for every department of Puritan thought. The physics was traditional, and the theory of the natural world that of medieval science. As a part of physics Puritanism retained the medieval conception of man, of his physiology and his psychology; it thought of the body and soul as matter and form, and it was undisturbed by the suspicions which led Descartes to an investigation of the passions or Hobbes to commence the Leviathan with an onslaught upon academic psychology. The definition of human reason, the description of its potentialities and its limitations, its relation to authority and revelation were essentially scholastic. <sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising, then, to find Dr. Walsh and Professor Morison in the works cited above, quoting commencement

1. Gilson, Etienne, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, p.37.
2. Miller, Perry, The New England Mind, p. 105

thesis after commencement thesis, which, with some allowances for archaic phraseology, are the very same theses defended today in our Catholic colleges and universities. Many of them were still stated in Latin. <sup>1</sup> As Dr. Walsh says: "Everything contributed to make the old Scholastic philosophy and especially its metaphysics and ethics the most important element in educational life during the last two years of their (the Harvard students) college course. <sup>2</sup>

The first two years of the college course at Harvard, together with the curriculum of their grammar schools, show that in their educational program the Puritans were followers of the humanistic traditions of the Renaissance, as I have said above. In some respects they had much more reason to modify the humanism of their studies than they did the scholasticum. They were no more ready to accept the "emancipation" of the pagan learning from Christian beliefs than were their Catholic contemporaries. But it is erroneous, as Professor Morison shows with abundant citation, to think of Puritan education, either at Harvard or in the grammar schools, as merely a training for the ministry.

"The New England colonial colleges trained ministers, but they were not theological seminaries. Less than half the alumni of

1. See the facsimile reproduction of "Harvard First Theses" (1642) in Walsh, James J., Education of the Founding Fathers, pp. 72-73.
2. Op. cit., p. 79.

seventeenth-century Harvard entered the sacred calling. All students, whether or not candidates for the pulpit, took a prescribed course in six of the traditional Seven Arts (Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Astronomy), in the Three Philosophies (Metaphysics, Ethics and Natural Science), and in Greek, Hebrew, and Ancient History. Latin was supposed to have been mastered in grammar school; it was the language of instruction, and of most of the textbooks. It was a very similar programme to that which many founders of New England had studied at Old Cambridge, containing the same three elements: the medieval Arts and Philosophies, founded largely on the works of Aristotle; the more serious Renaissance study of Greek and Hebrew; and the lighter Renaissance study of belles-lettres. All these subjects were considered essential to a gentleman's education." 1

Neither space nor the ultimate purpose of this thesis permits a detailed examination of the various ways in which Puritanism in seventeenth-century New England felt the impact of Renaissance influence on the intellectual life. Professor Morison gives a detailed and scholarly analysis of that influence by his careful examination of the complete educational system, the conditions prevailing in printing and bookselling, the libraries (private and Public), theology and the sermon, literature, and the beginnings of natural science among the early colonists. 2 In his enthusiasm for proving that the Puritans were men of the Renaissance he tends to ignore at times the supremacy of theology among them. He sometimes makes too much of

1. Morison, S. E., The Puritan Presence, pp. 39-40.
2. Op. cit. entire book.

isolated items from student notebooks and other data more statistical in character. Some of the samples of Puritan verse which he quotes to show that essentially Puritan poetry differed little, except in its religious emphasis, from that of the average poetry of its time are not particularly worth quoting. They bear as little resemblance to the spirit of the Renaissance as mere schoolboy versifying ever does to great poetry. Professor Morison is aware of this and defends himself for including these verses on the ground that they constitute part of his exhibit as a social history. He regrets, too, that the religion of the Puritan put limitations on the true religiosity of the poet's expression. The Puritan "abolished all the traditional church holidays, and he was very much opposed to symbols such as the cross and the sacred heart; here he cut himself off from a whole range of devotional poetry open to the Catholics." <sup>1</sup> All in all, however, Morison presents copious and often rather startling evidence to show that the Puritans were men of the Renaissance. Neither their religion nor their pioneering way of life could allow fullest expression to that spirit, but scholars certainly are purblind critics of early New England culture when they ignore the evidence of Morison... Those who seek to disparage the more secular aspects of Puritan learning are, it seems to me, invariably motivated by religious

1. Morison, S. E., *The Puritan Pronaos*, p. 206.

hostility, the same kind of hostility that closes its eyes to some aspects of Catholic culture, because of a hatred of its religious basis.

No better conclusion to this section of the chapter can be drawn than the final words which Professor Morison uses in that book, to which I am so deeply indebted for the information and ideas of this part of my thesis.

I quote him purposely again at some length:

"A veneration for learning, a respect for the humanities, and a habit of considering values other than material had been so firmly established among the ruling class of the New England people by 1701, that they were as well prepared as any people in the world to be quickened by new ideas, and to play their part in the coming drama of the Rights of Man.

"Thus, the story of the intellectual life of New England in the seventeenth century is not merely that of a people bravely and successfully endeavoring to keep up the standards of civilization in the New World; it is one of the principal approaches to the social and intellectual history of the United States. Primitive New England is a puritan proaog to the American mind of the nineteenth century, and of today." 1

##### 5. Theocracy and the Voices of Dissent.

No picture of seventeenth-century Puritanism would be complete without some discussion of the polity, ecclesiastical and civil, which made the Puritan Colony in Massachusetts notorious even among co-religionists in

---

I. Morison, S. E., The Puritan Proaog, p. 265.

the Mother Country. And any story of the New England theocracy, however brief, cannot be told without also saying something of the voices of dissent in this New Jerusalem, which the enemies of the Puritans have never ceased to praise from their day to ours. Even in this thesis in which we are concerned with Puritanism, only as a portent of the "shape of things to come," it is essential that we see both the fullness of Puritan intolerance and the intimations of that more logical and more liberal continuation of dissent, which eventually spelled the end of the Puritan domination of the New England churches. I say "more logical" continuation or dissent, because it seems to me as a Catholic that once Protestantism broke from the alleged intolerance and authoritarianism of "Rome", no dissenter could logically complain of still further dissidence within their own ranks. Nor does it seem logical that men who fled from England in the name of freedom of conscience should have set up in the New World a state-church of their own less tolerant of freedom than Archbishop Laud's Establishment.

But the Puritans were quite evidently neither inspired by any desire to extend liberty of conscience to others nor troubled by their own immediate failure to carry Protestantism to its logical conclusion. The settlers at Plymouth were, to be sure, tolerant and might have become even more consistently Protestant, had they been in the ascendancy in Massachusetts. After all, they were Brownists,

originally from the little village of Scrooby, England, and their years in Holland, under the leadership of the tolerant Robinson, had given them plenty of practice in a primitive Congregationalism, which gave a democratic character to their church government. Ten years later the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, casting about for some framework for their own social order, were glad to hit upon the Congregational idea. It may have appealed to their deep hatred of episcopacy, but it seems certain, in the light of almost immediate developments, that the decentralizing principles of autonomous congregations either were not fully realized or else were accepted as expedients.<sup>1</sup> Even such a zealous apologist for the Puritans as Professor Morison admits that "the latent democratic principle in their polity proved, humorously enough, an exceptionally heavy cross for the autocratically inclined parsons to carry."<sup>2</sup>

There can be little doubt that the leaders in the Bay Colony had little or no intention of letting Separatist and Congregational principles grow. They set about at once to enact legislation which step by step pretty effectually set up a state-church, much more Presbyterian than Congregational in its powers. The law of 1631 restricted the franchise to church members, that of 1635 made attendance at church compulsory on all; by 1636 a law was passed

1. Parrington, Vernon L., The Colonial Mind, pp. 16-17, 23-24.  
2. Morison, S. E., The Puritan Pronaocs, p. 7.



requiring the approval of the magistrates and elders for the establishment of a new church. In 1638 the Puritans set up a system of state support for the ministry. The first general synod, meeting at Watertown in 1637, spent most of its time debating over and finally condemning the Antinomianism of Mistress Ann Hutchinson, who was banished from the Colony. <sup>1</sup>

By 1646-47 the synod at Cambridge was ready to accept the Westminster Confession of Faith through which they expressed substantial agreement in doctrine with their brethren now in power in England. The so-called Cambridge Platform did contain significant reservations, or modifications of the implied liberalism of the Westminster Confessions. These consisted in a denial of toleration and in the advocacy of a "discipline that sanctions the power of the state to intervene in ecclesiastical matters and requires the magistrate to enforce uniformity in creed and worship." <sup>2</sup> With the Cambridge Platform, the creation of the theocracy was complete, although it was not accepted by the General Court without a three-year struggle, and even then there were fourteen dissenting voices on what Mr. Adams calls "the honored roll." <sup>3</sup>

The next important step in this story of the rise and fall of the theocracy is a long and involved one. It

1. This story, recapitulated above, is told in most histories of the Colony in great detail.
2. Parrington, V. L., The Colonial Mind, p. 25.
3. Adams, James T., The Founding of New England, p. 257.

is the story of the "Half-Way Covenant," adopted in 1662 and already touched upon briefly in the third section of this chapter. This new "Covenant" was a more or less frank admission on the part of the leading theocrats such as Richard Mather and his son Increase (who, incidentally, first opposed the "appeasers") that some recognition and control had to be exercised over baptized but "unregenerate" children. These were, by this Covenant, accepted to "full membership," thus keeping the younger and coming generations under church control. Obviously this accomplished two ends: it saved the theocrats from the embarrassing situation of losing from their control" a vast number of the second generation who were earnest and sober and had immaculate reputations, who sincerely desired to partake of the Lord's Supper"<sup>1</sup> (the Puritans' second "sacrament") but who could not bring themselves to declare publicly their own "regeneration". Secondly, however, an untold number (including thousands of "members" as yet unborn) were granted full standing in the church who certainly could not be expected to agree either with the autocracy of church polity or with the doctrinal pronouncements of those in control. Dr. Miller points out that the verdict of those who adopted this "Half-Way Covenant" was so nearly

1. Miller, Perry, "The Half-Way Covenant," New England Quarterly, Vol. VI, p. 680; entire article of nearly forty pages is indispensable in understanding this question.

unanimous that it is almost a misnomer to call it "Half-Way."

To my mind the adoption of the new Covenant (which Farrington never mentions and other modern enemies of Puritanism play down) really did more to open the "Wide Door of Liberty" in Massachusetts than any of the assaults from without which had been levelled against Puritan orthodoxy almost from the very beginning. And yet, singly and certainly collectively, the rebels in this theocrats' "Paradise" must have contributed no small part in building up a hostility to the established order, which helped to make possible the compromising spirit of the "Half-Way Covenant." Mistress Ann Hutchinson was perhaps quite properly suppressed, for she was teaching a kind of "inner light" doctrine, which not only would have been a serious blow to Puritan teaching, but would also have opened the way to a dangerous and fanatical spirit of "revivalism" such as New England was to know in all its crazy fervor in the days of Jonathan Edwards.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately her banishment and subsequent death at the hands of the Indians made her a "martyr" to the cause of religious liberty and her death, a serious blot on the Puritan escutcheon.

The proximity of unsettled territories also made it possible for dissenters like the Independents, Roger

---

1. See excellent reviews of three Ann Hutchinson biographies by Professor Morison in The New England Quarterly Vol. VI, pp. 358-361.

Williams and Thomas Hooker, to set up new colonies (Rhode Island and Connecticut) which could and did serve as havens for refugees from Massachusetts intolerance. The persecution of the Quakers <sup>1</sup> was also another serious black mark on the Puritan record at which generations of historians in more tolerant times have never tired of pointing. The culmination of theocratic persecution came toward the end of the century (1692) with the famous witchcraft trials, a brief account of which I have reserved for the next chapter.

The work of Hooker and Williams and all the other politico-religious refugees from the Massachusetts Bay Colony need not detain us here. The details are not pertinent to this thesis, and the stories of these famous rebels are too well-known to call even for a brief recital. I shall, however, underscore the adjective, "politico-religious," which I used to characterize these refugees in the above sentence. The modern canonizers of Roger Williams maintain that he was, after all more of a political philosopher than a theologian. Says Parrington:

"He was the incarnation of Protestant individualism, seeking new social ties to take the place of those that were loosening; and as a child of a great age of political speculation

---

1. For a brief account of the persecution of the Quakers and the eventual revulsion of the people against executions of the Quaker missionaries, see Wertebaker, Thomas J., The First Americans, pp. 101-105.

his religion issued in political theory rather than in theological dogma." 1

There can be little doubt that Williams was a kind of genius in whom there were strong admixtures of mysticism, petulance, practical zeal, and un-Puritanical tolerance-----a tolerance which had its limitations. For example, he had little use either for Quakers or Catholics.

I would not bring up the dissenting voices of Williams and Hooker at all, were it not for the fact that a complete picture of the Puritan ancestors of the writers of the New England Renaissance is impossible without some recognition of a numerically slight but fierce spirit of "liberalism", which was to combine with forces of the future as well as with the "fifth columnists" brought in by the "Half-Way Covenant", to destroy the religious as well as the political prestige of the theocrats. I have deliberately omitted from this section anything but passing reference to the political ramifications of all these theological controversies, partly because historians are still somewhat divided in their opinion as to the origins of political liberty in New England, and partly because these remote political backgrounds will not figure at all in the subsequent development of my principal topic.

#### 6. Conclusions: Looking Forward to the Golden Day

In the course of developing this chapter I have paused from time to time to show that seventeenth-century

New England was in truth what Professor Morison called it--- the "pronaos to the American mind of the nineteenth century." Unfortunately neither he nor any other student of the New England mind has yet shown precisely how any specific writer of the nineteenth century exhibited the Puritan impress upon his work. Even with Hawthorne, who has been often hailed as a kind of Puritan manqué, it has been difficult to isolate the Puritan part of his heritage and distinguish it with certainty from other influences operative upon his life and work. I can hardly claim, then, that I am going to be able to do what more experienced scholars have failed to accomplish. In fact, my problem, embracing as it does several authors, is necessarily more complex. And yet, as I have been thinking this thesis through, I have hit upon a theory which happens to agree in its essentials with one now being advanced by Professor Frederic J. Carpenter. <sup>1</sup> Like all theories, it has its recognizable limitations, which I shall point out as I meet them. Briefly the theory is this: there were two halves to Puritanism theologically: the one was conservative and intolerant, the other liberal and even radical. The two halves of this tradition came out in the nineteenth century; the former resulting largely in what Professor George

1. See especially Carpenter, Frederic J., "The Genteel Tradition: A Re-interpretation," The New England Quarterly, XV, 3, pp. 427-443.

Santayana called The Genteel Tradition,<sup>1</sup> the latter blossoming forth principally in the Transcendentalists. Now neither Dr. Carpenter nor I use the term "genteel," as Santayana did, in a disparaging sense. Nor do I regard the Transcendentalists themselves as "genteel." As a matter of fact, I shall use the term "genteel," if at all, merely to describe those writers of New England who continued, even when they failed to recognize that fact, the traditions of Puritanism, as I have outlined them in this chapter. This traditionalism embraces the religious and cultural traditions of Puritan life, insofar as these partake in great measure of the Christian and Renaissance traditions on which they were founded. I hope to show that both Longfellow and, with certain important qualifications, Hawthorne faced the realities of Catholicism as they did, because they possessed that portion of the Puritan heritage. Lowell also took the better part of his inspiration (quantitatively at least) from that same conservative tradition. Holmes, who was "genteel" enough in the sense in which Dr. Santayana used the term is, to my mind, more a product of reaction against the Puritan tradition, although he does not belong with Emerson, Thoreau, and the other Transcendentalists as a descendant of the alleged "piety" of the more liberal Puritans. My study of Lowell and Holmes will put a heavy

---

1. Santayana, George, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," in Winds of Doctrine, pp. 186-215.

strain on my theory, and the conversions to the Church of Brownson and Father Hecker out of Transcendentalism (or so it has always seemed) may put a still heavier burden on my theory. But, for all its limitations, this theory should do more to explain at least one important aspect of the survival of Puritanism in nineteenth-century New England literature than any that have been so far advanced. I do not intend to let this thesis become "ridden" with theory, however, for when the time comes, I hope to let the evidence speak for itself. I do submit here and now that both this theory and that evidence needs most be read in the light of the traditions which came down by blood, by education, and by social inheritance to the men who made New England's Renaissance a veritable Golden Day.

-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-



## C H A P T E R    I I

### THE GENESIS OF YANKEEDOM

#### 1. Transitions and Wonderful One-Hoss Days.

Dates on the calendar, even when they mark the end of one century and the beginning of another, are notoriously inconsiderate of historians. One age or movement does not end in 1699 and another begin in 1700 to suit our feeble memories or to correspond to our sense of the eternal fitness of numbers. It is not without significance to the history of Puritanism in Massachusetts that two of the members of the famous Mather Dynasty, Increase and Cotton, lived on well into the eighteenth century, Increase dying in 1723, and his son in 1728. Surely until the last of the three great Mathers had gone to his reward, no one would dare to say that the reign of the theocrats was definitely over. It is true that by 1700 the theocracy was already weak, and tottering, partly for reasons outlined in the previous chapter, and partly because the teeth had been taken out of the theocrats by the revocation of the old Charter, for which Increase Mather had fought a gallant but losing fight. The new Charter (1691) definitely ended the "legalized control of the Congregational church"<sup>1</sup>, but the theocrats

---

1. Adams, James T., The Founding of New England, p. 451.

still struggled manfully to retain their prestige by getting representatives of the clerical power appointed to office. This is not the place to go into the intricacies of the trouble between the Crown and the Colonists over the rights granted in the charters, but the Charter of 1691 played no insignificant part in spelling the doom of the theocrats.

We have already seen in a footnote in the previous chapter that the persecution of the Quakers had resulted in considerable anti-clerical feeling in the generation of 1660. Even more potent in arousing animus against the theocrats was the famous "witchcraft frenzy" of the 1680's, which came to a head in the infamous Salem trials and hangings of 1692. The reaction against the fanaticism of many of the clergy and judges who sat at these trials was not immediate, but once it set in, was certain and powerful in its effects. The whole story of the witchcraft mania in the Colonies is well told in several books.<sup>1</sup> Our chief concern with it here is to remark that by 1700, with the appearance of Robert Calef's answer to Cotton Mather's Wonders of the Invisible World, public opinion and even public indignation were plainly on the side of the

<sup>1</sup>  
I. Notably in Kittredge, George Lyman, Witchcraft in Old and New England. An excellent summary of the subject as it touched American colonial life in general may be found in Wertenbaker, Thomas J. The First Americans, Chapter VI.

opponents of the theocracy. Calef's work entitled More Wonders of the World Invisible was printed in London but was quickly brought to Massachusetts. Mr. James T. Adams states the results very concisely when he writes:

"Though the rage of the Mathers, father and son, was unbounded, their cause had been thoroughly discredited, and their day was past. They belonged, in reality, to the sixteenth century, while Calef, the merchant, defending the cause of intellectual freedom with no weapon but that of common sense, belonged to the eighteenth, the dawn of which was now at hand." 1

Although reaction against the autocracy of the clergy played no unimportant part in the decline of Puritanism and the rigor mortis of formalism had already crept into the veins of the Puritan churches, theocracy and Calvinistic orthodoxy still had a champion in the offing who was prepared to fight the inroads of infidelity to the last ditch. That champion was Jonathan Edwards, a man whose name has become at once the symbol of reaction and the most respected in the history of early American philosophy. Even Edwards's enemies recognized in him an opponent of extraordinary gifts and vast learning; and philosophers and scholars of our own day, who hate everthing for which Edwards stood, admit that his is one of the greatest minds that has ever appeared on the American scene. There are

1. Adams, James T., The Founding of New England, pp. 455-456.

many interesting aspects of Edwards's life and thought to stimulate the curiosity of students of the history of religion and of philosophy: his precocious bent for scientific observation, his independent development of a Berkleian system of idealism, his attempt to wed John Locke's logic to John Calvin's theology, his masterly attacks on the freedom of the will, and his strong tendency to mysticism, as revealed in his strange autobiography, the Personal Narrative. None of these topics, except perhaps his belated defense of extreme predestinarian Calvinism, needs to concern us here. Since the Freedom of the Will (1754) was written after his retirement from the ministry and only four years before Edward's death, it is possible to exaggerate its immediate importance in Edwards's own personal summons of a heretical generation to the more orthodox religion of its fathers. Of the uses and importance of this work, I shall say something more a little later in this chapter. <sup>1</sup>

Edwards did, however, figure largely in two other events of theological history in eighteenth-century New England that are of great interest to our thesis. The influence of a strong anti-Edwards attitude was tremendously important in the days of the New England Renaissance. <sup>2</sup>

1. There are numerous biographical studies of Edwards but that of Alexander V.G. Allen (1889) is still regarded as standard.
2. See Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Pages from an Old Volume of Life, (Works, Vol.VIII) - of little value as an exposition of Edwards's teaching, but it represents well the deep antipathy of Holmes's generations to the Edwardean doctrines.

And that anti-Edwards bias was based in part on his leadership in the Great Awakening. In 1738 there appeared in the Colonies the Methodist preacher and associate of John Wesley, the celebrated George Whitefield. Whitefield came to New England in 1740 and there lighted the signal-fires of America's most famous "revival", movement known as the Great Awakening. At first the clergy were well disposed to the fiery preachings of the great revivalist, because obviously religion had lost much of its hold on the lives of the descendants of the Puritan "saints". But so extreme and so highly emotional was Whitefield's evangelism that before long a strong reaction set in both against his teaching and his methods. New England was getting a taste of the kind of emotional excesses that might have been let loose back in 1637, had Mistress Ann Hutchinson not been condemned and banished. In 1744 Harvard College protested against Whitefield's preachings, and the following year Yale added her protest. What a shock this new Methodist shouting must have been to those ministers who had a long memory! As Barrett Wendell says: "Seventeenth-century Puritanism was a profound and lasting spiritual power; Whitefield's revival was rather an outburst of ranting excess."<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately for Whitefield Edwards immediately

---

1. Wendell, Barrett, A Literary History of America, p. 75.

endorsed the Movement. As a matter of fact, most scholars are inclined to pre-date the Awakening to 1734 and to find its origins in Edwards's own parish at Northampton. The most famous (or notorious) of the sermons of the revival was preached by Edwards himself at Enfield, Conn., in 1741, "Sinners in the hands of an Angry God." Taking as his text, "Their foot shall slide in due time"----"the assembly appeared deeply impressed and bowed down with an awful conviction of their sin and danger. There was such a breathing of distress and weeping, that the preacher was obliged to speak to the people and desire silence, that he might be heard."<sup>1</sup> While Edwards himself usually relied on a terrible and compelling logic to secure his effects, many of the preachers of the Awakening sought deliberately to induce all kinds of emotional extravagances, not unlike those associated with the Holy-rollers of a later day. It was against these wild and almost psychopathic accompaniments of the Awakening that the conservative ministers, notably the Rev, Charles Chauncy, directed their attacks. They objected especially to the "preaching of terror" with its attendant "bodily effects." Edwards not only preached sermons no less emotional in their consequences than those of other preachers; he even wrote treatises defending the "New Lights" (the name applied to

1. Tracy, Joseph, The Great Awakening (1841), p. 216, quoted in Faust, Clarence and Johnson, Thomas H. (eds.) Jonathan Edwards, p.XVII.

the ministers participating in the Awakening). Among these treatises the one Concerning Religious Affections was his last and best. In it he gives us an analysis of the operations of the human mind, which to us seems a somewhat strange medley of theological doctrine and eighteenth century psychology. Further exposition of this work is not relevant to our thesis, but it is worth noting that Edwards, who set himself up as champion of the old order, by his part in the Great Awakening, paved the way for the further breakdown of clerical powers. His dismissal from his own parish for a somewhat confused mixture of reasons was in itself a sign that the power of the minister even within his own parish was waning.

"But greater changes were to follow. After the Great Awakening itinerant preachers made their appearance, who presumed to enter any parish without the consent of the minister, and preach such doctrines as they would. They were non-conforming free lancers, hostile to the established church, whose stock-in-trade was the new emotionalism. Under their leadership, Separatist congregations were gathered that were not only an offense to the regular establishment but a challenge to its authority." <sup>1</sup>

Edwards's final difficulties with his parishioners in Northampton marked his second unwitting contribution to the downfall of the power of the churches. These difficulties arose out of his refusal to abide by the terms of the "Half-Way Covenant". Many ministers, including

---

1. Parrington, Vernon L., The Colonial Mind, p. 161.

Edwards's own grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, erstwhile pastor in the Northampton parish, had begun to administer the Lord's Supper to those who had become "members" of the church through the Covenant, even though they had never performed any personal act of public consecration. Edwards insisted that conversion was the sole ground of admission to the "sacrament." To him this was a matter both of doctrine and of discipline. He cared little or nothing about the social and political consequences which flowed from his teaching. What he really did was to give doctrinal basis for the "new" Congregationalism, already favorably disposed to accept the democratic ideas on church polity proposed by John Wise. Wise, who had opposed the Presbyterianism of the Mathers, had advocated autonomous churches by an analogy drawn from civil polity. His argument was based on Pufendorf's De Jure Naturae and was really the application of a thoroughly secular principle to church organization.<sup>1</sup> What strange company for Edwards to be keeping----however unwittingly!

Both in his part in the Great Awakening and in his resistance to the "Half-Way Covenant" Edwards believed sincerely that he was a defender of the faith. But his lifelong enemy, the snake which he felt had to be scotched

---

1. For an extravagantly sympathetic account of Wise, see Parrington, The Colonial Mind, pp. 118-125.



at all costs, was Arminianism. As we have seen in the first chapter of this thesis, Calvinism was almost from the very beginning a house divided against itself. There were the High Calvinists (the Supralapsarians) and the Low Calvinists (the Arminians). The Puritans in general were, as I have said, High Calvinists; whereas the Anglicans were inclined to follow the Dutch Bishop Arminius in his more moderate views on predestination. In the light of recent scholarship, notably that of Professors Morison and Miller, Edwards was mistaken in his belief that the Puritans of early New England were High Calvinists. He himself was at least aware of the fact that the dogmas of Calvin had suffered corruption in England in Charles I's time and that corruption had found its way across the water at an early date, for he writes "Arminianism has greatly prevailed among the Dissenters and has spread greatly in New England, as well as Old."<sup>1</sup> Cotton Mather could boast in 1726 (Edwards was twenty-three years old at this time): "I cannot learn, that among all the Pastors of Two Hundred Churches, there is one Arminian; much less an Arian or a Gentilist."<sup>2</sup> But Edwards was by no means so complacent; rationalism was abroad in the world, and Arminianism had already begun its

1. Edwards, Jonathan (Works I, 467) quoted in Faust, Clarence and Johnson, Thomas H., Jonathan Edwards, footnote, p. XLI.
2. Quoted in Walker, History of the Congregational Churches in U.S. p. 216.

deadly work even in the very citadels of Puritan orthodoxy in New England. By Edwards's time and indeed long before Cotton Mather's boast about the orthodox Calvinism of the New England clergy, English Presbyterianism had largely become Unitarian, and deism had become enthroned in the pulpits of the Established Church of England itself. There was reason enough for Edwards to fear the corrupting influences of eighteenth-century rationalism both within the Puritan churches and from without. Undoubtedly Edwards and other opponents of Remonstrant Calvinism were never quite sure what they were fighting. But fight they did, and Edwards's most illustrious contribution to the battle was his famous essay on the Freedom of the Will (1754). There is no need here to describe or to analyse in detail that famous defense of theological determinism. It is a treatise which must be read both in the light of the history and dogmas of Calvinistic theology and in the light of Edwards's own position in developing a new and surprisingly original logic and metaphysics. It was a forthright defense of the principle of "necessity," that is, of the principle that men's behavior is directed by a divine power apart from themselves. In his zeal to prove the bondage of the will (which, incidentally, is a more appropriate name for his treatise) he was anxious to prove God's complete sovereignty over man; his argument for man's total depravity, a related Calvinistic tenet, was motivated by

a similar desire to show man's utter helplessness. There can be little doubt that Edwards felt that he had proved both points of doctrine in the Freedom of the Will, and there were many theologians then and since who agree with him. Foster, an early twentieth century historian of the Edwardean movement, argues that by his work Edwards brought New England theology back to Calvinism. <sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that in this effort, if not in his part in the Great Awakening, or in his attack on the "Half-Way Covenant," Edwards helped to preserve predestinarian Calvinism in America well beyond its appointed day, both among the orthodox Calvinists that still survived and among the "New Light" Protestants, who made so many converts in the hinterlands of New England. Yale College, which for a time succeeded Harvard as the center of Calvinism, still used the Freedom of the Will as a textbook as late as 1775. <sup>2</sup> The Calvinism of Edwards, modified of course by his own religious psychology, was systematized by his friend Hopkins whose work "continued to dominate Congregational and Presbyterian theological seminaries until the last quarter of the nineteenth century." <sup>3</sup>

In spite of Edwards's valiant efforts to turn back the clock to a time that probably ante-dated the

1. See Faust, Clarence H. and Johnson, Thomas H., Jonathan Edwards, p. LXIV.
2. Loc. cit.
3. Anderson, Paul A., and Fisch, Mac H., Philosophy in America, p. 81.

theology of the seventeenth-century Puritans, by the middle of the eighteenth century New England theocracy and simon-pure Calvinism had lost their hold on the minds of the most influential leaders in what once had been the Bay Colony. Rationalistic arguments for the existence of God had appeared in the writings of men like Cotton Mather as early as 1721, and hence even when, like Mather himself, the New England divines did not recognize that a new day was at hand, the Bible commonwealth, set up by the fathers, was a thing of the past. The "Wonderful One-Hoss Shay" of Calvinistic theocracy, to borrow Dr. Holmes's quaint epithet, did not, as Holmes thought, go to pieces in a single day, but it was rapidly collapsing, owing to influences both within the churches and from without.

Unquestionably foreign influences not only from England but also from France helped to accelerate the doom of the old religion, at least in what once had been its very center. The importance of the works of the English deists such as Wollaston, Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke, soon brought into New England libraries a philosophical and theological viewpoint at complete variance with the teachings of the Puritans. "Contact with British troops during the French and Indian War helped acquaint the Americans with ideas current in England at the time." <sup>1</sup> The

---

1. Anderson, Paul A., and Fisch, Mac H., Philosophy in America, p. 154.

introduction of French into the schools and colleges in the 1780's brought in the writings of men like Condorcet, Diderot, and Voltaire, writers even more radical than the eighteenth century English deists. These French writers, to be sure, exerted a much greater influence in the South than they did in New England. But the new rationalism was in the air, and it was not long before America, even New England itself began to produce her own home-spun deists such as Ethan Allen, the Vermont patriot. In his Reason the Only Oracle of Man (written in collaboration with a Dr. Young) Allen went even further than the British deists by displaying a militantly anti-clerical bias. By the end of the century deism was at its height and had seriously destroyed the supernatural basis for religion of many of the prominent founders of the Republic. The deists were unquestionably a motley crowd, including men as different as Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine (author of deism's most notorious tract, the Age of Reason), and among its British and French advocates, men of even a greater diversity of opinion. In general, the deists, regardless of race or political status, agreed that reason was the primary source of all truth; hence they rejected both the authority of the church and of the Scriptures. They did believe in God as First Cause and in nature as the revelation of God's beneficence to man, but they rejected entirely the miraculous and thought of immortality, if at all, as of decidedly secondary importance

to the "good life" of this world. The deists emphasized morality, but it was a morality wholly divorced from the traditional theology. Most of the deists were republican in their politics; all of them were humanitarian and naturalistic. They believed in the almost infinite possibilities of man's perfection-----hence, they were unalterably opposed to anything that smacked of the "total depravity" of Calvinism. From the purely secular point of view, deism did accomplish much to advance science and learning and government here in America. It met strenuous opposition from the clergy of all creeds, but unfortunately the survivors of Calvinism tended to oppose it as much for its association with radical and republican politics as for its very obviously theological dangers. The Calvinists were undoubtedly aristocrats, and their clergy who attacked deism had a good worldly argument at hand to use in frightening the propertied classes into keeping away from a form of infidelity so intimately bound up with radical political doctrines.

AS the spirit of the Age of Reason became more widespread, the opposition of the clergy and the more conservative laity increased. Pamphlets, poems, sermons, and the like were levelled against deism with increasing violence. "With attacks from the orthodox, no unanimity within and a rationalistic position not always appealing to ordinary men, the Age of Reason was on the wane by the

early nineteenth century;"<sup>1</sup> The death of rationalism, like the death of the New England theocracy, was by no means immediate or complete. As we shall see later, many of its tenets found their way into New England Unitarianism, to be eclipsed temporarily by Transcendentalism, but destined to reappear in the middle of the nineteenth century when the evolution controversy held the center of the stage. The hold of deism on the New England religious mind was by no means immediate or as widespread as had been the tenets of the Puritan creed. But it is sad to relate that federalistic politics, even more than religion, succeeded in checking "the infuriated steeds of infidelity" in Boston and at Harvard. True enough, the new Unitarianism of Harvard was pretty far removed in spirit from the faith of the Puritans, but it did continue to present courses of study which sought to emphasize the similarities between natural and revealed religion, thus both preserving the semblance of orthodoxy and stealing the rationalistic thunder of the infidels.

The religious mind of New England had certainly suffered a series of deep-sea changes in the eighteenth century. By the time the century came to an end Unitarianism (whose origins and development will be treated in the next chapter) had definitely replaced the Puritanism of the

I. Anderson, Paul A., and Fisch, Mac H., Philosophy in America, p. 158.

seventeenth century in Boston, Cambridge, and Concord, the centers destined to be the home of the New England Renaissance. Both conservatism and liberalism survived the Age of Reason, but it is safe to say that neither John Cotton nor Cotton Mather would have been able to recognize either of them in their new clothes. Calvinistic orthodoxy of a kind was, as I have pointed out, still alive and kicking, but not in its old stamping ground. The Massachusetts, which was to give birth to a Golden Day in literature, was largely in the hands of liberal theologians, at least judged by seventeenth century standards. Quarrels over church polity, compromise platforms, Arminianism and deism had already done their deadly work. The Christian inheritance of the Middle Ages had been pretty well divided or dissipated. The New England mind by the end of the eighteenth century was worshipping strange gods, both in the Boston area and in the hinterlands where the "New Lights" were winning great "evangelical" victories. The true rationalism of the scholastic tradition had been replaced by the specious rationalism of the British and French Philosophers. The seamless garment had been rent into a hundred shreds to make the crazy quilt of New England Protestant heterodoxy. Catholicism had been hated, true enough, by the Winthrops, the Sewalls and the Mathers, but old Puritans still lived and moved and had their being in the reflected light of the Catholic tradition. Their descendants in eighteenth century Boston had moved farther and farther away from that



light. They would have to wait until events, as yet unborn, would send several of their intellectual leaders groping blindly along the road to Rome. And by the time Longfellow and Hawthorne and Lowell appeared, another great sea-change in New England life would find the descendants of Puritan divines pretty well metamorphosed into Yankees.

## 2. The Making of the Yankee.

Making all due allowances for his anti-religious bias, we must admit that Mr. James T. Adams has made out a fairly creditable case for the existence of worldly motives among the first immigrants to Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> Certainly not even the staunchest defenders of the purity of Puritan motive can deny that among the non-church-members of the expedition (and, according to Mr. Adams and others, these were more numerous than we usually think) the impelling motives for migration were economic or worldly. To contend that "Land hunger was the master passion which brought the men of the seventeenth century across the sea and lured them on to the frontier,"<sup>2</sup> is, as I have contended briefly in Chapter I, equally absurd. Even Mrs. Hazard, who is obviously an extremist in her dislike of the Puritans, admits that the safest conclusion for the sober historian to make is that the motives for Puritan migrations to

---

1. Adams, James, The Founding of New England, passim

2. Quoted in Hazard, Lucy L., The Frontier of American Literature, p. 4.

America were mixed.<sup>1</sup> There can be found in Puritan writings a fairly large number of statements of purpose in coming to New England, which unite the religious with the secular in a naivete as amusing as it is obvious. Mrs. Hazard quotes the conservative Bliss Perry as conceding that the Puritan pioneer was "both a mystic and a bargain hunter."

No matter how deeply religious the motives of the Puritan immigrants when they arrived on these New England shores, they had to earn their livelihood. Whatever delusion they may have had about finding a Promised Land in New England and turning it into a Heavenly Commonwealth, their first few months on the stern and rock-bound coast must have convinced them that the Promised Land was no Garden of Eden. There was no mistaking the fact that here in New England they would have to earn food, clothing, and shelter by the sweat of their brows. The soil was as rock-bound as the coast, and the climate as uncertain as only New England weather can still be. Hence, it is not surprising that the settlers of Massachusetts were early directed away from what could be little more than subsistence farming to the sea---to fishing, shipping, trading, and kindred activities. As Englishmen the lure of the sea was in their blood, as members of the middle class trade was the breath of life, and as children of the Reformation, their pursuit of wealth was not without its religious sanctions.

---

1. Loc. cit.

The sea was undoubtedly a watery avenue of adventure, escape, and profit. Why till a stony soil and get a bare subsistence in return, when, with the elements of navigation in his head and a little money in his pocket, a boy of nineteen or twenty might even command a ship of his own? It was not long before the sons of the Puritans were not only fishing off their own coast but were also literally sailing the seven seas in quest of cargoes much more exotic than the sacred cod of the Cape----and much more remunerative. To paraphrase Wordsworth a bit: Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, and to be young was very wealthy. Sometimes the cargoes were rum and molasses; sometimes, said to say, they were negro slaves. Sometimes they were whale oil and blubber----and sometimes fabulous ivories and spices from the Orient. Sometimes the sailing was strictly within the law; and sometimes when the Mother Country was at war with France and Spain and Holland, the sailing was for pirates' booty. Puritan consciences became more flexible on the high seas, and the long months at sea and in strange heathen ports left their marks of religious indifference and cosmopolitan tolerance on the sons of Puritan yeomen.

Even the stay-at-homes, who lacked the spirit of adventure, were building the ships, handling the precious cargoes, and poring over the ledgers of trade. They did not need to learn from Poor Richard that diligence was the mother of good luck. That virtue was bred in the bone

and nurtured in the blood by their fathers who had gone through the lean years of the first settlement. After all, these New England traders were the sons of disinherited middle-class Englishmen. Some of them might have grown up to be Daniel Defoes at home, but here, where their fathers and brothers and friends were as resourceful as Robinson Crusoe, they were fast developing into a new breed of Englishmen---the shrewd and hard-headed Yankee.

There is an impressively large list of European and British scholars who in recent years have sought to explain the phenomena of Puritans and their like turning into shrewd and enterprising businessmen and traders, by contending that there is an intimate relationship between Calvinistic Protestantism and capitalistic economics. Among these scholars are the Germans, Max Weber and Ernest Troeltsch, who begin with the premise that Calvinism arose as a justification for usury in its medieval sense i.e. the taking of interest, regardless of rate, on loaned money. This view is unquestionably an extreme one. Professor Morison argues that whatever may have been true of Calvinism in Continental Europe, it simply is not true that the Puritans in America reprobated the scholastic teaching on money-lending.<sup>1</sup> He is inclined to subscribe to the thesis of

1. See Morison, Samuel E., The Puritan Promise, p. 8; also by the same author, Builders of the Bay Colony, p. 161, p. 166.

Prof. R. H. Tawney, who argues simply that the unascetic character of Puritanism helped it to come to terms with this world. To Morison, the Puritan in any chosen calling, whether it were the ministry or not, felt he could serve his God "by nobly fulfilling a function determined by the conditions of this world, and thus prove your right to an easy place in the next world." <sup>1</sup> Tawney and even Weber had argued that Protestantism in none of its forms consciously recognized that it was making friends with the Mammon of iniquity, <sup>2</sup> and Father Fanfani of the University of the Sacred Heart (Milan) agrees with them. Father Fanfani contends that both Luther and Calvin were extremely conservative in their attitude to the evolving economic order; even though Calvin permitted interest-taking because "he sees it as corresponding to the natural order of events." <sup>3</sup> Of more relevancy to our subject Father Fanfani declares:

"The economic ethical code of the English Reformers and schismatics, in its most characteristic form, tends to agree with the most rigid Catholic view and often goes even further. The ideas on property of the theologians of the Anglican Church in its early days derives from Scholastic doctrines. We also find many echoes of their doctrines in the view of American Protestants of the eighteenth century." <sup>4</sup>

1. Morison, Samuel E., The Puritan Pronaos, p. 8.
2. See Fanfani, Amintore, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Capitalism, pp. 190-191 and passim for a thorough summary of all the various theories of the relationship between Calvinism and capitalistic enterprise.
3. Op. cit., p. 197.
4. Op. cit., p. 192.

How, then, is it possible for anyone to imply that the religious doctrines of the Puritans gave sanction to the enterprise of the Yankee trader? Professor Morison has given us one answer, already quoted above. Father Fanfani offers still further reasons for the rise of the capitalistic spirit under the influences of Calvinistic theology and ethics. It is enough for me to summarize the points in Father Fanfani's well-documented conclusions:

1. "Protestantism encouraged capitalism inasmuch as it denied the relation between earthly action and eternal recompense." <sup>1</sup> Such an attitude tends to invalidate both supernatural morality and the entire economic ethics of Catholicism.

2. Related to this conclusion, indeed corollary to it, is one which claims that Protestantism "transferred capitalistic efforts into religious efforts which although not meritorious, for otherwise God would be rewarding man, were the sole way in which man could burn a grain of incense to the terrible Lord of Heaven and Earth." <sup>2</sup>

3. Protestantism produced no new effects, but "facilitated the manifestations of a movement that had shown perceptible signs of vitality before the Reformation,

---

1. See Fanfani, Amintore, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Capitalism, pp. 203 and passim for a thorough summary of all the various theories of the relationship between Calvinism and capitalistic enterprise.

2. Op. cit., p. 208.

italics mine) and would continue its course after the Reformation." <sup>1</sup>

It is clear, then, that the religious doctrines of the Puritans, directly or indirectly, favored the rise of the trading classes. The very disciples of Puritan ethics sowed the seeds of an economic upheaval that was finally to reach its fullest expression in the Industrial Revolution. As Professor Parrington points out:

"The immediate result was the emergence of a middle-class, unimaginative, laborious, prudential, who devoutly believed that the right to rise in the world, to pursue economic well-being in a competitive society, was the most sacred of human rights; that those who were faithful in little things, God would make rulers over great things.....The rise of the new ethics coincided historically with the final disintegration of the craft guilds, and the emergence of the great trading companies. It provided a desirable sanction for the modern principle of exploitation, and the development of the middleman system of distribution; and these conceptions the Puritanized English commercial class seized upon eagerly, and in capable fashion set about the work of creating the system of modern capitalism." <sup>2</sup>

### 3. Englishmen into Yankee-men.

There is neither time nor space to treat fully of the effects of War and Revolution upon the provincial

2. Parrington, Vernon, The Colonial Mind, p. 268.
1. See Fanfani, Amintore, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Capitalism, pp. 209 and passim for a thorough summary of all the various theories of the relationship between Calvinism and capitalistic enterprise.

inhabitants of what once had been the Bay Colony. I have already mentioned in the first section of this chapter that the contact of the New Englanders with the British troops sent over to fight the so-called French and Indian War contributed somewhat to liberalizing the outlook of a people who had been pretty effectually isolated from Europe by a curious combination of theocracy and geography. But these British soldiers, whom the New Englanders had welcomed readily enough as protectors of their own self-interests, ultimately served to intensify the Yankee spirit. The military, accompanying the Colonial and Provincial governors, had never been very popular, and any increase in the numbers of the British soldiers, however expediently advantageous their presence, must have been viewed with a not unjustifiable alarm.

Now the Puritans had never been particularly docile sons of the growing Empire. They had come here in the first place because England's rulers had been their political and religious persecutors. In Massachusetts, partly because of remoteness from London and partly because the theocratic rulers were hard to handle, the Colonists had had pretty much their own way. They were willing enough as skippers of pirate brigs to take advantage of the enemies of Mother England; they were ready enough, undoubtedly because of genuine fear of the Indians, to join battle with the British against the French. But after the Treaty of Paris (1763), which concluded the War with France, the



Colonies in general and New England, among them, felt a strong resurgence of the old spirit of security and independence. England was still removed by six months of dangerous sailing from her North American colonies. There was still enough of the dissenting spirit left in narrow and provincial New England to bid defiance to rulers three thousand miles away, whose lives, judged by Puritan standards, were none too moral anyway.

And then in the very year of the Treaty of Paris a stupid Tory ministry inaugurated a series of acts which finally uncovered the lid of Revolution. Up to this time sentiment and self-interest had kept the Colonists loyal. As Parrington and even several wise British historians of a later date have pointed out (not to mention such contemporary conciliators as the great Edmund Burke) a "generous policy of imperial federation would have returned incredible revenues to Great Britain."<sup>1</sup> But a short-sighted imperialism was in the saddle, and the heavy debts incurred in Pitt's foolish wars had to be met. "It was the ill luck of the ministry to present the question so concretely that the colonial radicals were given an opportunity to awaken the latent forces of American liberalism and turn them against English sovereignty."<sup>2</sup> There is no need here to rehearse the series of acts which finally culminated with

1. Parrington, Vernon L., The Colonial Mind, p. 185.

2. Loc. cit.

the Revolution. Modern American historians agree that almost each separate colony entered into the uprising for special reasons of its own. The leaders had all they could do to turn the grievances of each separate colony to their own uses and to keep the flame of revolution burning simultaneously in each section. While elementary school historians have always made much of the grievances of Boston patriots against the tax on tea, adult historians agree that the sons of John Calvin and Cotton Mather had most deeply resented the provision of the so-called Quebec Act, which granted to the French Catholics of that province the free exercise of their religious beliefs.<sup>1</sup> It is always easy to oversimplify "causes" of such a complex movement as the American Revolution, and I am not prepared to maintain that the anti-Catholic, "no popery," prejudices of New England were the sole cause of New England's participation in the War. In the final section of this chapter, however, I shall touch again upon the Act in reference to the positions of Catholics in New England before the nineteenth century.

Once New England, especially Massachusetts, decided to cast the die for Revolution, she undoubtedly played her part in the war right nobly, if we are to judge the long honor roll of her great patriots. It is not for

1. See Metzger, Charles H., S. J., The Quebec Act: A Primary Cause of the American Revolution. (New York, 1936).

me to belittle or to malign their motives. The Revolutionary agitators often found among the ministers of the gospel their most potent assistants. But in Massachusetts, as elsewhere, there were prominent loyalists or Tories, the most celebrated being the royal governor, Thomas Hutchinson, descendant of the notorious Mistress Ann, and the minister, Jonathan Boucher. Of these loyalists Parrington says:

"Although native born they aped the English aristocracy, and reproduced on a less magnificent scale the manners of the English landed families. Less arrogant than their old-world models, certainly much less corrupt in their politics, they exuded the same aristocratic prejudices and the same narrow sympathies. Their most cherished dream was the institution of an American nobility, with the seal of royal favor set upon their social pretensions."<sup>1</sup>

The Tories were of course in a distinct minority, and as the Revolution progressed their fate was sealed. Most of them, who could be discovered (some astute gentlemen of wavering faith were never properly labelled as Royalists) were ultimately deported to "Hell, Hull, or Halifax," as the slogan put it. Unquestionably the Colonies, including New England, lost some of their most cultivated minds in the expatriation of the Tories to Canada, the Bahamas, and England itself. While such deportations may have been pleasing to the rising tide of republicanism in New England

<sup>1</sup> I. Parrington, Vernon L., The Colonial Mind, p. 194.

and the rest of the colonies, it seems to me that the exile of the loyalists helped still further to accentuate the provincialism which was fast turning American Englishmen into Yankees. Even Parrington, who is by no means an apologist for the Loyalists, says:

"The change of temper that came over American society with the loss of the Loyalists, was immense and far-reaching. For the first time the middle classes was free to create a civilization after its own ideals. In rising to leadership it brought another spirit into every phase of life. Dignity and culture henceforth were to count for less and assertiveness for more. Ways became less leisurely, the social temper less urban. The charm of the older aristocracy disappeared along with its indisputable evils." <sup>1</sup>

Curiously enough the departure of the more pronounced Loyalists from New England did not by any means bring about any strong tendencies towards the republican spirit. Except for Samuel Adams, one of the least fully appreciated firebrands of the new democratic order, New England furnished no first-rate political thinker to take part in the "Great Debate" out of which the destiny of the New Republic was shaped. Sam Adams himself was no "democrat" in the Jeffersonian sense and carefully refrained in all his writings from using that term. In the days of reconstruction, which followed the successful termination of the Revolution, New England became a hot-bed of Federalism and poor Sam Adams as Governor of Massachusetts had to listen to Robert

<sup>1</sup> Parrington, Vernon L., The Colonial Mind, p. 172.

Treat Paine at a Harvard Commencement, "fulminate against the red atheism of France and its American spawn." <sup>1</sup> New England Puritans had, as we have seen, never been friendly to democracy, and their descendants of post-Revolutionary times soon came, not unnaturally, to identify democracy with the irreligion of the anti-Federalistic republicans.

Undoubtedly the War itself, like all wars, was a mixed blessing to the religious spirit of New England. But the end of the War and the new sense of security and independence which followed, gave fresh vigor to the commercial life of the Yankee trader. He now felt that he was no longer a provincial Englishman more or less responsible in his business dealings to a rapacious ministry in London. He was a Yankee with vested interests of his own, which he was as ready as ever to defend against all aggressors. And he felt that the principal aggressor was the new democracy of Jefferson. Is it any wonder, then, that New England traders were as vociferous as their parsons in upholding federalistic principles? While the so-called Connecticut Wits-----Dwight, Barlow, and Trumbull----were the most articulate spokesmen, both in verse and prose, for the religious and political conservatives, it was Massachusetts, especially Boston, in which the last and most stubborn

---

1. Parrington, Vernon L., The Colonial Mind, p. 247.

battle for federalism was waged. And there seems little reason to doubt that, however sincerely the Boston minister may have reprobated the atheism of anti-Federalist politicians, the Yankee squire, erstwhile British provincial trader, was the man who "called the tune." It was his hard-earned cash, after all, which "paid the piper." In other words, it was the worldly prudence of the Boston Yankee rather than the religious zeal of the theocrat which emerged triumphant from the turmoil of Revolution. The parson, too, had become a Yankee and had found, as the next chapter will reveal, a brand-new faith to bolster up his Federalistic politics----at least in Boston. It was against this background that the opening scenes of New England's Renaissance were to be acted. The spirit of Separatist liberalism was by no means wholly defunct, and the new orthodoxy in religion (Unitarianism) had come to a dubious kind of terms with rational theology; But temporarily, as Emerson said, things were in the saddle----and things were very dear to the heart of the Boston Yankee.

#### 4. "Romanism" in New England.

New England, founded as a haven for religious refugees, was not, as I have said repeatedly, to become noted for its tolerance of alien creeds even in the Rhode

---

Island of Roger Williams, <sup>1</sup> The Quakers were the only truly tolerant Protestants in the Colonies, and they themselves had suffered a persecution and death at the hands of the Puritans. Above all, New England (or any of the northern Colonies, except Pennsylvania) had no use for what Roger Williams had called "the Romish wolf" or what the Puritans themselves regarded as the Scarlet Woman, the kingdom of anti-Christ. The Puritans, as we have seen, had broken away from the Church of England largely because they felt that the Establishment was still too Catholic in its hierarchical organization and in many of its devotions. As. Dr. Theodore Maynard says "No New England child but knew the gory lines:

'Abhor that arrant whore of Rome,  
And all her blasphemies  
And drink not of her cursed cup,  
Obey not her decrees.'" <sup>2</sup>

As Dr. Maynard and others have pointed out, Lord Bellomont after the Revolution of 1688 got New York to pass a law imposing the death penalty on priests and also induced Massachusetts to pass a similar law. In short, British penal laws emigrated to Massachusetts, along with the bitter anti-Catholic prejudices already deeply ingrained in the New England sons of John Calvin.

1. For a brief discussion of Williams's alleged tolerance, see Maynard, Theodore, The Story of American Catholicism, pp. 87-88.
2. Op. cit., pp. 90-91.

The story of the attitudes of New England to Catholicism from the beginning to nearly the end of the eighteenth century has already been thoroughly treated in a brilliant and scholarly doctoral dissertation.<sup>1</sup> There is no need to describe in all its lurid detail that most unhappy picture. While it is undeniably true, as I have shown at some length in Chapter I, that the Puritans themselves were still living on borrowed Catholicism, they hated the theology of the Schoolmen and all their works and pomps. It was one thing for the Puritan fathers to strive to imitate the methodology of St. Thomas; it was something else - and that something abhorrent - to accept the Angelic Doctor's conclusions. As Father Riley shows with abundant citation, not only the sermons and more formal theological works of the Puritans but also their popular pamphlets, almanacs, and schoolbooks for children, were replete with anti-Catholic vituperation. The Puritans were masters in the art of propaganda: no canard against the Church was too base for them to repeat ad nauseam in all writings intended for popular consumption. There can be little doubt that the Puritans and their eighteenth century descendants helped to perpetuate in this country the kind of "no popery" bigotry which was to bear such abundant fruit in the semi-political movements against the Church in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

1. Riley, Arthur J., Catholicism in New England to 1788.

2. The best account of these movements e.g. Nativism, can be found in Billington, Ray Allen, The Protestant Crusade, (N.Y., 1938)



Even in scholarly circles there were provisions for attacking "Romanism" and "Popery" that would reach out beyond academic walls and propagate their malignant influence. The famous Dudleian lectures, founded at Harvard by Judge Paul Dudley in the mid-eighteenth century, are notorious examples of this more "respectable" kind of anti-Catholic propaganda. One of the four annual lectures on the Dudley foundation was, by the terms of its founder, to be given with the purpose of "detecting, convicting, and exposing the idolatry, errors, and superstitions of the Roman Church." <sup>1</sup>

This concern of the Puritans and of their eighteenth century sons against the "evils" of "Romanism" cannot certainly be explained in terms of the numbers of Catholics in colonial, provincial, and Revolutionary New England. Some of it can, as I have suggested in the previous section, be explained by the proximity of the French Catholics of Quebec, who were alleged to have engaged in the active proselitizing of some of the New England captives of the French and Indian War. <sup>2</sup> But the importation and revival of the penal laws, together with the well-advertised intolerance of the Puritans against all alien faiths, were quite enough to keep sensible Catholics away from New England. If they dared to come, as some of them did, they were usually wise enough not to reveal their affiliations with "Romanism."

1. Quoted in Riley, Arthur J., Catholicism in New England to 1788, p. 22.

2. Op. cit., passim.

There are some stories of Catholics who for one reason or other were well treated by the Puritans; there is even the legend (of very doubtful authenticity) that the famous Captain Miles Standish was a Catholic and that the leaders of the Colony permitted him to take an annual trip to Maine to make his Easter duty. Certainly whatever Catholics found their way into seventeenth and eighteenth century New England found no opportunities to practice the Faith. As Father Riley states in the conclusion of his dissertation:

".....there were some Catholics present during the entire colonial period. No approximate estimates of the number are possible nor is there any certainty that any Catholics definitely persevered in the practice of their faith. Their actual presence, except for some war-time measures, was never restricted, but their exercise of religious, political, and civil privileges was seriously circumscribed. Until after the Revolution it was not possible for Catholics to organize a church or to practice their religion openly." <sup>1</sup>

The coming of religious liberty to American Catholics----except in Pennsylvania and Maryland, where it had already been granted----was hastened by the Revolution, partly because of the loyalty of known Catholics such as the great priest and future archbishop, John Carroll, and partly because of the splendid cooperation of Catholic France in helping the Colonies to win their freedom. It would be false to assume that with the signing of the peace Catholics

1. Quoted in Riley, Arthur J., Catholicism in New England to 1788, pp. 324-325.

were received with open arms in New England or elsewhere, but henceforth, they were to be more or less tolerated. The beginnings of the Church in Massachusetts were by no means auspicious. Boston itself seemed ill-fated in its first Catholic pastors.<sup>1</sup> Not indeed until the establishment of the See of Boston in 1808, under the saintly Bishop Cheverus, can we say that Catholicism had an even chance of surviving its birth. Even then and for many generations to come the Church was to be largely a church of the disinherited, of immigrant laborers come over from Ireland to escape worse evils than any the Puritan founders had ever known under Charles I and Archbishop Laud. Although I shall recur to this point rather often in the subsequent pages of this thesis, it is worth pointing out now that Catholicism, which was to make such a deep impression upon the great writers of New England's Renaissance, had scarcely emerged from the catacombs of Puritan persecution and Yankee distrust by the middle of the nineteenth century. The "Genesis of Yankeedom" had indeed witnessed many profound changes in the mental and spiritual attitudes of the inhabitants of Massachusetts. But the ancient grudges against "Romanism" died a slow death. Yankees, who had learned to tolerate and even to subscribe to theological doctrines that would have been anathema to the Mathers,

---

1. See Maynard, Theodore, The Story of American Catholicism, pp. 175-176.

continued to hate the "Scarlet Woman" of Rome with a bitterness once reserved for Quakers or Arminians or the British crown. The fires lighted by Puritan anti-popery were one day to burst into the all-too-literal flames of the Charlestown Convent (1834).

#### 5. Transition Again

By the end of the eighteenth century, it is clear, the establishment of Yankeedom was complete. Although the ancient faith of the Puritans still lived on, the survival of Puritan "morality" and prejudices was far more marked, except in villages and hamlets remote from Boston, than was the "survival" of the dogmas, disciplines, and piety of the founders of New England. The history of religion in Massachusetts especially is a strong confirmation of the fact that worldly-minded men often retain Christian morals when they themselves have ceased to believe in the dogmatic truths on which these morals rest. And so as the century closed Puritan morality was serving well the interests of the Yankee trader; and the accumulated religious prejudices of a hundred and thirty years were "sanctifying" Federalistic politics. The most conspicuous virtues were of course "natural" ones, but so confused was the religious "climate of opinion" that many a serious-minded Yankee sincerely believed he was still worshipping the God of his fathers. The final defeat of the theocracy, the Edwardian revival, the effect of deism, and the new Boston creed of the Uni-

tarians, had all left the religious picture substantially different from what it had been in 1700. Along with that change had come the metamorphosis of the Puritan into the wordly "economic" man of Yankeedom. The reign of the entrepreneur and merchant was at hand; things were indeed in the saddle, and the Yankee was riding on wings of gold, into the new century.

-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-

## C H A P T E R    I I I

### SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE RENAISSANCE

#### 1. New England and the Romantic Revival.

Strange as it may now seem, American literary history was written for generations from what was an undeniably "isolationist" point of view. I have already pointed out in the first chapter of this thesis that the history of the Puritans has been read as it should be only in recent years, because such scholars as Professors Morison, Miller, and Murdock have recognized thoroughly its European origins. Even the English roots of American literature suffered neglect, despite universal reference to the Colonists as "transplanted Englishmen" and superficial comparisons between American and British writers. In fact, especially in academic circles, until about the 1920's criticism of our own literature had fallen between two stools (or should I say schools?): the first provincially isolationist, and the second equally provincial, in its snobbishness toward any literature in English not produced in England. Consequently, with few notable exceptions, students of American literature, until our own time, failed to see that the first and broadest fact about the literature of New England's Renaissance is that it was an in-

tegral part of the Romantic Movement.<sup>1</sup> There had been some intimations of this fact scattered throughout the pages of critics like the late George Edward Woodberry but even the Cambridge History of American Literature shows no clearly defined awareness of Romanticism as a movement in American literature.

There are some critics now, among them Professor Norman Foerster, who date American Romanticism back to the "birth of the nation"<sup>2</sup> and regard Puritan "idealism" as one of its manifestations. This seems very far-fetched to me, even if not quite so absurd as the theory of enthusiasts who trace Romanticism back to Socrates! Unquestionably Romanticism in political form found its expression in the American Revolution or rather in the writings of the republican patriots who engineered the Revolution, and later, like Jefferson, stood for egalitarian principles in government. These egalitarian principles, soon to be identified with the "democracy" of the French Revolution, did not, as we have seen in the last chapter, make much headway in New England, particularly in Federalistic Boston. As a matter of fact it is hard to imagine any less propitious soil for the seeds of the Romantic Movement than the Boston area and the New England which I described

1. See Foerster, Norman (ed.), the Reinterpretation of American Literature, pp. 32-34.

2. Op. cit., p. 32.

in Chapter II. Politically Boston belonged to the eighteenth century; its consequent and/or antecedent social life was a Yankee interpretation of the social pattern of the Age of Enlightenment. In religion, as we shall see, Boston Unitarianism was also a curious compromise between the Congregationalism of the seventeenth century and the natural religion of the Age of Reason. But there were present, even in this unpromising soil, latent elements of the "genteel spirit." And winds were blowing from the East across Atlantic waters, winds which not even Tie-wig Federalism and Unitarian respectability would be able to keep out. Romanticism was in these winds, and while the New England Renaissance flourished, they kept blowing. They even took on some of the native wildness of New England winds----a phenomenon metaphorically and historically correct, even if it does seem to violate the principles of meteorology! For, to drop my metaphor entirely, Romanticism came to America in many of its European manifestations, but these were modified in New England to accord with American temperament and character. As Professor Howard Mumford Jones points out,<sup>1</sup> the moral idealism, surviving from an earlier New England, kept the Romantic Movement from the moral anarchy of Europeans and Englishmen like Shelley and Gautier and Heine and also from all

---

1. See Foerester, Norman (ed.), The Reinterpretation of American Literature, p.77.



passionate apologies for the senses. On the other hand, an idealistic, if not anarchical mania for reform ran riot in this country---New England itself became a land of Utopian dreams. Transcendentalism has been defined as "Romanticism on Puritan soil," and it is plain to the student of comparative literature that no country of Europe could have harbored such a singularly New England-ish brand of Romanticism.

The origins of the Romantic Movement in New England, then, were partly foreign and partly native. Hence in "Setting the stage for the Renaissance" we must take into account several characteristics of Romanticism which are universal in scope as well as peculiar to New England, at least in their interpretation. As I implied in my Foreword, the currents and cross-currents of the Renaissance are still something of a puzzle of the social and literary historian, but I do believe I can isolate a few of the universal and particular traits of Romanticism which will help to explain the relatively conspicuous part played by Catholicism in the literature of the Golden Day. Here let me insist that many of the properties which found their way onto the "Stage" of the Renaissance were Romantic---- and I am not forgetting that one of the chief manifestations of Romanticism, wherever it appeared, was a strong reaction against the established order.

## 2. New England Discovers Europe

The discovery or rediscovery of the past is by common consent of all schools of criticism one of the distinguishing marks of the Romantic Revival. It was also one of the chief sources of New England's Renaissance, and I submit perhaps the most potent one in bringing the writers of New England face to face with the Catholic Church. New England Romanticism not only helped her sons like Hawthorne to look back upon the native past, but it also turned their eyes to Europe, whence were blowing the winds of Europe's own new day. And, once the eyes of New England's most perceptive minds began to peer across the broad Atlantic to see what was going on in contemporary England and Europe, they could not help but see a past rich in traditions, traditions still very much alive even in a changing age. At first these glances Europe-ward were necessarily through the pages of books, but the lure of the Old World became so strong that the descendants of Englishmen who had said a glad farewell to "perfidious Albion" were now anxious to see Spain and Italy and France and Germany as well as the home of their grandsires. It was not long before the Grand Tour or something much more serious became a part of the education of New England's chosen sons. And on these Grand Tours the chosen ones rediscovered Europe and with it the Faith. I do not wish at all to minimize the other factors that led some of the

men of the Golden Day to a rediscovery of the need of a Church Universal, but European travel was often the principal stimulus to the other approaches to Catholicism.

Now I realize that most interpreters of New England literature, although fully aware that the re-discovery of Europe took no inconsiderable part in bringing about the Renaissance, are inclined to play it down, contending that its more vital qualities are native or else are native applications of imported Romantic ideas. And these importations, they argue, were through books, and the applications were made by men who had either never visited Europe or, if they had, were relatively untouched by their travels. I shall give due consideration to this position as the thesis progresses, particularly with reference to Emerson, Thoreau, Holmes, and some of the Transcendentalists. I am willing to admit that the more "radical" writers of the Renaissance were anti-traditional in the fullest sense of the term, and, as such, they either ignored or were seriously perplexed by European as well as by American traditions. In general, they were, as we shall see, hostile to the Catholic tradition----but they were disturbed by its presence. Their very hostility was an unconscious admission of the importance they attached to it. What is even more significant: the radicals' dissatisfaction with things as they were, was, as we shall see, a much deeper manifestation of divine discontent, hungering after the spiritual realities which Catholicism alone can supply.

Americans, even in provincial days, had returned to England or had visited the Continent for one or more immediately practical purposes. During the Revolution such natural cosmopolitans and ambassadors-extraordinary as Benjamin Franklin had gone to France in quest of help for the struggling Colonies. Some of the great leaders of the New Republic like Jefferson had also visited France on errands of state. Washington Irving, it may be recalled, first went to England ostensibly to represent his family's cutlery business, but remained to become the first ambassador of the New World of letters to the Old----and, ultimately, of the Old World to the New. But New England's young scholars, who made the Grand Tour, all left their native shores with the very definite intention of bringing back their share of the literary, linguistic, and cultural riches of Continental Europe. It was these earnest young men, who were largely responsible for the "Discovery of Europe", which preceded and accompanied the arrival of New England's Renaissance. It was also these same zealous young scholars who brought back with them their impressions of the Catholic tradition. For most of them this rediscovery of the Faith was entirely accidental and unintentional: studies in the German universities of the time were hardly calculated to inspire an awareness of or a devotion to Catholicism. One might almost paraphrase the famous line of Lowell's and say: Those who went to scoff, remained

to pray. That of course is an exaggeration, for there was little time and less inclination for praying among these descendants of the Puritans.

The first group of scholar-pilgrims to embark for Europe included George Ticknor, Edward Everett, and two sons of John Quincy Adams. The date of their sailing, April 16, 1815, ought to be regarded, as I am afraid it is not, as one of the important dates in American literary history. In the years that followed, these Literary Pioneers<sup>1</sup> were succeeded by Joseph Green Cogswell,, George Bancroft, Henry Wadsworth, Longfellow, John Motley, James Russell Lowell, Francis Parkman, Emerson, Holmes, and a host of other less important figures. Leaving out of consideration the names of those pilgrims who will later play a more significant role in these pages, I should like to summarize briefly the ultimate consequences of the European studies and travels of some of the others.

1. George Ticknor, who spent in all three long and notable periods in Europe, returned from his first voyage to become Smith Professor of the French and Spanish Languages and Literatures and Professor of Belles Lettres at Harvard College. During the four years of his first pilgrimage he had visited and resided in all of the important

1. This is the title of a scholarly study of the Literary Pioneers, by Orin William Long, a monograph to which I owe much for the information contained in this section. Professor Long makes available for the first time letters and other documents which throw a revealing light on the discoveries of these "Pioneers" and of the effects which they exerted later on their American students.

countries of the Continent, had spent about two full years of intensive study at the University of Gottingen, and had met nearly all the famous statesmen, writers, and scholars of England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

As Professor Long says:

"He had enjoyed unusual contacts with the most cultivated society of Europe, had pursued his studies under the direction of some of the most renowned scholars, and had acquired a vast fund of learning, as well as a valuable library of several thousand volumes. He brought with him not only a practical command of several modern languages and a knowledge of all the important literatures but also an acquaintance with the educational methods of European universities."<sup>1</sup>

Ticknor remained in his Harvard Professorship from August 10, 1819 until May, 1835, when he knew that Longfellow was to return from Europe as his successor. In June of that year Ticknor again sailed for what was to be a three years sojourn abroad. During the first ten years of his Professorship he had devoted himself principally to the preparation for and writing of his three volume History of Spanish Literature. This was his most notable contribution to what we call today "productive scholarship", and it was also, as I shall note later, one of the most influential books of the period in turning the minds of New England scholars and writers to the glorious culture of Catholic Spain. Ticknor's third trip to Europe, begun in June, 1856 and of fifteen month's duration, was related to the second most

<sup>1</sup>. Long, Orie W., Literary Pioneers, p. 41.

important phase of his life work. This trip was made in the interests of the Boston Public Library, of which Ticknor was one of the founders (1852). This Library became one of the storehouses not only of priceless native lore but also, as a result of Ticknor's purchases abroad, a repository of much of the best European writing. Professor Long summarizes Ticknor's long and scholarly career as follows:

"Throughout the years Ticknor was one of the most influential figures in the social and intellectual life of Boston and of the country, for which his knowledge of literature and scholarship and his wide contacts had fitted him. He delivered public lectures, contributed articles to the magazines, continued until the close of his career an enormous correspondence with distinguished statesmen and men of letters, and when his death occurred in January, 1871, he had been honored by numerous societies and institutions at home and abroad." 1

2. The second of these scholarly pilgrims, Edward Everett, is really of less interest to us than Ticknor, because he made no especial contribution to the cultural emancipation of New England that is more than remotely related to the re-discovery of Catholicism. Originally a minister, Everett became after his first four-year sojourn in Europe successively Eliot Professor of Greek Literature at Harvard, interim an editor of the North American Review, Congressman from his native state, President of Harvard (1846-49), Governor of Massachusetts, and United States Senator. During a long and distinguished public career

1. Long, Orin W., Literary Pioneers, p. 62

(the "vulgar prize of politics," Emerson scornfully called it) Everett "never failed in his allegiance to scholarship and learning, for which unquestionably his studies abroad had given him the first inspiration." <sup>1</sup> Although Everett was a student of German, Italian, and French, his chief contribution to the learning of New England was in his Greek studies.

3. Joseph Green Cogswell, Ph.D. of Gottingen, is still less interesting to the readers of this thesis, for, although he did ultimately make important contributions to American cultural development as a teacher at Harvard and at the Round Hill School, as editor of the New York Review and as a librarian, none of his activities brought him very close to the Church. His name, however, deserves a place on our honor roll because of his pioneer work in sponsoring an internationally-minded private school and for his important part in founding and organizing the Astor Library. As Professor Long says, he was, among other things, "an important mediator between Europe and America." <sup>2</sup>

Bancroft, Motley, and Parkman, the historians, were notable also among these early pilgrims and scholars. Bancroft and Motley, like the three scholars described above, were all German university products, whose contacts with Catholicism were necessarily limited and often colored

1. Long, Orie W., Literary Pioneers, p. 76.

2. Op. cit., p. 107.



by a Prussian-Yankee bias, never wholly eradicated from their outlook, even when they had extended their travels. As I said in my Foreword, I feel no special competence to deal with these historians or their work, but I cannot forbear recording some of the impressions made upon Parkman by his contacts with Catholic Europe. Hence, I have decided to close this section of the thesis by quoting some of the remarks about Catholicism appearing in the correspondence and notebooks of the man who was one day to become the historian of the French explorations and Jesuit missionary activities of North America. Parkman, a graduate of Harvard and of its Law School, was an extensive traveller in his own country, visiting many of the sites of his books (e.g. The Oregon Trail) on foot, but he also made two trips in his early years to Europe: the first, 1843-44, was his Grand Tour, the second, 1858-59, was largely intended for his health. Later he made several visits, particularly to Paris and to Germany, in quest of historical materials and sometimes of his ever-failing health. His earliest observations of the Church in Europe are most interesting, because they are fresh and unspoiled by his preoccupation with documents, ill-health, and almost total blindness.

Recognizing that, if he were to write intelligently of Canadian history, he had to understand the Catholic Church as the central force in that history, he saw as

early as 1843 (he was then only twenty years old) that he "required clear impressions of monastic life, and of Roman Catholic ecclesiasticism in general." <sup>1</sup> His biographer, in trying to defend Parkman's "objectivity" and fairness as a historian, reveals perhaps his own bigotry quite as much as Parkman's when he writes:

"Born and bred a Unitarian, but early escaping from the broad limitations of even this belief, he was quite indifferent to sectarian distinction; or, rather, he was antagonistic to religions of all kinds in proportion to their exaltation of doctrine and ritual above practical morality and the growth of character. The Roman Catholic Church repelled him by her moral code, her temporal and ecclesiastical ambition, her superstitions (sic!) and supernaturalism, and her denial of freedom in mental growth..... His most fundamental traits were absolutely opposed to many of the aims and methods of the church, though his love of truth and fair play never allowed him to ignore what was admirable in the character or conduct of her followers." <sup>2</sup>

The gentleman doth protest too much! It is my own conclusion, after dipping into the correspondence and the journals, (the historical works themselves are, I repeat outside the province of this thesis) that young Parkman, who had little or no personal religion, never could quite see Catholicism objectively, partly because he was "repelled" by "her supernaturalism," and partly because, like so many observers of the Faith, he never could distinguish between

1. Parkman's own words quoted in Farnham, Charles Haight, A Life of Francis Parkman, p.147.
2. Op. cit., pp. 147-148.

essentials of doctrine and accidental devotions, colored in Europe as they often are by the Latin temperament. And yet for all his handicaps and for all his prejudices as a creedless Yankee, he could, with (to us) amazing inconsistency, make a banal and ignorant remark such as: "These ceremonies of Holy Week, about which so much is said, would not be worth seeing, were it not for the crowd of people they draw together;"<sup>1</sup> and, then again, speaking of the ceremonies he had witnessed at a Benedictine convent in Messina, he could say:

"They are mistaken who sneer at its (the Church's) ceremonies as a mere mechanical farce; they have a powerful and salutary effect on the mind. Those who have witnessed the services in the Benedictine church, and deny what I say, must either be singularly stupid and insensible by nature or rendered so by prejudice." 2

Parkman quite naturally came to admire the learning and scholarship of the Jesuits. Once, towards the end of his life, he tells of a vacation spent in a Passionist convent in Rome, when he was visited by the Jesuits and others who, claims his biographer, were trying to convert him. Dr. Farnham, who apparently had less courage than his friend Parkman, is all admiration for Parkman's courage in placing himself in such a "dangerous" position. But Parkman regarded his alleged danger with frankness and even

1. Parkman's own words quoted in Farnham, Charles Haight, A Life of Francis Parkman, p.151.
2. Op. cit., p. 149.

with humor and at the same time even praised the learning of his "captors."

"It is as startling to a 'son of Harvard' to see the astounding learning of these Jesuit Fathers, and the appalling readiness and rapidity with which they pour forth their interminable streams of argument, as it would be to a Yankee parson to witness his whole congregation, with church, pulpit and all, shut up within one of the great columns which support the dome of St. Peter's-----a thing which might assuredly be done." 1

One more impression of Parkman's strangely conflicting attitudes to the Church is worth recording. It, characteristically, one based on his 1843-44 visit to Rome:

"I have now been three or four weeks in Rome--- have been presented to His Holiness the Pope, have visited churches, convents, cemeteries, catacombs, common sewers, including the Cloaca Maxima, and ten thousand works of art. This will I say of Rome,-----that a place on every account more interesting and which has a more vivifying and quickening influence on the faculties, could not be found on the face of the earth, ----or at least I should not wish to go to it if it could." 2

### 3. The Religious Setting

In the previous chapter I have described at length the gradual but profound changes that took place during the eighteenth century. In so doing I had occasion

1. Parkman's own words quoted in Farnham, Charles Haight, A Life of Francis Parkman, p. 152.
2. Op. cit., p. 192.

several times to refer to the "new" religion which, in the process of change, had come to dominate the religious picture in the Boston area. This "new" religion, Unitarianism, I suggested, was a kind of compromise between the Congregationalism of old and the deism of the Age of Reason. I have reserved for this chapter an account of the origins of Unitarianism, because by the time the nineteenth century began, its position was, in Boston at least, analogous to the position of the Puritans of earlier days in influence, if not in power. The heterodoxies of old had become the orthodoxy of the Boston Federalists, and it was partly in reaction to this new orthodoxy that much of the important writing of the Renaissance came into being. It is also worth mentioning that all of the writers treated in this ~~thesis~~ at one time or other believed more or less firmly in the Unitarian creed.

For nearly twenty years before the beginning of the nineteenth century theological liberalism had found its way into the New England pulpits, particularly in and around Boston. Oddly enough the liberalism which came to be called Unitarian had its origins in King's Chapel, an Anglican church, which decided, under the leadership of its rector, Dr. Freeman, to revise the Anglican Prayer Book. The new liturgy, published in 1785, insisted on the divine unity of God and on the "loving inspiration of God's word." Such insistence is hardly more than a euphemism for denying

the divinity of Our Lord, whom the King's Chapel communicants hastened to describe, in the words of Barrett Wendell, as "an excellent earthly manifestation of God's creative power."<sup>1</sup> Men needed Christ, Wendell adds, "not as a redeemer, but as an example."<sup>2</sup> The reader, literate in theological history, recognizes that Freeman's "divine unity of God," the only significant rallying-cry in the creedlessness of Unitarianism, is nothing more or less than the restatement of a heresy almost as old as the Church, one which had reared its head many times before. In England Presbyterianism had long since capitulated to a British version of Unitarianism, but historians are not inclined to regard the King's Chapel brand as an importation.

Whether imported as such or not, as we have already noted, liberalism had so far advanced in the Boston area by the turn of the century that even the First Church of the city, John Cotton's former "charge," had succumbed to the "new" doctrine. By 1805 Harvard, once the proud citadel of Calvinism, was ready to yield, as it did in the appointment of the Reverend Henry Ware, an avowed Unitarian, to the Hollis Professorship of Divinity. This change at Harvard did not occur without a struggle or without repercussions. The most notable of the repercussions resulted in the founding of the Andover Theological Seminary,<sup>3</sup> which took up

1. Wendell, Barrett, A Literary History of America, p. 281.

2. Loc. cit.

3. Andover was founded in 1808.

the cause of Edwarden Theology when Harvard became Unitarian, and stuck to its Calvinistic guns until well into the end of the nineteenth century.

What was, then, this Unitarianism which Boston and Harvard had taken to their bosoms? As I have said, its basic tenet was a denial of Christ's divinity, but that had already been one of the favorite "dogmas" of the eighteenth century deists. Some modern commentators argue that "Unitarianism is only romantic philosophy in a strange garb."<sup>1</sup> This argument seems to me to tell less than half of the story. Unitarianism did happen, and by no mere chronological coincidence, to jibe with such romantic doctrines as faith in the goodness of man, belief in the possibility of progress, and emphasis on the individuality of man. But these liberal and anti-Calvinistic doctrines had already been prescribed by the Arminian clergymen of the mid-eighteenth century such as Jonathan Mayhew and Lemuel Briant. And many deists, both European and native, had also promulgated similar humanitarian doctrines. After all, what we call Romanticism at least on its religious and political levels, was really an outgrowth of the very Age of Enlightenment so strongly condemned by the "literary" Romantics. Even if we cannot prove now that Thomas Paine and Ethan Allen were the sources of the Unitarianism of its great apostle, William Ellery Channing, it is certainly clear that religious liberalism in England knew a direct

1. Blankenship, Russell, American Literature, p. 281.

line of descent from the early English deists through William Godwin to the arch-Romantic Shelley. As Professors Anderson and Fisch point out: "Through such men as William Ellery Channing and Theodore Parker many deistic tenets passed over into American Unitarianism."<sup>1</sup> And again: "The Age of Reason had not been popular in New England and had never dominated the New England scene. Instead, its concepts slowly penetrated the New England mind...."<sup>2</sup>

My contention is this: New England Unitarianism was the resultant of three forces. The first of these was deism. The second was the various kinds of heresy (Arminianism, Socinianism, and Arianism) nurtured in the bosoms of certain liberal ministers, who never formally left the church. The third was the survival of the same "reverences" for the Scriptures (with important differences) once held by the Puritan fathers. The first of these forces I have already explained; the second has also been hinted at repeatedly throughout these pages. The third may come as a surprise, but, once the differences mentioned above are understood, the element of surprise disappears. No one has ever described the Unitarian "reverence" for the Scriptures any better than Barrett Wendell:

"They (the Unitarians) revered the Scriptures as profoundly as ever Calvinists did. The

1. Anderson, Paul Russell and Fisch, Max Harold, Philosophy in America, p. 138.

2. Op. Cit., p. 323.



difference was that they discerned in Scripture no such teaching as the experience of old-world centuries had crystalized into Calvinistic dogma. In the first place, they found in the Bible no passages which necessarily involved the dogmas of the Trinity. There might be puzzling sentences; but there was also clear, constant statement that there is one God, who made man to His image..... If we are truly made in the image of God, we shall thus reach true conclusions; and meanwhile to guide our way, God has made that most excellent of His creatures, Jesus Christ, and has authentically recorded his career in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Search these yourself; use the light of the Scriptures; remember the example of Christ; and all will be well. If there be any such thing as damnation, it can result only from lack of self-searching, from deliberate neglect of scriptural light, or, from wilful disregard of Christ's example."<sup>1</sup>

I have deliberately quoted Wendell at length not only because he describes so well the Unitarian "reverence" for the Scriptures but also because my underscoring of some of his phrases gives us a kind of summary of the essence of Unitarian belief. Surely Protestantism could go no farther. No, indeed, there is no need to seek an explanation of Unitarianism in the Romantic spirit which was about to dawn in America. The roots of the "new" Boston religion were as old as heresy itself and nothing more or less than the absurdly logical result of the principles of the Reformation. Unquestionably the minds of Boston ministers and laymen alike were ready to drink in the noxious teachings of men like Rousseau, whose "democratic" philosophy these good Boston Federalists still regarded as the work of his Satanic majesty. The irony of this situation is a

1. Wendell, Barrett, A Literary History of America, p. 283.

excellent example of one of those paradoxes of history and of human nature which brings to light the Dr. Jekyll-and-Mr. Hyde nature of homo sapiens. Professor Parrington, quite evidently a thoroughly "modern mind" as well as a good Jeffersonian democrat, shows his own appreciation of the situation when he writes:

"The heretical doctrines of the excellence of human nature and the perfectibility of man were preached to Federalist congregations so persuasively that instead of repudiating them and asserting the total depravity of their neighbors, simple-minded merchants approved the doctrines and cheerfully paid their pew-rent. It was a respectable and bloodless revolution. Under its discreet disguise Unitarianism accomplished for New England what Jeffersonianism had accomplished for the South and West---the wide dissemination of French liberalism." <sup>1</sup>

It is equally ironical that the "enlightened" minds among the Unitarian ministers such as Channing were preaching the new gospel to congregations of politicians and merchants who would have been quick to repudiate the social implications of Christ's life and teaching. If the Unitarian break with the Calvinist past was as Parrington claims, "fundamentally ethical rather than theological," <sup>2</sup> the Yankee Federalists, who heard these preachers, must have been so captivated by the progressive, not to say aggressive, implications of the "theology" of a naturally regenerate man that they did not have time to

1. Parrington, Vernon L., The Romantic Revolution in America, p. 322.

2. Op. cit., p. 326.

note that the Christ of the Gospels, even when robbed of His divinity had little use for the friends of the Mammon of iniquity. To do Channing justice, he did recognize that Unitarianism needed to extend its social sympathies for Christ's sake as well as man's. He himself was a good man, and consistently tolerant of the beliefs of others. On the death of Bishop Cheverus he said: "Who among our religious teachers would solicit a comparison between himself and the devoted Cheverus?...How can we shut our hearts against this proof of the Catholic religion to form great and good men?"<sup>1</sup> Evidence of the esteem in which his Catholic contemporaries in Boston held Channing is found in the order of Bishop Fenwick to have all the Catholic church bells tolled at the death of the man sometimes called "the Unitarian Pope." As he grew older, in fact towards the end of his life, Channing became restive under the smug orthodoxy of his co-religionists and leaned more and more to the transcendental viewpoint. He tended to emphasize the supreme authority of the individual conscience and also to develop a conception of the Deity which was exceedingly "personal" in the sense that he regarded the Human soul itself as the "spring of our knowledge of God." Wendell commenting somewhat condescendingly on Channing's fear lest Unitarianism remain stationary says:

1. Quoted in Maynard, Theodore, The Story of American Catholicism, p. 212.

"The good man need not have troubled himself about that. Almost in his own time, on the one hand, the progress of personal freedom led to something like rejection of Christianity; on the other hand, it reacted into the acceptance of the oldest Christian traditions. Typical examples of these tendencies may be found in the careers of Mr. George Ripley and his wife. Beginning in full sympathy, as ardent Unitarians, they so parted in faith that Mrs. Ripley died in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, while Mr. Ripley, who long survived her, became a devout freethinker." <sup>2</sup>

However "free" the religious creed of the Unitarians, their social thinking was as conservative as was their Federalism in politics. Their church became, as I have said above, so limited in its social sympathies that its ethics could hardly be looked upon as even remotely Christian. Orthodox Unitarians had their pet philanthropies, but these were not motivated even by broad humanitarian sympathies, to say nothing of supernatural ideals. Their churches became "respectable" clubs to which He who ate with sinners and preached to the poor would not have been admitted. The current phrase had it that "one who was born in Boston had no need to be born again." (I regret to say that the Unitarians had come to think of Boston as their city.) Their arrogance, unlike that of the Puritans, was of a cold and secular kind. The wheel had come full circle----I mean the wheel of Puritan intolerance.

Out of this cold ice-house of Unitarianism, as Emerson called it, was to blossom the more vital tree of

---

2. Wendell, Barrett, A Literary History of America, p. 286-287.

the Transcendentalists and Utopian reformers of Brook Farm. The "negative individualism," (Parrington's phrase) of Unitarianism was ultimately to be blended with the intuitional and humanitarian spirit of the Renaissance. That blending is to be the subject of the next chapter.

#### 4. Winds from the East.

Even before literary pilgrims and young Boston scholars returned to our shores with their rich burdens of Old World culture, the newness of the Romantic Revival was finding its way to New England shores almost literally on the very wings of Atlantic winds. This is of course only another way of saying that the breath of the Romantic spirit was in the air! Ideas in the winds and in the air, of course, cannot as yet, even in our overly-scientific age, be traced or measured with proper scholarly exactitude. Ideas brought over in books and periodicals can be traced, though the full measure of their influence will always defy the most scrupulous kind of researchings.

Now the most bitterly hostile critic of the early Puritan cannot deny that they did pass on to their descendants a love of books and learning. It was in the very nature of the Puritan creed that they should worship the printed word-----at least as that word appeared in the pages of the Infallible Book. We have just seen that even when their eighteenth and early nineteenth century

heirs abandoned nearly all the principal religious doctrines of their grandfathers, they still were deeply "reverential" to the Word of God. As we have seen in the first chapter, the Puritan reverence for the Scriptures did not mean that other books were forbidden, either the words of pagan Greece and Rome or the commentaries and treatise of theologians as different from the Puritans as Aquinas and Bellarmine. It was Protestantism's good fortune (and its ill-fortune, too!) that it should have appeared on the scene almost simultaneously with the invention of printing. And of all the heretical groups none put such a premium on literacy as the Calvinistic group and its subdivisions. As the descendants of the early New England Puritans moved farther and farther away from Calvinism, they retained not only a reverence of a kind for the Book of books but also an increasingly passionate devotion to books of any sort. Although reliable statistics can probably never be available on the subject, there seems to be every reason to believe that by the end of the eighteenth century the libraries, public and private, in New England held many, many hundreds of books. Doubtless even then the great majority were theological. Professor Morison,<sup>1</sup> speaking only of the libraries of the previous century, suggests that time and our renewed interest in cultural history may uncover a great

I. Morison, Samuel E., The Puritan Presence, Chapter VI.

many surprises in regard to the quality and number of secular books owned and avidly conned by New Englanders long before the dawn of the Renaissance. Many of their books must have been not merely worldly but even heretical in character. Some of the latter may have been kept for purposes of refutation as in the controversies with the deists. Once however the theocrats lost control of doctrine and sincere believers manifested a tendency to relax the rigidity of their creed, the heretical books often received, as heretical books have a way of doing, much more attention than they deserved. (All this testifies, if somewhat reluctantly, to the wisdom of the Catholic Index of Prohibited Books.) And then several devils were abroad in the land, and they found their way into ministerial studies to distract attention from the Scriptures or from meditation on the Wonders of the World Invisible.

It was very natural that the New Englanders, particularly the Boston ministers, should have been the intellectual leaders, who eagerly devoured the new ideas contained on almost every book-shelf. As we shall see, when we come to study Transcendentalism, it is no exaggeration to say the ordination to the Unitarian ministry was almost a prerequisite to membership in the cult and always a badge of intellectual distinction. But Boston laymen, particularly the graduates of Harvard who had elected to follow the law or politics, were also forming intellectual

fraternities of their own, comparatively free from clerical domination. One of these was the Anthology Club (c. 1804-11) which set out to conduct a literary and scholarly review (and succeeded in founding the old North American) but wound up by laying the foundations of the famous Boston Athenaeum Library. By 1845 this Library was large and important enough to have a building of its own.

What were these young men reading? Obviously the books and principal periodicals of England (this was the era that gave birth to the great British Quarterlies and reviews) were first on the list. The young intellectuals of the Anthology Club, however, were ambitious and cosmopolitan. Even the Mother Country, emerging from the insularity of the eighteenth century, was turning to the Continent for literary and philosophical inspiration. Writers as different as Scott and Coleridge were translating and adapting to their own ends the literature of German Romanticism and of idealism. The celebrated Madame de Stael, who owned land on Lake Ontario, was succeeding just then in introducing her own countrymen to the literature of Germany. Of course Ticknor and Everett and the rest of the Club had read her De l'Allemagne (1813), and so it was that the famous daughter of Necker rather than Coleridge or Scott impelled Ticknor to learn German. It is not true, as Dr. Samuel Lee Wolff declares in the Cambridge History of American Literature, that "German scholarship



did not come to these shores until after Americans had gone abroad to get it." <sup>1</sup> Intellectual relations between America and Germany "were by no means non-existent even in the seventeenth century." Professor Harold S. Jantz has shown conclusively that the lack of German books and of knowledge of the German language in New England has been greatly exaggerated.<sup>2</sup> Professor Jantz's investigations and the more recent studies of Prof. Rene Wellek of the University of Iowa concur in pointing out that "the role of the American students who returned from Germany has been.....greatly overrated."<sup>3</sup>

With the dawn of the Renaissance, however, New Englanders as scholarly as the young men who went to Gottingen and as "radical" as the Unitarians who turned German idealism into Yankee Transcendentalism began to read German literature and philosophy as voraciously as the Italian humanists read the classics of ancient Greece. As Professor Parrington says:

"Germany meant much to the awakening mind of New England, by reason of its spiritual and intellectual kinship. Plato was their common father, a transcendental mysticism their common experience. Philosophical idealism with its indwelling Godhead that exalted man into

1. Vol. III, p. 451 (Reprinted edition).
2. Jantz, Harold S. "German Thought and Literature in New England, 1620-1820," Journal of English and Germanic Philosophy, Vol. XLI (1942), 1-45.
3. Wellek, Rene, "The Minor Transcendentalists and German Philosophy," The New England Quarterly, Vol. XV, 4 (December, 1942) p. 655.

the dwelling place of divine love-----this was a dynamic faith, more seductive to the children of Puritanism than any political or economic romanticism. It opened to them new heavens when the old were closed and encouraged them to go forth on great ventures." 1

Quite obviously Parrington is speaking especially of those minds of the New England Renaissance which went the ways of Transcendentalism. He might well have been speaking of all the young New Englanders of the time---of Longfellow, who was bored by the philosophizings of former Unitarian divines as well as of Emerson to whom idealism was the breath of life. The readings both in the Anthology Club and all that it stood for as well as in the studies of disaffected Unitarians were extensive and deep in the pages of Kent and Schleiermacher, Goethe and Schiller. No German romanticist was too sentimental, no German idealist too obscure, but he had his readers and imitators in Boston and Cambridge and Concord. A complete list of the German writers and philosophers who found ready audiences in New England during the high tide of the Renaissance would really be a catalogue, startling in its fullness, of Germany's own Golden Day.

It is easy to exaggerate the Teutonic influence on New England's Renaissance. France, too, had a shaping hand in turning Yankee minds to dreaming of social Utopias such as they realized somewhat tragically at Brook Farm and Fruitlands (Alcott's ill-starred experiment). As Parrington

1. Parrington, Vernon L., The Romantic Revolution in America,  
p. 318.

points out,<sup>1</sup> the notorious Jean Jacques was known in, New England before Hegel, and the rationalism of the "philosophes" had already played its role in creating Unitarianism. I have mentioned that it was Madame de Stael who first oriented George Ticknor, and his friends to German romanticism. Even the Transcendentalists, with their penchant for German idealism, owed a considerable debt to contemporary French philosophers such as Cousin, Constant, and Jouffroy. Nor should we forget that New Englanders of the Renaissance turned time and again for their reading to the pages of the English Romantics. The influence of Coleridge and later of Carlyle on the encouragement of German studies was great, even if not first in order or paramount. Coleridge's Aids to Reflection, edited and published in 1829 by President James Marsh of the University of Vermont, a belated Cambridge Platonist, was to become one of the seminal books of American Transcendental thinking.<sup>2</sup> Carlyle's influence on Emerson, and Emerson's on Carlyle constitutes one of the best known chapters in cultural international relations between America and the Mother Country. Francis Parkman, the famous historian, took Edmund Burke as the chief model for his style; nevertheless Professor Bliss Perry points to Parkman's early immersion in the Romantic literature both of France and of

---

1. Loc. cit.

2. See Lindsay, Julian I., "Coleridge and the University of Vermont," Vermont Alumni Weekly, Vo. XV, Nos 13 and 14, January 29 and February 5, 1936.

England---Byron, Scott, Chateaubriand. The story has often been told that when "Quincy Shaw offered Parkman his choice of three books to read in Fort Laramie in 1846---the Old Testament, Shakespeare and Byron---Parkman chose what he said was the 'worst of the three.'" Furthermore, it is known that Childe Harold was the last book he read before his death." <sup>1</sup>

The biography of any writer treated in this thesis or indeed of any of the minor writers of the period will reveal that all of them read omnivorously, with of course special preference for the Romantic "radicals" and the Romantic sentimentalists of Europe who were nearest them in time. The classics of ancient Greece and Rome were by no means forgotten nor the classic works of philosophy and theology of earlier days. Nor were the best works of any time or country neglected. Theodore Parker, one of the most gluttonous readers of the time, read so widely and indiscriminately that it is hard for us less ambitious mortals to see how he had time for his own writing to say nothing of his duties as a minister. Language, history, theology, poetry, drama, philosophy---the name of his studies is legion, and his library knew no linguistic barriers. Professor Henry Steele Commager describes both Parker's library and his attitude toward his books in the following passage:

---

1. Schramm, Wilbur L. (ed.), Francis Parkman, p. XXXIX.

"There was everything here, standard works and obscure volumes, sets and monographs, fiction and poetry, sermons and tracts, and the serried volumes of the learned societies, but they all had their place, they all earned their keep. This library was no vanity, no showroom; he had no hankering for first editions, no money for fine buildings. It was the library of a worker, not of an antiquarian or a bibliophile. It filled his needs, it revealed his hopes and confessed his fancies, it told the biography of his mind." <sup>1</sup>

Not all the writers were so omnivorous as this "Intellectual Gourmand;" some of them, like Emerson, affected to despise bibliomania in all its forms. It has been said that Emerson never read a book through and he and you Thoreau, good Romantics that they were, had a more than Wordsworthian respect for the great Book of Nature. And yet both Emerson and Thoreau were readers of no uncommon sort----but of a sort well represented in New England's Renaissance. In his Journal for October, 1842, Emerson writes as if he were cataloguing the Homeric ships:

"Thou shalt read Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, Proclus, Plotinus, Janblichus, Porphyry, Aristotle, Virgil, Plutarch, Apuleius, Chaucer, Dante, Rabelais, Montaigne, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Johnson, Ford, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher, Bacon, Marvell, More, Milton, Moliere, Swedenborg, Goethe." <sup>2</sup>

Here indeed is God's plenty! Young Henry Thoreau had most certainly taken Emerson's injunction to heart, and he and Waldo had also drunk deeply both in the wells of German idealism and in the strange Oriental books which found their way into the libraries of Concord.

<sup>1</sup>. Commager, Henry Steele, Theodore Parker, Yankee Crusader, p. 124  
<sup>2</sup>. Quoted in Carpenter, Frederic I. (ed.), Emerson, p. XVI.

I could go on almost endlessly cataloguing the libraries and the readings of Longfellow, Hawthorne, Holmes, and Lowell, but it is hardly necessary to do so here. As the chapters on these writers unfold, it will become apparent very quickly that even the least scholarly of them, Hawthorne, had not spent his years in vain in the solitude of his House at Salem. Lowell, although a professor of European languages, had read nearly everything worth reading in English and American literature as his criticism testifies most abundantly. Longfellow almost lost his creative talents, so zealous was he in "peering into, absorbing, translating" the literatures of nearly every country of Europe. Holmes, learned both in science and theology, displays a wide and almost pedantic knowledge of all literatures in his famous Breakfast Table series. In short, all the men who made the literature of New England's Renaissance were themselves scholars in the best and truest sense of the term.

There can be little doubt that books beget books, given of course creative minds who are truly aware that literature is nothing unless it has human significance. The surprising thing about New England's Renaissance is that the creativeness of its best minds was not seriously impaired by the mere business of reading and acquiring knowledge. Lowell, it is true, did not let enough light into his famous study windows----even some of his most ambitious poems smell too strongly of the lamp. Fortunately all these writers,

whatever the limitations of their genius, were preserved from the curse of so much modern literary scholarship---- a quasi-scientific pedantry that knows little either of real literature or real life. The "Winds from the East" really inspirited them, blowing away both the dust of their libraries and the musty, and provincial odor of years of New England smugness.

While it is true that only a very small fraction of the reading done by these New England writers can be called Catholic, that small fraction proved to be disproportionately vital. All of it was certainly catholic in the sense of being universal in its scope, but this breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, to borrow Wordsworth's famous phrase, helped to make some of these New Englanders much more tolerant as well as much more receptive. As we shall see later, the influence of Dante alone was worth several trips to Europe in bringing New Englanders to see the "Scarlet Woman" of their ancestors in a more favorable light. We should not underestimate the inspiration of Cary's famous translation of the Divine Comedy; nor should we forget the influence of Ticknor's studies in Spanish literature and their consequent effects on Longfellow and Lowell. As Mr. Walter Gavigan says of Ticknor:

"In writing his famous History of Spanish Literature, Ticknor discovered what Longfellow was to discover shortly afterwards, namely that it was impossible to dissociate

the cultural history of France, Spain, and Italy from the religion in which these countries had been nurtured." 1

On the whole then, in spite of the wide dissemination given to some of the craziest and most extravagant heresies of Romanticism, the "Winds from the East" played a very significant role in bringing New Englanders as different as Brownson and Hawthorne, George Ripley and Holmes to see the Catholic Tradition in a more favorable light. To Brownson, Father Fecker, and Mrs. Ripley this light, as we shall note later, was eclipsed by the discovery of the Light of Faith; to all of the others, it remained merely a light but one which added a glory all its own to the illumination of New England's Golden Day.

5. Action and Reaction:  
The Social Setting

I have already said that New England at the beginning of the nineteenth century seemed to be a most unpromising kind of soil in which to plant the Romantic seeds of the Renaissance, but I have also reminded my reader that one of the principal traits of Romanticism was its opposition to the established order. Hence, it is not surprising to find some of the strongest opponents of things-as-they-were among the Romantic rebels. They were

1. Gavigan, Walter V. "Longfellow and Catholicism," The Catholic World, Vol. CXXXVIII, pp.42-50 (October, 1933.)



prepared even to bite the hand that was feeding them, as well as to attack the smug respectability of Protestant orthodoxy. As so often happens, some of the active opponents of the rule of State Street (the financial center of Boston) came themselves from the upper middle class or from among the relatively respectable malcontents in the church. But the New England apostles of the new day for the common man were an altogether miscellaneous lot of zealots.

Among the social dissenters at the outbreak of the Renaissance there were two distinct groups, both of them springing from religious or quasi-religious sources. The members of the better known group almost all found their ultimate way to Brook Farm. The other group was extremely miscellaneous, but they are often lumped together as Perfectionists, taking their name from a small monthly periodical, published and edited by the notorious young Vermont "mystic," John Humphrey Noyes. Any extensive description of the Perfectionists is really outside the scope of this thesis, for although they represent most extreme opposition to the status quo, they are in no sense a by-product of Transcendentalism or European idealism. None of them was even remotely related to the Catholic tradition; they sprang, rather, from a kind of millennial Protestantism with dreams of returning to primitive Christianity. They held two famous conventions----a Peace Convention in 1838 and a

still more famous gathering, the Charndon Street Convention, two years later. Emerson, in spite of his taste for novel-  
ties of all kinds, has given us a most amusing description  
of the motley crowd of Perfectionists, who gathered at  
Charndon Street:

"Madmen, madwomen, men with beards, Dunkers,  
Mugletonians, Come outers, Groaners, Agra-  
rians, Seventh-Day Baptists, Quakers, Aboli-  
tionists, Calvinists, Unitarians, and Philo-  
sophers,----all came successively to the top,  
and seized their moment, if not their hour,  
wherein to chide, or pray, or preach, or pro-  
test." <sup>1</sup>

This Perfectionist movement did draw to its skirts a few  
really notable reformers like William Lloyd Garrison, most  
justly famous apostle of Abolition, but, on the whole, the  
followers of Noyes represented hardly more than the fringe  
of lunatic discontent. And yet, as Parrington puts it,  
this revival of religious Utopianism "was a breaking through  
of the submerged New England spirituality, a volcanic  
release from sterile conformity; and it summoned the awaken-  
ing soul to go forth and conquer the world for righteous-  
ness." <sup>2</sup>

A much better known and more truly "respectable"  
example of social and economic discontent may be found among  
the followers of America's most justly renowned experiment  
in group-living, the Brook Farm movement. In the next chap-

---

1. Emerson, Edward, The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson,  
Vol. X, p. 374.

2. Parrington, Vernon L., The Romantic Revolution in Ameri-  
ca, pp. 345-346.

ter I shall deal specifically with the Catholic by-products of Brook Farm, but it is important for us to see the Farmers and their "communistic" Utopia for what it was: perhaps the most concrete expression of the spirit of Romantic discontent with the established order ever made by the New England "intellectuals." Among all the "communistic" experiments initiated here in America during the first half of the nineteenth century----and there were dozens of them----few were native in origin and still fewer dared to raise their heads in conservative New England. John Humphrey Noyes, after the collapse of his millennial activities, went out to Oneida, N.Y., to found his scandalous free-love community. Foreigners, like Robert Dale Owen, had tried to build a city of "Nowhere" out in New Harmony, Indiana, and several German groups, looking for freeland, had tried their hand at the game.<sup>1</sup> Brook Farm was a purely native product----a-dyed-in-the-wool Yankee experiment. It was, moreover, conceived in the minds of some of New England's most brilliant men. Even Emerson, who was properly suspicious of all social panaceas and too much of an individualist to enter into any form of community living, sat in on some of the planning. Indeed nearly all the founders of the Colony were Transcendentalists and contributors to the Dial, official organ of Transcendentalism,

I. A good popular account of America's many experiments in "communistic" living is given in Calverton, V. F., Where Angels Dared to Tread (1941)----a book unfortunately spoiled by the belligerently left-wing bias of Dr. Calverton.

edited at intervals by both Emerson and Thoreau.

Neither Emerson nor Thoreau was in that company of men and women, who, in 1841, bought a farm ten or twelve miles outside of Boston and set up what was supposed to have been an "ideal community." This community did bring together a roster of able and zealous members, including Mr. and Mrs. George Ripley, Charles Anderson, Dana, John Sulligan Dwight, Margaret Fuller, and a score of other equally distinguished men and women. Temporary residents and frequent guests included Hawthorne, Brownson, Issac Hecker, and Emerson----who refused consistently to remain overnight! But for all its literary and Transcendental respectability, this community at West Roxbury was the answer to (yes, the challenge) the growing industrialism of New England. Whereas "fellowship founded on common ownership and communal labor was an ideal that left the religious mystic (like the Perfectionist) cold,"<sup>2</sup> the growing sense of economic maladjustment seemed of first importance to the men of Brook Farm. The cotton mills at Lawrence, the Merrimac Mills at Lowell, and the exploitation of Irish immigrant labor brought new wealth to the homes on Beacon street, but the intelligentsia such as Channing, Parker, and George Ripley were quick to recognize the need of "mutualism" or "cooperation" to offset the already incipient evils of industrial competition. The more ardent

---

2. Parrington, Vernon L. The Romantic Revolution in America, p. 347.

Transcendentalists such as Emerson, as I have said, would have little or nothing to do with a plan so evidently collectivistic in scope. The extreme left-wing of Transcendentalism was instinctively hostile to any form of socialism. Hence, the plans for Brook Farm ultimately resulted in a kind of via media between communistic regimentation and "rugged individualism." All the Transcendentalists heartily approved of the agrarian part of the Brook Farm program, but the Phalanx idea of Fourier, with its corollary assignment of definite tasks to each member, was not at all to the liking of the members of the left-wing.

When Brook Farm, after going through a series of ups and downs, ultimately collapsed, the individualists felt, perhaps with some twinges of conscience, that they were right all along. Utopia could not be built even in the Golden Day at West Roxbury or elsewhere. Art and Agriculture refused to mix. Even before the doors of the Farm were finally closed forever, the dream of a self-sustaining Aracadia for New England's "best and happiest" minds was pretty thoroughly destroyed. Parrington offers one good explanation of Brook Farm's failure. "The transcendentalist with his Puritan conscience could understand and sympathize with the perfectionist zeal for universal righteousness; but collectivistic systems of economy seemed alien and a community of goods uncongenial to his Yankee individual-

ism." <sup>1</sup>

The ways of Providence are strange, and there are few well-intentioned failures without their compensations. In the next chapter we shall see that Brook Farm, for all its futility, helped to sow the seeds of conversion to Catholicism of some of its members. These members---- Hecker, Brownson, and Mrs. Ripley----set out to find a man-made refuge against the evils of economic competition and wound up in communion with Christ's Mystical Body.

#### 6. New England Catholicism and the Renaissance

Before we leave the Stage finally set for the Renaissance, a few words should be said about the position of that Institution which was to loom so large in the literature of the period. While the Church was still, relatively speaking, in its infancy in New England, the signs of its almost phenomenal growth were already on the horizon. While statistics are notoriously untrustworthy in measuring spiritual growth or even in determining the exact membership of any church, it is interesting to note that between 1808, when there were only seven hundred Catholics in Boston, and 1820 the Church grew large enough to claim over two thousand souls. <sup>2</sup> Before the mid-century the Catholics

1. Parrington, Vernon L., The Romantic Revolution in America, pp. 349-350.

2. Channing, Edward, History of the United States, Vol. X, p. 214.

in Boston must have more than doubled the 1820 figure, <sup>1</sup> because of the tremendous influx of Irish immigrant refugees from famine and persecution. The Church was in excellent hands in Boston. Even such non-Catholic historians as Channing admit this.

"In Massachusetts, the Catholics rejoice in the presence of two remarkable men, Francis A. Matignon and John Lefebvre Cheverus. Like so many of the Roman Catholic priests of that time in America, they were Frenchmen born and were men of culture. <sup>2</sup>

After the departure for his native land of Bishop Cheverus, destined for the See of Montauban, he was succeeded by a native born Marylander, Bishop Benedict J. Fenwick, who in turn was succeeded by his Coadjutor, Bishop John Bernard Fitzpatrick. Although Fitzpatrick's parents were Irish immigrants, he himself was a native of Boston.

Unfortunately we cannot take the time here to pay tribute to the memory of these brave and resourceful bishops and their devoted assistants among the clergy, regular and secular. Their trials and triumphs are written in the Book of Life. Their Church in New England was pretty largely the Church of the disinherited. In spite of some notable conversions among the old New England families and rapid numerical growth, the Catholics living in the environs of New England's Renaissance could do little or nothing to

1. There were, according to the Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol.II, p.706, 53,000 in the entire state of Massachusetts in 1845.  
2. Channing, Edward, History of the United States, Vol.V, p.214.

bring the culture of their great religious tradition to the attention of State Street merchants or of Transcendentalists. It is true that Boston did not escape the waves of anti-Catholic bigotry which swept the country until the outbreak of the Civil War. None of Boston's "intellectuals," be it said to their eternal credit, took active part in any of these no-p~~o~~pery movements. Not that they were by any means immune to religious prejudices----it happened that they were too deeply concerned with other things. They left the exploitation of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sentiments to the politicians and the more unenlightened among the clergy. Some of the latter were undoubtedly men of influence and were certainly not mere backwoodsmen, but I find no evidence in Professor Billington's well-documented study of the Protestant Crusade to implicate any of the leading subjects of this thesis.

-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-



## C H A P T E R    I V

### THE ETERNAL VERITIES:

#### TRANSCENDENTAL AND CATHOLIC.

##### 1. Transcendentalism: A Catholic Viewpoint.

Thus far I have been using the terms, Transcendentalism and Transcendentalist, very freely, without attempting to define or explain their meaning. Even now I am not so sure that my definitions and explanations are going to be very precise or clear, because there still seems to be nothing like unanimity among scholars as to the nature and origins of a "movement" so vague in its manifestations and tendencies. It is safe to say that the Transcendentalists themselves, despite certain fundamental attitudes of mind which prevailed among them, were as baffled as I am when they tried either to define their terms or to explain the origins of their "movement". Perhaps the only common denominator of their thinking can be found in "certain fundamental attitudes of mind" and, as I have shown in the previous chapter in reference to Brook Farm, these were not universally harmonious. For one thing, Transcendentalism had both its practical and its theoretical sides. The best known historian of the movement writes:

"Practically (it) was an assertion of the inalienable worth of man; theoretically it was an assertion of the immanence of divinity in instinct, the transference of supernatural attributes to the natural constitution of mankind." <sup>1</sup>

Obviously this definition leaves much to be desired. Unfortunately the very names, Transcendentalism and Transcendentalist, tend now, as they did in the days of the Renaissance, to suggest a close alliance with German metaphysics, with the consequent implication that Transcendentalism was a philosophy of life based on the acceptance of eternal and ultimate verities.

It is clear at once, nevertheless, to any tyro in philosophy that whatever Transcendentalism was, it was not a philosophy of life. Unquestionably the contact of the New England mind with the "metaphysic of Kant, the mysticism of Jacobi, the idealistic egotism of Fichte, the transcendentalism of Schleiermacher" <sup>2</sup> played a tremendous but incalculable part in shaping the direction of Transcendentalism. Doubtless too, there had always been an incipient Platonism in the minds of all the New England rebels, from the days of Roger Williams down to the days of Channing, and this Platonism was a congenial soil in which the "transcendental" ideas could take root. But by no

1. Frothingham, Octavius B., Transcendentalism in New England, (See Chap. VI.)

2. Parrington, Vernon L., The Romantic Revolution in America, p. 382.

juggling of terms and their meanings can Transcendentalism itself be called a philosophy. It was neither a rational nor a consistent explanation of "first causes," although it did touch upon the perennial and eternal problems of the philosopher----the nature of God, man's place in the universe, the problem of knowledge, and the nature of truth, beauty, and goodness. The very approach of the Transcendentalist to these ultimate realities was intuitional and "mystical" rather than rational, and consistency was certainly not one of its virtues. Emerson's famous remarks in his essay on "Self-Reliance" are perhaps extreme, and its modern readers usually fail to note the qualifying word, "foolish," but here is what the greatest Transcendentalist of them all thought of consistency:

"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do." <sup>1</sup>

Such egotistic self-assurance (I am purposely tautological) is not of the stuff from which philosophers are made.

Nor was Transcendentalism a religion----at least not a supernatural religion. "Transcendentalism concerned itself almost wholly with day by day living as an end in itself." <sup>2</sup> The Transcendentalist was interested neither in

1. Emerson, E.W., The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 57.

2. Blankenship, Russell, American Literature, p. 285.

doctrine nor organization. Hence, for him both creed and any type of church organization would have been regarded as the negation of his own self-trust. While it is true that many of the Unitarian ministers flirted with its philosophizings, most of them rejected it. This may seem strange to the Catholic who can look back even on Channing's Unitarianism as hardly more than the pale negation of Protestant dissent. But devout and orthodox Unitarians feared and repudiated the individualism of the Transcendentalists, whom they regarded correctly as moral anarchists. In the previous chapter I have pointed out that Unitarianism was the Protestant principle of private judgment carried to its logical conclusion. Transcendentalism showed there was another step to go before arriving at the completely "emancipated" individual----and that step takes us to a region wherein religious nihilism reigned supreme. No, indeed, Transcendentalism was not a religion.

To my mind Transcendentalism was rather a substitute for religion----and a quite Romantic substitute at that. A former teacher of mine, Professor William York Tindall of Columbia, has defined Romanticism as religion slopped over, a homely and yet expressive phrase, which defines Transcendentalism even more accurately than it does Romanticism. Parrington describes and accounts for the origins of this Transcendental substitute in these words:

"In essence this new transcendental faith was a glorification of consciousness and will. It

rested on the rediscovery of the soul that had been dethroned by the old rationalism; and it eventuated in the creation of a mystical egocentric universe wherein the children of God might luxuriate in their divinity. The Unitarians had pronounced human nature to be excellent; the transcendentalists pronounced it divine. They endowed it with great potentialities; made it a dwelling place of the Most High; discovered the secret voice of God in the buried life that men call instinct; refused to heed any other command save this inner voice of God." <sup>1</sup>

Here is subjectivism run riot! Here is idealism in a two-fold sense. I confess that the Transcendentalists, like their ancestor, Jonathan Edwards, had the makings of them of mystics, but the dogmatic basis of their communing with God was so insubstantial that their alleged mysticism is best described in Msgr. Fulton J. Sheen's famous pun, as misty-schism!

Father Hecker, who had once worshipped at the Transcendental shrine and knew its inner mysteries, was even more blunt when in his review <sup>2</sup> of Frothingham's Transcendentalism in New England, he speaks of it as a heresy. Father Hecker is inclined to overemphasize the native origins of the Movement and to play down foreign influences such as German idealism, although he believed that these outside influences did stimulate and strengthen it. He goes on to say that:

1. Parrington, Vernon L., The Romantic Revolution in America, p. 382.
2. This review, an unsigned one, but written certainly by Father Hecker, can be found in The Catholic World, Vol. XXIII, No. 136, (July, 1876), (pp. 528-537) of which Father Hecker was then Editor.

"To give us a right history of transcendentalism, Mr. Frothingham must enlarge the horizon of his mental vision, and include within its scope a stretch of time which elapsed before his ancestors were led off by heresy into the cavern of obscurity. He will find a historical no less than a 'dialectical basis' for its ideas or primary truths, and other truths of natural reason of which he has not yet made the discovery, in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, in Augustine, in Vincent of Lerens, in Anselm, and above all in Thomas of Aquinas....  
.....Those profound thinkers maintained and demonstrated the truth of the great ideas which Kant, according to his own showing, neither dared affirm nor deny, and which the transcendentalists held for the most part by openly contemning logic and by submissively accepting the <sup>1</sup> humiliating charge of being 'sentimentalists!'"

Father Hecker goes on to deliver an even more humiliating blow to the pride of his former associates, and at the same time he shows very clearly that the "Eternal" Verities of the Transcendentalists, like the truths of Christianity which survived in Puritanism, were really the assertion of ancient Catholic Verities and, when properly understood and interpreted, domatically sound! Urging Frothingham and other ex-Transcendentalists to study Catholic philosophy, Father Hecker writes:

"After all, perhaps, the task might prove an ungracious one, for it would not be flattering to the genius of originality, on which our transcendentalists pride themselves, to discover that these utterances concerning the value of human reason, the dignity of the soul, and the worth

---

1. This review, an unsigned one, but written certainly by Father Hecker, can be found in The Catholic World, Vol. XXIII, No. 136, (July, 1876), (pp. 531) of which Father Hecker was then Editor.

of man---barring occasional extravagant expressions-----were but echoes of the voice of the Catholic Church of all ages, of the traditional teachings of her philosophers, especially of the Jesuitical school; all of which, be it said between ourselves, has been confirmed by the sacred decrees of the recent Vatican Council!" 1

Father Hecker then asserts boldly that the "dialectical basis," which Frothingham claimed the Transcendentalists lacked and for which he sought recourse in the great German systems, might well have been found in Catholic philosophy. Here they would have discovered "ground to sustain every truth which (they) so enthusiastically proclaimed in speech, in poetry, and prose, and which truths, in their practical aspect not a few made noble and heroic sacrifices to realize." 2

Orestes A. Brownson, who had been present at the first meeting of the so-called Transcendental Club, was even more intimately tied up with the Movement than Father Hecker. While some of his former friends in Transcendentalism either disowned him or ignored him after his reception into the Catholic Church, there seems little reason to doubt that he was one of the leading members of the original group, which included Emerson, George Ripley, Hedge, Con-

1. This review, an unsigned one, but written certainly by Father Hecker, can be found in The Catholic World, Vol. XXIII, No. 136, (July, 1876), (pp.531-532) of which Father Hecker was then Editor.

2. Loc. cit.

vers Francis, James Freeman Clarke, and Alcott. Hedge claimed that Brownson met with the Club only once or twice but "became unbearable," but, as Mr. Arthur H. Schlesinger, Jr., so well says:

"Brownson no doubt proved unbearable to some; for the lesser Transcendentalists luxuriated in a windy and diffuse thought of a kind calculated to drive the logical Brownson to fury -----But his connection with the Club was much longer than Hedge, who undoubtedly dislike him, cared to remember. It met at his home in Chelsea, and he was known generally as one of its leading members." <sup>1</sup>

Later in life Brownson both claimed he was a Transcendentalist and denied it. It seems clear that just before he decided to become a Catholic he was deeply concerned over whether the Faith and its philosophy could clear up once and for all the problem of the reality of knowledge. As Mr. Schlesinger says: "Until he answered it (this problem), he could not be sure that Catholicism would give him any more certainty than Transcendentalism." <sup>2</sup> Once, however, he had refuted to his own satisfaction Kant's denial of man's ability to arrive at absolute truth, Brownson capitulated.

It was characteristic of the new convert that he should henceforth look back with distrust and contempt

1. Schlesinger, Arthur H., Jr., Orestes A. Brownson, p.46. This author's testimony is that of a non-Catholic scholar.
2. Op. Cit., p. 177.



upon his own former doubts and difficulties. He was therefore, able to argue himself in all sincerity into believing that he never really was a Transcendentalist. Since there were all of fifty-seven varieties of Transcendentalism, we have every reason to believe that for a few years at least Brownson had as much right to bear the label of the Club as Hedge or Emerson or Alcott. Mr. Schlesinger contends that the mere fact that Alcott, Emerson, and Margaret Fuller even seriously considered making Brownson's Boston Quarterly Review the organ of the Movement rather than founding, as they were to do, the Dial, is highly significant.<sup>1</sup> It may be equally significant that the famous trio decided against the use of the Boston Quarterly-----it was certainly from the Transcendentalist view-point, a wise decision. Brownson was not the kind of man to suffer fools gladly, and doubtless, had he the power to wield the editorial blue-pencil, would have dissipated many of the vaporings of the die-hard Transcendentalists into thin air. There was something of the anima naturaliter Christiana about Brownson's good sense which had persisted throughout his own checkered spiritual odyssey. Hence, he might have detected the heretical absurdities of Transcendentalism long before he did, in the capacity of editorial pontiff of the Movement.

1. Schlesinger, Arthur H., Jr., Orestes A. Brownson, p.48

Within a year of his conversion to the Church Brownson was writing against Transcendentalism in a series <sup>1</sup> of closely reasoned but passionate attacks on its creed, which appeared originally in his own Quarterly Review. Taking Theodore Parker's A Discourse of Matters pertaining to Religion, as his point of departure, the great Orestes delivered himself of what was at once a detailed analysis of Transcendentalism as a "religion" and a fervent confession of his own convictions as a Catholic. He began the series by a quick and devastating condensation of Parker's hastily written, "crude," and "confused" book. Brownson then went on to examine and refute Parker's propositions step by step, showing how each of the erroneous propositions is but a reflection of Transcendentalism. The reviewer knew full well that in the heaven of Transcendentalism there were many mansions, and he was, therefore, careful to recognize the divergent views of the group. He saw clearly, nevertheless, that all of them adhered more or less to Parker's fundamental theory, which Brownson reduced to the following principles: <sup>2</sup>

- "1. Man is the measure of truth and goodness.
2. Religion is a fact or principle of human nature.

1. These articles are easily available in Brownson, Henry F., The Works of Orestes A. Brownson, Vol. VI, pp. 1-113.  
2. Op. cit., p. 2.

3. All religious institutions, which have been or are, have their principle and cause in human nature."

Any detailed summary of Brownson's masterly argument is beyond the scope of this thesis. The gist of his argument is that Transcendentalism is "naturalism, ----nothing more, nothing less." <sup>1</sup> Brownson, who once had defended the Transcendentalist position against the famous orthodox Unitarian scholar, the Rev. Andrew Norton, was now ready to adopt Norton's label and call it the "latest form of infidelity." <sup>2</sup>

It is very interesting for the modern Catholic scholar to see Brownson making one of his initial attempts to apply his as yet undigested knowledge of scholastic philosophy to the refutation of his opponent. Fortunately for him his own wide knowledge of the literature of the Transcendentalists, together with his native gifts for logical argument, did him such good service that his congenital ineptitude for the metaphysics of St. Thomas made little difference. The peroration of the series became impassioned enough, but it is so good that it is worth quoting both for its blunt expression of common sense and its withering irony. Taking two "grand formu-

---

1. These articles are easily available in Brownson, Henry F., The Works of Orestes A. Brownson, Vol. VI, pp. 3.

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 111.

las" from Parker----"Goodness is goodness," and "Be good and do good"----Brownson says:

"If this be not the whole of transcendentalism, when divested of its denials, its blasphemy, and its impiety, and reduced to its simple dogmatic teaching, then we have given days, weeks, months, and years to its study to no purpose. Stated in plain and simple terms, it is the veriest commonplace imaginable. It is merely 'much ado about nothing' or 'a tempest in a teapot.' Dressed up in the glittering robes of a tawdry rhetoric, or wrapped in the mystic folds of an unusual and unintelligible dialect, it may impose on the simple and credulous; but to attempt to satisfy one's spiritual wants with it is as vain as to attempt to fill one's self with the east wind, or to warm one's freezing hands on a cold night by holding them up to the moon. Yet its teachers are the great lights of this age of light, before whom all the great lights of past times pale as the stars before the sun. Men and women, through some mistake not in a lunatic hospital, run after them with eagerness, hang with delight on their words, and smack their lips as if feeding on honey. Our Protestant populations, on whom the sun of the reformation shines in its effulgence, are moved, run towards their teaching, and are about to hail it as the Tenth Avatar come to redeem the world; Wonderful teachers! Wonderful population! Wonderful age!"<sup>1</sup>

In this section I have attempted to show what Transcendentalism was and especially how two great Catholic converts from the Movement regarded its teachings. Nothing that anyone can write today can in any way improve upon Father Hecker's and Brownson's condemnation of the

1. These articles are easily available in Brownson, Henry F., The Works of Orestes A. Brownson, Vol. VI, pp. 112-113.

Transcendentalism conception of the great truths of life. Father Hecker is obviously less blunt and less scornful than the hard-hitting Brownson. The founder of the Paulists is also much more charitable and patient in his dismissal of their doctrines. But both converts, seeing with the eyes of Faith, were at one in condemning Transcendentalism as a mere Romantic substitute for religion. As philosophers they saw it not only as a heresy against God, but as a heresy against man's very nature, which it had tried vainly to deify. Once one accepted its fundamental teaching, he was bound to fall victim to subjectivism, naturalism, and pantheism, and these errors inevitably dimmed his eyes to the Catholic tradition with its insistence on:

1. the objective and eternal character of Truth
2. the supernatural character of Faith
3. an understanding of the true nature of God - the only genuinely Transcendental Reality.

With this section, I bring to a close the long story of the vicissitudes of the New England mind up to the period when its leading spokesmen began to see the shining presence of the Catholic Faith. In the next section of this chapter I shall show how some of the Transcendentalists went out to Brook Farm and discovered for themselves the Way to Rome. In the concluding sections of the chapter I shall present what evidence there is available to show how the two greatest Transcendentalists looked upon the Church. It goes without saying that the outlook of Emerson and Thoreau was bedimmed and perverted by the philosophical and theological con-

fusion of their Transcendental doctrines. After all, Transcendentalism, that "latest form of infidelity," was in reality a nineteenth-century reaction against the dogmatism of Calvinism or, to put it in another way, it was the spiritual child of earlier New England attempts to deal with "mystical experiences." As such it was radical in its origins, both proximate and remote. In its blending of the heresies of such early "seekers" as Ann Hutchinson and Roger Williams with the Romantic doctrines of its own day, it was indicative of a deep dissatisfaction with orthodox Protestantism. On the other hand, in its laudable attempt to fill in the emptiness achieved by Protestant negation, Transcendentalism went farther and farther away from the Center of religious truth. It is bound to surprise us then to discover any of the Transcendentalists finally arriving at the Truth---that could have been nothing short of a miracle of God's grace; it is also going to surprise us to discover Emerson and Thoreau seeing, through the light of natural reason, even a little of the Divine Effulgence of Catholic Truth.

## 2. Half-Way House on the Road to Rome.

The above title is purposely extravagant. It no more accurately describes Brook Farm than it describes a colony of Shakers. And yet at least two notable resi-

dents at the Farm and one frequent visitor did find their way to Rome----and to the Church of which Rome is a symbol. Unfortunately both the memoirs of the colonists and the various studies or histories of the Farm available do not dwell at length on the interest in Catholicism of its members. The work of Lindsay Swift touches somewhat briefly, but without sympathy or understanding, on the subject, and most stories of the Colony either repeat what Swift said or ignore the question entirely. The only Catholic attempt to deal extensively with Brook Farm is Miss Katherine Burton's Paradise Planters. This work is semi-fictional in character and merely uses Swift's information and that of others of his type more understandingly. The best scholarly study of Brook Farm conversions from the Catholic viewpoint is in Father Vincent Holden's The Early Years of Isaac Thomas Hecker<sup>1</sup> to which I am indebted for a good deal of the information used, in this section. Father Holden was of course chiefly concerned with Father Hecker, but he does give us an interesting picture of life at Brook Farm.

In Chapter III I have already described Brook Farm as the most concrete expression of the discontent of New England's "intellectuals" with the rising social and economic order. The Farm also was founded for two other important ends: 1. by (supposedly) reducing the process

---

1. See especially Chapters V and VI.

of getting a living to a few hours a day, the residents were to be left free for self-cultivation and their own personal "creative" work, and, 2. provisions were made for more or less formal classes for the adult members interested in study and for their own children or other children put in their charge. Pervading this plan of work and study was an air of freedom and good fellowship. Swift, who held no brief for the Rome-ward tendencies of some of the community says:

"Both Hecker and Brownson found the generally tolerant spirit of the place refreshing. Their association with men and women of noble aspirations was helpful, and neither of them failed in reasonable gratitude toward this early experience."<sup>1</sup>

Before the Association was founded, George Ripley, prime mover in the plan, talked it over at length with Brownson and apparently was much influenced by the advice of the latter. Writing to Brownson from the Farm on December 18, 1842, Ripley says in part:

"We have truly sympathized as few men have done: you have always quickened my love for humanity; and for no small share of what mental clearness I may have, am I indebted to the hours of genial, pleasant intercourse I have enjoyed with you. If I had never known you, I should never have been engaged in this enterprise. I consider it as the incarnation of those transcendental truths which we have held in common and which you have done much to make me love." <sup>2</sup>

1. Swift, Lindsay, Brook Farm, p. 99.

2. Quoted in Brownson, Henry F., Brownson's Early Life, p. 313.



This passage carries with it the implication that Brownson (not yet a Catholic) was one of the moving spirits in the founding of Brook Farm. In the light of other information on the forming of the Association, I am more inclined to regard it simply as a testimonial of Ripley's respect for Brownson. The latter, although an occasional visitor at the Farm and even a kind of propagandist for the community, never was himself a resident of West Roxbury. He did send his oldest son, Orestes, Jr., a boy of fourteen to study in the farm school, and he did write an article in the November, 1842 number of the Democratic Review defending the simplicity of the scheme as against Fourierism.<sup>1</sup> Ironically enough the chief result of sending young Orestes to Brook Farm was to arouse in the lad a passion for the sea! Orestes, Jr., must have been highly impressionable, because his inspiration for the sea came from hearing a young lady at the Farm sing "A Life on the Ocean Wave!"<sup>2</sup>

Brownson's most notable connection with the Farm came through his sending Isaac Hecker there at a time in that young man's life when he was mentally and spiritually at loose ends. Brownson had already begun to help Hecker pick up these loose ends. In fact, while Hecker was a visitor at Brownson's home, before going to

1. See Swift, Lindsay, Brook Farm, pp. 241-242.

2. Brownson, Henry F., Brownson's Early Life, p. 315.

Brook Farm, it is clear that he was already dedicating himself to a life of "continuous prayer." <sup>1</sup> But he was still perplexed in soul and Brownson had enough confidence in the West Roxbury experiment to think that a few months there might help Hecker to solve his problems. And so at Brownson's instigation, <sup>2</sup> Hecker took up his residence at Brook Farm in the third week of January, 1843----nearly two years after it had started its work.

The Farm had begun with eighteen members, including George Ripley and his wife, but, by the time of Hecker's arrival, there were nearly ninety members. This is not the place to enter into detail either about the membership or the mode of life of the community. Suffice to say, that the plan of the day's activities was not unlike that of a Catholic religious community, with of course more allowance for the individual taste and even whims of the more "rugged" Transcendentalists among the members. Each one had his assigned task, and Hecker, who had been a baker, lived at the so-called "Hive" and became baker for the community. When not engaged in the kitchen, he spent much time in his room in meditation and in study. Father Holden finds it difficult to determine what he studied. He had intended to

1. Holden, Vincent F., The Early Years of Isaac Thomas Hecker, p. 90.

2. Father Holden, in Chapter IV of his work, makes it clear that Hecker had a mind of his own and was no mere reed leaning on Brownson's rugged shoulder.

study French and music, and there is evidence in the Hecker Papers that he did go ahead with music. <sup>1</sup>

Some of the Farmers (e. g. George William Curtis) "do not remember him as especially studious," but there seems to be little doubt of his generally studious intentions. Hecker must have been reading widely in these days, judging by the list of books he wanted his family to procure for him, <sup>2</sup> and considering that Ripley's well-stocked library, including French and German works, was available to all members of the Colony.

Owing to his continued spiritual difficulties, which he wished to discuss with his family, Hecker left Brook Farm for his home in New York City for a visit of a little over two weeks. During this visit he satisfied his anxious family that it was better for him to stay on at the Farm at least until the end of the summer----- it was then about mid-April. On his return to West Roxbury he gave up his job as baker, for, by paying two dollars a week more for his board, he would be permitted to devote himself entirely to his studies. Thereupon he began a serious devotion to French, Latin, Music, philosophy, and even botany and agriculture. The Latin learned at Brook Farm laid the foundation for his future ecclesiastical subjects.

---

1. Op. cit., especially, pp. 104-106.

2. Op. cit., p. 105.

Meanwhile, although deeply interested in the philosophical studies he was following under George Ripley, he continued his own independent researches into theology. Visits to Brownson, then pastor of a liberal church in Chelsea, brought him into contact with the famous Tracts for the Times of the Oxford Movement. His brothers in New York had been reading them, and he was of course anxious to report to them his own and Brownson's reactions. The Tracts of the "Puseyites" gave evidence of a "unifying trend" which he fondly hoped might lead to One Church, One Faith, One Baptism. <sup>1</sup> They even made him look for a time with favor upon the Episcopalian Church, which his brother John had decided to join. Father Holden writes:

"Though he had encouraged his brother John in this new move, Isaac himself seemed to have no intention of following him. Like Brownson, he preferred to wait until the union of all churches should be accomplished before he would cast his lot with any one of them." <sup>2</sup>

Even more important than the reading of the Oxford Tracts in directing Hecker's thoughts Rome-ward was the acquisition through Charles Dana of Theodore Parker's copy of John A. Moehler's Symbolik, a work explaining the doctrinal differences between Protestantism and Catholicism. This book was almost as influential as

1. op. cit., p. 108

2. op. cit., p. 109

the work of Newman in turning American minds to the Church.<sup>1</sup> In an extract from Hecker's diary printed in Father Holden's book, we find strong evidence of the effects of Moehler at work upon Hecker's mind under the date April 24, 1843:

"The Catholic Church alone seems to satisfy my wants, my faith, life, soul-.....I have not wished to make myself Catholic, but it answers to the wants of my soul, it answers on all sides; it is so rich, so full."<sup>2</sup>

This is not the place to retell the full story of Hecker's conversion or to compare and contrast his search for the Truth with Brownson's. I have told this much of his story to show that Brook Farm and even the bigoted Theodore Parker served as unwitting instruments in bringing the founder of the Paulists to the True Faith.

One more incident about Hecker's career at Brook Farm is worth recording. Now it seems that at the West Roxbury community the members were left free to practice any religion they preferred, and, although the majority of them were more or less fervent Unitarians, there seems some reason to believe from Codman's memoirs of the Farm<sup>3</sup> that there were Episcopalians, Methodists,

1. Burton, Katherine, In No Strong Land, p. 84.

2. Holden, Vincent F., The Early Years of Isaac Thomas Hecker, pp. 143-144

3. See Holden, p. 106.

Swedenborgians, and Roman Catholics among them. Sometimes the Farmers went forth on a spiritual "adventure" of their own. And so it happened that Hecker went on Easter Sunday of 1843 to visit the Catholic Church at West Roxbury. Father Holden writes:

"He found the services 'impressively effective.' The painting and statuary with the Mass and sermon, produced upon him a quieting effect. A perfect stillness came over him and he felt as if his soul 'were soaring on the bosom of the clouds.'"

This visit did not of course help Hecker to decide the issue immediately, for he feared his reactions were only emotional, but there can be little doubt that on this Easter day one pilgrim from Brook Farm had come nearer the End of his quest than he knew.

Father Holden, perhaps very wisely, avoids mention of anything like a little Oxford Movement among the members of the Farm. Mrs. Georgiana Bruce Kirby, who formed a close friendship with Hecker, claimed in her memoirs that "rough, wooden crosses and pictures of the Madonna began to appear, and (she suspected) rosaries rattling under the aprons." <sup>1</sup> Mrs. Kirby was undoubtedly anti-Catholic in her outlook and deplored Hecker's conversion. This might seem to make her testimony all the more valuable, but it so happens that many

1. Quoted in Swift, Lindsay, Brook farm, p. 200.

of the Brook Farmers, whom she had suspected of flirting dangerously with Rome, never did find their way into the Church. Furthermore, no other witness, including Brownson and Hecker, made very much to-do about the Catholic tendencies of the colonists. There may have been a kind of "aesthetic Catholicism" present among such members as Charles King Newcomb, who had many pictures of Catholic saints on the walls of his room and who was fond of reading St. Augustine, but, except for the conversion, after they left the Farm, of Mrs. Ripley and her niece, I can find little evidence of anything like a real Rome-ward movement. Undoubtedly Catholicism was often the subject of much serious discussion in some of the numerous informal "conversations" held at Brook Farm. There is considerable evidence to show that the Church was often the topic of earnest debate when the apostolic Brownson (himself even then unconsciously very close to the Church) was a visitor. This evidence also makes it clear that in general neither Brownson nor the Church was altogether popular with the Brook Farmers. <sup>1</sup>

In spite of my finding no genuine movement toward the Catholic Church among the members of the Brook Farm community, I still maintain that for Father Hecker, Mrs. Sophia Dana Ripley and her niece, Miss Stearns and

---

1. See Swift, Lindsay, Brook Farm, pp. 241-242; also Schlesinger, Arthur H., Jr., Orestes A. Brownson, p. 153.

perhaps even Brownson, New England's most famous experiment in community living did serve as a kind of "half-Way House on the Road to Rome." Here they had a chance to discuss the "historic faith," as Swift calls it, and to solve some of their own personal religious problems. It seems clear, moreover, that although Mrs. Ripley's conversion was delayed until after she and her husband left Brook Farm for New York, the seeds of faith had already been sown at West Roxbury. Miss Burton, in telling the story of Mrs. Ripley's conversion, introduces two pieces of evidence to support this claim.

"He (Hecker) and Mrs. Ripley were often in the kitchen together, she scrubbing and he baking bread, and they had long discussions. Isaac was even then veering towards the Catholicism he later embraced, and though he was at the Farm only a short time, it was enough to give Mrs. Ripley a fair knowledge of Catholic belief.....

"Two years later, when Isaac was on his way from Concord to New York he stopped off at the Farm to tell his friends his plans for the future. 'I am going to enter the Catholic Church,' he said, and began explaining his decision. Ripley listened with interest, but Isaac thought Sophia showed even more warmth and earnestness. It impressed him because her manner was usually very calm and unexcited. He wondered at it, and hoped that she would be a Catholic some day too."

The second piece of evidence, even more striking than the first, is found in Mrs. Ripley's own declaration to Father Hecker upon his return to the United States as

---

1. Burton, Katherine, In No Strange Land, pp. 34-35.



a Redemptorist priest: "I am without doubt the only convert you and Dante have made between you." <sup>1</sup> It is significant that Father Hecker became then and remained until her death Mrs. Ripley's confessor. Fifteen years after Sophia's death he came very near bringing her husband into the Church----how near we shall never know, for George Ripley's dying request to see Father Hecker was ignored until it was too late. <sup>2</sup> Ripley had once hinted very strongly of a death-bed conversion. Had the grace of God come to him in his late hours (perhaps it had), the story of the relationship between Brook Farm and the Church would not have been substantially changed. That the free-thinking Ripley was well disposed to the Church of his wife's adoption cannot be doubted. Nor can it be doubted that for a few chosen spirits at least Brook Farm, which was to have been man's realization of Heaven on earth, turned out to be a kind of "Half-Way House on the Road to Rome." Some of the Transcendentalists, finding their substitute cheap and tawdry, had, by the grace of God, come to find the Real Thing.

### 3. Emerson and the Catholic Church

It is not my conscious purpose here to duplicate

1. Burton, Katherine, In No Strange Land, p. 39
2. Op. Cit., pp. 40-41.
3. As reported in American Literature, Vol. XII, p. 358 (Nov. 1940).

the work of Dr. Charles C. Charvat, who, in a doctoral dissertation completed about three years ago at the University of Iowa,<sup>1</sup> has examined this subject from beginning to end. I say it is not my "conscious purpose," because undoubtedly I shall employ in this relatively brief study some of the evidence already utilized by Dr. Charvat. Unfortunately, as I mentioned in my Foreword, this probably definitive study of Emerson's attitudes towards the Church is not yet in print. I should also suspect that the scope and purpose of this section of my own thesis are necessarily more limited, because I do not intend at all to make any attempt to view Emerson's work as a whole in terms of its conformity with or departure from Catholic theology and philosophy. In the first section of this chapter I have of course condemned Transcendentalism in the light of Catholic principles, and I shall suggest here in general terms some of the causes operating to keep Emerson from seeing the Church in a more favorable light.

My chief concern is to present some of the more important evidence I have been able to discover in Emerson's writings, of his attitudes to the Church as an institution, and to those doctrines of the Church which happened to be brought to his special attention. I should

1. As reported in American Literature, Vol. XII, p. 358 (Nov. 1940).

say at the very outset that direct references to Catholicism are comparatively rare in Emerson's writings, except in those pages of his Journals which record his travels in Italy. And I intend here to confine my evidence entirely to direct and explicit comments or remarks of Emerson in reference to the Church and its doctrines. As a matter of fact, I could almost certainly satisfy many students of Emerson by saying simply: He was hostile to the Catholic Church and all it stood for. But I do not believe that such a conclusion is altogether warranted.

A recent writer has said of Emerson: "When an Emerson broke through the barriers of rationalism, he could not escape to the Middle Ages as could Keats and even Coleridge, for the long distrust of Catholic ritual was too deeply engraved in his background." <sup>1</sup> That statement is true enough as far as it goes. Quite naturally Emerson, with seven generations of Puritan and Yankee blood in his veins, <sup>2</sup> faced the Church with what we might call an ancestral handicap. Emerson's own father and grandfather had been ministers, and he himself was ordained to serve as a Unitarian divine. Furthermore, Emerson himself found the none-too-rigorous doctrines of Unitarianism so little to his liking that he resigned

---

1. Matthiessen, Francis O., American Renaissance, p. 104.  
2. See Carpenter, Frederic J. (ed.), Emerson, pp. XII-XIII.

from his pulpit-----although he did continue to preach when he could find ministers "liberal" enough in their views to let the author of The Divinity School Address mount their pulpits. It is also a well-known fact that the occasion for Emerson's break with his church was over the question of administering the so-called Lord's Supper. In his famous farewell sermon entitled "The Lord's Supper" <sup>2</sup> he preached from the text: "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." To Catholic eyes this Sermon seems little less than a blasphemous attack on the Holy Eucharist. Emerson may have been sincere enough in claiming that he could not continue to administer "the elements" even in this "symbolical" Protestant survival of Holy Communion. But it is clear that the author of such a sermon must be already deeply hostile to the very essence of Catholic doctrine. I purposely avoid either repeating or refuting the gist of Emerson's shallow line of argument.

The sermon on the "Lord's Supper" was delivered September 9, 1832. In less than four months Emerson was on the high seas bound for his first direct contact with the Catholic Church. (At this date Emerson had probably never met any Catholic on an equal social and intellectual

2. Emerson, Edward W., The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, XI, pp. 3-25.

level). Subsequently Emerson visited Europe on two more occasions, but the evidence from his Journal of his experiences with the Church on the first voyage are most striking and valuable. He was then a comparatively obscure minister without a church; later he was something of a celebrity.

In the Journal for February 16, 1833 at La Valetta, Malta, Emerson gives us his first impressions of the Church:

"I went to St. John's church, and a noble house it is to worship God in, full of marble and mosaic and pictures and gilding; the walls are eloquent with texts and the floor covered with epitaphs.....

"In all these churches there were many worshippers continually coming, in, saying their prayers, and going their way. I yielded me joyfully to the religious impression of holy texts and fine paintings and this soothfull faith, though of women and children. How beautiful to have the church always open, so that every tired wayfaring man may come in and be soothed by all that art can suggest of a better world when he is weary of this. I hope they will carve and paint and inscribe the walls of our churches in New England before this century, which will probably see many grand granite piles erected there, is closed. To be sure there is plenty of superstition. Everywhere indulgence is offered, on one convent gate on our way home I read this inscription over the gate, 'indulgentia plenaria, quotidiana, perpetua, pro vivis et defunctis.' This is almost too frank, may it please your holiness."

What a medley of admiration and hostility! The art and its "soothing" properties and the ever-open churches

---

I. Emerson, E.W., and Forbes, W.E., Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. III, pp. 30-32.

bring forth Emerson's frank praise. There is even the hint of contrast between this Catholic church and the cold and barren meeting-houses of his New England. But the Old Protestant bogey of indulgences comes up to temper his praise, and a perfectly understandable and "frank" text about indulgences is, as usual misread and perhaps even taken as an invitation to sin!

The following day Emerson writes in the Journal (February 17):

"Visited St. John's again and attended mass. The bishop, a venerable old man, was present, but did not officiate.....The music of the organ and chanting friars very impressive especially when we left the kneeling congregation in the nave and heard it at a distance, as we examined the pictures in a side oratory. I went into several churches, which were all well attended. How could anybody who had been in a Catholic church devise such a deformity as a pew?"<sup>1</sup>

Under the date of March 1, 1833, from the town of Catania, Emerson includes among various secular remarks about his observations these significant words:

"But what is even this church to that of the Benedictines? Indeed, my holy Fathers, your vows of poverty and humility have cost you little; Signor Ricciardi of Syracuse gave me a letter to Padre Anselmo Adorato, the Celle-rajo of this monastery, and this morn I waited upon his reverence in his cell, and the kings of France and England, I think do not live in a better house. The Padre with great courtesy showed us the church and its paintings, and its organ, here reputed the finest in Europe. It imitates sackbut, harp, psaltery and all

---

1. Op. cit., pp. 32-33.

kinds of music.....To my ignorance, however, the organ neither appeared very large nor very richly toned. But the church shall be St. Peter's to me till I behold a fairer shrine. Have the men of America never entered these European churches, that they build such mean edifices at home?.....About 50 monks are laid up in clover and magnificence here. They give bread twice in a week, one roll to every comer. I saw hundreds of women and children in the yard, each receiving her loaf and passing on into a court that none should come twice to the basket." <sup>1</sup>

In this passage Emerson is once more contrasting the beauties surrounding Catholic worship with the drab exterior of New England churches. Emerson's failure to appreciate the organ is understandable to a student of his rarely tuneful verses. His speaking of the "vow" of humility, and his typically Protestant failure to see that the magnificence of churches and convents is often in very marked contrast to the simplicity and poverty of the monks associated with them.

The next entry of significance in the travel-diary and one of the most important of the trip for our purpose is dated from Rome itself on March 31, Palm Sunday of that year:

"I have been to the Sistine Chapel to see the Pope bless the palms, and hear his choir chaunt the Passion. The Cardinals came in, one after another, each wearing a purple robe, an ermine cope and a small red cap to

---

1. Emerson, E.W., and Forbes, W.E., Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. III, pp. 52-53.

cover the tonsure. A priest attended each one, to adjust the robes of their eminences. As each cardinal entered the chapel, the rest rose. One or two were fine persons. Then came the Pope in scarlet robes and bishop's mitre. After he was seated the cardinals went in turn to the throne and kneeled and kissed his hand. (Then Emerson continues a more or less detailed account of the ceremony of blessing of the palms.).....

"It was hard to recognize in this ceremony the gentle Son of Man who sat upon an ass amidst the rejoicings of his fickle countrymen.....

"All this pomp is conventional. It is imposing to those who knew the customs of courts, and of what wealth and of what rank these particular forms are the symbols. But to the eye of an Indian I am afraid it would be ridiculous. There is no true majesty in all this millinery and imbecility. Why not devise ceremonies that shall be in as good and manly taste as their churches and pictures and music?

"I counted twenty-one cardinals present. Music at St. Peter's in the afternoon, and better still at Chiesa Nuova in the evening. These mutilated wretches, sing so well it is painful to hear them."

This is one of the longest and least intelligent of Emerson's fulminations against the Church, which shows very clearly that Emerson was repelled by the actual ceremonial and vestments of the ritual. He had already praised the art surrounding Catholic devotions and the music of the liturgy, but the ceremonies themselves and the "millinery" of the officiating clergy were distasteful to his "democratic" eyes-----and to a mind closed

---

I. Emerson, E.W., and Forbes, W.E., Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. III, pp. 81-83.



for generations to the meaning behind all this seeming pomp and circumstance. His call for "manly" ceremonies is characteristic of the pioneer, whose tastes were unfortunately often as crude as the Indian he would introduce as his touchstone. The lesson Our Lord himself preached to those who rebuked Magdalene for washing His feet in precious oils was evidently lost on this son of the Puritans. The passage concludes with the hoary legend about the castrati in the choir. All in all, this passage is one of Emerson's most discreditable performances.

The notes on the next few days of Holy Week are much more favorable. On Wednesday, April 3, Emerson writes:

"The famous Miserere was sung this afternoon in the Sistine Chapel.....

"Surely it is sweet music, and sounds more like the Eolian harp than anything else. The pathetic lessons of the day related the treachery of Judas and apply select passages from the prophets and psalms to the circumstances of Jesus. Then whilst the choir chaunt the words "Traditor autem dedit eis signum dicens, Quem osculatus fuero, ipse est tenete eum," all the candles in the chapel are extinguished but one. During the repetition of this verse the last candle is taken down and hidden under the altar. Then out of the silence and the darkness rises this most plaintive and melodious strain (the whole congregation kneeling), "Miserere mei, Deus," etc. The sight and sound are very touching.

"Everything here is in good taste."<sup>1</sup> (Italics mine)

Once again the music strikes Emerson's ear, and the revealing phrase, "Everything here is in good taste," speaks volumes about the mind of the man who wrote it. The comments on Holy Thursday are, as I said above, generally sympathetic, but there is one characteristically Emerson passage:

"To-day I saw the Pope wash the feet of thirteen pilgrims, one from each nation of Christendom. One was from Kentucky. After the ceremony he served them at dinner; this I did not see. But Gregory XVI is a learned and able man; he was a monk and is reputed of pure life. Why should he not leave one moment this formal service of fifty generations and speaking out of his own heart-----the Father of the Church to his children,-----though it were but a single sentence or a single word? One earnest word or act to this sympathetic audience would overcome them. It would take all hearts by storm." <sup>1</sup> (Italics mine.)

This passage is not only Emersonian----it is, in one sense, the expression of two of the most potent forces which shaped his mind. The first of these is the cry of the Puritan rebel, the antinomian, with his strong urge to "speak out" the revelations of his own "inner light." The second is the voice of the self-reliant Transcendentalist telling his fellow-man to speak his own mind---not the mind of an Eternal and Universal Church.

Emerson's descriptions of the ceremonies of Good Friday and Easter Sunday are also quite favorable.

<sup>1</sup>. Op. cit., p. 86.

The account of the Easter ceremonies concludes with a glorious tribute to the beauties of St. Peter's.

"I love St. Peter's church. It grieves me to think that after a few days I shall see it no more. It has a peculiar smell from the quantity of incense burned in it. The music that is heard in it is always good and the eye is always charmed. It is an ornament of the earth. It is not grand, it is so rich and pleasing; it should rather be called the sublime of the beautiful."<sup>1</sup>

One more item, and I have finished with what we might call Exhibit A in the case of Emerson versus the Catholic Church. Later visits to Europe never changed very materially the impressions of this first pilgrimage. The final item is not favorable-----indeed, it is essentially Protestant:

"I went this morn to the Church of Trinita de' Morte to see some nuns take the veil. Can any ceremony be more pathetic than to see youth, beauty, rank, thus self-devoted to mistaken duty."<sup>2</sup>

Although after Emerson left Rome for the relatively more congenial trip to England, there are several references to religion in the Journal, specific remarks about the Catholic Church, except for perhaps a passing reference, disappear from its pages.

1. Emerson, E.W., and Forbes, W.E., Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. III, pp. 89-90
2. Op. cit., p. 99.

Even mere mentions of Catholic saints occur less frequently than they did in the Journal of his college years and his days as a minister, when he should have but did not advert to Catholicism very frequently. The remainder of my quotations from the Journal are, then, necessarily random ones and their scarcity is indicative of Emerson's comparatively negative attitude towards Catholicism except when he was reminded of some of the artistic beauties of the Faith he had cherished during his first European visit.

Here is a jotting in the Journal for July 4, 1835 of this kind:

"The arts languish now because all their scope is exhibition; when they originated, it was to serve the gods.....The Catholic Religion has turned them to continual account in its services. Now they are mere flourishes. It is strange they perish?"<sup>1</sup>

This is more the comment of the artist than of one interested in religion in any vital way.

In June of 1842 another and indeed unusual entry appears in the Journal:

"I hear with pleasure that a young girl in the midst of rich, decorous Unitarian friends in Boston is well-nigh persuaded to join the Roman Catholic Church. (There follows a brief description of the girl's immaturity and her "liberal, susceptible,

---

1. Emerson, E.W., and Forbes, W.E., Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. III, pp. 501.

expanding nature," which, wants "adequate objects.") In this church, perhaps, she shall find what she needs, in a power to call out the slumbering religious sentiment. It is unfortunate that the guide who has led her into this path is a young girl of a lively, forcible, but quite external character, who teaches her the historical argument for the Catholic faith. I told A. that I hoped she would not be misled by attaching any importance to that. If the offices of the church attracted her, if its beautiful forms and humane spirit draw her, if St. Augustine and St. Bernard, Jesus and Madonna, cathedral music and masses, then go, for thy dear heart's sake, but do not go out of this icehouse of Unitarianism, all external, into an icehouse again of external. At all events, I charged her to pay no regard to dissenters,<sup>1</sup> but to suck that orange thoroughly."

It is obvious that Emerson has retained little respect for the creed of which he was once a minister and still less for the "dissenters" by which he very likely means the evangelical Protestant churches. Characteristically he has no regard for the "historical argument" for Catholicism. But he does suggest here the pragmatic values of Catholicism, for this prospective convert-----values which, as he suggests them, are principally aesthetic as well.

In the January of 1843 from Baltimore he writes to Margaret Fuller in a rare moment when even he feels the pragmatic and aesthetic attraction to the Catholic Church. I quote this letter in part:

1. Perry, Bliss, The Heart of Emerson's Journals, pp. 180-181.

"This morning I went to the Cathedral to hear mass with much content.....The chanting priest, the pictured walls, the lighted altar, the surpliced boys, the swinging censor, every whiff of which I inhaled, brought all Rome again to mind. And Rome can swell so far! It is a dear old church,-----the Roman, I mean,-----and today I detest the Unitarians and Martin<sup>1</sup> Luther and all the parliament of Barebones."

This confession of what Professor Perry calls a "Puritan on a moral holiday" is too unlike the usual Emerson to be taken too seriously. But after all why should we look for consistency in one who made a virtue of inconsistency?

More characteristic is a statement made by Emerson in his "Remarks----At the Meeting for Organizing the Free Religious Association," May 30, 1867:

"One wonders sometimes that the churches still retain so many votaries, when he reads the history of the Church. There is an element of childish infatuation in them which does not exalt our respect for man. Read in Michelet, that in Europe for twelve or fourteen centuries, God the Father had no temple and no altar. The Holy Ghost and the Son of Mary were worshipped, and in the thirteenth century the First Person began to appear at the side of his Son, in pictures and in sculpture for worship. These mortifying puerilities abound in religious history. But as soon as every man is apprised of the Divine Presence within his own mind,-----then we have a religion that exalts, that commands<sup>2</sup> all the social and all the private action."

1. Perry, Bliss, Emerson Today, p. 71.

2. Emerson, E.W., The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. XI, p. 479.

The absurdity of this statement is enough to suggest that Emerson badly needed to study the "historical argument" ----and from a more reliable source than Michelet! But the Emerson of 1826 (age twenty-one) who could write: "They (his ancestors) have been clergymen for many generations, and the piety of all and the eloquence of many is yet praised in the Churches. But the dead sleep in their moonless night; my business is with the living,"<sup>1</sup> never changed very much except in brief moments. It was not the ritual of Catholicism that kept him away; it was the tradition of the Church that he hated and feared. Father Hecker, who had good reason to know personally Emerson's dislike of the Church, put it very well when he wrote:

"If Mr. Emerson had not been led to regard the Catholic question as closed except to the dwellers among tombs, and to the ignorant and superstitious, and had studied the Church with half the diligence he has Plato, Mohammed, or Swedenborg, it is possible that he would have found in Christianity the life and truth, the reality, unity, and catholicity he has so long and<sub>2</sub>so earnestly sought elsewhere and found not."

Earlier in this same article Father Hecker does more to explain Emerson's failure to reach anything like an understanding of the Church than all the evidence I

1. Perry, Bliss, The Heart of Emerson's Journals, p.28.
2. Hecker, Isaac, "Emerson's Prose Works," The Catholic World, Vol. XI, (May, 1870), p. 208.

have here presented when he writes:

"He (Emerson) saw that Protestantism is narrow, hollow, unreal, a sham, a humbug, and ignorant of the Catholic Church and her teaching, he considered that she must have less of reality, be even more of a sham or humbug, than Protestantism itself. He passed then naturally to the conclusion that all pretensions to a supernaturally revealed religion are founded only in ignorance or craft, and rejected all of all religions, except what may be found in them that accords with the soul or the natural reason of all men."<sup>1</sup>

No words of mine or of Emerson's can bring this section to a more fitting conclusion than these of a man who had reason enough to know from personal experience Emerson's distrust and ignorance of Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, one more phrase worth adding to the above exhibits of Emerson's attitudes towards the Church. It is a phrase which Father Hecker would have understood. In the Journal for an unnamed date in August, 1847, Emerson is listing "The Superstitions of Our Age." The first item on that list is one which, I suspect, Emerson himself unconsciously entertained:

"The fear of Catholicism."<sup>3</sup> (italics mine!)

1. Hecker, Isaac, "Emerson's Prose Works," The Catholic World, Vol. XI, (May, 1870), p. 202.
2. See Holden, Vincent F., The Early Years of Isaac Thomas Hecker, pp. 230-231.
3. Perry, Bliss, The Heart.



#### 4. Thoreau and the Catholic Church

Several years ago I read an article by a well-known Catholic priest in which he suggested that Thoreau in his hut at Walden was a kind of Yankee St. Francis of Assisi. A former student of mine wrote a brilliant master's thesis developing this topic.<sup>1</sup> Later on we discovered to our amazement that an Englishman, H. A. Page developed this thesis way back in 1877 in a book which is now unavailable. In the course of reading I have done in preparing this thesis I came across a statement by Miss Katherine Burton which claimed that Father Hecker first suggested the comparison between St. Francis and the hermit of Walden Pond. Determined to find out for myself when and where Father Hecker made this suggestion, I went through more than a score of volumes of The Catholic World when that periodical was under Father Hecker's editorship. After much research I found an article (unsigned but unquestionably by Father Hecker, who wrote all articles dealing with New England literature during his term as Editor) entitled "Thoreau and New England Transcendentalism."<sup>2</sup> This article was based on Page's book and on another work, a memoir by Thoreau's friend, William Ellery Channing, nephew and namesake of the "Unitarian Pope." My joy at finding the article was definitely tempered by discovering

1. Kelly, Gerald M., St. Francis in Concord.

2. Hecker, Isaac, The Catholic World, Vol. XXVII, pp.289-300

that Father Hecker, far from comparing Thoreau to St. Francis, demolished the Page development of the comparison in no uncertain terms. I am going to dismiss this phase of my topic with a brief quotation from Father Hecker's article:

".....Page's (book) is made ridiculous by an attempted comparison between Thoreau and St. Francis of Assisi, based on the saint's love of, and miraculous power over animals, and the Concord man's ability to bring a mouse out of its hole or tickle a trout. ....Page must be a member of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, for Thoreau's kindness to brutes he, evidently regards as his finest trait." <sup>1</sup>

Father Hecker is pretty convincing: whatever else Thoreau was, he was no St. Francis-----at least not according to the Page comparison. Mr. Kelly naturally developed his thesis along different lines, which need not concern us here. He does, however, give me a point of departure for this section of my thesis when he writes: "Thoreau's limited contact with Catholicity did not impress him very favorably, because with his retrogressive vision he saw it, as he saw all things, against the Concord background." <sup>2</sup>

Thoreau, the only native son of Concord among the so-called Concord group, was also, ironically enough, the only of the Transcendentalists with Catholic blood in

---

1. Hecker, Isaac, The Catholic World, Vol. XXVII, pp. 278, 300.  
2. Kelly, Gerald M., St. Francis in Concord, p. 35.

his veins. <sup>1</sup> The Catholic blood was of course mixed up with Huguenot and Puritan blood, and his racial background included a paternal grandfather from the Isle of Jersey and maternal grand parents of Connecticut Yankee origin. In spite of this cosmopolitan heritage, Thoreau was the most truly provincial of all the New England writers-----hence, his "limited contact with Catholicity." Unfortunately Thoreau lived as he died-----"without a single throb of supernatural faith, hope, or charity." <sup>2</sup> Not that he was completely disinterested in religion----he even pronounced himself a "Buddhist without the Indic veneration" <sup>3</sup> but my investigations reveal both less interest in Catholicism and less interest in religion in general than I found in Emerson.

Thoreau's most personal contact with Catholicism must have come through his association for a brief period with Hecker. Between April 22 and June 20, 1844 Hecker was at Concord, where he had gone for the express purpose of studying Greek and Latin under the direction of an old Brook Farm teacher, George Bradford. While in Concord Hecker roomed with Thoreau's mother, and thus he got the opportunity to see Henry daily. Thoreau, he acknowledged, did much more than Bradford to help him with his lessons.

---

1. Hecker, Isaac, "Thoreau and New England Transcendentalism," The Catholic World, Vol. XXVII, p. 297.

2. Loc. cit.

3. See Christy, Arthur, The Orient in American Transcendentalism.

Three months after meeting Thoreau, Hecker, who had just been received into the Church, wrote to Henry, inviting him to take a kind of Bohemian walking tour of Europe with him. It seems not unlikely that Hecker thought that the trip and his own enthusiasm for the Church might inspire Thoreau to become a Catholic. Thoreau answered in a characteristic way, declining the invitation and implying that his own means of "exploring the Father Indies" was "inner" -----through reading and meditation. For Thoreau Concord was the world, the "nutshell" wherein he felt he could be "king of infinite space" like Hamlet. In the final paragraph he writes:

"I remember you, as it were, with the whole Catholic Church at your skirts. And the other day, for a moment, I think I understood your relation to that body; the thought was gone in a twinkling, as when a dry leaf falls from its stem over our heads, but is instantly lost in the rustling mass at our feet."

This is, to my mind, one of the most pathetic confessions of the New England mind to its failure to understand Catholicism. "For a moment" Thoreau thought he understood; but "the thought was gone in a twinkling." The "dry leaf" fell and was lost in the "rustling mass." And in that "Twinkling," I fear that whatever hope there was of Thoreau's finding the Faith had gone.

Thoreau's most personal contact with Catholicism

came from the poor Irish immigrants and day-laborers whom he met in and about their "shanties" in Concord, and also from his excursion into French Canada. His attitudes towards the Irish, like those of his Yankee friends and neighbors, were at first intolerant, expressing the resentment of the already-established to the arrival of an alien group. Thoreau seemed less interested in the religion of these Irish "intruders" than he was in their poverty and the necessary dirt and disorder of their humble shanties. Unlike most of the Concord Yankees, he bore against these new neighbors no personal ill-will. On this point Professor Frank Buckley of the University of Minnesota writes:

"His comments (on the Irish) were cleverly satirical; his decision was that the immigrants were hopeless and did not deserve help; but in general his reports were more coldly analytical, than those on lichens, muskrats, and turtles."

After 1850 Thoreau became both more ardent in his defense of the Irish and more caustic in his condemnation of them. Since 1850 marked the year of his visit to Canada, it has been suggested that his observations in Catholic Quebec made him more sympathetic to the Faith of the Irish. Professor Buckley believes, correctly I think, that there is no evidence for this; he contends, rather, that Thoreau used his previous knowledge of the Irish to judge the Canadians. Perhaps the only really pertinent conclusion

I. Buckley, Frank, "Thoreau and the Irish," The New England Quarterly, Vol. XIII, No. 3, p. 392 (September, 1940).

I can draw from Thoreau's comments on the Irish is to say with Professor Buckley: "In its freedom from religious and political bias it is almost unique."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately such a conclusion has only negative value for this thesis; it attests that Thoreau could be "fair" in his judgment of Catholics, but it reveals nothing positive with regard to his Catholicism.

The trip to Canada is something else. I consider it my most important evidence of Thoreau's reactions to Catholicism. The account of that trip appears in A Yankee in Canada,<sup>2</sup> which began serial publication in Putnam's Magazine in 1853. This short work is divided into five chapters as follows:

- I Concord to Montreal
- II Quebec and Montmorency
- III St. Anne
- IV The Walls of Quebec.
- V The scenery of Quebec; and the  
River St. Lawrence.

As these very commonplace chapter titles indicate, the framework of the book is geographical, indicating the principal points of interest on Thoreau's tour. But it is a thoroughly Thoreauvian work. Its first paragraph begins:

1. Buckley, Frank, "Thoreau and the Irish," The New England Quarterly, Vol. XIII, No. e, p. 400 (September, 1940).  
2. Op. cit., pp.3-101.

"I fear that I have not got much to say about Canada, not having seen much; what I got by going to Canada was a cold."

It is of course filled with the details one would expect to find in the work of a writer who was also a close, almost pedantic observer of nature. From the first paragraph to the last we can also find typically Yankee observations on expenses----the entire trip cost Thoreau but twelve dollars and seventy-five cents! The author recalls his Canadian history as he travels north by train and back to Montreal, and as economical of his time as of his cash, he keeps us well informed about his hours of arriving and leaving each stopping-place of his pilgrimage.

Thoreau's first impressions of Catholic Montreal are generally favorable:

"It was early in the afternoon when we stepped ashore. With a single companion, I soon found my way to the church of Notre Dame. (He had already observed this first as the boat drew near the city.) I saw that it was of great size and signified something. It is said to be the largest ecclesiastical structure in North America, and can seat ten thousand, It is two hundred and fifty-five and half feet long, and the groined ceiling is eighty feet above your head. The Catholic are the only churches which I have seen worth remembering, which are not almost wholly profane. I do not speak only of the rich and splendid like this, but of the humblest of them as well. Coming from the hurrahing mob and the rattling carriages, we pushed aside the listed door of this church, and found ourselves instantly in an atmosphere which might be sacred to thought and religion, if one had any. There sat one or two

1. Buckley, Frank, "Thoreau and the Irish," The New England Quarterly, Vol. XIII, No. e, p.3 (September, 1940)

women who had stolen a moment from the concerns of the day, as they were passing; but, if there had been fifty people there, it would still have been the most solitary place imaginable. They did not look up at us, nor did one regard another. We walked softly down the broad aisle with our hats in our hands. Presently came in a tropp of Canadians, in their homespun, who had come to the city in the boat with us, and one and all kneeled down in the aisle before the high altar to their devotions somewhat awkwardly, as cattle prepare to lie down, and there we left them. As if you were to catch some farmer's sons from Marlborough come to cattlę show, silently kneeling in Concord meeting-house some Wednesday. Would there not soon be a mob peeping in at the windows? It is true these Roman Catholics, priests and all, impress me as a people who have fallen far behind the significance of their symbols. It is as if an ox had strayed into a church and were trying to bethink himself. Nevertheless, they are capable of reverence; but we Yankees are a people in whom this sentiment has nearly died out, and in this respect we cannot bethink ourselves even as oxen. I did not mind the pictures nor the candles, whөther tallow or tin. Those of the former, which I looked at appeared tawdry. It matters little to me whether the pictures are by a neophyte of the Algonquin or the Italian tribe. But I was influenced by the quiet, religious atmosphere of the place. It was a great cave in the midst of a city; and what were the altars and the tinsel but the sparkling stalactites, into which you entered in a moment and where the still atmosphere and the somber light disposed to serious and profitable thought? Such a cave at hand, which you can enter any day, is worth a thousand of our churches which are open only Sundays, hardly long enough for an airing, and then filled with a bustling congregation,---a church where the priest is the least part, where you do your own preaching, where the universe preaches to you and can be heard. I am not sure but this Catholic religion would be an admirable one if the priest were quite omitted. I think I might go to church myself some Monday if I lived in a city where there was such a one to go to. In Concord, to be sure, we do not need such. Our forests are such a church, far grander and more sacred. We dare not leave our meeting houses open for fear they would be profaned. Such a cave, such a shrine, in one of our groves, for instance,



how long would it be respected? For what purposes would it be entered by such baboons as we are? I think of its value not only to religion, but to philosophy and poetry; besides a reading room to have a thinking room in every city!----- Let it be furnished and ornamented with whatever conduces to serious and creative thought. I should not object to the holy water or any other symbol, if it were consecrated by the imagination of the worshippers.....

"As for the Protestant churches, here or elsewhere they did not interest me, for it is only as caves that churches interest me, and in that respect they were inferior." 1

I have quoted the above paragraphs almost in their entirety because so many of Thoreau's phrases are so characteristic of the man and of his attitudes to religion in general and to the Catholic Church in particular that they would lose their effect in summary form. Unlike Emerson, Thoreau (not present, be it noted, at formal services) is unimpressed by the art of Notre Dame. His interest in this vast cathedral is that of one who sees it as a "cave," a place for quiet and meditation, reverential in its inspiration but inferior for Thoreau's purposes, to the Concord woods. He does not resent "simple" symbols, and he plainly admires the Catholic capacity for reverence---- with, of course, some reservations. He apparently has little or no respect for Yankee religiosity and has much less than admiration for the barren meeting-houses of which Emerson had complained. It is clear, nevertheless, that Thoreau,

1. Buckley, Frank, "Thoreau and the Irish," The New England Quarterly, Vol. XIII, No. 5, pp.12-14 (September, 1940)

hermit and extreme individualist, was quite incapable of seeing the real significance of the personal and silent Faith of the simple Canadians whom he watched at their devotions. The remark, "I think I might go to church myself some Monday" tells us much of the perversity of this greatest exponent of Emerson's brand of "Self-Reliance." It is the old story: Thoreau admired in the church only those things which he valued most-----silence, solitude, and religion's secular auxiliaries, poetry and "philosophy."

After leaving the Church of Notre Dame Thoreau goes on to say:

"From time to time we met a priest in the streets, for they are distinguished by their dress, like the civil police. Like clergymen generally, with or without gown, they make on us the impression of effeminacy. We also met some Sisters of Charity, dressed in black, with Shaker-shaped black bonnets and crosses, and cadaverous faces, who looked as if they had almost cried their eyes out, their complexions parboiled with scalding tears; insulting the daylight by their presence, having taken an oath not to smile. By cadaverous I mean that their faces were like the faces of those who have been dead and buried for a year, and then untombed, with the life's grief upon them, and yet, for some unaccountable reason, the process of decay arrested.....

"They waited demurely on the sidewalk, while a truck laden with raisins was driven in at the seminary of St. Sulpice, never once lifting their eyes from the ground."

This paragraph, like the preceding one, has more than a touch of anticlericalism in it, which extended even to the commonplace Protestant antipathy for nuns. He speaks of the

1. Buckley, Frank, "Thoreau and the Irish," The New England Quarterly, Vol. XIII, No. e, pp.15-16. (September, 1940).

priests as if they were ecclesiastical policemen, and the good but naive Henry hated all keepers of law and order. What should we have expected on this score from one who wrote in his famous "Resistance to Civil Government" one of the most completely anarchical articles ever written? (The title of this essay is more familiarly known as "Civil Disobedience.").

Thoreau's next specific observations on the Church were reserved for his experiences at the famous shrine of St. Anne. He writes:

"We began to meet with wooden crosses frequently, by the roadside, about a dozen feet high, often old and toppling down, sometimes standing in a square wooden platform, sometimes in a pile of stones, with a little niche containing a picture of the Virgin and Child, or of Christ alone, sometimes with a string of beads, and covered with a piece of glass to keep out the rain, with the words, Pour la Vierge or I N R I, on them. Frequently, on the cross-bar, there would be quite a collection of symbolical knick-knacks, looking like an Italian's board; the representation in wood of a hand, a hammer, spikes, pincers, a flask of vinegar, a ladder, etc., the whole, perchance, surmounted by a weathercock; but I could not look at an honest weathercock in this walk without mistrusting that there was some covert reference in it to St. Peter. From time to time we passed a little one-story chapel-like building, with a tin-roofed spire, a shrine, perhaps it would be called, close to the path-side, with a lattice door, through which we could see an altar and pictures about the walls; equally open, through rain and shine though there was no getting into it. At these places the inhabitants kneeled and perhaps breathed a short prayer. We saw one schoolhouse in our walk, and listened to the sounds which issued from it; but it appeared like a place where the process, not of enlightening but of obfuscating the mind was going on, and the pupils received only so much light as could penetrate the shadow of the Catholic Church."<sup>1</sup>

1. OP. Cit., pp. 45-46.

In this passage Thoreau, the observer of detail, is at work, but the whole paragraph is permeated with a bias which robs these observations of their objectivity. The extent of Catholic symbolism, its very familiarity and closeness to the people, is already beginning to pull on him; he dare not look at an "honest weathercock!" His remarks about the "obfuscating" character of Catholic education are nothing more than the expression of traditional prejudices-----the prejudices of one who had himself been a most unconventional schoolmaster after his graduation from Harvard. Note that Thoreau did not even deign to enter the school; he knew without bothering to find out that nothing good could come out of Nazareth; Even if he had entered, his very lack of proficiency in French would have been a barrier only less serious than his Protestant prejudices.

Inevitably he visited the Church of La Bonne Ste. Anne, but of course he was, as one might expect, exceedingly sceptical of the miraculous cures wrought there. He writes:

"There was a profusion of gilding, and I counted more than twenty-five crutches, suspended on the walls, some for grown persons, some for children, which it was to be inferred so many sick had been able to dispense with but they looked as if they had been made to order for the carpenter who made the church.....Our whole walk was through a thoroughly Catholic country, and there was no trace of any other

religion. I doubt if there are any more simple and unsophisticated Catholics anywhere." <sup>1</sup>

Again the gratuitous inference about the crutches tells its sad story of Thoreauvian prejudice.

Our final reference of importance to Catholicism of the French Canadians appears in this work. In the Chapter on the visit to St. Anne, Thoreau praises the alleged liberality of England in treating her Catholic subjects in Canada-----"permitting them of wear their own fetters, both political and religious, as far as was possible for subjects." <sup>2</sup> For this Transcendentalist par excellence, as I have said before, all bonds of authority were "fetters," and the bonds of ecclesiastical power were particularly odious.

Except for infrequent and trivial references to the Church in Thoreau's Journals or familiar letters, there is little more record about his attitude to Catholicism. That little (e.g. in a letter to Harrison Blake: "Have no idle disciplines like the Catholic Church"<sup>3</sup>) presents only further confirmation of the prejudices he recorded in his "Yankee in Canada." Undoubtedly Thoreau thought sincerely that he was being just and fair to an Institution he had comprehended only once for a mere "Twinkling." But fair and just he was not-----less so even

1. Buckley, Frank, "Thoreau and the Irish", The New England Quarterly, Vol. XIII, No. e, pp.51-52. (September, 1940).
2. Op. cit., p. 64.
3. Op. cit., p. 243.

than Emerson. It is small wonder that Father Hecker deeply presented any comparison between Concord's handy-man and El Poverello or that he could write, in spite of his admiration of Thoreau's literary style and honest love of Nature, these words:

"With Thoreau died the Transcendental hermit, and so far as human nature and a happy combination of character and circumstance could permit, the only truly ideal man that Transcendentalism has produced. Yet how far he falls below the most commonplace mind in spiritual range and power and aim! ..... There was not the light of Christian faith or love upon his life, which is distinguished from the savages' only by its superior mental civilization and its relation to that civilization which he so humorously yet contradictorily despised."

Yes indeed, the "only truly ideal man that Transcendentalism has produced" was hardly more than a superior and noble savage. Unfortunately that "superiority" proved to be his undoing as far as approaching Catholicism was concerned. Like Emerson, Thoreau was never thoroughly emancipated from his Puritan and Yankee past, and the kind of emancipation he managed to achieve through Romantic liberalism served only the more to becloud the fundamental questions, the answers to which lead the "seeker" inevitably to the doors of the Church Universal. He may not have entered Notre Dame Church to scoff, but he was by tempera-

I. Hecker, Isaac, "Thoreau and New England Transcendentalism," The Catholic World. Vol. XXVII, No.159, p. 299 (June, 1878).

ment and self-training singularly unsuited to remain to pray.

5. Afterthoughts

It is quite clear from this chapter that in general the Transcendentalists, the chief rebels of the Golden Day, were by their very creedless creed very unlikely to look at Catholicism with kindly eyes. Although their roots were in the Puritan past, these roots did not belong to the main or parent trunk of that tree. As time had marched relentlessly on and the essential traditionalism of Puritan Faith had disappeared, the rebels moved, to change our figure farther and further away from the center. They came in fact to what Carlyle in another similar but more personal situation had called the "Center of Indifference." And yet, paradoxically, it was from Transcendentalism rather than from the Genteel Tradition that Catholicism won its only notable converts in the New England Renaissance. With Bronson and Hecker and Mrs. Ripley the Transcendental Verities turned away from that dangerous Center and turned full circle to that point whereat, by the grace of God, they were able to shout not only The "Everlasting Yea" of Carlyle but also the "Sursum Corda" of those who had found the Eternal Verities of the Catholic Church.

## C H A P T E R \_ V

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW:

### POET AND PILGRIM

#### 1. The "Genteel" Poet.

Of all the New England writers upon whom the modern critics have fastened the contemptuous epithet "genteel," none has suffered either so much or so little as Longfellow. Although he was not without his detractors while living, among whom Poe was a notorious example, Longfellow's reputation had to wait until the 1900's to reach its lowest point.

A new generation of poets was then in the ascendancy and their satellite critics seemed to feel that the "New Poetry" had to rise triumphant over the nineteenth century traditions - or not rise at all. Hence, they hastened, (I choose this word advisedly) to pronounce obituaries over Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, and the rest, that were nothing more or less than compendia of abuse and scorn. The "gentle" Longfellow, beloved of households, and of children was one of their principal targets. In the bright new lexicons of these critics such words as "genteel" and "didactic" and "sentimental" were fighting words, with which to beat



the shades of the New England Renaissance. Longfellow suffered more from that beating than the rest, because he was most widely known and loved, thanks to the kind, but not always merciful employment of his didactic pieces in the schoolroom. To admire Longfellow in the 1920's or, what was worse, to admit that you did, was tantamount to confessing one's own alleged puerility. And yet Longfellow suffered rather less than his other "genteel" contemporary poets because even his detractors were willing to admire his undeniable contributions "in making Americans acquainted with certain phases of European Literature" <sup>1</sup> by adaptation and translation; and partly because his defenders were already at hand to rescue him from his schoolroom reputation as the poet of pious platitudes. <sup>2</sup> His detractors (among whom I select Professor Blackenship, not because he is a really noted critic, but because his work expressed the opinions of certain "liberal" university critics) also admitted that Longfellow had pleasant and homely virtues, but they despised his "bookishness," his moralizings, and his sentimental ideals.

This is obviously not the place to defend Longfellow or his reputation as a poet. He has been defended not only by university critics such as Professors Jones, Shepard, and Elliott, but also by such master craftsmen

1. Blankenship, Russell, American Literature, p. 337.
2. See the essay on Longfellow by Howard Mumford Jones in Macy, John (ed) American Writers on American Literature, pp. 109-124; also Shepard, Odell (ed) Longfellow.

as the English poet, Mr. Alfred Noyes<sup>1</sup>. It is worth noting here in explanation, if not in defense, of the attack on Longfellow that the critics who condemned him usually represented a strong left-wing group, which quite naturally hated and misunderstood Longfellow's re-discovery of the Christian traditions of Europe. This group had neither eyes to see nor ears to hear nor scholarship to understand the "gentle," the cultured Cambridge poet. Still less did they care to permit his "shade" to perpetuate the glories of a Faith which they regarded as even more archaic than the poet's ~~quaint~~ tendency to speak respectfully of God.

## 2. The Young Pilgrim

There is no evidence to show what Longfellow thought about Catholicism before he set out on his first European pilgrimage in 1826. This nineteen year old boy, scion of an old and fairly well-to-do New England family, had been sent to Europe by his Alma Mater, Bowdoin College, for the express purpose of learning and preparing to teach the modern languages of Europe. His father, a lawyer by profession, was a Harvard classmate of the elder William Ellery Channing, and had brought his family up in the creed of Unitarianism. Bowdoin in Longfellow's time, was much more inclined to be conservatively Calvinistic in its

1. Alfred Noyes, Some Aspects of Modern Poetry p. 73 and ff.

faculty; but there is evidence to show that young Henry had an independent spirit in religious matters. He even dared to try to establish a Unitarian society at the College.<sup>1</sup> Certainly young Longfellow approached Catholicism in Europe with no better backgrounds than previous New England pilgrims, such as Ticknor. There seems to have been nothing either in his inheritance or his previous education to predispose him to that alien and much-hated institution, the Catholic Church, unless it was the heart of the poet hungering for new inspiration. Longfellow's discovery of Catholicism was no more like Brownson's than it was like Father Hecker's. These two "seekers" were in quest of spiritual realities that would satisfy restless minds and troubled hearts. Longfellow's discovery of Catholicism came unfortunately to one who had little or no taste for theological speculation. His spiritual hunger was almost entirely artistic.

The record of Longfellow's sojourn in Europe during 1826 to 1829 is replete with striking evidence, however, that Catholicism made an almost instantaneous appeal to his imagination and feelings. This record contained principally in his letters and in his own Sketch Book entitled Outre Mer, is embarrassingly rich. I shall cite only the most significant passages, because much of the evidence was necessarily repetitions. I shall begin with

I. Hatfield, J.T. New Light on Longfellow, p. 4.

the letters to his father and brother and an extract from his Journal, because, although the materials in Outre Mer antedate these items, the book itself was not published in its final form until 1823.

The first pertinent letter is one of the comparatively rare pieces in our exhibit to record an unfavorable attitude to the Church. Writing to his father from Bordeaux on February 26, 1827, three sentences bespeak the Unitarian mind on the alleged attempts of the French ministry to "shackle the spirit of the nation:"

"It is the dark and dangerous policy of the priesthood that is doing this. The Jesuits rule the mind of a rich, good-hearted king (Charles I). Think with what strides a nation is going back to the dark ages, when a printer is publickly (sic!) prosecuted for publishing the moral precepts of the Evangelist without the miracles!"<sup>1</sup>

This extract written several months after Longfellow's arrival in Europe might seem to contradict my assertion of the "almost instantaneous appeal" of the Church, but please note that these remarks were concerned with the least imaginative side of Catholicism and were doubtless colored by political bias.

In another letter to his father, dated July 16, 1827, from Madrid, his comment on the obedience and docility of the Catholicism of the Spaniards is notable for another

1. Longfellow, Samuel, Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,  
Vol. I, p. 101.

slighting reference to the "blind obedience" of the faithful to the priesthood. And yet in the next paragraph Longfellow writes:

"The ceremony most frequently witnessed is the passage of the **Host**, or consecrated wafer, or as the Spaniard firmly believes it to be, the body of God himself - to the death-bed of some poor child of immortality. It is carried upon the end of a silver staff by some bare-headed friar, preceded by the banners of the church, and a short procession of the priests with wax candles and the tinkling of a bell. As the procession passes through the street, the people take off their hats and throw themselves upon their knees; the noise and bustle of the city ceases, and you hear nothing but the tinkling of the bell. These are common every-day processions, But the other night I witnessed a spectacle far more imposing. I was at the Opera, and in the midst of the scene, the tap of a drum at the door, and the sound of the friar's bell, announced the approach of the Host. In an instant the music ceased; a hush ran through the house. The actors on the stage in their brilliant dresses kneeled, and bowed their heads. And the whole audience turned toward the street and threw themselves upon their knees. It was a most singular spectacle; the sudden silence, the immense kneeling crowd, the group upon the stage and the decorations of the scene<sup>1</sup> produced the most peculiar sensation in my mind".

This passage speaks for itself. Although Longfellow does not understand, as we say, what it is all about, the scene at the Opera certainly appealed to his sense of reverence.

In his Journal for November 12, 1827, he tells of a visit to a Carthusian convent outside of Rome. He describes the rigorous life of the monks with sympathy and comments favorably on the hospitality, and unassuming asce-

1. Longfellow, Samuel, Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  
Vol. I, p. 119-120

ticism of the guest-master. <sup>1</sup>

One of the most significant of the letters written during the period was one to his brother Stephen, from Rome, on June 28, 1828. He comments at some length on the startling differences in customs and attitudes toward morality between New England and Italy. He is of course still a bit perplexed by the frankness of the Latin races in "parading" openly their marital infidelities. He is perhaps disturbed (not too much so) by the contrast between the freedom the Latins enjoy on Sunday and his memories of the rigors of the New England Sabbath. Like Emerson, he is still more puzzled by what he regards as "superstition" and "political Catholicism", and yet he can say:

"But I have been so long in Roman Catholic countries, that the abuses in this religion have little effect on me. Its principles are as pure and holy as could be wished." <sup>2</sup>

To turn to the pages of Outre-Mer after reading some of these sharp criticisms of the Church in his personal letters and Journal, we experience a pleasant surprise. In this work in which he was trying to emulate Irving's Sketch Book there is scarcely a line of really adverse commentary on the Church or its communicants. Unquestionably Outre-Mer lacks the mellowness and literary grace of Irving's work, but here we find something more than the merely

1. Longfellow, Samuel, Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  
Vol. I p.133

2. Op. cit., p.148

objective reports of a student-pilgrim. Both in the sketches and in the fictional chapters of this volume we can see Longfellow entering valiantly and sympathetically into the Catholic spirit of the Old World. It may be, as Professor Hatfield claims, that he softened a little some of his more trenchant satire on the Church in response to the advices of editors.<sup>1</sup> There is no reason to believe that the "softening" process played any conspicuous part in Outre-Mer. In the opening sketch he confesses:

"The Pays d'outre-Mer, or the Land beyond the Sea, is a name by which the pilgrims and crusaders of old usually designated the Holy Land. I, too, in a certain sense have been a pilgrim to Outre-Mer; for to my youthful imagination the Old World was a kind of Holy Land, lying far off beyond the blue horizon of the ocean."<sup>2</sup>

The "Old World was a kind of Holy Land", indeed, and Longfellow entered it like a devout pilgrim or palmer.

The first sketch of definitely Catholic tone is Longfellow's retelling of a thirteenth century Norman Fabliau, which he called "Martin Franc and the Monk of Saint Anthony."<sup>2</sup> Like a good many of the fabliaux, the tone of the story is rather frankly anti-clerical, but, if I may be permitted to make such a distinction, it is Catholic anti-clericalism rather than the Protestant or worldly anti-clericalism of modern times. It is the kind of satire on wordly monks and friars such as we may read

---

1. See Hatfield, James T., New Light on Longfellow, p.137.  
2. Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, The Works of (Edition DeLuxe). Vol. I p.28.

in the pages of Chaucer. As a story it is quite evidently amateurish and, except as evidence of a quasi-Catholic tinge in Longfellow's suspicions about the celibacy of certain worldly monks, is of slight value to this thesis. The following sketch, "The Village of Auteuil", contains an excellent but brief description of Longfellow's feelings as he watches the solemnity of the Catholic burial-service.<sup>1</sup>

The seventh sketch contains a very beautiful and sympathetic story of the death of "Jacqueline"<sup>2</sup>. I have met few descriptions, even in Catholic fiction, of the beauty and tenderness with which Holy Church comes to her children with the Blessed Viaticum and the last anointing to equal this. There is not a single false or bigoted note in this little seven-page story. It is almost certainly the work of one who believes sincerely in a "better world" than this and who has nothing but reverence for the last rites of a Church hitherto alien to his experience.

Between "Jacqueline" and a semi-fictitious chapter called "The Baptism of Fire" are four sketches which are scarcely concerned, except by indirection, with Catholicism. "The Baptism of Fire" is the story of on Anne Du Bourg, a Protestant "martyr" under Henry II. It is of course sympathetic to Du Bourg, but the most striking thing about the story is its freedom from vituperation against the Church - the usual anti-Catholic chorus of similar tales. A Catholic friend comes to Anne (a man) and tries to get

---

1. Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, The Works of (Edition DeLuxe).  
Vol. I, pp.73-74

2. Op. cit., pp.76-83.



him to recognize his heresy. Although Longfellow's sympathies are obviously with the heretic, he can write:

"The Catholic and the Huguenot reasoned long and earnestly together; but they reasoned in vain. Each was firm in his belief; and they parted to meet no more on earth."<sup>1</sup>

This is of course only negative evidence, but it is safe to assume that most of Longfellow's contemporaries among the writers of New England would have seized the opportunity to denounce the Church.

After two more French sketches, we find ourselves on the way to Spain, and it seems to me that in general Catholicism as expressed by the Spanish way of life made a deeper, and more favorable mark upon Longfellow than the Catholicism of France or Italy. In that series of impressionistic pictures of Spain united under the title, "A Tailor's Drawer," we find this item:

"What a contrast between this personage (a Spanish gallant) and the sallow, emaciated being who is now crossing the street. It is a barefooted Carmelite, a monk of an austere order,- wasted by midnight vigils and long penance. Abstinence is written on that pale cheek, and the bowed head and down cast eye are in accordance with the meek profession of a medicant brotherhood.

"What is the world to thee, thou man of penitence and prayer? What hast thou to do with all this busy, turbulent scene about thee,- with all the noise, and gayety, and splendor of this thronged city? Nothing. The wide world gives thee nothing, save thy daily crust, thy crucifix, thy convent-cell, thy pallet of straw! Pilgrim

---

1. Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, The Works of (Edition De-Luxe). Vol. I p. 137.

of heaven! thou hast no home on earth.  
Thou, art journeying onward to a house not  
made with hands; and like the first apostle  
of thy faith, thou takest neither gold, nor  
silver, nor brass, nor scrip for thy journey.  
Thou hast shut thy heart to the endearments  
of earthly love, - thy shoulder beareth not  
the burden with thy fellow-man- in all this  
vast crowd thou hast no friends, no hopes, no  
sympathies. Thou standest aloof from man- and  
art thou nearer God? I know not. Thy motives,  
thy intentions, thy desires are registered in  
heaven. I am thy fellow-man- and not thy judge." 1

Surely, Emerson or Thoreau could never have penned this  
eloquent and understanding lines! I give them in their  
entirety, for they have rarely been quoted.

"The Village of El Pardillo" is a lively little  
Spanish prose idyll which gives Longfellow several good  
opportunities to meditate upon the Faith of the people  
to whom he "took" almost by instinct. In that memorable  
chapter he tells us:

"One evening, as I loitered around this spot  
(the village church) the sound of an organ  
and the chant of youthful voices from within  
struck my ear; the church door was ajar, and I  
entered. There stood the priest, surrounded by  
a group of children, who were singing a hymn to  
the Virgin: -

"Ave, Regina coelorum,  
Ave, Domina angelorum" 2

After describing the beauty of the children's singing,  
Longfellow goes on to recount in detail a lesson in cate-  
chism in which the priest seeks to teach these little ones

1. Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, The Works of (Edition DeLuxe)  
Vol. I p. 192.
2. Op. Cit., p. 225.

something of the Divine Mysteries of the Trinity, the "redemption, and so on. The words translated from the Spanish by Longfellow, sound very familiar to Catholic ears, but Longfellow, impressed though he was by the setting, cannot refrain from writing;

"I did not quarrel with the priest for having been born and educated in a different faith from mine; but as I left the church and sauntered slowly homeward I could not help asking myself in a whisper, why perplex the spirit of a child with these metaphysical subtleties, these dark, mysterious speculations, which man in all his pride of intellect cannot fathom or explain?"<sup>1</sup>

Here speaks the artist, the man who has neither the mind nor the taste for "metaphysical subtleties" and theological speculation. Here is a kind of reverent scepticism often hard to distinguish from mysticism. Longfellow fears to break the romantic spell of his village idyll. Later he follows up these observations, in the vein of Oliver Goldsmith describing his native Lissoy, by giving us a very human and pleasing pen-sketch of the priest who has just been teaching the catechism.

"He was a short portly man serious in manner, and of grave and reverend presence, though at the same time there was a dash of the jolly-fatfriar about him; and on hearing a good joke or a sly innuendo, a smile would gleam in his eye, and play over his round face, like the light of a glow-worm."<sup>2</sup>

The rest of the chapter completes an altogether beautiful

- 
1. Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, The Works of (Edition DeLuxe) Vol. I pp. 228-229.
  2. Op. Cit., p. 229.

pastoral sketch, written by one who was doing his very best to enter into coincident thinking and feeling with the villagers of Catholic El Pardillo.

The next chapter in *Outre-Mer* is one of the longest in the volume. It is also the only one with any pretensions to specialized scholarship. I am, unfortunately, unable to speak with authority on "The Devotional Poetry of Spain", but I have rarely read a more delightful vade-mecum to any foreign literature. What does impress me about the entire tone of this chapter is Longfellow's whole-hearted acceptance of the simple fact that any true understanding of the devotional poetry of Spain must be founded on a genuine effort to know and to appreciate the Faith of the Catholic Church. Read the following passage carefully, and note the progress Longfellow has made since our trip with him through the Land beyond the Sea.

"An enthusiasm of religious feeling, and of external ritual observances, prevails throughout the land. But more particularly is the name of the Virgin honored and adored. Ave Maria is the salutation of peace at the friendly threshold, and the God-speed to the wayfarer. It is the evening orison, when the toils of the day are done; and at midnight it echoes along the solitary streets in the voice of the watchman's cry.

"These and similar peculiarities of religious faith are breathing and moving through a large portion of the devotional poetry of Spain. It is not only inspired with religious feeling, but incorporated with the substance of things seen. Not only are the poet's lips touched with a coal from the altar, but his spirit is folded in the cloud of incense that rises before the shrines of the Virgin Mother, and the glorious company of the saints and martyrs. His soul is not wholly swallowed up in the sublime attributes of the Eternal Mind; but with its lamp trimmed and burning,

it goeth out to meet its bridegroom, as if he were coming in a bodily presence" <sup>1</sup>

That last sentence tells us that Longfellow must have been contrasting the simple and concrete piety of the Spanish poets with the vague contemplation of the "Eternal Mind" he heard so much talk about in Unitarian and Transcendentalist circles at home.

The concluding paragraph of this sketch is also worth quoting in part. Longfellow is here writing of the sincerity of the devotional poets. He says:

"During the Middle Ages, there was corruption in the church, - foul, shameful corruption; and now also hypocrisy may scourge itself in feigned repentance, and ambition hide its face beneath a hood; yet all is not therefore rottenness that wears a cowl. Many a pure spirit through heavenly-mindedness and an ardent though mistaken zeal has fled from the temptations of the world to seek in solitude of self-communion a closer walk with God. And not in vain. They have found the peace they sought. They have felt, indeed, what many profess to feel, but do not feel, - that they are strangers and sojourners here, travellers who are bound for their home in a far off country. It is this feeling which I speak of as giving a peculiar charm to the devotional poetry of Spain. Compare its spirit with the spirit which its authors have exhibited in their lives. They speak of having given up the world, and it is no poetical hyperbole; they speak of longing to be free from the weakness of the flesh, that they may commence their conversation in heaven, - and we feel they had already begun it in lives of penitence, meditation, and prayer." <sup>2</sup>

In the following sketch Longfellow returns to the subject of devotion to Our Blessed Lady. Here in

1. Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, The Works of (Edition De-Luxe). Vol. I pp. 236-237

2. Op. cit., pp. 259-260.

"The Pilgrims Breviary" he writes in part:

"I have always listened with feelings of solemn pleasure to the bell that sounded forth the Ave Maria. As it announced the close of day, it seemed also to call the soul from its worldly occupations to repose and devotion. There is something beautiful in this measuring the march of time. The hour, too, naturally brings the heart into unison with the feelings and sentiments of devotion. The close of the day, the shadows of evening, the colour of twilight, inspire a feeling of tranquility,- and though I may differ from the Catholic in regard to the object of his supplication, yet it seems to me a beautiful and appropriate solemnity that at the close of each daily epoch of life,- which, if it have not been fruitful in incidents to ourselves, has, nevertheless, been so to many of the great human family, the voice of a whole people, and of the whole world should go up to heaven in praise, and supplication, and thankfulness." <sup>1</sup>

The Pilgrim may be a bit mistaken about the "object" of the Catholic's supplication, but he surely shows here a genuine understanding of the essence of prayer- "praise, supplication, and thankfulness.

By the time Longfellow was ready to leave Spain for Italy, he is already thoroughly steeped in the Catholic traditions of southern Europe. It is not strange then to find him in Leghorn making an invidious comparison between the worldly and sentimental epitaph on the tombstone of a lady buried there in the Protestant cemetery, with an inscription he had read on the tomb of a Catholic Lady in Bologna. The former:

---

1. Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, The Works of (Edition De-Luxe). Vol. I pp. 277-278.

"With Joy of heart she has resigned her breath,  
A living martyr to sensibility."

The latter is memorialized in these simple words:

"Lucrezia Picini  
Implora eterna pace."<sup>1</sup>

Like so many pilgrims to Rome, Catholic and Protestant, Longfellow is struck by the omnipresent and importunate beggars, but, unlike so many travellers of his own faith and country, he is amused rather than disedified by their pleas, in which extravagant compliments and whinings are joined to pious litanies and salutations.<sup>2</sup> He is still, however, a bit too much inclined to believe gossip about the bad reputation of "priests, monks, monsignors, and cardinals of Rome". Perhaps the only really malicious references in Outre-Mer occur in regard to the alleged immorality of the Roman clergy. His editor assures us in a footnote that "Longfellow's views on the matter underwent a change later."<sup>3</sup>

The final episode in Outre-Mer of significant interest to this thesis occurs in the sketch called "Village of La Riccia". It tells of Longfellow's conversation with an Irish Capuchin friar at the convent of Castel Gandolfo. The monk invited Longfellow in to see another Irish Capuchin, who was dying. The scene is described

- 
1. Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, The Works (Edition DeLuxe), Vol. I, pp.298-299.
  2. Op. cit., pp.312-313.
  3. Op. cit., p.315.

simplicity and sympathy. The young American admired the courage of anticipated recovery with which the dying priest greeted them and was thrilled deeply by his longing for the shores of the Emerald Isle. The sketch closes with these words:

"I saw the sick monk no more; but a day or two afterward I heard in the village that he had departed, - not for an earthly, but for a heavenly home." <sup>1</sup>

Our poet-pilgrim had come a long way towards Rome, the Church, since his peregrinations began. His first European sojourn, of which Outre-Mer is an excellent record, sent Longfellow back to America and Bowdoin College with a love and admiration for Catholicism, which was to remain with him throughout life. Later visit served but to confirm or strengthen these first impressions. It is surely safe to conclude even at this point that no New Englander on the Grand Tour in Longfellow's day ever came so close as he to seeing the Beauty of Holiness in its full Catholic radiance.

### 3. The Catholic Poetry of Longfellow.

So much of Longfellow's poetry is religious and moral in tone that it is often difficult to decide whether or not a given piece, not specifically Catholic in imagery

<sup>1</sup> Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, The Works of (Edition De-Luxe). Vol. I pp. 336.



or inspiration, had its origin in the poet's contacts with Catholicism. Then, too, there are other poems e.g. "Midnight Mass for the Dying Year",<sup>1</sup> replete with Catholic imagery and closing with the familiar "Kyrie elesyon! Christe eleyson!", which do not seem Catholic, except in the broad and universal sense of the term. Quite obviously too, such deeply moral poetry as the "psalm of Life," with its implicit denial of Calvinism, was, as Professor Jones and others have pointed out, derived from Goethe.<sup>2</sup> Without indulging in the pedantary of line-counting, I still can say that more than fifty percent of Longfellow's poetry is, nevertheless, Catholic in inspiration and idea or both.

Amid this profusion of riches I must choose carefully; and for that reason I shall present as evidence of Longfellow's attitudes some quotations from well-known Catholic poems and some from pieces usually ignored in the essays on Longfellow and Catholicism. It must be remembered that the poet often drew both from his memories of Catholic Europe and from his wide readings in Christian Literature that go back to the early Church Fathers and forward to the venacular writers of his own time. I had intended to present the poems in order of composition, but careful study shows there is no point in so doing. Longfellow had pretty well formed his ideas about the Church by 1829.

1. Scudder, Horace E., The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, pp.6-7
2. Macy John (ed), American Writers on American Literature, p.116

Some of his earlier prejudices, it is true, did disappear entirely as he matured. He was, remember, only twenty-two years old, but I can find little evidence in his poems of even the slight metamorphosis that took place within the pages of Outre Mer.

In one sense the purest and greatest Catholic poem in Longfellow's works is his verse-translation of the "Divine Comedy". This translation, included in the poet's Collected Works, is omitted from his Complete Poetical Works, but other translations and adaptations from Catholic literature are there. Although Longfellow spent much of his mature life in the study and translation of Dante, it is admitted generally by his admirers that the work is a failure. There is in it at once too much of a Longfellow, who lacked the Florentine's depth, and too much of Dante, to regard the poem as an "original" work. I am omitting it from this study principally because it would be an arduous and unrewarding task in itself for one, not an Italian scholar, to determine how much, if any, of the Catholicism of the poem is Longfellow's. I find more truly relevant evidence in the group of sonnets <sup>1</sup>, six in number, written during the process of the translation. The first two served as fly-leaves to the Inferno, the third and fourth to the Purgatorio and the last two to the Paradiso.

---

1. Macy John (ed), American Writers on American Literature, pp. 292-293.

These sonnets are almost too well known for re-copying here, and yet, after years of reading them and now comparing them with his other Catholic poems, I am prepared to say that nothing in Longfellow seems to express such perfect rapprochement with Catholicism as we find in the first, third, and fifth of these sonnets. The first, which compares the peace and consolation the poet finds in translating Dante to the refuge from the "dust and heat" the laborer finds in some quiet cathedral, tells us that Longfellow is "not ashamed to pray." And indeed he is not, for this sonnet is a kind of "veni, Sancte Spiritus" uttered before he writes. The third closes with a marvelous sestet on confession:

"From the confessionals I hear arise  
Rehearsals of forgotten tragedies,  
And Lamentations from the crypts below,  
And then a voice celestial that begins  
With the pathetic words, 'Although your sins  
As scarlet be; and ends with 'as the driven snow!'" <sup>1</sup>

The first of the fly-leaf sonnets for the *Paradiso* is worth quoting in its entirety:

"I lift mine eyes, and all the windows blaze  
With forms of Saints and holy men who died  
Here martyred and hereafter glorified;  
And the great Rose upon its leaves displays  
Christ's Triumph, and the angelic roundelays,  
With splendor upon splendor multiplied;  
And Beatrice again at Dante's side  
No more rebukes, but smiles her words of praise.  
And then the organ sounds, and unseen choirs

---

1. Macy John (ed), American Writers on American Literature, p. 292.

Sing the old Latin hymns of peace and love  
And benedictions of the Holy Ghost;  
And the melodious bells among the spires  
O'er all the ten house tops and through heaven above  
Proclaim the elevation of the Host!" 1

This is not only a fine sonnet, but in tone and in conception it is about as close as any son of New England came to the beauties of Catholicism during their Renaissance.

It is difficult to continue this process I have begun of ranking in eminence the Catholic poems of Longfellow. In the kingdom of these poems there are many mansions, ranging from the ambitious Christus: A Mystery, with its magnificently medieval second Part, "The Golden Legend," to the pastoral simplicity of Evangeline and including such characteristic Longfellow pieces as "The Sermon of St. Francis." I shall reserve Evangeline and the Christus for special mention at the end of this section and proceed now to consider some of the "simple and heart-felt lays," often passed over with a mere mention by students of Longfellow's Catholicism.

The first group worthy of consideration consists of two poems included in the Appendix of the Complete Poetical Works. They are translations or rather adaptations from the Spanish; in spite of this, I include them, because they must have appealed in their substance to Longfellow -

1. Macy John (ed), American Writers on American Literature,  
p. 293.

otherwise he would not have translated them. Writers much less Catholic in spirit than Longfellow often translated Dante, for his work has secular as well as religious appeals. The first of these from Luis de Gongoray Argote is called "The Nativity of Christ."

"To-day from Aurara's bosom  
A pink has fallen,- a crimson blossom;  
And oh, how glorious rests the hay  
On which the fallen blossom lay.

"When silence gently had unfurled  
Her mantle over all beloved  
And crowned with winter's frost and snow,  
Night swayed the sceptere of the world,  
Amid the gloom descending slow,  
Upon the monarch's frozen bosom  
A pink has fallen,- a crimson blossom.

"The only flower the Virgin bore  
Aurora fair within her breast  
She gave to earth, yet still possessed  
Her Virgin blossom as before:  
The hay that colored drop caressed,-  
Received upon its faithful bosom  
That single flower,- a crimson blossom

"The manger unto which 't was given,  
Ever amid wintry snows and cold,  
Within its fostering arms to fold  
The blushing flower that fell from Heaven,  
Was as a canopy of gold,-  
A downy couch,- where on its bosom  
That flower hath fallen,- that crimson blossom." <sup>1</sup>

The second of these poems is an adaptation from Luis Ponce de Leon, and, like its companion-piece, is a Marian poem on

"The Assumption of the Virgin"

"Lady! Bethine upward flight  
The opening heavens receive with joyful song,  
Blest, who thy garments bright

1. Macy John (ed), American Writers on American Literature, pp.51-52.

May seize, amid the throng,  
And to the sacred mount float peacefully along.

"Bright angels are around thee,  
They that have served thee from birth are there:  
Their hands with stars have crowned thee;  
Thou, - peerless Queen of air,  
As sandals to thy feet the silver moon dost wear.

"Celestial dove!, so meek  
And mild and fair! - oh, let thy peaceful eye  
This thorny valley seek,  
Where such sweet blossoms lie,  
But where the sons of Eve in pain and sorrow sigh.

"For if the imprisoned soul  
Could catch the brightness of that heavenly way,  
't would run its sweet combat  
And gently pass away  
Drawn by the magnet, power to an eternal day." <sup>1</sup>

To me these two translations are striking evidence of Longfellow's leanings towards Catholicism, - more striking, as I implied above, than his translations of the Divine Comedy, which appealed to many other poets for its sheer greatness as a poem. Longfellow alone among the New England writers was, as we have seen in Outre Mer, struck by Catholic love for Our Blessed Lady. And in these two translations, not notable in themselves for their art, he reveals by indirection an attitude toward a distinctively Catholic devotion exceedingly rare among the sons of Puritan New England. May I suggest that Longfellow's respect for the veneration of Mary is the real touchstone of his understanding of Catholicism?

1. Mac, John (ed), American Writers on American Literature,  
p. 652.

Longfellow's reverence for the saints was also sui generis. Emerson might speak grandiosely of the eloquence of St. Chrysostom or the profundity of St. Augustine, but the High Priest of Transcendentalism admired them much as he admired Martin Luther and Plato. Emerson could no more have translated "Saint Teresa's Book Mark" than he could have written a Marian poem. Here is Longfellow's translation:

"Let nothing disturb thee,  
Nothing affright thee;  
All things are passing;  
God never changeth;  
Patient endurance  
Attaineth to all things;  
Who God possesseth.  
In nothing is wanting;<sup>1</sup>  
Alone God sufficeth."

One committed to the Emersonian doctrine of "Self-Reliance" would never subscribe to these Teresian sentiments- even by translation. I pass over "The Sermon of St. Francis" <sup>2</sup> quickly, because so many other Protestants and even unbelievers have paid homage to the Assisian's love of birds, without ever recognizing the basis for this love. They praise St. Francis as if he were a modern humanitarian. Longfellow does not, to be sure, but the poem is not to my mind distinctively Catholic. "Monte Cassino", <sup>3</sup> on the other hand, is filled with the lore about this famous cradle of the

1. Mac, John (ed), American Writers on American Literature, p. 597
2. Op. Cit., p. 327.
3. Op. cit., pp. 325-326.

Benedictines and its saintly founder. I quote three stanzas:

"The silence of the place was like a sleep,  
So full of rest it seemed: each passing tread  
Was a reverberation from the deep  
Recesses of the ages that are dead

"For more than thirteen centuries ago,  
Benedict fleeing from the gates of Rome,  
A youth disgusted with its vice and woe,  
Sought in these mountains solitudes a home.

"He founded here his Convent and his Rule  
Of prayer and work, and counted work as prayer;  
The pen became a clarion, and his school  
Flashed like a beacon in the midnight air."

This is not by any means a soul-stirring poem, but it is written because Longfellow feels in the holy silence of Monte Cassino the vast difference between the "ideal" as here represented and the "actual" as typified by the "iron horses of the steam" in the valley below!"<sup>1</sup>

Among Longfellow's longer and more ambitious poems none is so well loved for its delineation of idyllic Catholic life as Evangeline: A Tale of Arcadie. The meter, unrimed dactyllic hexameters, is pretty wearisome to the modern ear, but one's taste is indeed perverted who cannot enjoy the quiet simplicity of its narrative. The story need not be repeated in detail here - it is well known and easy to remember. There are, however, several distinctively Catholic touches to the narrative which deserve special mention in this thesis. Even when

1. Father S. Tannetta's Henry W. Longfellow and Monte Cassino is a slight but pleasing commentary on the setting of this poem.



the poet is describing the loveliness of his heroine, he asks to see her walk down the street ready for church:

"Fairer was she when, on Sunday morn, while the  
bell from its turret

Sprinkled with holy sounds the air, as the priest  
with his hyssop

Sprinkles the congregation and scatters blessings  
upon them

Down the long street she passed, with her chaplet  
of beads and her missal,

Wearing her Norman cap, and her kirtle of blue,  
and the ear-rings

Brought in the olden time from France, and since,  
as an heirloom

Handed down from mother to child, through long  
generations.

But a celestial brightness - a more ethereal beauty -

Shone on her face and encircled her form, when  
after confession,

Homeward serenely she walked with God's benediction  
upon her,

When she had passed, it seemed like the ceasing  
of exquisite music."<sup>1</sup>

One of the most admired characters of the poem is the saintly priest, Father Felician, who enters the church just at the dramatic moment when the British commander has pronounced the awful sentence of confiscation and dispersal. The Acadians have been turned into an angry mob - Basil, father of Evangeline's lover, the most violent of all in his loud protests. And then, the patient priest preached

---

1. Scudder, Horace E., The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, p. 73.

them a brief but moving sermon on Christian forgiveness and non-resistance.

"Then came the evening service. The tapers gleamed  
from the altar.

Fervent and deep was the voice of the priest, and  
the people responded

Not with their lips alone, but their hearts, and  
the Ave Maria.

Sung they, and fell on their knees, and their souls,  
with devotion translated,

Rose on the ardor of prayer, like Eliyah ascending  
to heaven." 1

Again we see the priest on the fateful evening of the embarcation, moving among his flock like the true shepherd, blessing and consoling them. And at the sudden death of Evangeline's father, Benedict, the priest is also at hand to speak:

"Let us bury him here by the sea. When a happier  
season  
Brings us again to our homes from the unknown land  
land of our exile,  
Then shall his sacred dust be piously laid in the  
churchyard." 2

Years pass, and in the second part of the poem the idyllic village is gone forever. The wanderings of Evangeline are, however, still described faithfully and well, - with a fuller measure of the Catholic atmosphere surviving than we should have any reason to expect. The

1. Scudder, Horace E. The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, p. 84.
2. Op. cit., p. 84.

finding of Basil is an important dramatic interlude, but still the quest for Gabriel, who has been separated from his father, goes on. To Evangeline he seems so near, - and yet so very far away. She soon comes to feel that, like a bereaved Indian maiden she meets on the way, she is "pursuing a phantom." The visit to the "Black Robes" (the name the Indians gave to Catholic priests, especially the Jesuits) momentarily brings hope to Evangeline, and here again Longfellow embellishes his lines with appropriate Catholic allusions. But the years go on, and Evangeline's odyssey finally takes her to Philadelphia where she becomes a Sister of Mercy. Her love for Gabriel is not forgotten, to be sure, but she now dedicates herself to

"Patience and abnegation of self, and devotion to  
others

-----  
So was her love diffused, but, like to some odorous  
spices;

Suffered no waste nor loss, though filling the  
air with aroma.

Other hope had she none, nor wish in life, but  
to follow

Meekly, with reverent steps, the sacred feet of  
her Saviour." 1

The story ends very touchingly with Evangeline's recognition of Gabriel in the person of a pestilence-stricken man to whom she is administering aid. This meeting is of course "dramatic," but Longfellow spares us from the vices of

melodrama just as he spares us from any condescending remarks about Evangeline's vocation. On the whole his handling of the Catholic elements in the sad story is judicious and natural. The temptation often succumbed to by would-be Catholic poets of over emphasizing the religious aspects is carefully avoided; but, on the other hand, the equally great temptation of using the religious elements profanely or patronisingly also rejected. Here is the true artist at work, and, what is more unusual here is a poet, not of the Faith, whose understanding of the Church and her children is as free from prejudice as possible. Truly the familiar lines of Evangeline belong among my choicest exhibits of Longfellow's attitudes towards Catholicism. The story was obviously not exclusively religious in its inspiration. The setting was American rather than European. But he takes his Acadians as he finds them- human, but Catholic in every fiber of their being.

Most critics of Longfellow agree that the second part of Christus: A Mystery, the part called "The Golden Legend" is unquestionably the greatest and most complete expression of his understanding of Catholicism. My own study substantiates the verdict. In a letter to an English correspondent at the time the "Golden Legend" was published as an independent poem, he writes:

"I am glad to know that you find something to like in The Golden Legend. I have endeavored

to show in it among other things, that through the darkness and corruption of the Middle Ages ran a bright, deep stream of Faith, strong enough for all exigencies of life and death. In order to do this I had to introduce some portion of the darkness and corruption as a background. I am sure you will be glad to know that the monk's sermon is not wholly of my own invention. The worst passage in this is from a sermon of Fra Gabriella Barletta, an Italian preacher of the fifteenth century. The Miracle boy is founded on the Apocryphal Gospels of James and the Infancy of Christ. Both they and the sermon show how sacred themes were handled in the days of long ago." <sup>1</sup>

This letter, rarely quoted in its entirety, is "revealing" in a two fold sense;- 1. it helps us to understand what Longfellow was striving to do in the poem, and 2. it gives us an explicit statement of his philosophy of Catholic literature. It surely was exceedingly rare in Longfellow's time for any Protestant writer to have a good word to say for the so-called Dark Ages, which at that time were supposed to embrace all of medieval history. Even when a writer, like Sir Walter Scott, deliberately utilized the background and pageantry of the Ages of Faith for artistic purposes, he never seemed to dare confess, even to himself, that there "ran a bright, deep stream of Faith" through all the alleged darkness and corruption. Surely no other Protestant contemporary of Longfellow's would have felt it necessary to explain the introduction into a work on the Middle Ages of "some portion of the darkness and cor-

1. Scudder, Horace E. The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, p. 361.

ruption as a background." Furthermore, Longfellow felt certain that, in his employment of both the light and the shadows of medieval life, he was conforming to the Christian literary traditions as exemplified, say, in Chaucer.

"The Golden Legend" ultimately became the middle part of a trilogy, called, as I have said, Christus: A Mystery. The first part, "The Divine Tragedy", is weak both in its conception of Our Lord's public ministry and Sacred Passion, and in its poetry, which is "pious" but uninspired. As a passion play "The Divine Tragedy" is a sublime failure-hardly more than a poor paraphrase of the Gospel narratives. The third part, "The New England Tragedies," takes us back to Puritan Boston in 1665. We should naturally expect Longfellow to be at his best amid these ancestral scenes, but he is not, possibly because the inspiration for his two stories of Puritan Christianity came as a decided anti-climax to "The Golden Legend." "The New England Tragedies" is, moreover, really nothing more or less than a repudiation of the "tornado of fanaticism" which Longfellow recognized as obscuring the "unseen Christ," really the theme of his trilogy. Professor Howard Mumford Jones puts his finger squarely on the reason for Longfellow's failure in this most ambitious of his works:

"-the reason why Christus as a whole is a failure is that Longfellow did not know what he meant to do in it, and the reason he did not know what he meant to do is that Puritanism, watered into Unitarianism, had no outline and no edge, so that consequently the dramatic epic shaped by its

spirit and philosophy had no outline and no edge."<sup>1</sup>

Curiously enough, although the Christus "as a whole" is a failure, "The Golden Legend" is, as Professor Jones admits, "The only successful portion."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this is one of the most remarkable précis of evidence I have to present to show how close Longfellow came to Catholicism. He came to learn enough of its "spirit and philosophy," so that "The Golden Legend" had an "outline" and an "edge" conspicuously absent in the portion of his epic, dealing with the faith of his Puritan ancestors. It is perhaps true, as Professor Jones argues, that Longfellow who had rejected Puritan fanaticism, was also indebted to the type of Puritan piety which inculcated "that simple, sweet and gracious life out of which Longfellow developed."<sup>3</sup> And yet, as I have shown at length in the first chapter of this thesis, Professor Jones ought to be told that the best of Longfellow's religious inheritance was derived from the same great Source which the poet had discovered for himself in medieval and Catholic Europe. In other words, in the pages of "The Golden Legend" we can see Longfellow's ancestral piety, derived from the "Genteel Tradition," meeting and mingling with the Catholic piety he came to love and revere in the living reality of the European tradition.

1. Macy, John (ed.) American Writers on American Literature, p. 112.
2. Ibid.
3. Op. cit., p. 110.

The story of "The Golden Legend" has been so well summarized in the Oxford Companion to American Literature that I have decided to use it rather than write one of my own:

"Prince Henry Hoheneck, a student of alchemy, becomes ill, and Lucifer, in the guise of a physician pretends to cure him. As a result the prince is excommunicated and exiled. He takes refuge with a peasant family whose daughter, Elsie, upon discovering that some maiden must offer her life to save his, resolves to sacrifice herself. Lucifer, now disguised as a priest, persuades the prince and the girl's mother to consent to her death. Henry and Elsie journey to Salerno, where the sacrifice is to take place. On the way they see typical medieval examples of corruption and high faith existing side by side. As Elsie is about to die, the prince suddenly interferes. Because of this good deed, he is miraculously restored, to health, and they marry." 1

Naturally such a summary does less than justice even to the story itself, which is unfolded with consummate artistry. Mr. Walter Gavigan notes that: "In a few of the passages of "The Golden Legend", Longfellow makes some of the characters talk like Calvinistic Puritans rather than simpleminded German Catholics, but there remain in contrast so many passages of beauty that exude the very spirit of medieval Catholicism that readers can pardon any occasional lapses." 2 Granting that there are "occasional lapses" (which may have been deliberate on Longfellow's part) I must mention or cite some of the more notably

1. Hart James D. The Oxford Companion and American Literature pp. 281-282.
2. Gavigan, Walter V., Longfellow and Catholicism, The Catholic World Vol. CXXXVIII, p. 48, Oct. 1933.



Catholic passages of the "Legend."

The first of these is the beautiful prayer of Elsie who is trying to decide whether she will die to save the prince's life. The scene is "Elsie's Chamber." She prays:

"My Redeemer and my Lord,  
I beseech thee, I entreat thee,  
Give me in each act and word,  
That hereafter I may meet thee,  
Watching, waiting, hoping, yearning,  
With my lamp well trimmed and burning!  
Interceding  
With thy bleeding  
Wounds upon thy hands and sides,  
For all who have lived, and erred  
Thou hast suffered, thou hast died,  
Scourged, and mocked, and crucified,  
And in the grave hast thou been buried!

"If my feeble prayer can reach thee,  
O my Saviour I beseech thee,  
Even as thou hast died for me,  
More sincerely  
Let me follow where thou lookest  
Let me, bleeding as thou bleedest,  
Die, if dying I may give  
Life to one who asks to live,  
And more nearly,  
Dying, thus resemble thee! " 1

Another very beautiful section of the "Legend" is the miracle-play "The Nativity," witnessed by prince Henry and Elsie. It is much too long to quote in its entirety, but the second division, "Mary at the Well" gives us one more fine example of Longfellow's sympathy with Catholic devotion to our Blessed Lady:

---

1. Scudder, Horace E. The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. p. 420.

Mary

"Along the garden walk, and thence  
Through the wicket in the garden fence,  
I steal with quiet pace,  
My pitcher at the well to fill,  
That lies so deep and cool and still  
In this sequestered place.

"These sycamores keep guard around;  
I see no face, I hear no sound,  
Save bubblings of the spring,  
And my companions, who, within  
The threads of gold and scarlet spin,  
And at their labor sing.

The Angel Gabriel

Hail, Virgin Mary, full of grace!  
Here Mary looketh around her, trembling, and  
then saith:  
Who is it speaketh in this place,  
With such a gentle voice?

Gabriel

The Lord of heaven is with thee now!  
Blessed among all women thou,  
Who art his holy choice!  
Mary, setting down the pitcher  
What can this mean? No one is near,  
And yet, such sacred words I hear,  
I almost fear to stay,  
Here the Angel, appearing to her, shall say:

Gabriel

Fear not, O Mary! but believe!  
For thou, a Virgin, shalt conceive  
A child this very day.

Fear not, O, Mary! from the sky  
The majesty of the Most High  
Shall overshadow thee,

Mary

Behold the handmaid of the Lord!  
According to thy holy word,  
So be it unto me!

Here the Devils shall again make a great noise under the state." 1

There are so many passages worth quoting that it is difficult to make a choice, but once more, and for my final exhibit from the "Legend", I choose a simple prayer, that of Elsie's mother, Ursula, addressed to Our Lady:

"Virgin! who lovest the poor and holy,  
If the loud cry of a mother's heart  
Can ever ascend to where thou art,  
Into thy blessed hands and holy  
Receive my prayer of praise and thanksgiving!<sup>o</sup>  
Let the hands that bore our Saviour bear it  
Into the awful presence of God;  
For thy feet with holiness are shod,  
And if thou bearest it He will hear it.  
Our child, who was dead again is living!" 2

There are, to be sure, some lustier lines in the poem e.g. the song of Friar Claus in praise of wine, and there are some deliberately disedifying "shadows, but, on the whole, in all English poetry there is scarcely a poem of comparable length to be matched in Catholic spirit with Longfellow's "The Golden Legend."

As I said in the beginning of this section, I cannot possibly even mention all of Longfellow's Catholic poems. I have tried here to mention only the more important ones or those that are ordinarily ignored in treating this subject. One of Longfellow's finest narrative pieces

1. Scudder, Horace E. The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. p. 432.
2. Op. Cit., p. 460.

in the Tales of a Wayside Inn is his "King Robert of Sicily,"<sup>1</sup> a poem based on a line from the Magnificat: "Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles." It is one of the most striking little sermons on the virtue of humility in our language, but it is much too long to quote here. By contrast the same collection of poems contains "The Theologian's Tale"<sup>2</sup> of "Torquemada," one of the few poems by Longfellow that has any real touch of anti-Catholic animus. Even his sympathetic understanding of Spanish Catholics did not save him from the old bogey of the Inquisition. Perhaps, however, as a counter-balance, the Theologian (quite evidently a Protestant) told another Tale, "The Legend Beautiful" which recounts the vision of Our Lord which came to a monk and remained in his cell, because he took care of God's poor.

It is surely safe to conclude this section by saying that few American poets of Longfellow's time and few of any other time, except those who belonged by birth or have been converted to Catholicism, can lay claim to as many poems of definitely Catholic inspiration as he. Sometimes it seems almost as if, like the mystical Spanish poets he loved so much, his lips had touched a coal from the altar. It seems, too, as if it were in the order of Providence that this son of New England Unitarians should have ~~been~~ elected to bring both the riches of European literary

1. Scudder, Horace E. The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. pp. 215-218.
2. Op. cit., pp. 236-239.

culture and the Beauty of Catholic holiness to thousands of men and women whose first insight into these alien glories should come through the pages of his poetry.

#### 4. A Word about "Kavanagh"

Relatively few of Longfellow's admirers are aware that he was the author of two unsuccessful novels, Hyperion (1839) and Kavanagh (1849). The first is of no concern to this thesis, but the second is worthy of very special consideration - one almost invariably ignored by students of Longfellow and Catholicism. The story is undoubtedly both dull and "dated", for Longfellow's gifts as a narrator, did not extend to his prose. But I think that it does contain several passages of unique interest in the light they throw on Longfellow's attitude towards the Church.

Kavanagh, the hero of the story, is a convert to Protestantism and its ministry from Catholicism. His "romances" and the still more important problems of Churchill, the village schoolmaster, make up the bulk of the story. This "bulk" (a pretty thin one at that!) need not concern us here. Our chief interest in this "converted" Protestant is to discern in his philosophizings about religion a good deal of the author's own spirit of "tolerance" and, what is more, his hankering after the beauties of the Old Faith.

Most writers of Longfellow's day would have treated of Kavanagh's conversion in the manner of the ex-priest legends currently popular at the time. But not

Longfellow. He tells us that "Arthur Kavanagh was descended from an ancient Catholic family."<sup>1</sup> The author goes on to describe with what loving care Arthur's mother reared him in the Catholic Faith:

"She taught him his letters from the Lives of the Saints, - a volume full of wondrous legends and illustrated with engravings from pictures by the old masters, which opened to him at once the world of spirits and the world of art, and both were beautiful. She explained to him the pictures; she read to him the legends - the lives of the holy men and women, full of faith and good works, - things which ever afterward remained associated together in his mind. This holiness of life, and self-renunciation, and devotion to duty, were early impressed upon his soul. To his quick imagination, the spiritual world became real; the holy company of the saints stood round about the solitary boy, his guardian angels led him by the hand by day, and sat by his pillow at night. At times, even, he wished to die, that he might see them and talk with them, and return no more to his weak and weary body."<sup>2</sup>

Longfellow then retells the familiar medieval legend of St. Christopher, which he claims made the deepest impression of all the saintly lore upon his hero. The legend, a "beautiful allegory of humility and labor"<sup>3</sup> was to abide with him throughout his life. When it came time for Arthur to go to college, Longfellow sends him to the Jesuits in Canada (possibly to Loyola College in Montreal) where he became a student distinguished for his scholarly zeal and for his gentleness and generosity. Longfellow writes:

1. Longfellow, Henry W., The Works of (Edition DeLuxe), Vol. III, p. 84.
2. Op. Cit., p. 85.
3. Op. Cit., p. 90;

"There he was thoroughly trained in the classics, and in the dogmas of the august faith, whose turrets gleam with such crystalline light, and whose dungeons are so deep, and dark, and terrible."<sup>1</sup>

Upon the completion of his college studies Kavanagh returned just in time to receive his dying mother's blessing.

"Then the house became empty to him. Solitary was the seashore, solitary were the woodland walks. But the spiritual world seemed nearer and more real. For affairs he had no aptitude; and he betook himself again to his philosophic and theological studies."<sup>2</sup>

These studies, made in books found in his mother's library, could hardly be called "philosophic." All the works mentioned by Longfellow were books of Spanish mysticism and quietism. It is small wonder that a boy of Kavanagh's romantically impressionable nature should have been led astray on a diet of Molinos and Madame Guyon! But Longfellow attributes his hero's abandonment of the Church to other causes:

"The study of ecclesiastical history awoke within him many strange and dubious thoughts. The books taught him more than their writers meant to preach. It was impossible to read of Athanasius without reading also of Arius; it was impossible to hear of Calvin without hearing of Servetus. Reason began more energetically to vindicate itself; that Reason which is light in darkness, not that which is "a thorn in revelations side." The search after Truth and freedom, both intellectual and spiritual, became a passion in his soul; and he pursued it until he had left far behind him many dusky dogmas, many antique superstitions, many time-honored observances, which the lips of her alone, who first taught them to him in childhood, and invested with solemnity and sanctity."<sup>3</sup>

1. Op. Cit., p. 88
2. Op. cit., p. 89.
3. Op. cit., p. 90.

This sounds very much like imaginary autobiography: it recounts what Longfellow thought would have happened to himself, had he been born a Catholic. And yet Longfellow, who can only imagine Kavanagh's "conversion," is careful to show his hero's (and his own) "tolerance" and eclectic spirit:

"By slow degrees, and not by violent spiritual conflicts, he became a Protestant. He had but passed from one chapel to another in the same vast cathedral. He was still beneath the same ample roof, still heard the same divine service chanted in a different dialect of the same universal language. Out of his old faith he brought with him all he had found in it that was holy and pure and of good report. Not its bigotry and fanaticism, and intolerance; but its zeal its self-devotion, its heavenly aspirations, its human sympathies, its endless deeds of charity. Not till after his father's death, however, did he become a clergyman. Then his vocation was manifest to him. He no longer hesitated, but entered upon its many duties and responsibilities, its many trials and discouragements, with the zeal of Peter and the gentleness of John." <sup>1</sup>

Here surely Longfellow is telling us why he himself never came closer to the Church. Quite apparently he was fundamentally "tolerant", but it was the tolerance of an indifferentist. It was the tolerance of one who loved the beauties of Catholic life and ritual, who admired the "eminent holiness" of the Church's children, but who had little or no talent for understanding either Catholic theology or the paradoxes of ecclesiastical history. The anemia of Unitarian negativism had entered his spiritual

1. Longfellow, Henry W., The Works of (Edition deLuxe), Vol. III, pp. 90-91.



blood and kept him from ever recognizing the full-blooded lustiness of genuine Catholic piety.

The favorite theme of the religious indifferentist, "One religion is as good as another", followed Kavanagh into the ministry. He even retained what must have been an embarrassing leaning to "Romanist" church music and art. But his indifferentism was most marked. He desired a return to the Unity of the Church he had abandoned - provided that Church was first stripped of the things in it he disliked or misunderstood. He hated not sects but sectarianism - "for sects were to him only as separated converging roads, leading all to the same celestial city of peace." <sup>1</sup> He went off on a three-year honeymoon with his bride, Cecilia, and turned his wedding journey into a crusade for "the union of all sects into one universal Church of Christ."<sup>2</sup> Kavanagh was possessed, I fear, of much more apostolic zeal than Longfellow. There is no record that Longfellow ever became deeply enough concerned about his own personal beliefs to do any crusading - except perhaps in this one story. Fortunately Kavanagh is rarely read to-day, and unfortunately the favorite doctrine of its hero is much too widely known to need further propagation. Although in this book Longfellow says or implies many things of a complimentary nature to Catholicism, the almost unadulterated reverence of the poems is replaced by a seemingly innocent but truly dangerous attitude.

1. Longfellow, Henry W., The Works of (Edition deLuxe), Vol. III, pp.97.
2. op. cit., p. 155.

Had Longfellow never written Kavanagh, we might still be somehow puzzled at his failure to enter the Church. But Kavanagh is my most important witness to the conclusion that Longfellow still had a long way to go before he could have discovered that the glories of Catholicism he celebrated so often and so devoutly in his poems rested on a firm and closely integrated body of doctrine. I agree with Mr. Gavigan that Longfellow's interest in Catholicism was "something more than a superficial aestheticism- a hedonistic infatuation for her ceremonial and ritual." <sup>1</sup> But I submit that intellectually (i.e. theologically) the author of Kavanagh, who had vaguely exalted "Reason" as a "light in darkness", was himself too little of the true rationalist to comprehend the sublime Truths upon which the great Mysteries of the Christian Faith are founded. His love of things Catholic was, I admit again, no "superficial aestheticism." It was one with his sense of justice<sup>2</sup>- and one with the hungerings of a heart that sought vainly for the "unseen Christ", when all the time He was there amid the beauties of the "august faith" which Kavanagh had forsworn.

1. Gavigan, Walter V., "Longfellow and Catholicism", The Catholic World Vol. CXXXVIII, P. 50 (October, 1933.)
2. See Sencourt, Robert, "Longfellow in Europe" The Catholic World, Vol. CXVIII, pp. 178-179 (November, 1923).

## C H A P T E R VI

### HAWTHORNE: PURITAN SCEPTIC

#### ON THE ROAD TO ROME

##### 1. About Hawthorne.

No writer in American literature, except perhaps Poe, has been the subject of so much theorizing as Nathaniel Hawthorne. He was, all admit, a strange man - probably not a psychopathic personality like Poe - but an "odd one". His friends and contemporaries recognized his "oddity", and even we, who could not know him personally, are quite justified in concluding that any man who spent nearly a dozen years of his young manhood in comparative solitude must have become "queer". His books are almost, as strange as the man himself. They are not the meaningless jottings of a mad genius, but they all (short stories as well as novels) take us into a world of twilight and shadows only a little less baffling than Poe's "misty mid-region of Weird."

Recent scholarly studies in Hawthorne, however, have all tended to establish his essential normality as a man, particularly the re-edited Notebooks<sup>1</sup> as prepared by

---

1. Stewart Randall (ed.) *The American Notebooks* (by Nathaniel Hawthorne), New Haven: 1932; *The English Notebooks*, N.Y., 1942.

Professor Randall Stewart. But the critics are still curiously unable to agree on anything about his work except its competence. Professor John Erskine in the article on Hawthorne in The Cambridge History of American Literature <sup>1</sup> believes that his genius was formed in Transcendentalism. Dr. and Mrs. Charles A. Beard, on the other hand, regard Hawthorne as a true democrat in his acceptance of the people and in his mistrust of aristocracy. <sup>2</sup> They point out that his unwillingness to go "all out" with the romantic idealists was chiefly manifested by his early withdrawal from Transcendental circles, where he never seemed particularly happy. Dr. Carl Van Doren, a former colleague of Professor Erskines sees Hawthorne as the American Romanticist par excellence. <sup>3</sup> Mr. Lloyd Morris, in a highly controversial work, looks upon Hawthorne as The Rebellious Puritan; <sup>4</sup> although the traditional viewpoint of academic critics used to see him as a Puritan born out of due time! <sup>5</sup> Professor Parrington argues that Hawthorne was temperamentally a sceptic:

"Cool, detached, rationalistic, curiously inquisitive, he looked out upon the ferment of the times, the clash of rival philosophies

1. Vol. II (reprint-edition), pp.16-31
2. Beard, Charles and Beard, Mary, The Rise of American Civilization (single volume edition), pp. 774-777
3. Van, Doren, Carl, The American Novel, pp. 77-108
4. Morris, Lloyd, The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne.
5. See almost any textbook written before 1928, of which Long, William, American Literature is an example.

and rival interests only to bring them into his study and turn upon them the light of his critical analysis. One after another he weighed the several faiths of New England, conservative and transcendental and radical, and ended a sceptic." 1

It is possible to go on almost endlessly "explaining" Hawthorne - as a victim of solitude, as an incurable allegorist, as a man who had a Vision of Evil, as a writer who knew his market, as a victim of his milieu-endlessly, I say, because this theorizing about a man like Hawthorne can quickly become a fascinating but profitless game. Perhaps after all, Hawthorne is in a literary or a psychological sense all things to all men, and each biographer or critic can find what he is looking for in Hawthorne's works. For the purposes of this thesis, I am going to indulge in a little generalizing of my own and call him a "Puritan Sceptin on the Road to Rome".

How could he, a man of the nineteenth century, have been a Puritan? It seems to me that Hawthorne's Puritanism is well established both by his ancestry and by his mental or, rather, moral outlook. In no author of his time do we find such deep and abiding self-consciousness of the Puritan past as we do in the pages of Hawthorne. We might say that his ancestry exerted an almost spectral influence over his mind and heart. It was not that Haw-

---

I. Parrington, Vernon L., The Romantic Revolution in America, p. 442.

thorne himself came out of the past to live in the present; rather it was as if his Hawthorne (traditional spelling - Nathaniel himself introduced the w) grandsires were the ones who kept coming out of the past to haunt the mind of their most important literary descendant. Hawthorne deliberately steeped himself in family history, with its foreboding curses, and in the lore of seventeenth-century New England, not so much that he might become a learned antiquarian but rather that he might find less difficulty in evoking the presence of men and women who had solved to their satisfaction the problems with which his mind was continually wrestling. These problems were moral and religious, for, in spite of Hawthorne's lack of Transcendental mysticism and his indifference to the religions and philosophies of his own day, the Vision of Evil, which haunted him perpetually, made him as deeply concerned about the religious "explanations" of that Vision as were his Puritan ancestors. He was not of course completely satisfied with the Puritan "explanation". There is reason to believe that his own scepticism about human perfectibility also embraced a wise distrust of Puritan theology and ethics. Unlike his contemporaries, however, he never succumbed to the Romantic idea of denying the existence of evil and calling sin by polite and vacuous names. Nor did he believe with Emerson that good and bad are merely relative terms. In other words, Hawthorne was as thoroughgoing in his scepticism as he was

in his consciousness of evil. Paradoxically, he, who was most vitally disturbed about the subjective state of man's soul, the most truly objective observer of life of his generation. This objectivity is revealed both in his Notebooks, where we find him penetrating and shrewd in his comments even on contemporary affairs, and in his fiction, where his detachment has all of the coldness of a chemist watching the reactions in his test-tube.

Most unfortunately this "seeker" for an answer to the age-old problems of sin and its consequences was fifty-four years old before he visited France and Italy to come for the first time in his life into contact with Catholicism. There is little or no evidence to show what Hawthorne knew or thought of the Church before this time. He makes infrequent references to Catholic symbolism in The Scarlet Letter and elsewhere, but these references are so unconvincing that one suspects their bookish origins. There is no indication that he ever entered into the religious discussions at Brook Farm, and we can be very certain that, even if he were present, he would have been his usual silent, non-committal self. Hawthorne saw Rome, literally and figuratively, too late in life for his own good. As we shall see, nevertheless, perhaps his very lateness in seeing the Church gave a maturity and depth to his observations, notably absent in the attitudes of Parkman and Emerson.

## 2. Hawthorne and Theology

Before presenting the evidence of Hawthorne's belated reactions to Catholicism, I should like to analyze briefly and yet more completely than in the previous section, his general religious and theological position. For this purpose I am going to follow faithfully but critically the best treatment of the subject available at present, the work of Professor Austin Warren!<sup>1</sup>

It seems pretty certain that Hawthorne, although of a religious nature, never underwent any "conversion", never formally affiliated with any church, and kept aloof from all theological discussion. He was not as some people imagine, the product of a gloomy Puritan boyhood because the Mannings (his mother's family) attended one of the three Unitarian churches in Salem, and Hawthorne as a boy, went with them. But until his sojourn in England he seems to have attended church rarely, and, while resident at Concord, not at all. Mrs. Hawthorne, his wife, was also an irregular attendant at church. She liked the services, but she had been brought up among Transcendentalists, "high-minded minimizers of form and ceremony."<sup>2</sup>

Hawthorne seems to have had little respect for the intelligence of Protestant ministers, an attitude which

1. Warren, Austin (ed), Nathaniel Hawthorne, pp. XIX-XXXIV  
2. Op. cit., p. XXI.



made him somewhat anti-clerical in his viewpoint. He had little or no interest in theology as such, but occasionally read a little of it, Protestant and Catholic alike, with amused and unsympathetic tolerance. Significantly enough, he much preferred the dull and weighty tomes of such Puritan divines as Cotton Mather to the more sprightly brochures of the contemporary Unitarians. His "Celestial Railroad" is indeed an extremely caustic satire of Protestant liberalism. Truth to tell, the kind of "theology" that appealed to him most he found in the allegorical pages of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. This work, together with the reading and study of Paradise Lost and Mather's Magnalia Christi Americana, gave Hawthorne his chief insights into the Puritan mind. AND yet as Professor Warren says:

"His Calvinism was nameless and indisputable, and it was arrived at by experience and insight. Hawthorne did not need to believe in Puritanism. (Dr. Warren is quoting from Herbert Schneider's The Puritan Mind, p. 262) for he understood it. He saw the empirical truth behind the Calvinist symbols. He recovered what Puritans professed but seldom practised the spirit of piety, humility and tragedy in the face of the inscrutable ways of God!" 1

Professor Warren becomes much more definite in the following paragraph in regard to the essence of Hawthorne's theological beliefs:

"In point of fact, Hawthorne's notebooks and Letters make it quite clear that their writer

1. Warren, Austin (ed), Nathaniel Hawthorne, pp. XXIV.

held quite literally to belief in theism, in some sort of Christology (of the conservative Unitarian variety, it would appear), and in the Future Life - not to cite the Articles of Faith which most firmly strike Hawthorne's reader, sin and predestination, Articles which he, like his Calvinist ancestors, found compatible."<sup>1</sup>

It would seem to me that Hawthorne's acceptance of such Calvinistic doctrines as predestination was based, as Professor Warren suggests on a somewhat dangerously empirical attitude to fundamental Christian truths. Unlike the Seventeenth-century Puritan, whom he admired, he was no Bible Christian; nor, on the other hand, did he accept the authority of any creed. Although he may have very sensibly rejected much of the Romantic moonshine of Transcendentalism, he did retain that paradoxical idealistic-pragmatic attitude towards religion, which characterized Emerson and Thoreau's theological opinions.

Whatever the theological basis for his beliefs, Hawthorne, as I have said previously, always was profoundly concerned with sin and its consequences. No modern psychoanalyst has ever found, nevertheless, one shred of evidence to prove that this sense of sin really concealed some secret guilt of his own. Nor has any cynic ever proved that Hawthorne, the artist, was merely exploiting sin for aesthetic purposes. Professor Warren brings out a point

---

1. Warren, Austin (ed), Nathaniel Hawthorne, pp. XXv.

about Hawthorne's preoccupation with sin that I had noted long ago:

"A curious aspect of his preoccupation is the frequent vagueness of the sin. He seems more concerned with sin in the abstract than with particular offenses, even that particular sin, adultery, which has come, in Protestant countries, to preempt the term. The Scarlet Letter deals with a particular sin- that particular sin, yet Hawthorne does not describe the passion."<sup>1</sup>

Yes, Hawthorne seems much more interested in sin in the abstract than in particular sins. We can see this in The Marble Faun and The Blithedale Romance as well as in such short stories as "Young Goodman Brown." In the novels, particularly in The Scarlet Letter and The Marble Faun his chief concern is undoubtedly with the sense of guilt which follows sin-especially when that guilt is concealed. This is a very important point for us to bear in mind when we come to discuss his attitude towards confession, as revealed both in short passages in the Notebook and in one long and memorable scene in The Marble Faun.

### 3. The French and Italian Note-Books

The evidence of Hawthorne's attitudes to Catholicism is relatively easy to assemble. As I have already pointed out, his first-hand contacts with the Church came late in life; hence, all our documentary evidence resulted

<sup>1</sup> L. Warren, Austin (ed), Nathaniel Hawthorne, pp. XXVII-XXVIII.

from his two years in Italy (1858-1860) and brief preliminary travels in France. The two works resulting from Hawthorne's French and particularly from his Italian contacts with Catholicism are The French and Italian Notebooks, first published posthumously in 1871, and The Marble Faun (1860). The French and Italian Notebooks, like the American Notebooks AND the English Notebooks, recently re-edited by Professor Stewart, are now being prepared for the press by Dr. Norman Holmes Pearson of Yale. For this thesis I am obliged to rely on the third edition, which admittedly contains only selections and very likely a corrupt text. Fortunately, I do not have to rely entirely on Mrs. Hawthorne's work, thanks to Professor Newton Arvin, who made a collation from the manuscripts in the Morgan Library of selections from all the Notebooks! <sup>1</sup> Professor Stewart claimed (New England Quarterly, Vol II, pp. 517-521) that Mr. Arvin has failed to give us a reliable text, but, as we shall see, he does furnish us a few valuable observations on the Church omitted by Mrs. Hawthorne. The reasons for her omissions are not quite clear, because she does give us many very favorable impressions of her husband's attitude to the Church. I suspect, however, that her omissions in this regard, as in others, were dictated by a desire to offend no one. I say this because the omitted passages invariably include strictures

1. Arvin, Newton, The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals

against Protestantism. Mrs. Hawthorne was, as Professor Stewart has so well shown, a bad editor, chiefly because her own tastes were prudish and "genteel" (in the worst sense of that word). I doubt whether she was consciously bigoted against the Church, although it is barely possible that the Pearson edition of the French and Italian Notebooks will reveal some unsuspected prejudices. Nevertheless, between Mrs. Hawthorne's edition and the selected collations of Professor Arvin, I think I can present enough evidence of Hawthorne's attitude to Catholicism for the purposes of this thesis, for the references available are fairly numerous and usually frank.

The first item of important Catholic significance in the French and Italian Notebooks<sup>1</sup> occurs on January 9, 1858 and is dated from the Hotel de Louvre. It tells of his visit to the Madeleine while a funeral service was in progress. He begins by describing the appearance of the high altar and the catafalque or coffin of the deceased. He hears the rumblings of the organ and the "heavy chanting" of the priests.

"The church, between the arches, along the nave and round the altar, was hung with broad

---

I. Hawthorne, Nathaniel, The Complete Works of. "Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks," Vol. X (Fireside edition) - hereafter I shall refer to this work as the Notebooks.

expanses of black cloth; and all the priests had their sacred vestments covered with black.(sic!) They looked exceedingly well; I never saw anything half so well got up on the stage. Some of these ecclesiastical figures were very stately and noble, and knelt and bowed, and bore aloft the cross and swung the censers in a way that I liked to see. The ceremonies of the Catholic Church were a superb work of art, or perhaps a true growth of man's religious nature; and so long as men felt their original meaning, they must have been full of awe and glory. Being of another parish, I looked on coldly, but not irreverently and was glad to see the service so well performed, and very glad when it was over."<sup>1</sup>

Hawthorne's first observations are somewhat lukewarm, if not "cold". Like Longfellow, he is struck by the beauties of Catholic ritual; but, like Thoreau, he seems to suspect that the "original meaning" of these services is lost on an unappreciative audience. There is a touch of pragmatism in that opinion reminiscent of modernists of our own day who feel that ancient ceremonial no longer possesses religious "validity".

Two days later from the same address Hawthorne writes appreciatively of his impressions of Notre Dame de Paris and says in part:

"The interior loftiness of Notre Dame, moreover, gives it a sublimity which would swallow up anything that might look gewgaw in its ornamentation-----It is an advantage of these vast edifices, rising over us and spreading about us in such a firmamental way that we cannot spoil them by any pettiness of our own, but that they

---

1. Loc. cit. pp. 24-25.

receive or absorb our pettiness into their own immensity. Every little fantasy finds its place and propriety in them, like a flower on the earth's broad bosom." <sup>1</sup>

The immensity of the great churches and cathedrals of Europe invariably appealed to the imagination of visiting New Englanders. To Hawthorne the loftiness of Notre Dame is such that he cannot be spoiled "by any pettiness of our own"!

On January 24th of the same year Hawthorne is writing from Rome and once more telling us of his visits to cathedrals and churches. He interrupts his descriptions at one point to observe: - "nobody who has not seen a church like this can imagine what a gorgeous religion it was that reared it." <sup>2</sup>

By February 3rd our traveller is beginning to complain (perhaps not unjustifiably) about the winter climate and the lack of heating in Italian apartments. He has had a touch of "feverish influenza", and hence is in no mood to be very appreciative of anything he sees, places or people. He cordially dislikes everything from "pavements most uncomfortable to the feet" to "a shabby population smoking bad cigars." <sup>3</sup> He wisely desists from describing such glories as St. Peter's while this black mood is upon him. I should observe right here and now that Hawthorne was a bad traveller-worse than Emerson. It is all the more remarkable, then

---

1. Op. cit. p. 35.  
2. Op. cit. p. 52.  
3. Op. cit. p. 58.

that he was able to note the beauties of Catholic life and worship amid scenes in which he was never thoroughly happy and at home.

On February 7th Hawthorne reports three or four visits to St. Peter's and comments both on its spaciousness and on its "genial" temperature. Mrs. Hawthorne omits entirely from her edition of the Notebook the following very striking passage:

"St. Peter's offers itself as a place of worship and religious comfort for the whole human race; and in one of the transepts, I found a range of confessionals where the penitane might tell his sins in the tongue of his own country whether French, German, Polish, English, or what not. If I had a murder on my conscience or any other great sin, I think I should have been inclined to kneel down there and pour it into the safe secrecy of the confessional. What an institution that is! Man needs it so, that it seems as if God must have ordained it. The popish religion certainly does apply itself closely and comfortably to human occasions, and I cannot but think that a great many people find their spiritual advantage in it who would find none at all in our formless mode of worship. You cannot think it all a farce when you see a peasant, citizen, and soldier, coming into the church, each on his own hook, and kneeling for moments or for hours, directing his silent devotions to some particular shrine; too humble to approach God directly, and therefore asking the mediation of some saint who stands beside his infinite Presence. In the church of San Carlos, yesterday, I saw a young man standing before a shrine, writhing and wringing his hands in an agony of grief and contrition. If he had been a Protestant, I think he would have shut all this up within his heart, and let it burn there till it seared him." 1

---

1. Arvin, Newton, The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals, pp.257-258.



This is one of the finest tributes paid by any of the writers of the New England Renaissance to the consolations and spiritual advantages of Catholicism. Confession, at least as a human institution, fascinated Hawthorne, and he refers to it often in the Notebook and elsewhere. But this passage also indicates an unusual understanding of the position of saints as members of the Church Triumphant and as our intercessors before the "infinite Presence". I regret to have to say that Mrs. Hawthorne omitted this passage, perhaps because of its disparagement of the barrenness of Protestantism.

On February 19th there is a long account of his Ash-Wednesday visit to St. Peter's, but in this lengthy entry into his journal, there is only one passage pertinent to our subject. Hawthorne, like most foreigners, is honestly puzzled by the juxtaposition in Rome of the sublime and the mean:

"Perhaps there is something in the mind of the people of these countries that enables them quite to dis sever small ugliness from great sublimity and beauty. They spit upon the glorious pavement of St. Peter's, and wherever else they like; they place paltry-looking wooden confessionals beneath its sublime arches, and ornament them with cheap little colored prints of the crucifixion; they hang tin hearts and other tinsel and trumpery at the gorgeous shrines of the saints, in chapels that are incrustated with gems, or marble almost as precious—they put pasteboard statues of saints beneath the dome of the Pantheon; in short, they let the sublime and the ridiculous come close together, and are

not in the least troubled by the proximity.  
It must be that their sense of the beautiful is  
stronger than in the Anglo-Saxon mind, and that  
it observes only what is fit to gratify it." <sup>1</sup>

I give prominence to this passage, because to artists like Hawthorne these incongruities he describes have sometimes served as serious obstacles to their understanding of Catholicism. If their approach to it is superficially aesthetic, they are naturally repelled. Unless they see the substance behind the shadows, not only the sublime ones but the "mean" ones, there is little hope for anything like conversion. I think that further evidence will show that Hawthorne was no mere aesthete.

Under the date of February 20th the author returns to the subject of confession. In this passage I am again relying on the collation of Professor Arvin because it is more complete. Hawthorne is once more in St. Peter's. He writes:

"Passing near the confessional for foreigners today I saw a Spaniard, who had just come out of one devoted to his native tongue, taking leave of his confessor, with an affectionate reverence, which-as well as the benign dignity of the good father-it was good to behold. The relation between the confessor and his penitent might, and ought to be, one of great tenderness and beauty; and the more I see of the Catholic Church, the more I wonder at the exuberance with which it

---

1. Arvin, Newton, The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals, p.85

responds to the demands of human infirmity. If its ministers were themselves a little more than human, they might fulfill their office, and supply all that men need." <sup>1</sup>

Note, however, in this otherwise excellent passage his distrust of the clergy and his strange demand that they be "a little more than human."

The next day, in another passage omitted by Mrs. Hawthorne, our traveller, commenting on Guido's painting of the "Archangel Michael overcoming Lucifer," writes:

"This is surely one of the most beautiful things in the world, one of the human conceptions that are imbued largely with the celestial. The old painters were wonderful men and have done great things for the Church of Rome- great things, we may say for the Church of Christ and the cause of good; for the moral of this picture (the immortal youth and loveliness of virtue, and its irresistible might against evil) is as much directed to a Puritan as to a Catholic." <sup>2</sup>

This is perhaps less striking than the excerpt on confession and the invocation of the saints, but it does happen to bring together in the happy union of Guido's picture, Hawthorne's great admiration for Christian art and his constant search for some representation of the loveliness of virtue. It is also not without significance that the concluding sentence implies that he himself is a Puritan. Few Puritans of an earlier day, however, would have made such a "liberal" concession as to the moral values of any art, least of all Catholic art.

<sup>1</sup> Arvin, Newton, The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals, p. 261.  
<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., pp. 262-263.

Hawthorne makes a very interesting and characteristic remark in the Notebook for February 23rd- a remark usually ignored by commentator on his attitude to Catholicism. He goes with a guide to visit the old Mamertime Prison, where St. Peter had been in chains. The Notebook says:

"The custode showed us a stone post, at the side of the cell, with the hole in the top of it, into which, he said, St. Peter's chain had been fastened and he uncovered a spring of water, in the middle of the stone floor, which he told us had miraculously gushed up to enable the saint to baptize his jailer. The miracle was perhaps the more easily wrought, in as much as Jugurtha had found the stone floor of the dungeon oozy with wet. However, it is best to be as simple and childlike as we can in these matters; and whether St. Peter stamped his visage into the stone, and wrought the other miracle or not and whether or not he ever was in the prison at all, still the belief of a thousand years and more gives a sort of reality and substance to such traditions. The custode dipped an iron ladle into the miraculous water, and we each of us drank a sip; and, what is very remarkable, to me it seemed hard water and almost brackish, while many persons think it is the sweetest in Rome. I suspect St. Peter still dabbles in the water, and tempers its qualities, according to the faith of those who drink it."

This passage is remarkable, first, for its touch of scepticism -----Hawthorne was ready to accept a purely natural explanation of the miracle. And yet, on the other hand, his respect for an enduring and venerable belief made him credit it with "reality and substance." Finally his whimsical

1. Notebooks, p. 101

sense of humor asserted itself in his suspicion that St. Peter "still dabbles in this water and tempers its qualities according to the faith of those who drink it."<sup>1</sup>

On March 1st Hawthorne tells of his mingled feelings of understanding and distrust as he beholds Christian alterations or additions made to the Palace of the Caesars;

"The Catholics have taken a peculiar pleasure in planting themselves in the very citadels of paganism, whether temples or palaces. There has been a good deal of enjoyment in the destruction of old Rome. I often think so when I see the elaborate pains that have been taken to smash and demolish some beautiful column, for no purpose whatever, except the mere delight of annihilating a noble piece of work. There is something in the impulse with which one sympathizes; though I am afraid the destroyers were not sufficiently aware of the mischief they did to enjoy it fully. Probably, too, the early Christians were impelled by religious zeal to destroy the pagan temples before the happy thought occurred of converting them into churches."<sup>2</sup>

Hawthorne is here trying as hard as possible to be fair and objective.

On March 27th Hawthorne records that he and his wife visited the chapel of the Holy Sacrament "to see the Pope pray." He comments on the congregation and the chapel very briefly, remarks caustically on the tardy arrival of the Pope, and then turns to describe the entry of the Holy Father;

---

1. Notebooks, p. 112.

2. op. cit., p. 112.

"-first, there appeared some cardinals in scarlet skull-caps and purple robes, intermixed with some of the Noble Guard and other attendants. It was not a very formal and stately procession, but rather straggled onward, with ragged edges, the spectators standing aside to let it pass, and merely bowing, or perhaps slightly bending the knee as good Catholics are accustomed to do when passing before the shrines of saints. Then in the midst of the purple cardinals, all of whom were gray haired men, appeared a stout old man, with a white skull-cap, a scarlet, gold-embroidered cape falling over his shoulders, and a white silk robe, the train of which was borne up by an attendant." 1

Hawthorne goes on with a still more detailed picture of the holy Father and of the ceremonies which followed. And then comes this short but revealing paragraph:

"I am very glad I have seen the pope because now he may be crossed out of the list of sights to be seen. His proximity impressed me kindly and favorably toward him and I did not see one face among all his cardinals (in whose numbers, doubtless, is his successor) which I would so soon trust as that of Pio Nono." 2

This paragraph for all its simplicity is eloquent, first of all, of Hawthorne's weariness and boredom: the pope "May be crossed out of the sights to be seen." 3 Hawthorne was a bad traveler but a dutiful one. Then too, there appears the old anti-clerical note of distrust for all ecclesiastics except Pope Pius IX, who seems to have been a great favorite with American Protestants, thanks to certain

1. Notebooks, pp. 144-145.

2. Loc. Cit.

3. Op. cit., p. 184.

pronouncements which they regarded as "liberal."<sup>2</sup>

Our author continues his seemingly interminable visitation of churches, however, for all his weariness. On May 1st he writes (after a brief description of a church, whose name he does not know):

"Two or three persons are kneeling at separate shrines, there are several wooden confessionals placed against the walls, at one of which kneels a lady, confessing to a priest who sits within; the tapers are lighted at the high altar and at one of the shrines; an attendant is scrubbing the marble pavement with a broom and water--a process, I should think, seldom practiced in Roman churches. By and by the lady finishes her confession, kisses the priest's hand, and sits down in one of the chairs which are placed about the floor, while the priest, in a black robe, with a short, white, loose jacket over his shoulders, disappears by a side door out of the church. I likewise finding nothing attractive in the pictures, take my departure. Protestantism needs a new apostle to convert it into something positive..."<sup>1</sup>

This paragraph is a characteristic one, showing Hawthorne's favorite preoccupations - church art and confession but its cryptic demand for a new apostle for Protestantism leaves us wondering which of his chief concerns prompted this observation. I should say that this demand would have left us wondering, for Professor Arvin includes another passage, omitted by Mrs. Hawthorne, which explains away the "mystery" about her husband's call for a new apostle. The omitted passage precedes the last sentence of the para-

<sup>1</sup> Notebooks, p. 184.

graph quoted above:

"To good Catholics, it must be a blessed convenience - this facility of finding a cool, quiet, silent, beautiful place of worship in even the hottest and most bustling street into which they may step, leaving the fret and trouble of the world at the threshold, purifying themselves with a touch of holy water as they enter and kneeling down to hold communion with some saint, their awful friend; or perhaps confessing all their sins to a priest, laying the whole dark burden at the foot of the cross; and coming forth in the freshness and elasticity of innocence. It is for Protestants to inquire whether some of these inestimable advantages are not compatible with a purified faith and do not indeed belong to Christianity, make up part of the blessings it was meant to bring. It would be a good time to suggest and imitate some of these, now that the American public seems to be stirred by a revival, hither to unexampled in extent." <sup>1</sup>

Again I suspect that the omission of the passage by Mrs. Hawthorne is due to its implied criticism of Protestantism. Not that Mrs. Hawthorne held any special brief, even for a mild form of Unitarianism, but she thought it "poor form" to criticize the beliefs of her friends and neighbors.

Between May 1st and October 9th, Hawthorne visited many other Italian cities and places of special interest, but neither Mrs. Hawthorne's edition of the Notebooks nor the Arvin collation contains any allusions pertinent to our thesis. The author comments on Italian customs and superstitions and climate, he tells us anecdotes

1. Arvin, Newton, The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals, pp. 277-278.



about his wanderings and his American friends, he regales us with brief and usually sympathetic descriptions of churches and ecclesiastical art, but, unless Mrs. Hawthorne's heavy censorship was working overtime, he seems to forget to say anything very personal or pointed about the Faith which built the churches and inspired the art. Two or three times he does make half humorous references to his heretical presence in churches during services, but he is always respectful and reverent.

On October 9th (the date is the 7th in Arvin) he comes back once more to his favorite topic. This time he is in Siena:

"Yesterday morning, in the Cathedral I watched a woman at confession, being curious to see how long it would take her to tell her sins, the growth of a week perhaps. I know not how long she had been confessing when I first observed her, but nearly an hour passed before the priest came suddenly from the confessional, looking weary and moist with perspiration, and took his way out of the Cathedral. The woman was left on her knees. This morning I watched another woman and she too was very long about it, and I could see the face of the priest behind the curtain of the confessional, scarcely inclining his ear to the perforated tin through which the penitent communicated her outpouring. It must be very tedious to listen, day after day, to the minute and commonplace iniquities of penitents, and it cannot be often that these are redeemed by the treasure-trove of a great sin. When her confession was over the woman came and sat down on the same bench with me, where her broad-brimmed straw hat was lying. She seemed to be a country woman, with a simple matronly face, which was solemnized and softened with the comfort that she had obtained by disburdening herself of the evil of wordly frailties and receiving absolution. (Hawthorne is accosted by a beggar.)

It almost invariably happens in church or cathedral, that beggars address their prayers to the heretic visitor, and probably with more unction than to the Virgin or saints. However, I have nothing to say against the sincerity of this people's devotion, they give all the proof of it that a mere spectator can estimate." 1

It is safe to say that none of Hawthorne's contemporaries, even the fair minded Longfellow, would ever stop to consider the exhausting and nerve-wearying aspects (humanly speaking) of the confessor's duties. It is also worth noting, that Hawthorne's sense of justice, if nothing else, always made him credit the sincerity of Catholic piety.

From Siena on October 10th comes another notable and lengthy entry in the Notebook:

"This morning too we went to the Cathedral, and sat long listening to the music of the organ and voices, and witnessing rites and ceremonies which are far older than even the ancient edifice where they were exhibited. A good many people were present, sitting, kneeling, or walking about, a freedom that contrasts very agreeably with the grim formalities of English churches and our own meeting-houses. Many persons were in their best attire, but others came in, with unabashed simplicity in their old garments of labor, sunburnt women from their toil among the vines and olives. One old peasant I noticed with his withered shanks in breeches and blue yarn stockings. The people of whatever class are wonderfully tolerant of heretics, never manifesting any displeasure or annoyance, though they must see that we are drawn thither by curiosity alone, and merely pry while they pray. I heartily wish the priests were better men, and that human nature, divinely influenced, could be depended upon for a constant supply and succession of good and pure ministers, their religion has so many admirable

---

1. Notebook, pp. 540-541

points. And there is a sad pity that this noble and beautiful cathedral should be a mere fossil shell, out of which life has died long ago. But for many a year to come the tapers will burn before the high altars, the Host will be elevated, the incense diffuse its fragrance, the confessionals be open to receive the penitents. I saw a father entering with two little bits of boys, just big enough to toddle along, holding his hand on either side. The father dipped his fingers into the marble font of holy water,- which, on its pedestals was two or three times as high as those small Christians,- and wetted a hand of each, and taught them how to cross themselves. When they come to be men it will be impossible to convince those children that there is no efficacy in holy water, without plucking up all religious faith and sentiment by the roots. Generally, I suspect, when people throw off the faith they were born in the best soil of their hearts is apt to cling to its roots."<sup>1</sup>

This paragraph makes it obvious that Hawthorne regarded Catholicism as no longer possessing vitality. This is an idea reminiscent of Thoreau in Montreal and is doubtless a product of the sceptical and pragmatic spirit of Transcendentalism. And yet Hawthorne, always a shrewd observer of the workings of the human heart, recognizes clearly that, even psychologically speaking, faith cannot be cast aside- particularly if the mind and heart of the faithful have been well schooled in its rites and ordinances.

A little farther on in the Notebook under the same date, the author writes appreciatively of a contrast between Catholic Italy and Puritan New England:

---

1. Notebook, pp. 452-453.

"The road was thronged with country people, mostly women and children, who had been spending the feast-day in Siena; and parties of boys were chasing one another through the fields pretty much as boys do in New England of a Sunday, but the Sienese lads had not the sense of Sabbath-breaking like our boys. Sunday with these people is like any other feast-day, and consecrated to cheerful enjoyment. So much religious observance, as regards outward forms, is diffused through the whole week that they have no need to intensify the Sabbath except by making it gladden the other days."<sup>1</sup>

Hawthorne surely was no Puritan advocate for New England's notorious "Blue Laws."

On October 21st Hawthorne makes what is for him a somewhat strange remark:

"Looking over what I have said of Sodoma's Christ Bound, at Siena, I see that I have omitted to notice what seems to me one of its most striking characteristics, - its loneliness. You feel as if the Saviour were deserted, both in heaven and earth; the despair is in him which made him say, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Even in this extremity, however he is still divine, and Sodoma almost seems to have reconciled the impossibilities of combining an omnipresent divinity with a suffering and outraged humanity."<sup>2</sup>

Does this mean that Hawthorne had come to believe in the Divinity of Our Lord? After all, his Puritan ancestors were Christian enough to believe in this cardinal doctrine, but such belief was scarcely more than a beautiful metaphor to the Unitarians and Transcendentalists. I am afraid

1. Notebook, p. 482.  
2. Op. cit., p. 482.

that Hawthorne was speaking here only as an artist or rather as a sympathetic critic of Christian art. Catholic dogma meant little to the New England mind probably because all dogma had become associated with some of the more forbidding Calvinistic doctrines.

The brief paragraph about Sodoma's Christ Bound is the last passage in the Notebooks of significance to our study. It is possible that Professor Pearson's edition will reveal even more serious omissions or emendations than those I have noted by comparing Mrs. Hawthorne's text with Professor Arvin's. But there can be no doubt that the evidence at our disposal is sufficient to reveal the conflict stirred up in Hawthorne's mind by his first and only intimate contact with the Catholic tradition. While age is no insuperable obstacle to conversion, it is clear that nothing short of a miracle could have brought our Puritan sceptic any closer to "Rome" than Longfellow. To Hawthorne, however, torn by the eternal conflict between ~~God~~ and Evil, which had haunted his mind from early manhood, the Sacrament of Penance made a strong and almost irresistible appeal. Had he been able to subdue his anti-clerical prejudices and to preempt his mind of the sceptical accretions of New England "liberalism", the consolations of confession alone might have led him to utter his "Credo". I say this because in spite of his fifty odd years Hawthorne's general attitude towards the Church and her communicants was,

in the best sense of a much abused word, tolerant. It strikes me, as I think it may strike other readers of this thesis, that Hawthorne's attitude to the Church as revealed in the Notebook is singularly free from the condescension which seriously marred the tone of Emerson's most favorable observations.

I should add that there is nothing in the letters reprinted in Julian Hawthorne's memoirs<sup>1</sup> of his parents to modify in any way the conclusions we can draw from the Notebook.

#### 4. The Marble Faun.

While the evidence we shall cite from The Marble Faun in regard to Hawthorne's attitude to Catholicism is necessarily more limited in scope than that of the Notebook, it is definitely more artistic. In one sense, of course, the evidence is hardly more than a repetition of what we have already read in The Notebook, because Hawthorne, like Emerson, ordinarily drew heavily upon his journals, both for the ideas of his creative work and even for descriptive passages. Naturally however, these ideas and descriptions were often transmitted from something sketchy or commonplace into "something rich and strange". This is certainly true of the transmutation effected by Hawthorne as he drew

1. Hawthorne, Julian, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife.

on the notes of his Italian or rather Roman memoranda for The Marble Faun.

In the Introductory Note to the edition of Hawthorne prepared by his son-in-law, George Parsons Lathrop (convert to Catholicism and, husband to Rose who later became famous as Mother Alphonsa) <sup>1</sup>, the editor writes:

"The last of Hawthorne's completed romances was also thought by its author to be his best. The Marble Faun certainly was the outcome of copious observation and mature deliberation; and it was produced after he had rested from composition for the space of five years. He began the book in the winter of 1859, at Rome while harassed by illness in his family, and to some extent distracted by the number, of interests appealing to him on all sides - 'interruptions, as he expressed it, 'from things to see and things to suffer.'" <sup>2</sup>

Few critics, if any, have ever agreed that The Marble Faun is Hawthorne's best work; ordinarily, and quite correctly, I think The Scarlet Letter is hailed as his master-piece. The Marble Faun is, nevertheless, a powerful story, a study in sin and secret guilt, even more mysterious and perplexing than the story of Hester Prynne and the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale. Because its central problem was worked out against a Roman setting at a time when Hawthorne's mind was filled with thoughts of the human consolations of the

1. See Burton, Katherine, Sorrow Built a Bridge, for a fine account of the conversion and noble deeds of Mother Alphonsa.
2. Lathrop, George Parsons, The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. VI, p. 7.

Sacrament of Penance The Marble Faun just barely misses being a kind of Catholic novel.

Once more I shall let the Oxford Companion to American Literature summarize the plot of the story:

"Kenyon, an American sculptor, Hilda, a New England girl, and the mysterious Miriam are friends among the arts students in Rome. They become acquainted with Donatello, Count of Monte Beni, a handsome Italian who resembles the Faun of Praxiteles, not only physically, but also in his mingling of human and animal qualities, his amoral attitude, and his simple enjoyment of the life of the senses. The dark, passionate Miriam is loved by Donatello, but she is haunted by an unrevealed sin and by the persecution of a mysterious man who dogs her footsteps after an accidental meeting in the Catacombs. Donatello is enraged by this man, and after an encouraging glance from Miriam flings him to death from the Tarpeian Rock. Thereafter they are linked by their mutual guilt, which they keep secret. Donatello becomes brooding and conscience-stricken and, though humanized by his suffering, is a broken spirit when he finally gives himself up to justice. Hilda, who saw the crime committed, is also involved in the sin until she forsakes Puritan tradition and pours out her secret at a church confession. The unhappy Miriam disappears into the shadowy world from which she came, and Hilda and Kenyon are married." 1

This recital of the plot, although essential to the understanding of what follows, fails to suggest Hawthorne's masterly handling of the atmosphere of hidden evil which pervades the story, and the palpable sense of place he is able to create because of his minute knowledge of the City.

---

1. Hart, James D. (ed) The Oxford Companion to American Literature p. 457.



Some commentators of the Catholic elements in The Marble Faun have seen fit to discuss in some detail Chapter XXI, "The Dead Capuchin," but I cannot see that it tells us much of anything about Hawthorne's feelings toward the Church. In the scene the novelist is employing for fictional purposes an experience he had previously recorded in the Notebook for February 17th, 1858, but which Mrs. Hawthorne omitted by merely referring the reader to the chapter in The Marble Faun.<sup>1</sup> The vague suggestion is made that Brother Antonio may have been the persecutor of Miriam, killed by Donatello, but even at the end of the book we are still left in the dark as to the identity of Donatello's victim. Both the Notebook and the novel refer to the "sudden stream of blood which flowed from the nostrils," but Hawthorne neither affirms nor denies that this phenomenon is miraculous.

The chapters in The Marble Faun of most interest to students of Hawthorne's Catholicism are Chapters XXXVIII, XXXIX and XL. The first of these chapters, "Altars and Incense", takes us with Hilda on visits to numerous churches in Rome, whither, she went not "for the sake of wondering at their gorgeousness, as she had formerly done, but "to observe how closely and comfortingly the popish faith applied itself to all human occasions";<sup>2</sup> Hilda was in

---

1. Notebook p. 78.  
2. Op. cit., p. 394.

deep distress - a distress which kept getting deeper and deeper the longer she kept her terrible secret to herself.

Hawthorne begins the chapter by editorializing a bit on Hilda's troubles and the "dangers" now attending her:

"Had the Jesuits known the situation of this troubled heart, her inheritance of New England Puritans would hardly have protected the poor girl from the pious strategy of these good fathers. Knowing, as they do, how to work each proper engine, it would have been ultimately impossible for Hilda to resist the attractions of a faith, which so marvellously adapts itself to every human need. Not, indeed that it can satisfy the soul's ~~cravings~~ cravings, but, at least it can sometimes help the soul towards a higher satisfaction that the faith contains within itself. It supplies a multitude of external forms in which the spiritual may be clothed and manifested; it has many painted windows, as it were, through which the celestial sunshine, else disregarded, may make itself gloriously perceptible in visions of beauty and splendor. There is not one want or weakness of human nature of which Catholicism will own itself without a remedy; cordials, certainly, it possesses in abundance, and sedatives in inexhaustible variety, and what may once have been genuine medicaments, though a little worse for long keeping.

"To do it justice, Catholicism is such a miracle of fitness for its own ends, many of which might seem to be admirable ones, that it is difficult to imagine it a contrivance of mere man. Its mighty machinery was forged and put together, not on middle earth, but either above or below. If there were but angels to work it, instead of the very different class of engineers who now manage its cranks and safety-valves, the system would soon vindicate the dignity and holiness of its origin." <sup>1</sup>

In these paragraphs Hawthorne is not only editorializing on Hilda's "danger"; he is also arguing in print with him-

---

1. Notebook, pp. 392-393.

self. Most of the ideas of the passage are already familiar to a reader of the Notebook : Hawthorne's sincere admiration for the human consolations of the Church's ministrations, the pragmatic worth of these consolations, scepticism about their abiding vitality, and suspiciousness about the virtues and worth of the priesthood. The Jesuits again appear as a favorite bogey, and like Parkman's biographer and friend, Hawthorne ascribes to the sons of Loyola almost superhuman powers of proselytizing susceptible heretics. There is also the frank admission that the "miracle of fitness" of the Church's rites is of an un-earthly origin-whether supernatural or diabolical, he does not know. As I said, Hawthorne is here telling us as much about his own perplexities as he is about Hilda's. His own favorite prejudices plainly will not yield.

And so Hilda from the "hundred steps of Ara Coeli" passed on to the "broad silent nave of St. John Lateran, "thence to the Pantheon. "She went into every church that rose before her, but not now to wonder at its magnificence, which she hardly noticed more than if it had been the pine-built interior of a New England meeting house." And her meditations or, rather Hawthorne's, continue:

"It was impossible to doubt that multitudes of people found their spiritual advantage in it, (the Church) who would find, none at all in their own formless mode of worship; which, besides, so far as the sympathy of prayerful souls

is concerned, can be enjoyed only at stated and too unfrequent periods. But here, whenever the hunger for divine nutriment came upon the soul, it would on the instant be appeased. At one or another altar, the incense was forever ascending; the mass always being performed, and carrying upward with it the devotion of such as had not words for their own prayer. And yet if the worshipper had his individual petition to offer, his own heart-secret to whisper below his breath, there were divine auditors ever ready to receive it from his lips; and what encouraged him still more, these auditors had not always been divine, but kept, within their heavenly memories, the tender humility of human experience. Not a saint in heaven, but once a man on earth."<sup>1</sup>

In The paragraph which follows the above, Hawthorne continues through Hilda's meditation to talk understandingly of Catholic devotion to the saints. He has her see all sorts and conditions of men and women enter the church to make their obeisance to their favorite saint, "They were too humble", she thinks, "to approach the Deity directly." The paragraph concludes with lines reminiscent of the conclusion to the February 7th excerpt from the Notebook previously quoted. Hilda sees a young man before a shrine:

"---writhing, wringing his hands, contorting his whole frame in an agony of remorseful recollection, but finally knelt down to weep and pray. If this youth had been a Protestant, he would have kept all that torture pent up in

---

1. Doc. cit.

his heart, and let it burn there till it seared him into indifference." <sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, according to Hawthorne, Hilda's "delicate appreciation of art stood her in good stead, and lost Catholicism a convert. <sup>2</sup> The author is referring to Hilda's study of the various artistic conceptions of Our Blessed Mother's face, which she had been observing at shrines and in Lady-chapels:

"If the painter had represented Mary with a heavenly face, poor Hilda was now in the very mood to worship her, and adopt the faith in which she held so elevated a position. But she saw that it was merely the flattered portrait of an earthly beauty, the wife, at best, of the artist; or, it might be a peasant-girl of the Campagna, or some Roman princess, to whom he desired to pay his court.----Hilda's fine sense of the fit and decorous could not be betrayed into kneeling at such a shrine." <sup>3</sup>

And yet Hilda, although not aesthetically satisfied by the pictures of the Virgin Mother she saw, admits the human need of God's Mother:

"Ah! thought Hilda to herself, 'why should not there be a woman to listen to the prayers of women? a mother in heaven for all motherless girls like me? In all God's thought and care for us, can he have withheld this boon, which our weakness so much needs?'" <sup>4</sup>

- 
1. Notebook p. 395.
  2. Loc. cit.
  3. Op. cit., pp. 395-396.
  4. Op. cit., p. 396.
  5. Op. cit., p. 397.

Hilda's wanderings had naturally brought her oftener to St. Peter's than to other churches:

"Within its vast limits, she thought, and beneath the sweep of its great dome, there should be space for all forms of Christian truth; room both for the faithful and the heretic to kneel; due help for every creature's spiritual want." <sup>1</sup>

And yet even St. Peter's did not always impress her, partly perhaps because the reality of its magnificent spaciousness never seemed quite to measure up to her dreams, about it. She could never recover from these dreams which had vanished the first time she opened the Cathedral door.

But one afternoon her churchly peregrinations came to a climax, and it was in St. Peter's that the Climax came. She had entered it in a sombre mood and yet:

"---its interior beamed upon her with all the effect of a new creation. It seemed an embodiment of whatever the imagination could conceive, or the heart desire, as a magnificent, comprehensive, majestic symbol of religious faith. All splendor was included within its verge, and there was space for all." <sup>2</sup>

Hawthorne enumerates the details of Hilda's impression and tells that she sees each one contributing to the "grandeur of the whole. Even "those grim popes who sit each over his own tomb" now began to seem suitable and in place:

1. Notebook p. 397.
2. Op. cit. pp. 398-399.

"The pavement! it stretched out illimitably, a plain of many-colored marble, where thousands of worshippers might kneel together, and shadowless angels tread among them without brushing their heavenly garments against those earthly ones, The roof! the dome! Rich, gorgeous, filled with sunshine, cheerfully sublime, and fadeless after centuries, those lofty depths seemed to translate the heavens to mortal comprehension, and help the spirit upward to a yet higher and wider sphere. Must not the faith that built this matchless edifice, and warmed, illuminated, and overflowed from it, include whatever can satisfy human aspirations at the loftiest, or minister to human necessity at the sorest? If Religion had a material home, was it not Here?" <sup>1</sup>

Before she realizes what she is doing, this "daughter of Puritan forefathers", as Hawthorne calls her, dips her fingers in the holy water fount. She has the feeling that her mother's spirit is hovering near, "weeping to behold her ensnared by these gaudy superstitions." She goes from shrine to shrine, stopping, as Hawthorne had stopped, before Guido's pictures of St. Michael overcoming Lucifer, and ruminates in almost the very words <sup>2</sup> Hawthorne had entered into his Notebook:

"She felt, while gazing at it, that the artist had done a great thing, not merely for the Church of Rome, but for the cause of Good. The moral of the picture, the immortal youth and loveliness of Virtue, and its irresistible might against ugly Evil, appealed as much to Puritan as to Catholics." <sup>3</sup>

---

1. Notebook, pp. 398-400

2. Op. cit. See the entry in the Notebook for February 21, 1858.

3. Op. cit., pp. 400-401.

She finds herself, as in a dream, kneeling before the shrine and sobbing out a prayer- to Michael, the Virgin, or God, the Father - she did not know which.

"In an instant she snatched herself up, as it were, from her knees, all a-throb with the emotions which were struggling to force their way out of her heart by the avenue that had so nearly been opened for them. Yet there was a strange sense of relief won by that momentary passionate prayer; a strange joy, moreover, whether from what she had done or for what she had escaped doing, Hilda could not tell. But she felt as one half-stifled, who had stolen a breath of air."

Before long the temptation comes to Hilda, as it must have come often to her creator, to go to confession. In the ~~thirtieth~~ thirty-ninth chapter we find her where the confessionals are located:

"They are small tabernacles of carved wood, with a closet for the priest in the center; and, on either side a space for the penitent to kneel and breathe his confession through a perforated auricle into the good father's ear. Observing this arrangement, though already familiar to her, our poor Hilda was anew impressed with the infinite convenience - if we may use so poor a phrase - of the Catholic religion to its devout believers." <sup>2</sup>

These thoughts are followed by a passage in which Hawthorne himself again appears in his role as editor. Like so many of the passages in the Notebook, this paragraph bespeaks eloquently Hawthorne's yearning for the

1. Notebook, p. 401.
2. Op. cit., pp. 402-404.



human comforts of religion:

"Who in truth, that considers the matter, can resist a similar impression. In the hottest fever-fit of life, they can always find ready for their need, a cool, quiet, beautiful place of worship. They may enter its sacred precincts at any hour, leaving the fret and trouble of the world behind them, and purifying themselves with a touch of holy water at the threshold. In the calm interior, fragrant of rich and soothing incense, they hold converse with some saint, their awful, kindly friend. And, most precious privilege of all, whatever perplexity, sorrow, guilt, may weigh upon their souls, they can fling down the dark burden at the foot of the cross, and go forth-to sin no more, nor be any longer disquieted; but to live again in the freshness and elasticity of innocence." <sup>1</sup>

There follows a long struggle within Hilda's mind and heart as to whether she should yield to the temptation to find out a confessor and unburden to him her terrible secret. She even goes so far as to question a woman penitent about the happiness that comes to these who have confessed their sins. The woman affectionately reassures her and says:

"My heart is at rest now, Thanks be to the Saviour, and the Blessed Virgin and the saints, and the good father, there is no more trouble for poor Teresa!" <sup>2</sup>

Hilda looks closely at the confessionals, noting the inscriptions on each-one for almost every tongue in Christendom. Here indeed was "room for all nations", an ear

1. Notebook, p. 404.

2. Op. cit., p. 405.

for every overburdened heart. Before she knows what she is doing, she flings herself down in the penitent's place at a confessional labelled, Pro Anglica Lingua. And then, with the kindly help of an aged confessor, she tells her whole unhappy story, except that she mentions no names. When the confession is over and after the priest, mistaking Hilda for a Catholic, pronounces the words of absolution, he comes out of the confessional to talk to her face to face. He does recognize that this is the penitent's first acquaintance with the confessional. She admits it and her heresy, telling the priest that she is from New England. He, too, is a native New Englander. There follows a long discussion as to whether Hilda told her sin "under the sacred seal." The priest tells her, much to her consternation, that she did not. He even tries to persuade her to make the crime she had witnessed known to the proper authorities. Hilda protests the sacredness of her trust in the "confession" she just made so violently that the priest smiles and tries to reassure her. Hawthorne has him follow up this reassurance with a brief but eloquent plea for Hilda to become a Catholic. The chapter closes thus:

"Father, said Hilda, much moved by his kindly earnestness; in which, however, genuine as it was, there might still be a heaven of professional craft, I dare not come a step farther than Providence shall guide me. Do not let it grieve you, therefore, if I never return to the confessional; never dip any finger in holy water; never sign my bosom with the cross. I am a daughter

of the Puritans. But, in spite of my heresy, she added, with a sweet, tearful smile, you may one day see the poor girl, to whom you have done this great Christian kindness, coming to remind you of it, and thank you for it, in the Better Land.

"The old priest shook his head. But, as he stretched out his hands at the same moment in the act of benediction, Hilda knelt down and received the blessing with as devout a simplicity as any Catholic of them all."

Chapter XL is devoted largely to a debate or a discussion about the merits of Catholicism between Hilda and her lover, Kenyon, who has been a silent observer of Hilda's confession, of her interview with the priest, and the final benediction. Hilda is calm and happy when she goes to meet Kenyon, but he is deeply distrustful of all that he has just seen. Some critics argue that Kenyon, throughout the story, has been serving as Hawthorne's mouthpiece. These critics claim to discover a similar "mouthpiece" in all the Hawthorne novels. Now it may be that Kenyon, who plays the advocate of the devil with Hilda, is Hawthorne's mouthpiece, but, as I have said before, in the two previous chapters the author very frankly uses his own omnipresence to editorialize, and sometimes it seems as if Hilda's own thoughts are Hawthorne's. Perhaps the latter wanted to make assurance doubly sure by having Kenyon rebuke Hilda for flinging her "angelic purity into that mass of unspeakable corruption, the Roman

Church." <sup>1</sup> But Hilda is made to be more than a match for Kenyon. When he inquires:

"Then you are not a Catholic-----she, answers  
"Really, I do not quite know what I am,'-----  
---'I have a great deal of faith, and Catholicism  
seems to have a great deal of good. Why should not  
I be a Catholic, if I find there what I need, and  
what I cannot find elsewhere? The more I see of  
this worship, the more I wonder at the exuberance  
with which it adapts itself to all the demands  
of human infirmity. If its ministers were but a  
little more than human, above all error, pure from  
all iniquity, what a religion would it be!'" <sup>2</sup>

Surely these are the familiar sentiments of Hawthorne. Before the pair leaves the Cathedral, however, Kenyon indulges in some foolish talk, which brings a rebuke from Hilda:

"It is not kind, nor like yourself!---'to  
throw ridicule on emotions which are genuine.  
I revere this glorious church for itself and  
its purposes; and love it moreover, because  
here I have found sweet peace, after a great  
anguish.'  
"Forgive me," answered the sculptor, 'and I  
will do so no more. My heart is not so ir-  
reverent as my words.'" <sup>3</sup>.

I like to think that in these words Kenyon is speaking for Hawthorne, because my study of The Marble Faun, together with my reading of the Notebook, convince me that Hawthorne's own heart is never quite so irreverent as some of his words. He does not always succeed in being

1. Notebook, p. 416.  
2. Op. cit. p. 418  
3. Op. cit. p. 420.

just to this alien Church(certain of his prejudices are too deeply ingrained for that), but his heart is, as they say, in the right place. Had he come to Catholicism directly from Puritan "piety", having escaped the ice-house of Unitarianism and the blight of Transcendental scepticism, he might have found the True Faith in the English-speaking confessional at St. Peter's.

### 5. Conclusion

As far as I know, the two previous sections constitute a more complete documentation of Hawthorne's attitude to Catholicism than any as yet in print. Quite obviously other readers of Hawthorne, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, have been struck by his preoccupation with the Church, with her art, and with some of her teachings: Father A.F. Hewit, the earliest and still one of the best students of the subject, concluded his study in these words:

"Hawthorne was, and remained to the end, the child of his New England, Puritan ancestry, a genuine, thoroughgoing son of the soil of Massachusetts, and he was at home nowhere else on this earth, which was much less his real dwelling-place than the ideal, ethereal realm of his own imagination. And, although the superb incarnation of religious, faith which St. Peter's presented powerfully fascinated him, there is no sign of his having attained a perception of the historical and theological evidence that the Catholic Church is the one only church of Christ and way of salvation for all men.

"He had no doubt that the Catholic religion was one form of Christianity, good, and even the best for many who believe in it and practice its precepts. But, in his own case, although he was a member of no church, he appears to have clung to his own hereditary belief as a descendant of New England Puritans, and to have remained to the last what is called a Liberal Christian, although his language does not indicate that he was a Unitarian." <sup>1</sup>

No one, even with better evidence at his disposal than Father Hewitt could obtain, can improve theologically upon the above verdict.

Several more recent non-Catholic critics have tried to explain, on the other hand, why Hawthorne came as close as he did to a sympathetic understanding of the Church. No one has done so any better than Mr. Herbert Gorman, in a work which is unfortunately spoiled by its determined effort to account for Hawthorne almost entirely in terms of his years of solitude in the "chamber under the eaves". Mr Gorman writes:

"Hawthorne's sensitivity toward the Roman Catholic Church was the direct result of his brooding observations. He comprehended better than most of his New England contemporaries how much the solitary man, perplexed with the incubus of sin might relieve himself through the soothing ministrations of the confessor. It was a long way for a man brought up in the old Puritan traditions to go, but Hawthorne, at least, achieved a broken glimpse of that deep mystic foundation upon which the invol-

---

1. Hewitt, A. F. "Hawthorne's Attitude towards Catholicism", The Catholic World, Vol. XLII (October 1885).

nerable strength of the Roman Catholic Church is braced." 1

Professor Frederic I. Carpenter will speak for me the last word in this chapter, because it is to his theory of "The Genteel Tradition" that I have subscribed (with some slight modifications) in this thesis. Professor Carpenter sums up Hawthorne in this way:

"Perhaps Hawthorne was the most typical, as well as one of the greatest, writers of the genteel tradition. Born in Puritan Salem, in an atmosphere of genteel poverty, he learned to revere as well as to hate his heritage. If he accepted for himself the curse of Maule, which he described in The House of the Seven Gables, he did not accept it blindly. In the Scarlet Letter he followed in imagination the alternative of individual freedom to its end, and concluded that, like Dimmesdale, it was not for him. In The Blithedale Romance he rejected the alternative of social liberalism. (Ed. note i.e. at Brook Farm.) And finally, in The Marble Faun, his imagination sought refuge in Rome, the source of all orthodox tradition. Through the character of Hilda, who worshipped at the shrine of the Virgin Mary and became 'almost a Catholic' he prophesied the return of modern Americans such as T.S. Eliot to the Catholic faith. (Ed. note: Mr. Eliot is an Anglo-Catholic!) But Hawthorne remained true to his own tradition and ended his days in ancestral New England. Rejecting the two living religions of militant liberalism and of Roman Catholicism he resigned himself, without hope to his own puritan traditionalism. 26

1. Gorman, Herbert: Hawthorne: A study in Solitude; pp. 125-126.
2. Carpenter, Frederic I, "The Genteel Tradition: A Re-interpretation; The New England Quarterly, Vol. XV, No. 3, (September, 1942) pp. 434-435.

## C H A P T E R VII

### THE GENTEEL BRAHMIN

#### LOOKS AT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

##### 1. Two Genteel Brahmins.

It was Holmes himself who first called them Brahmins. By "them" I mean the New England writers, who, like Emerson, Lowell, and Holmes, were the direct descendants of a long line of ministerial ancestors. According to the more radical young scholars of our generation, the Brahmins are often equated with the followers of the "Genteel Tradition". Professor Blankenship, for example, says of them:

"The Brahmins, as the New England aristocrats are called, have always held themselves aloof from the middle-class Yankees. Family connections, money, and culture have long been considered the hallmark of Brahmin respectability. Behind this triple protection the upper class of New England society developed its inviolable code of customs and prejudices beside which it tests all things to determine if they are respectable. The touchstone of this respectability is the possession of good manners, a genuine but frigid culture, a scrupulous regard for appearances, and a genteel determination to admit the existence of nothing unpleasant."<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Blankenship, Russell, American Literature, p. 334



It is clear that the author of the above lines is as hostile as his master, Professor Parrington, to the Brahmin class and no less hostile to them than is Professor Santayana to "The Genteel Tradition", which he defined in his famous lecture on the subject in terms of its cultural conservatism. <sup>1</sup> What Holmes started as a king of "genteel", joke,<sup>2</sup> has been turned against himself and his king. What Professor Santayana had aimed primarily at Emerson, Whitman, and William James has been also applied perhaps more correctly and jointly to Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, and Norton.

As I have already said, in defending Longfellow, the term "genteel" has often been used in disparagement of any writer in America who showed any kind of respect for tradition, especially for a religious tradition. In this sense, as we have seen, it has been applied to Hawthorne. There is no reason at all so to use this term or the even more aristocratic name of Brahmin. Both terms do describe (perhaps with Holmesian irony) a fairly large and genuinely respectable group of American writers, who deserve quite as well of critical posterity as their bolder and less traditional contemporaries. As I have already shown clearly, two of the members of "The Genteel Tradition", (who were not Brahmins in Holmes's sense of the term),

1. See Santayana, George, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy", Winds of Doctrine. pp. 187+188.
2. See Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Elsie Venner (Holmes's Works, Vol.V), Chap. I.

Longfellow and Hawthorne, were much more kindly disposed to the Catholic Church than such left-wing descendants of Puritanism as Emerson and Thoreau. And Holmes and Lowell, though Brahmins to the core, were very much unlike each other and the rest of their "tribe" - so much so that I question whether Holmes deserves to be called either a Brahmin or "genteel" without very definite reservations which will become apparent as this chapter develops. Both Holmes and Lowell did look at the Catholic Church, however, and the results of their inspection constitute the real purpose of this chapter.

## 2. Medicine and Theology

Although Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809) was born ten years before Lowell (1819), he outlived the latter by three years, and hence gets priority in this chapter on two accounts. He also deserves first place for another and more relevant reason: he was a physician over whom religion and theology exerted an unusual fascination. I say "unusual", remembering that most doctors of medicine are proverbially careless of spiritual concerns; they are more like Chaucer's Doctor of Physic, whose "studie was but litel on the Bible", than like Sir Thomas Browne or the great Louis Pasteur. One of Holmes's biographers (his best known one, in fact) John T. Morse, has tried to deny Holmes's

interest in religion, <sup>1</sup> but even a hasty dip into the Index to the learned Doctor's Works reveals a long and inspiring list of references to religious and theological topics. It is true that Holmes was from his earliest years an avowed enemy of ancestral Calvinism, but he was by no means a silent enemy as his works abundantly testify.

Early in life, while still a student at Harvard, he became definitely anti-Calvinist, or at least he became bitterly opposed to what he mistakenly took for Calvinism. In its place, he substituted Universalism, with its strong liberalistic tinges and its comforting belief in universal salvation. His medical studies both in this country and abroad, tended naturally to strengthen his rationalistic bias, so much so indeed that in spite of his "full-blown Victorian" manners and tastes, he "was something of a child of the eighteenth century at heart." <sup>2</sup> Professors Hayakawa and Jones put it very well when they write:

"Professionally trained as he was to empiricism, the theological apriorisms that underlay Calvinistic dogmas about sin and moral responsibility seemed to him relics of barbarism unbecoming the enlightened American, so that he set about with great vigor to destroy, by mockery, logic, sentiment, and science, the notions prevailing among the general public about crime and sin. <sup>3</sup>

1. See letter to W.S. Merrill in The Catholic World, February, 1932, p. 586;
2. Parrington, Vernon L., The Romantic Revolution in America, p. 452.
3. Hayakawa, S.I. and Jones, Howard Mumford (eds.) Oliver Wendell Holmes p. XLVI.

It is possible to show that Holmes, who reprobated the predestination of Calvin, was one of the earliest victims of that "scientific" determinism which did so much to destroy the supernatural faith of so many men and women of the nineteenth century. Fortunately for Holmes, he never tried to defend a complete and thoroughgoing determinism,<sup>1</sup> but adopted a kind of via media by never denying responsibility altogether.

Similarly, he said a fond farewell to his own father's Calvinism, but he never could forget completely either the religion of Jonathan Edwards or any religion for that matter which came within his purview. Curiously enough, as Mr. Walter Gavigan contends, he, the archrationalist, is "singularly free of the prejudices characteristic of other so-called emancipated New Englanders like Emerson and Thoreau"<sup>2</sup>; when he came to look at the Catholic church. He is more condescending in tone, as we shall note, than Longfellow and Hawthorne, but surprisingly objective for such a militant free-thinker.

The evidence of Holmes's attitude to Catholicism is not too easy to assemble, because he left us no chronological account of his early impressions of European Catholicism. The evidence is embedded in his work and often

<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. XLVIII.

<sup>2</sup> Gavigan, Walter V., "The Doctor Looks at Religion", The Catholic World, Vol CXXXVII, p. 53 (April, 1933)

comes to light in unexpected places. In presenting this evidence I am going to follow largely the order of its appearance in his Works - which is not always the order of composition. The first items I have to present, from The Professor at the Breakfast-Table, are on the whole unfavorable. In each instance the Professor, (Holmes himself), is laying down his usual obiter dicta with whimsical solemnity. The Professor is speaking on the privacy which he feels should be enjoyed by the dead - à propos the passing of the "Little Gentleman". Among other things, he writes:

"The Roman Catholic Church has certain formulae for its dying children, to which almost all of them attach the greatest importance. There is hardly a criminal so abandoned that he is not anxious to receive the 'consolations of religion' in his last hours. Even if he is senseless, but still living. I think that the form is gone through with, just as baptism is administered to the unconscious new-born child. Now we do not quarrel with these forms-we look with reverence and affection upon all symbols which give peace and comfort to our fellow-creatures. But the value of the new-born child's passive consent to the ceremony is small, as testimony to the truth of a doctrine. The automatic closing of a dying man's lips on the consecrated wafer proves nothing in favor of the Real presence, or any other dogma. And, speaking generally, the evidence of dying men in favor of any belief is to be received with great caution." <sup>1</sup>

This is certainly not a very auspicious passage to begin with, for it reveals, in spite of expressed toleration, a

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol.II), The Professor at the Breakfast Table, pp. 291-292.

pragmatic attitude toward the efficacy of the sacraments quite typical of what we today call "modernism" but also more than faintly reminiscent of eighteenth-century infidelity.

The second piece of evidence originates from the same occasion, the death of the "Little Gentleman":

"Bridget, the housemaid, always insisted that he died a Catholic. She had seen the crucifix, and believed that he prayed on his knees before it. The last circumstance is very probably true-indeed, there was a spot worn on the carpet just before the cabinet which might be then accounted for. Why he, whose whole life was a crucifixion, should not love to look on that divine image of shameless suffering, I cannot see; on the contrary, it seems to me the most natural thing in the world that he should. But there are those who want to make private property of everything and can't make up their minds that people who don't think as they do should claim any interest in that infinite compassion expressed in the central figure of the Christendom which includes us all." 1

At first glance this passage seems as hostile to Catholicism as the previous one, and yet there is behind its hostility the very obvious feeling of one who, however much in error, wishes to belong to the soul of the Church. There is even, odd as it may seem, a hint that this believer in liberal Protestantism has a strong suspicion of Our Lord's Divinity and the very real desire to be a sharer in His Divine compassion. True enough there is more than a hint here that Holmes regards Catholicism as sectarian and resents

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol.II), The Professor at the Breakfast Table, p. 309.

its alleged exclusiveness. It is something, nevertheless, that he can turn to Christ on the Cross and want so much to claim his share in Him crucified.

In another passage (the book is disjointed, hence sequence in treatment is unnecessary) the Professor is talking on and on, as was his wont, about the spiritual problems of the young girl Iris. Without even the slightest hint of irony, he soon lapses into a very Catholic way of speaking that sounds very natural.

"Pray for these dear young souls! This is the second natural birth;- for I do not speak of those peculiar religious experiences which form the point of transition in many lives between the consciousness of a general relation to the Divine nature and a special personal relation. The litany should count a prayer for them in the list of its supplications; - masses should be said for them as for souls in purgatory; - all good Christians should remember them as they remember those in peril through travel or sickness or in warfare." 1

Taken out of its context and with no author's name assigned to it, this passage scarcely seems to be the work of a rationalist - must less of an enemy of Catholicism.

This passage is preceded by a really ironical one in which Holmes accuses Protestants of looking upon Catholics as "the Holy Father's one hundred and thirty-nine millions as spiritual larvae."2 He then goes on with withering scorn to tell his fellow-Protestants that they are the ones who

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol.II), The Professor at the Breakfast Table, p. 243.

2. Op. cit., p. 242.

keep their young, spiritually speaking, "in the tadpole state." After he finishes his paragraph of excoriation, he then cries out - "Pray for these dear young souls!" and so on.

The finest tribute ever paid by Holmes to the Church occurs in Over the Teacups, another series of papers like the "Breakfast Table" books. Again the subject is death, and Holmes, the physician, is speaking:

"So far as I have observed persons nearing the end of life, the Roman Catholics understand the business of dying better than Protestants. They have an export by then, armed with spiritual specifics, in which they both, patient and priestly ministrant, place implicit trust. Confession, the Eucharist, Extreme Unction, - these all inspire a confidence which without this symbolism is apt to be wanting in over-sensitive natures. They have been peopled in earlier years with ghostly spectres of avenging fiends, moving in a sleepless world of devouring flames and smothering exhalations where nothing lives but the sinner, the fiends, and the reptiles who help to make life an unending torture. It is no wonder that these images sometimes return to the enfeebled intelligence. To exercise them, the old Church of Christendom has her mystic formulæ, of which no rationalistic prescription can take the place. If Cowper had been a good Roman Catholic instead of having his conscience handled by a Protestant like John Newton, he would not have died despairing, looking upon himself as a castaway. I have seen a good many Roman Catholics on their dying beds, and it always appeared to me that they accepted the inevitable with a composure which showed that their belief, whether or not the best to live by, was a better one to die by than most of the harder creeds which have replaced it."<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol. IV), Over the Teacups, pp. 250-251.



This commendation is of course not, without its sting, but again it testifies to Holmes's fairness in praising the practical or pragmatic values of Catholicism as he had observed them in his capacity as a physician.

None of Holmes's works gives us so much evidence of his attitudes to Catholicism as one of his "medicated novels", Elsie Venner. It is unnecessary to summarize this strange story of pre-natal influence and snake-worship in which the author was "testing" the doctrine of original sin. The Catholic references are fairly numerous but are incidental to the main plot of the narrative. Holmes describes at length the village of Rockland in Chapter V, and in this description he includes sketches of the village's two leading ministers, the Reverend Dr. Pierrepont Honeywood, an adherent of the old Puritan faith, and the liberal Mr. Chauncy Fairweather. Speaking of Mr. Fairweather, he writes:

"The minister, unlike his rival on the other side of the way, was a down-hearted and timid kind of man. He went on preaching as he had been taught to preach, but he had misgivings at times. There was a little Roman Catholic Church at the foot of the hill where his own was placed, which he always had to pass on Sundays. He could never look on the thronging multitudes that crowded its pews and aisles or knelt bare-headed on its steps, without a longing to get in among them and go down on his knees and enjoy that luxury of devotional contact which makes a worshipping throng as different from the same numbers praying apart as a bed of coals is from a trail of scattered cinders.

"'Oh, if I could but huddle in with those poor laborers and working-women!' he would say to himself.

'If I could but breathe that atmosphere, stifling though it be, yet made holy by ancient litanies, and cloudy with the smoke of hallowed incense for one hour, instead of droning over these moral precepts to my half-sleeping congregation!"<sup>1</sup>

Holmes here, through the mind of Mr. Fairweather, is hinting at an understanding of the need for communal worship as well as of the warmth and antiquity of Catholicism as contrasted with the "newness" and the "droning over" moral precepts of the Unitarian or Universalist creeds.

By the end of Chapter XVII, Mr. Fairweather's spiritual doubts are beginning to come to a head. They rose in part from his attempt to understand the nature of poor Elsie Venner, but his proximity to a Catholic chapel had more than a little to do with his perplexed state of mind. He had to pass this chapel every Sunday on the way to his own church.

"Such a crowd of worshippers, swarming into the pews like bees, filling all the aisles, running over at the door like berries heaped to full in the measure, - some kneeling on the steps, some standing on the sidewalk, hats off, heads down, lips moving, some looking on devoutly from the other side of the street! Oh, could he have followed his own Bridget, maid of all work, into the heart of that steaming throng, and buried his head while the priests intoned their Latin Prayers! could he have snuffed up the cloud of frankincense, and felt that he was in the great ark which holds the better half of the Christian world, while all around it are wretched creatures, some struggling against the waves in leaky boats, and some on ill-connected rafts, and some with

---

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol V) Elsie Venner, pp.64-65.

their heads just above water, thinking, to risk out the flood which is to sweep the earth clear of sinners, upon their own private, individual life-preservers.!" 1

Again Holmes, looking inside the unhappy mind of Mr. Fairweather, signalizes one of the strongest human appeals which the Church has always held out to sinners, to confused and isolated minds and hearts. Surely Holmes himself knew at first hand the dangers of "private, individual life-preservers" and well may have looked longingly at the "ark" of the Church.

Chapter XVIII marks the climax of Mr. Fairweather's spiritual problems. He had, according to Dr. Holmes, been engaged for months in studying "the records of ancient councils and the writings of the early fathers". As he continued to study, his discontent with his own church's position grew apace.

"He yearned especially toward the good old unquestioning, authoritative Mother Church, with her articles of faith which took away the necessity for private judgment, with her traditional forms and ceremonies, and her whole apparatus of stimulants and anodynes." 2

Those last two words imply of course serious misunderstanding, if the good Doctor wished to have his readers regard the sacraments as "stimulants and anodynes". He may have

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol V) Elsie Venner, p. 250.  
2. Op. Cit., p. 251.

used them without special malice, however, for they are obviously taken from a physician's vocabulary.

To continue the story:

"About this time he (Mr. Fairweather) procured a breviary and kept it in his desk under the loose papers. He sent to a Catholic bookstore and obtained a small crucifix suspended from a string of beads. He ordered his new coat to be cut very narrow in the collar and to be made single-breasted. He began an informal series of religious conversations with Miss O'Brien, the young person of Irish extraction already referred to as Bridget, maid of all work. These not proving very satisfactory, he managed to fall in with Father McShane, the Catholic priest of the Rockland church. Father McShane encouraged his nibble very scientifically. It would be such a fine thing to bring over one of these Protestant heretics, and a 'liberal' one too! - not that there was any real difference between them, but it sounded better, to say that one of these rationalizing free-and-equal religionists had been made a convert than any of those half-way Protestants who were the slaves of catechisms instead of councils, and of commentators instead of popes. The subtle priest played his disciple with his finest tackle. It was hardly necessary: when anything or anybody wishes to be caught, a bare hook and a coarse line are all that is needed." 1

It is very plain as Holmes goes on in his delineation of Mr. Fairweather's problems that sympathy is giving way to satire. Before Dr. Honeywell arrives on the scene to try to dissuade Mr. Fairweather from his apparent determination to "go over to Rome", the author himself stops his narrative for four paragraphs to indulge in an editorial attack on Catholicism, which comes as close to real bigotry, in my

---

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol V) Elsie Venner, pp. 251-252.

opinion, as anything in Emerson or Thoreau. He uses such phrases as the following:

"If a man has a genuine sincere, hearty wish to get rid of his liberty, if he is really bent on becoming a slave, nothing can stop him. 1

"America owes its political freedom to religious Protestantism. 2

"All of us love companionship and sympathy; some of us may love them too much. All of us are more or less imaginative in our theology. Some of us may find the aid of material symbols a comfort, if not a necessity. The boldest thinker may have his moments of languor and discouragement, when he feels as if he could willingly exchange faith with the old beldame crossing herself at the cathedral door, etc. 3---"

Such special pleading and bigoted haranguing of his reader is, to say the least, out of place artistically. It does seem also to contradict my earlier quotation from Mr. Gavigan, in which he claims Holmes to be singularly free from prejudice. And yet, although Holmes quite evidently wishes that Mr. Fairweather might attain his own coldly rationalistic state of mind, it cannot be said that the Doctor did not appreciate some of the very real attractions in Catholicism for a man like Fairweather - and perhaps even for himself. It might even be contended that Holmes in his editorial paragraphs was protesting too much and hence was not only trying to warn his readers against the dangers

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol V) Elsie Venner, p. 252.
2. Op. cit., p. 253.
3. Op. cit., pp. 253-254.

of yielding to the lure of Catholic authority, but also he may have been , like Hawthorne in somewhat similar passages, trying to argue with his own conscience.

The presence in Elsie Venner of a medical doctor, Dr. Kittredge, who talks as oracularly as the Autocrat and the Professor rolled into one, makes the reader very suspicious, however, that not all of the author's editorializing is as direct as in the above-mentioned paragraphs. Dr. Kittredge is Dr. Holmes, and through Dr. Kittredge's observations both on Mr. Fairweather's spiritual problems and on Dr. Honeywood's attempts to defend Calvinism we get no very favorable picture of Holmes's views either on religion and clergymen in general or on the Catholic Church and its priests in particular. The more I study the remarks of Dr. Kittredge, the less I am inclined to see eye to eye with Mr. Gavigan's compliments to Dr. Holmes on his alleged freedom from prejudice. It is true that Holmes's prejudices do not stem from Protestantism for he hated orthodox Calvinism, as I have said, with a bitterness unexpected in a man of his usual urbanity. They come rather from his old-fashioned rationalism. Dr. Kittredge is arguing with the Rev. Dr. Honeywood:

"As for our (medical and scientific men) getting any quarter at the hands of theologians, we don't expect it, and have no right to. You don't give each other any quarter. I have had two religious books sent me by friends within a week or two. One is Mr. Brownson's; he is as fair and square as Euclid; a real honest, strong thinker, and one that knows what he is talking about, - for he has tried all sorts of religions, pretty much. He tells us that the Roman Catholic Church is the one

"through which alone we can hope for heaven".

The other is by a worthy Episcopal rector, who appears to write as if he were in earnest, and he calls the Papacy the "Devil's Masterpiece", and talks about the "satanic scheme" of that very Church "through which alone", as Mr. Brownson tells us, "we can hope for heaven"! What's the use in our caring about hard words after this, - "atheists", heretics, infidels, and the like? They're, after all, only the cinders picked up out of those heaps of ashes round the stumps of the old stakes where they used to burn men, women, and children for not thinking just like other folks. They'll "crock" your fingers, but they can't burn us". 1

There is honor here for the "fair and square" Orestes Brownson but equal respect for an unnamed Episcopal rector, who must have been an anti-Romanist of deepest dye. The sum and substance of the Kittredge - Holmes conclusion is that he, the sceptic, will be quite happy to let the contending theologians damn each other. "What's the use in our caring?"

The paragraph which follows has Dr. Kittredge employ an ancient canard against the Church. The tone is good-natured enough, but the bias is all too apparent when he writes:

"Doctors are the best-natured people in the world, except when they get fighting with each other. And they have some advantages over you: (i.e. over the clergy), You inherit your notions from a set of priests that had no wives and no children, or none to speak of (italics mine!) and so let their humanity die out of them. It didn't seem much to them to condemn a few thousand million people

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol V) Elsie Venner, pp. 324-325.

to purgatory or worse for a mistake of judgment. They didn't know what it was to have a child look up in their faces and say "Father!" It will take you a hundred or two more years to get decently humanized, after so many centuries of de-humanizing celibacy!" 1

Quite evidently the good Dr. Holmes, for all his acquaintance with priests at death-beds, had never got to know one very intimately. This paragraph, with its slyly "humorous" attack on priestly morals and its misguided appreciation of clerical celibacy, is hardly in the best "genteel" tradition.

One more item, and I am done with Elsie Venner, although there are three or four other brief passages in much the same vein as the above. Dr. Holmes decided to let Mr. Fairweather go his solitary way to Rome very gradually. Even at Elsie's death the "convert" is still on the road.

"It was not unwillingly that the Reverend Chauncy Chauncy Fairweather had relinquished the duty of conducting the service to the Reverend Doctor Honeywood, in accordance with Elsie's request. He could not, by any reasoning, reconcile his present way of thinking with a hope for the future of his unfortunate parishioner. Any good old Roman Catholic priest, born and bred to his faith and his business, would have found a loophole into some kind of heaven for her, by virtue of his doctrine of 'invincible ignorance' or other special proviso, -but a recent convert cannot enter into the working conditions of his new creed. Beliefs must be lived in for a good while, before they accomodate themselves to the soul's wants, and wear loose enough to be comfortable." 2

---

1. op. cit. p. 325.  
2. op. cit. p. 456.



Holmes is not altogether clear here or elsewhere as to whether Mr. Fairweather had actually embraced Catholicism. It is interesting to note in this passage that Holmes, unlike more sympathetic New Englanders such as Longfellow and Hawthorne, really did have some knowledge of technical theology. I do not base this claim merely on his remark, a somewhat satirical one, on "invincible ignorance". There are other references in Elsie Venner and elsewhere in his work to substantiate this contention. He even shows a bit of wisdom in his observation that "beliefs must be lived in" and so on that is reminiscent of Hawthorne, and very probably true to life.

Another "medicated novel", The Guardian Angel<sup>1</sup>, is also deeply concerned with religion, depicting the revolt of Myrtle Hazard against Calvinism. There is only one important reference to Catholicism in this novel. Holmes is writing of Miss Silence Withers, a spinster aunt and guardian to Myrtle:

"The stern spinster to whose care this vigorous life was committed was disposed to discharge her duty to the girl faithfully and conscientiously; but there were two points in her character and belief which had a most important bearing on the manner in which she carried out her laudable intentions. First, she was one of that class of human beings whose one single engrossing thought is their own welfare, - in the next world, it is true, but still their own personal welfare."

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol. VI), The Guardian Angel.

The Roman Church recognizes this class, and provides every form of specific to meet their spiritual condition. But in so far as Protestantism has thrown out works as a means of insuring future safety, these unfortunates are as badly off as nervous patients who have no drops, pills,<sup>1</sup> potions, no doctors' rules, to follow."

In spite of Holmes's natural but somewhat unfortunate use of the medical analogy, this passage is intended at once to be a compliment to the Church and a dig at Calvinism. Like Hawthorne, perhaps even more so because of his profession, Holmes saw the abundance of provisions made by the Church for human weaknesses such as excessive egotism.

The final important references to Catholicism in Holmes's works is in a collection of essays, written between 1857 and 1881, entitled Pages from an Old Volume of Life.<sup>2</sup> These seem to be miscellaneous in subject-matter but not so discursive as the "Breakfast Table" series. Better than half of them are concerned directly with Holmes's two favorite topics-medicine and theology. This is the volume in fact which contains the notorious attack on Jonathan Edwards. Of more immediate concern to us is the final essay in the volume, "Pulpit and Pew." It opens with a rather confused but earnest plea for the restoration of the priesthood. It comes indeed as a surprise from an author who, in Elsie Venner, had called the

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol.VI), The Guardian Angel p. 29.
2. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol.VIII), Pages from an Old Volume of Life.

priesthood "de-humanized". The essay begins:

"The priest is dead for the Protestant world. Luther's inkstand did not kill the devil, but it killed the priest, at least for us. He is a loss in many respects to be regretted. He kept alive the spirit of reverence. He was looked up to as possessing qualities superhuman in their nature, and so was competent to be the stay of the weak and their defence against the strong. If one end of religion is to make men happier in this world as well as in the next, mankind lost a great source of happiness when the priest was reduced to the common level of humanity, and became only a minister. Priest, which was presbyter, corresponded to senator, and was a title to respect and honor. Minister is but the diminutive of magister, and implies an obligation to render service.

"It was promised to the first preachers that in proof of their divine mission they should have the power of casting out devils and talking in strange tongues; that they should handle serpents and drink poisons with impunity; that they should lay hands on the sick and they should recover. The Roman Church claims some of these powers for its clergy and its sacred objects to this day. Miracles, it is professed, are wrought by them, or through them, as in the days of the apostles. Protestantism proclaims that the age of such occurrences as the apostles witnessed is past. What does it know about miracles? It knows a great many records of miracles, but this is a different kind of knowledge.

"The minister may be revered for his character, followed for his eloquence, admired for his learning, loved for his amiable qualities, but he can never be what the priest was in past ages, and is still, in the Roman Church. Dr. Arnold's definition may be found fault with, but it has a very real meaning. "The essential point in the notion of a priest is this: that he is a person made necessary to our intercourse with God, without being necessary or beneficial to us morally,- an unreasonable, unmoral, spiritual necessity." He did not mean, of course, that the priest might not have all the qualities which would recommend him as a teacher or as a man, but that he had a special power quite independent of his personal character, which could act, as it were, mechanically;

that out of him went a virtue, as from the hem of his Master's raiment, to those with whom his sacred office brought him in contact.

"It was a great comfort to poor helpless human beings to have a tangible personality of like nature with themselves as mediator between them and the heavenly powers. Sympathy can do much for the sorrowing, the suffering, the dying, but to hear God himself speaking directly through human lips, to feel the touch of a hand which is the channel of communication with the unseen Omnipotent, this was and is the privilege of those who looked and those who still look up to a priesthood. It has been said, and many who have walked the hospital or served in the dispensaries can bear witness to the truth of the assertion, that the Roman Catholics know how to die." 1

I have quoted this long and fine tribute to the priesthood verbatim both because of its eloquence and because of the somewhat curious medley of real understanding and awkwardness apparent in Holmes's conception of the sacred ministry. The Church does not of course profess that priests ordinarily can work apostolic miracles except the great Miracle of Holy Mass. There is, nevertheless, in spite of the strangeness of phrasing in Holmes's words and in Dr. Arnold's definition, a very unusual understanding of the meaning of the priesthood--an understanding conspicuous usually by its absence in the writings of the other members of the New England group. It is indeed a great pity that Hawthorne never got even a brief insight into the true meaning of the priesthood. Longfellow may have sensed this meaning, but he was too much disinterested in theology ever to become

1. Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Works (Vol. VIII), Pages from an Old Volume of Life. pp. 402-403.

articulate on the subject.

It is ironical indeed that the only thoroughgoing rationalist among the major writers of the New England Renaissance should have come as close as Holmes did to understanding the Catholic priesthood. This is particularly ironical when we recall with his biographer and friend that:

"His warfare-----was always against the glosses of Christianity, never against Christianity; against clergymen, not against Christ. He repudiated the Deity of ecclesiastical commerce.-'."1

Such distinctions as Mr. Morse makes here between Christianity and its "glosses", and clergymen and Christ, are often found in the works of unbelievers, both malicious and honest. They always tell us more about the person who makes them than they do about Christianity. And I think these remarks of Mr. Morse tell us some important things about Holmes, that take on a special significance in the light of the evidence presented in this chapter.

To begin with, Holmes, for all his somewhat militant rationalism, was deeply interested in religion. Mr. Morse assures us that Holmes was an inveterate churchgoer. I have also pointed out that Holmes's works give abundant evidence of his interest in religion and theology. This evidence seems strangely absent from his poems, until we recall that most of his poems are light, humorous, and

1. Morse, John T. The Life and Letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes (Vol.I), p.279.

occasional, and rarely have any of the spiritual "lift" of Longfellow's. Furthermore, unlike the other New Englanders who visited Europe, he was singularly untouched by contact with Catholicism. This may be because his medical studies took him mainly to Holland, Switzerland, and England or were, when in Paris, too absorbing to permit him to see French Catholicism. As a matter of fact, his most serious medical courses abroad were made in Paris at a time when, if so inclined, he might never have had more than passing contact with the Church but rather daily and intimate association with her enemies.

But Holmes, whose own father lost his church because of his orthodox Calvinism, was, from his Harvard years, an avowed opponent of his ancestral beliefs. Unlike most young Protestants, first reared in orthodoxy and later converted to liberalism, Holmes never became a complete and logical "indifferentist"; religion, I repeat, was one of his favorite topics. Sometimes he was its enemy, or critic, but at other times he wrote of it as if he himself were a "seeker" rather than a confirmed sceptic. I say this, despite his apparent lack of sympathy with Mr. Fairweather's quest. Dr. Holmes had had his "liberalism" more or less solidly established by his medical and scientific studies, and yet he desired very much to see harmony between religion and science. He desired also to be a genuine Christian. He was wise enough see that neither Puritan orthodoxy nor

Protestant liberalism presented a consistent or thoroughly satisfying creed. Like Emerson, he felt, therefore, that on the whole, Catholicism should be even less able to satisfy his spiritual demands. But he did, as we have seen, occasionally make a valiant effort to study the Old Faith which seemed to bring so much consolation to his Catholic Patients. The latter, drawn from his Irish and Italian neighbors, were his only first-hand contacts with the Church of Rome. He gives us little evidence, however, of ever comprehending the effects of Catholicism upon these poor immigrants except on their deathbeds. Had he been socially less the Brahmin, these good people, hewers of wood and drawers of water, might have given him a better and more practical understanding of the Faith than his literary colleagues, who were ordinarily first attracted to the Church through its art and music. To the latter Holmes paid little or no attention, for they were outside the spheres of his interest.

At times Dr. Holmes's preoccupation with science and practical affairs seems to preclude him from the company of the "genteel," His own limited vision of Catholicism, referred to above, also seems not very characteristic of the vision of his "genteel" contemporaries. But his remarks on the priesthood are consistent with his generally urbane and conservative outlook: his gentility was genuine and humanistic enough to appreciate tradition wherever he found it.

Unhappily most of the rich tradition of Catholicism was a closed book to the genial Dr. Holmes.

3. Gentleman, Scholar, and Poet.

To the above trinity of titles for James Russell Lowell should be added that of Preacher - not that he was the occupant of any religious pulpit, but because from earliest manhood he was an incurable didacticist. He himself plainly recognized that his love of preaching stood in his way of becoming even a second-rate poet. Writing of himself in the Fable for Critics, he says:

"There is Lowell, who's striving Parnassus to  
climb  
With a whole bale of isms tied together with rhyme  
We might get on alone, spite of brambles and boulders,  
But he can't with that bundle he has on his shoulders,  
The top of the hill he will ne'er come nigh reaching  
Till he learns the distinction 'twixt singing and  
preaching;" <sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact, Lowell's early inclinations had been to his father's calling, the ministry - the calling indeed of many of his ancestors. He was quite literally born into the Brahmin caste. Undecided as to whether he really had the "call" to the pulpit, he almost desperately hit upon the idea of studying law. It is possible that he may have broached the subject of becoming a writer to his father, while he was still a Harvard undergraduate, but the Rev.

I. Scudder, Horace E., The Complete Poetical works of James Russell Lowell, p. 145.



Charles Lowell was a somewhat stern and conservative man, and doubtless advised his son to try some less precarious means of earning a living. The law was never really congenial to young "Jemmy" Lowell, who had already begun to feel that his destiny lay in literary pursuits, but whether he elected the ministry, the law, or letters, the feeling that he had a mission in life was never altogether to leave him. It is true that with the tragic death of Maria White, his first wife, Lowell lost much of his early passion for "causes" and movements such as Abolitionism. But as professor at Harvard (where he succeeded Longfellow), as editor of the Atlantic Monthly and of the North American Review, and even in his capacity as minister at Madrid and London (he spent eight years in the diplomatic service), Lowell always remained the preacher. Like Emerson and Carlyle (minus their Transcendental nonsense), he was a man with a Message. Hence, his poems and his prose works became his tracts for the times, and, although by no means devoid of literary graces, all his best writing is distinctively ethical.<sup>1</sup>

It might seem, then, that, with Lowell's moral idealism inclining him to be a "preacher", he would be very likely to have had some very positive religious convictions. He had, strange as it may seem, fewer real religious convictions than the rationalist Holmes. Like Holmes, he had

---

1. For an excellent brief discussion of Lowell's dedication to didacticism, see Shea, Leo Martin, Lowell's Religious Outlook, Chapter I.

revolted against the faith of his ancestors, but, in spite of his undeniably high ideals, he never effected a respectable modus vivendi between his ethical teachings and his religious creed. His own father had thrown over Congregationalism for Unitarianism, but, as Father Shea says, the elder Lowell "was not an active, virulent reformer; he retained very much of the older Puritan minister in method, though operating on new materials".<sup>1</sup> Lowell himself was a "full-blown liberal" in theology, according to Father Shea. He was not an infidel, nor was he a rationalist. "It may be said that----Lowell is the poet of twentieth century religious uncertainty".<sup>2</sup>

Now the general tone of Lowell's ethical teaching is healthy, as Father Shea maintains,<sup>3</sup> but in my opinion it is commonplace, indicative of a second-rate mind, with as little talent for speculation as for lyrical flights of song. This is not the place to pronounce an obituary over Lowell's reputation as a poet, but it seems to me undeniably true that his particular brand of gentility deserves neither defense nor revival as does Longfellow's. His most vital poems for us today are the doggerel dialect pieces The Biglow Papers (both series) and The Fable for

---

1. For an excellent brief discussion of Lowell's dedication to didacticism, see Shea, Leo Martin, Lowell's Religious Outlook, Chapter I. p. 11..

2. Op. cit., p. 115.

3. Op. cit., p. 116.

Critics. There are among his more pretentious poems a few that deserve to live for a line or a stanza or a section, but on the whole, his verse is as anemic as his theology. His prose still commands the interest of the literary scholar, although as a critic he usually followed well-beaten paths---his more adventurous excursions into contemporary writings were very unhappy indeed. <sup>1</sup>

In re-reading a good deal of Lowell's poetry and apparently relevant prose work for this thesis, I was struck by the fact that so little of his didactic poetry can be called religious at all. And of this "religious" poetry only a very small fraction was inspired by Catholic themes or invested with Catholic imagery. This is the more surprising when we recall that Lowell spent several years of study and residence in Catholic countries (Italy and Spain), and as a scholar should have had as good an opportunity as Longfellow to drink at the springs of Catholic devotional literature. Most people who have read Lowell in schooldays think immediately of The Vision of Sir Launfal and have a hazy recollection that this poem has strong Catholic implications. It is my conclusion now that, although the poem does "teach a good lesson", The Vision is not a distinctively Catholic poem.

1. These are now widely held opinions verifiable in almost any handbook of American Literature. I endorse them with few reservations.

In a brief preface to this poem<sup>1</sup> the author tells us that he based his story on the "mythology of the Romancers". In other words, he drew his inspiration from medieval literature, especially from the much-worked mines of Arthurian romance. The plot, which he admits is slight, was his own. The first Catholic reference happens to be an unfortunate one:

"Earth gets its price for what earth gives us;  
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,  
The priest hath his fee who comes and shrives us  
We bargain for the graves we lie in;"<sup>2</sup>

The third line above revises an old Protestant dig at the "price" Catholics pay for receiving absolution. This is hardly an auspicious beginning.

In Part First Sir Launfal determines to go in search of the Holy Grail, the legendary cup from which Our Lord drank at the Last Supper. The cup was supposed to have been brought to England by Joseph of Arimathea, where it was kept by his lineal descendants for many years as the object of adoration and pilgrimage. The cup had disappeared because one of its keepers had failed to keep chaste "in thought, word and deed." Before Sir Launfal can set out on his mission (a favorite one with King Arthur's knights), he falls asleep and has a Vision. At the gate of his

1. Scudder, H.E., (ed.), The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell, p. 106.  
2. Op. cit., p. 107.

castle he meets with a leper, begging and meaning. Scornfully the knight throws the "lazar" a piece of gold. The very presence of the leper "Rasped harshly against his dainty nature". The concluding stanza of this Part reads:

"The leper raised not the gold from the dust;  
"Better to me the poor man's crust,  
Better the blessing of the poor  
Though I turn me empty from his door;  
That is no true alms which the hand can hold;  
He gives only the worthless gold  
Who gives from a sense of duty;  
But he who gives but a slender mite,  
And gives to that which is out of sight,  
That thread of the all-sustaining Beauty  
Which runs through all and doth all unite;-  
The hand cannot clasp the whole of his alms,  
For a god goes with it and makes it store  
To the soul that was starving in darkness before!"<sup>1</sup>

This conclusion sounds commendable enough until we begin to do some thinking about it, as Orestes Brownson did, in his criticism of the poem in the April, 1849 issue of his own Quarterly Review.<sup>2</sup> The Vision had appeared in 1848, but it did not take Brownson a hundred years to recognize the essential shallowness of the above stanza. Says Brownson:

Mr. Lowell is either a bad psychologist or a bad moralist. Love, as distinguished from the sense of duty, is an affection of the sensible instead of the rational nature. He who acts from a sense of duty acts from the highest and noblest love of which man is capable; he who acts only from what we may term

1. Scudder, H.E., (edi.) The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell, pp. 108-109.
2. Brownson, Henry F., The Works of Orestes A. Brownson, Vol. XIX "Popular Literature", pp.308-317.

sensible love acts from his lower nature,- that which he possesses in common with many animal tribes.--- he who performs a duty which is repugnant to his nature, and which demands great self-denial and self command, is far more meritorious than he who performs an act, in itself considered, of equal worth, to which he feels no repugnance. To throw an alms in scorn to a beggar is, indeed, not meritorious, because there is no virtuous intention, and because scorn of a brother man, however low, or however loathsome his appearance, is always wrong. But it is clear, from the author's comment, that the 'scorn' he charges upon Sir Launfal, was simply giving from a sense of duty, and therefore no scorn at all". 1

Brownson praises the poem as a work of art quite beyond its merits, but, without demanding that a poet be a philosopher, he very rightly condemns the Vision on one of the grounds that gives it an excuse for existing- its ethical teaching.

In the Second Part, after the lapse of many years, Sir Launfal returns from his fruitless quest- an old man, scarcely able to withstand the cold blasts of the Christmas season. The Vision is indeed a dreadful one, for the dreamer finds that a usurper sat in his earldom. Suddenly he hears the cry

"'For Christ's sweet sake, I beg an alms'",

and looks down to see a leper, to whom he addresses these words:

"----I behold in thee  
An image of Him who died on the tree;  
Thou also hast had thy crown of thorns,  
Thou also hast had the world's buffets and scorns,  
And to thy life were not denied  
The wounds in the hands and feet and side;

---

1. Op. cit., p. 312.

Mild Mary's Son, acknowledge me:  
Behold through him, I give to thee!"<sup>1</sup>

The leper, who is the same one Sir Launfal met in the First Part, remembers the former treatment he had received at the hand of the Knight. The latter now has only a crust and the icy water of a neighboring brook to give the poor fellow, but he gives him a full share. And as the two men eat, the leper suddenly becomes glorified - for he is none other than the Christ:

"Himself the Gate whereby men can  
Enter the temple of God in man."<sup>2</sup>

Some critics have felt that Lowell joined his Unitarian brethren in denying the divinity of Jesus, but at least in this poem and in some others, as Father Shea points out, he is most certainly representing Our Lord as divine.<sup>3</sup>

The glorified Vision speaks to Sir Launfal in the best-known lines of the poem:

"Lo, it is I, be not afraid!  
In many climes, without avail,  
Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail;  
Behold, it is here - this cup which thou  
Didst fill at the streamlet for me but now;  
This crust is my body broken for thee,  
This water his blood that died on the tree,  
The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,  
In what so we share with another's need;  
Not what we give, but what we share,  
For the gift without the giver is bore;

---

1. Scudder, Horace E., The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell, p. 110

2. Loc. Cit.

3. Shea, Leo M., Lowell's Religious Outlook, p. 78.

Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,  
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me.'"<sup>1</sup>

The sentiment of the last couplet is unexceptionable. I am greatly surprised that the vigilant Brownson did not smell out the strong implication of heresy against the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist in the lines which precede the couplet. Sir Launfal learned a "good lesson" from his Vision, but doctrinally the lesson is not peculiarly Catholic. Brownson points out that Lowell really turned a Catholic legend teaching chastity into a more or less Christian plea for charity. I agree with him.

Probably Brownson had read The Fable for Critics and seen himself lampooned with the rest. Not that Lowell was ill-natured in his remarks on the great Orestes whom he finds with

"----his mouth very full  
with a attempting to gulp a Gregorian bull;  
Who contrives, spite of that, to pour out as he goes  
A stream of transparent and forcible prose;  
He shifts quite about then proceeds to expound  
That 't is merely the earth, not himself, that  
turns round,  
And wishes it clearly impressed on your mind  
That the weathercock rules and not follows the wind;"<sup>2</sup>

but Lowell must have known he was no match for this "weathercock" in "Forcible prose", so he lets loose this jet of satire on Brownson's religious vicissitudes. And like Dr. Holmes, Lowell must have realized also that in Brownson the Church had an able defender.

1. Scudder, Horace E., The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell, pp. 110-111.
2. Op. cit., p. 129.



Of far less value as a poem than the satirical Fable but of more pertinence to this thesis is "All-Saints", often quoted in commentaries on the alleged Catholic traits in Lowell's poetry. It is a rather "pretty" piece, but, beyond the idea expressed in the first stanza, it really tells us little or nothing about Lowell's attitudes to the Church. I quote the first stanza in its entirety:

"One feast, of holy days the crest,  
I, though no Churchman, love to keep,  
All-Saints, - the unknown good that rest  
In God's still memory folded deep-  
The bravely dumb that did their deed,  
And scorned to blot it with a name,  
Men of the plain heroic breed,  
That loved Heaven's silence more than fame."<sup>1</sup>

The two other stanzas of the poem continue in similar vein and conclude with lines a bit reminiscent of a Protestant hymn:

"And in their mercy felt the pledge  
And sweetness of the farther shore".<sup>2</sup>

I have scrutinized every poem of Lowell's with a possibly religious background and especially every one cited by Father Shea in his study of Lowell's Religious Outlook, but, except for the citations given above, I find only one more item that does more than hint of Lowell's attitude to the Catholic Faith. This item is a long and ambitious poem in blank verse called "The Cathedral". The

1. Scudder, Horace E., The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell, p. 319.

2. Op. cit., p. 320.

poet had originally called the piece "A Day at Chartres",<sup>1</sup> but his publisher, James T. Fields, had suggested the more general title. A careful study of this long and almost unquotable poem reveals, however, that, in spite of the fact that Lowell's musings were inspired by a visit to that Cathedral which was one day to bring Henry Adams so close to the Church, the conclusion of these musings was that of a "liberal" Protestant. Like Henry Adams, Lowell saw in this great monument to man's Faith in God a very real reminder that a truly unshakable belief in Him once inspired men to almost super-human achievements in art. As Father Shea says, - "The tone was plaintive, a vain humming of an old tune in half-expectancy that it might reestablish the vanished order of imperturbable faith".<sup>2</sup> The word "plaintive" is very significant, for it implies that Chartres had affected Lowell's sentiments rather than his intellect. And to Lowell in this poem, as in all his religious pieces, the sentimental appeal is the "last and most definite criterion"<sup>3</sup> of faith. This, I submit, is not a Catholic viewpoint.

As I have said, the rest of Lowell's religious poems, although dominated by his ethical impulses, are singularly free from Catholic inspiration. Much more evidence of Lowell's attitudes to Catholicism is available in

1. Scudder, Horace E., The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell, pp.349-360.
2. Shea, Leo M., Lowell's Religious Outlook p. 72.
3. Op. cit., p. 73.

his prose work, notably in "Leaves from My Journal in Italy and Elsewhere."<sup>1</sup> The first passage of interest is found in a conversation between Lowell and one of his guides, Leopoldo. The latter is represented by the traveller as a somewhat cynical commoner, who receives the sacraments once a year in order to avoid a prison sentence. Leopoldo claims also to be speaking for all the common people of Italy "but a few women and fools." Lowell adds this interesting editorial note to the conversation:

"It is proper to add that in what Leopoldo said of the priests he was not speaking of his old masters, the Jesuits. (Leopoldo, although a poverino had gone to a Jesuit school at Tivoli in his boyhood.) One never hears anything in Italy against the purity of their lives, or their learning and ability, though much against their unscrupulousness. Nor will any one who has ever enjoyed the gentle and dignified hospitality of the Benedictine be ready to believe any evil report of them."<sup>2</sup>

Doubtless Lowell may have been reporting only what he had heard about Jesuit "unscrupulousness", but he speaks apparently from experience of his admiration for the Benedictines. The year of the Journal was 1854, so it is only natural to expect that in those troubled days many American travellers might have picked up considerable anti-clerical gossip; among the Italians. Lowell could hardly be human and be unaffected by it. There is more of this same anti-clerical talk after Lowell reaches Rome. His conclusion to this second experience with an anti-clerical guide leads Lowell to make an astonishingly bad prophecy:

---

1. Lowell, James Russell, Literary Essays (Vol I), pp.100-217.  
2. Op.Cit., pp. 144-145.

"But I am more and more persuaded every day, that as far as the popular mind is concerned, Romanism is a dead thing in Italy. It survives only because there is nothing else to replace it with, for men must wear their old habits (however threadbare and out at elbows) till they get better. It is literally a superstition, -a something left to stand over till the great commercial spirit of the nineteenth century balances his accounts again, and then it will be banished to the limit of profit and loss. The Papacy lies dead in the Vatican, but the secret is kept for the present, and government is carried on in its name. After the facts get abroad, perhaps its ghost will terrify men a little while longer, but only while they are in the dark, though the ghost of a creed is a hard thing to give a mortal wound to, and may be laid, after all, only in a Red Sea of blood". 1

Lowell's shade must be doing some very heavy blushing, if it be able (as I think it should) to read that paragraph over my shoulder. Lowell was definitely anti-clerical himself, and he seems to have been quite certain that "Romanism" was nothing but superstition - and one that ought to be exterminated even at the price of a "Red Sea of blood."

St. Peter's, as usual, brings forth still more Lowell's reactions to Catholicism. He writes:

"In approaching St. Peter's, one must take his Protestant shoes off his feet and leave them behind him in the Piazza Rusticucci. Otherwise the great Basilica, with those outstretching colonnades of Bramante, will seem to be a gloated spider lying in wait for him, the poor heretic fly." 2

There follow several lines of digression, and then Lowell begins his finest tribute to the Church. Indeed, it stands

1. Lowell, James Russell, Literary Essays (Vol I) p. 155.  
2. Op. cit., pp. 194-195.

out like a beacon amid the darkness and bigotry of most of the Italian "Leaves". It is very long, but eminently quotable:

"Suppose that a man inpouring down a glass of claret could drink the South of France, that he could so disintegrate the wine by the force of imagination as to taste in it all the clustered beauty and bloom of the grape, all the dance and song and sun-burnt Jollity of the vintage. Or suppose that in eating bread he could transubstantiate it with the tender blade of spring, the gleam-flitted corn-ocean of summer, the royal autumn, with its golden beard, and the merry funerals of harvest. This is what the great poets do for us, we cannot tell how, with their fatally-chosen words, crowding the happy veins of language again with all the life and meaning and music that had been dribbling away from them since Adam. And this is what the Roman Church does for religion, feeding the soul not with the essential religious sentiment, not with a drop or two of the tincture of worship, but making us feel one by one all those original elements of which worship is composed; not bringing the end to us, but making us pass over and feel beneath our feet all the golden rounds of the ladder by which the climbing generations have reached that end; not handing us drily a dead and extinguished Q.E.D., but letting it rather declare itself by the glory with which it interfuses the incense-clouds of wonder and aspiration and beauty in which it is veiled. The secret of her power is typified in the mystery of the Real Presence. She is the only church that has been loyal to the heart and soul of man, that has clung to her faith in the imagination, and that would not give over her symbols and images and sacred vessels to the perilous keeping of the iconoclast Understanding. She has never lost sight of the truth, that the product human nature is composed of the sum of flesh and spirit, and has accordingly regarded both this world and the next as the constituents of that other world which we possess by faith. She knows that poor Panza, the body, has his kitchen longings and visions, as well as Quixote, the soul, his ethereal, and has wit enough to supply him with the visible, tangible raw material of imagination. She is the only poet among the churches, and, while Protestantism is unrolling a pocket surveyor's-plan, takes her votary to the pinnacle of her temple, and shows him meadow, upland, and tillage, cloudy heaps of forest clasped with the river's jewelled arm, hillsides white with the perpetual snow of flocks, and, beyond all, the interminable heave of the unknown ocean. Her empire may be traced upon the map by the

boundaries of races; the understanding is her great foe; and it is the people whose vocabulary was incomplete till they had invented the archword Humbug that defies her. With that leaden bullet John Bull can bring down Sentiment when she flies her highest. And the more the pity for John Bull. One of these days some one whose eyes are sharp enough will read in the Times a standing advertisement, "Lost, strayed, or stolen from the farmyard of the subscriber the valuable horse Pegasus. Probably has on him part of a new plough-harness, as that is also missing. A suitable reward, etc."

J. Bull<sup>1</sup>

"Protestantism reverses the poetical process I have spoken of above, and gives not even the bread of life, but instead of it the alcohol, or distilled intellectual result. This was very well so long as Protestantism continued to protest; for enthusiasm sublimates the understanding into imagination. But now that she also has become an establishment, she begins to perceive that she made a blunder in trusting herself to the intellect alone. She is beginning to feel her way back again, as one notices in Puseyism, and other such hints. One is put upon reflection when one sees burly Englishmen, who dine on beef and porter every day, marching proudly through St. Peter's one Palm Sunday, with those frightfully artificial palm-branches in their hands. Romanism wisely provides for the childish in men."<sup>1</sup>

While this long quotation is very evidently the work of an artist and poet, Lowell's tribute to Catholicism is by no means merely aesthetic. Like Hawthorne, Lowell was captivated at times by the sheer grandeur of Catholic art as applied to devotion; nevertheless, what really appealed most to both these sons of the Puritans was the human and universal provisions of the Church. "She is

---

1. Op. cit., pp. 194-196.

the only poet among the churches", Lowell declares, but remember he also writes, "She is the only church that has been loyal to the heart and soul of man." In the sentence which begins with this last quotation, Lowell, who came ultimately to have neither sympathy nor respect for the Transcendentalists, is taking his position beside them in condemning "the iconoclast Understanding". Such a viewpoint is not by any means at variance with his own conviction that religion is, after all, pretty much a matter of feeling.

The above passage also suggests that the Englishman is much inclined to kill Sentiment and, hence, to ignore some of the wise provisions made by the Church "for the childish in men". There follows a rather long discussion in which Lowell claims that, on the whole, the American tourist is much more susceptible than the Englishman to the appeals of "that mysterious enchantress", the Catholic Church. This discussion is interesting - and perhaps Lowell may have been correct enough in his generalizations, comparing the proverbial Yankee Brother Jonathan, and his English counterpart, John Bull, - but he himself quite evidently made no virtue of consistency. Except in the presence of St. Peter's or some other great monument to Catholic art, his own anti-clerical bias beclouds the Vision of the City Beautiful.

Although Lowell can write: "Provident Judas wished to utilize the ointment, but the Teacher (Jesus

Christ) would rather that it should be wasted in a poem".  
(sic),<sup>1</sup> he was certainly a true son of the Puritans in  
his attitude to ritual.

"As for the ceremonies of the Church, one need not waste time in seeing many of them. There is a dreary sameness in them, and one can take an hour here and an hour there, as it pleases him, just sure of finding the same pattern as he would be in the first or last yard of a roll of printed cotton. For myself, I do not like to go and look with mere curiosity at what is sacred and solemn to others. To how many these Roman shows are sacred, I cannot guess; but certainly the Romans do not value them much. I walked out to the grotto of Egeria on Easter Sunday, that I might not be tempted down to St. Peter's to see the mockery of Pio Nono's benediction. It is certainly Christian, for he blesses them that curse him, and does all the good which the waving of his fingers can do to people who would use him despitefully if they had the chance."<sup>2</sup>

As Father Shea says: "His (Lowell's) description of the religious rites in Rome shows that he understood the theory of ritual but did not sympathize with its application."<sup>3</sup> Lowell quite evidently admired the ceremonial, but, with his emphasis on the feelings as the source of true religion, he always had a quasi-Puritanical fear that all ritual is necessarily artificial.

There are a few other short passages in the Leaves about the Church, but they do little more than substantiate the generally confused and contradictory picture

---

1. Op. cit., p. 203.  
2. Op. cit., p. 204.  
3. Shea, Leo M., Lowell's Religious Outlook, p. 67.



presented by the passages I have already quoted. On the whole, Lowell's views of Catholicism must have been rather lukewarm. As a poet he could admire the Church for her human wisdom in putting Beauty to work in the interests of Religion. But Lowell, I fear, was intellectually convinced that Catholicism was dead and that what he saw in Italy and even in the pages of Dante (whom he admired as much as Longfellow did) was almost entirely of antiquarian interest. This attitude has been one of the most characteristic inheritances of the Genteel Brahmin mind. Honest enough to admit the validity of tradition in general and averse to adopting the mania for the contemporary, these Genteel Brahmins, like Lowell, whether they realize it or not, cannot see Catholicism steadily or whole. They cannot see that the Church is a living institution, independent of accidents of time, place, and the social or economic standing of its members. They represent today as they did in Lowell's time a kind of cultural standoffishness, which is never sure of what it sees, because as Genteel Brahmins, they themselves are never quite sure of what they believe. Lowell's was a scepticism far more disastrous in its consequences than Hawthorne's. He may have seen, but he dared not believe. It is a pity he did not retain from his younger days at least a little of Emersonian self-trust. One must believe in himself before he can recognize in others the fact that Faith in God is something more than superstition.

Unfortunately the evidence of Lowell's attitudes to the Church is by no means all available. I have been forced to draw the above conclusions from his poems and from his fragmentary account of the visit to Italy in 1854, either because Lowell had no interest in elaborating in print upon these attitudes or because his biographers have seen fit to suppress any more intimate reactions to Catholicism from their editions of his letters. I doubt, however, whether any new or undiscovered evidence can alter materially this somewhat unhappy picture I have painted of how this "man of feeling", for all his love of the traditional, came to look upon the grandest traditions of the western mind. Oddly enough, that picture is far less flattering than the one I have given of Dr. Holmes. The ways of the Genteel Brahmin were indeed strange.

-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-

## C H A P T E R    V I I I

### LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD

#### 1. Backward Glances.

Now that all the evidence is assembled, I am not so confident as I was in the beginning that I can "prove" any clearly defined "thesis" about the attitudes of the most articulate spokesmen of New England's Renaissance to Catholicism. The evidence which I have presented for each of the major authors studied in this work - Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes - is, for all these, either ambiguous or contradictory. Each author - even Thoreau - had his "moments" when he seemed to see Catholicism "steadily and whole", but these "moments", even those of longest duration, proved on closer inspection to have been fleeting, and their vision fragmentary or shot through with prejudices, old and new. I have been particularly impressed by the fragmentary character of their reactions to the Church. Each one found in Catholicism what he was looking for but closed his eyes to almost everything else. All of them expected to find "intolerance" and "superstition", all of them expected to see evidence of "priestcraft" and clerical corruption, and they "found" these things, or at least

they thought they did. None of them, except Longfellow, was broad enough in his viewpoints ever completely to rid himself of his expectations and first impressions. And yet all these undeniably great and sincere men of New England found at least one or two aspects of Catholicism to which they could give their unqualified, if somewhat condescending, approval. Even Thoreau admired the beauty and spacious solitude of the Catholic churches and the capacity for "reverence" of their communicants. All of them, both as literary artists and as critics of their own ancestral creed, were more or less impressed by the "poetry" of the Catholic Way, especially when they contrasted the art and music and ritual of the Church with the cold and barren meeting-houses and services of New England Protestantism. And yet none of these writers can be charged with being a mere aesthete, and all of them were Puritan enough, except perhaps Longfellow, to have a fundamental distrust of ritualism.

It seems to me to be futile to attempt to combine or to add up all the more favorable impressions of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and the rest, and from this composite picture to conclude that any one hypothetical writer of the New England Renaissance, who endorsed all of these impressions, might have been led to follow Brownson and Father Hecker into the Catholic Church. Such a synthetic picture would be not merely futile but false. I shall, therefore, waste no time or space in pointing out

again Hawthorne's great admiration for the Sacrament of Penance and Holmes's eloquent justification for the existence of the priesthood and Longfellow's veneration for Our Blessed Lady. A mere listing of these particulars, even if seen in their combined totality, can be of little help to us now that we are trying to come to some general conclusions. The seamless robe of Christ, which had been first seriously torn asunder by ancestral Puritanism, had been almost literally rent into a thousand pieces during the long and devious journey of the New England religious "mind". By the time of the New England Renaissance it was indeed much too late except by the miracle of God's grace, to put it back together again. And none of the major writers, with the possible exception of Holmes, had any real interest in or talent for theological speculation. This is the one general, sure, and definite conclusion that we can reach amid this mass of ambiguity and contradiction.

It is also safe to conclude that all of these writers, except possibly Longfellow, had been so blinded by ancestral bigotry that they could never be expected to look upon Catholicism as anything more than a vast superstructure, however beautiful and "picturesque", which had been erected on ignorance and greed and superstition. Even these men, who all thought, except Hawthorne, that they had arrived at a high level of "liberalism" in their religious outlook, did not wholly escape the strong anti-

Romanist outlook of earlier days. Furthermore, their Unitarianism left them high and dry, theologically speaking; while Transcendentalism brought its disciples farther and farther away from the Center. True enough, the "genteel" writers (Longfellow, Hawthorne, Lowell, and Holmes) undoubtedly retained from their more "orthodox" Puritan inheritance a respect for traditions of a kind, but that kind was not religious - again, excepting Hawthorne. It is generally true that the "genteel" writers and their followers were more tolerant of the Church and less inclined to belittle the claims of Catholicism than the more radical descendants of Puritan "piety", the more heterodox Transcendentalists. But I am not so sure as I was before I had assembled and sifted all the evidence that between 1815 and 1865 the descendants of the Puritans, who happened also to be writers, can be divided into two really distinct theological camps. The reasons for this are now very apparent: 1. the above-mentioned lack of interest in and talent for real theological speculation; 2. the pervasive influence of a real religious indifferentism that made all of these writers fundamentally oblivious to religion in the supernatural sense, in spite of their concern for ethical conduct. In other words, the finest and most sensitive minds of New England, whether "genteel" or Transcendental, had become thoroughly secularized.

Furthermore, the Transcendentalists in particular and also Hawthorne and Holmes had already begun more

or less consciously to formulate a pragmatic way of regarding religious truth. To them the supreme test of a belief or practice was its human utility. The humanitarianism of their creedless Protestantism had done its deadly work on their minds, and, even while their hearts and aesthetic tastes were rebelling against Yankee thrift and the dominant commercial spirit, they were, as Holmes said so wittily of Emerson, "winged Franklins". By this I mean that while their heads were often up in the "Transcendental clouds or their imaginations soaring aloft on the wings of Spanish mystical poetry, they were all Yankee enough to look for "practical" worldly values even in a Kingdom that is not of this world.

Unfortunately the Catholic Church almost necessarily had to be approached as a foreign institution, for as I have said, the Church in mid-nineteenth century America was a church of the disinherited, whose artistic glories had been left behind in European countries of alien tongue and strange customs and folk-ways. The New England Movement never really had the chance to develop into anything remotely resembling the Oxford Movement. In England, it is true, Catholicism had been proscribed by law, but, for those with eyes to see there still remained even in the Established Church strong vestiges of the Faith that had once made England "merrie England". I cannot agree with Dr. George N. Shuster's contention that: "it is not too much to say that Puritan New England saw

a Concord Movement which was in many respects a shadow of the Oxford Movement."<sup>1</sup> I should call it a decidedly thin shadow! Puritanism, deism, revivalism, Unitarianism, Transcendentalism and all their works and all their pomps had so thoroughly stamped out the traces of Catholicism surviving the Reformation that the wonder is that any of the writers of the Golden Day were able to see, even as in a glass darkly, the still living realities of Christ's Church.

There is no way of proving that the favorable citations or passages from any or all of these writers ever led one single soul into the Church. And yet it stands to reason that perhaps for thousands of New Englanders Longfellow and Hawthorne and even Lowell have been instrumental in giving them a brief Vision of the Beauty of Holiness that might never have come to them in any other way. These writers must have succeeded not only in helping their followers to say a last farewell to Puritan dogma but also, there is every reason to believe, in turning their minds to "historic Christianity" as seen in the Catholic Church, the only Rock upon which the things that are not Caesar's can be safely founded.

---

1. Shuster, George N., The Catholic Spirit in America, p. 66.



## 2. Forward.

What happened to the New England mind after 1865 (with exceptions already noted of works by the major authors of the Renaissance published after that date) is really of no special concern to this thesis. In the previous section I have already suggested that writers such as Longfellow and Hawthorne may have contributed more or less unwittingly to predispose their contemporaries and descendants to Catholicism. Following the Civil War of course there were some other important determinants at work, notably the almost phenomenal growth of the Church in the Boston area, which ultimately turned the home of the Puritans into a very decidedly Catholic center of population. The Church itself began to furnish intellectual and literary figures to the nation such as the Irish exile, John Boyle O'Reilly, who came to America from an Australian prison in 1869, and Louise Imogen Guiney, the Boston-born daughter of a general in the Civil War. The extent of the influence of these and other Catholic writers can be easily exaggerated. I regret to say that as yet the effect of Catholic culture on American letters in general is negligible. The Boston area has, moreover, ceased to be the proverbial "hub of the universe" since 1885, when William Dean Howells abandoned Boston for the more fertile field of New York City.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. See Brooks, Van Wyck, New England Indian Summer.

Among the more immediate spiritual descendants of the writers of the Renaissance, interest in European, if not in American, Catholicism continued but with far less enthusiasm. The American Church, if I may be pardoned the use of a dangerous term, was still more or less beneath the notice of the Boston "blue-bloods". To them it was still the Church of Irish servants. Sometimes they may have expressed alarm at the undeniable progress of the immigrant in numbers and political powers, but on the whole Beacon Street and the new Back Bay and Harvard itself were much too satisfied with themselves and their own cultural and religious institutions to bother their proud heads about the growth of Catholicism going on right under their noses. As I have said, interest in Catholicism continued but in a more or less attenuated manner than in the days of the Renaissance.

Perhaps the best representative of the established order to turn to Europe and to the Church for inspiration and spiritual sustenance was Henry Adams, grandson of President John Quincy Adams, great grandson of President John Adams, Harvard historian, and author of the most cynical and disillusioned autobiography ever written in America.<sup>1</sup> Henry Adams was both by birth and education one of the most thoroughly cultivated minds of his generation (1838-1918). He was also one of the unhappiest of mortals, who always found stones where he expected to find gold - in England, where he was secretary to his father at the American consulate during the Civil

---

1. See Adams, Henry, The Education of Henry Adams.

War; in Germany, where he went for post-graduate studies; in Washington, where he was completely disedified by the scandals of President Grant's administration; and, at Harvard, where as a student and later as professor he grew continually more and more dissatisfied with formal education. He lived long enough to see the developments of what Professor Hayes has called A Generation of Materialism, and he had as little faith in mechanical achievement as a native of darkest Africa. In Catholic Europe alone did he find the answers to his spiritual yearnings, but unfortunately Adams had become so bitter by the time he made this discovery that nothing short of a miracle could have brought his brilliant mind into complete submission to Rome. In fact, Henry Adams was sixty-two years old when he came to see the glories of Catholicism in all their fullness in the Cathedral at Chartres and especially in the statue there of Our Blessed Lady.<sup>1</sup>

Of much more interest to the Catholic reader than this somewhat ambiguous tribute to the greatness of Mary's womanhood is the book, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres;<sup>2</sup> published first privately by the author in 1905, later reissued in a very limited and expensive edition in 1913, and only made available to the general reader in 1933. This is not the place to analyse this great but compara-

---

1. See The Education of Henry Adams, Chapter XXV, The Dynamo and the Virgin (1900), pp. 379-390.

2. Adams, Henry, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres. 1933.



for his work as an architect both of Catholic and Protestant churches. As a writer he has never reached a very wide audience, except in his little monograph, The Catholic Church and Art, which was sponsored by Catholic editors. Most of his books are too strictly professional to be of interest to the lay reader.

Much more influential as a literary artist today is the poet, playwright, and critic, Mr. Thomas Stearns Eliot, who since 1927 has been a British subject, chiefly because of his deep personal interest in Anglo-Catholicism. Although born in the state of Missouri, Mr. Eliot has good old Massachusetts blood in his veins and is a graduate of Harvard (1910). He has achieved of course most of his literary fame for poems like the notoriously incomprehensible The Waste Land. In marked contrast to the modernistic technique of this and most of his poems are his literary criticism and his religious writings, in which he stands as one of the staunchest but most intelligent exponents of traditionalism in the English-speaking world of our time. This descendant of the Puritan Eliots now claims to be a royalist in politics and a Catholic in religion. His Catholicism, however, is not, it should be emphasized, of the "Roman" variety. Several of his recent poems, e.g. Ash Wednesday, and his play about the martyrdom of St. Thomas a Becket, Murder in the Cathedral, seem to be the work of a devout member of the Church Universal. It is

very doubtful, however, if Mr. Eliot will ever "come over to Rome". I can furnish no documentary proof for this assertion, which I base on my own first-hand acquaintance with his prose and poetry and also on the verbal testimony of those who know him intimately as a man. It is indeed a great pity that Mr. Eliot's genuine and sincere love of what he mistakenly regards as Catholicism is so closely bound up with his political creed. He loves the beauties of Catholic ritual and art, but he is more than a mere ~~Anglo~~-Catholic ritualist: he has a real understanding of Christian theology such as no modern descendant of the early Puritans has ever manifested. Ironically, T.S. Eliot, most modernistic of poets, is a staunch defender of religious dogma. Once a humanistic disciple of Irving Babbitt, he has gone far beyond the negative traditionalism of the famous Harvard scholar when he can use as his own the words of J.E. Hulme - and quote them against Babbitt:

"I have none of the feelings of 'nostalgia', the reverence for tradition, the desire to recapture the sentiment of Fra Angelico, which seems to animate most modern defenders of religion. All that seems to me bosh. What is important, is what nobody seems to realize - the dogmas like that of Original Sin, which are the closest expression of the categories of the religious attitude. That man is in no sense perfect, but a wretched creature, who can yet apprehend perfection. It is not, then, that I put up with the dogma for the sake of the sentiment, but that I may possibly swallow the sentiment for the sake of the dogma."<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Quoted in Eliot, T.S., Selected Essays, p. 402

It is inconceivable that any writer of Emerson's day could have endorsed those lines, but Eliot should no longer be regarded as a New England writer. When he returned to Harvard in 1933 as Charles Eliot Norton Fellow in Poetry, he came as a citizen of Great Britain - as a stranger to his native land, which received him hospitably enough but which looked upon his new political allegiance as well as his religion as an eccentricity or as an affectation. Sons of New England who would give their right arm to have written The Waste Land and who admired Eliot's undeniable brilliance as a critic, have pretty largely ceased to care at all about religion. It seems to me very doubtful that if most of our young modernistic New Englanders cannot see Catholicism with Eliot's help that they will ever bother to turn back the pages of literary history, as we have done in this thesis, to see what the Ancient Faith once meant to the men who made New England's own Flowering into a Transcendental or "Genteel" Golden Day.

### 3. Postscript.

I have purposely avoided much citation and documentation in the previous section, because my intention in looking forward beyond the days of the Renaissance is merely to indicate the possibility of still further developing this thesis. The temptation to deal with the "Indian Summer" which followed the "Flowering" is very great indeed,

but my original purpose in writing this thesis is already accomplished. The days even of the "Indian" Summer are now over, and there are few signs that New England will ever recapture the inspirations of her literary Renaissance and fewer still that her present writers, except for an occasional convert, will ever look again with the wondering eyes of Hawthorne or Longfellow on the glory that is now and ever shall be Immortal Rome.

-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-  
-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-  
-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-  
-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-  
-O-O-O-O-  
-O-O-



## B I B L I O G R A P H Y

### PART ONE: BOOKS CONSULTED

- Adams, Henry, "The Education of Henry Adams," Boston, 1918.
- Adams, Henry, "Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres", Boston, 1933.
- Adams, James T., "The Founding of New England", Boston, 1933.
- Alexander, Calvert, "The Catholic Literary Revival",  
Milwaukee, 1935.
- Anderson, Paul Russell and Fisch, Max Harold (eds), "Philosophy in America from the Puritans to James",  
New York and London, 1939.
- Andrews, Charles McL., "The Colonial Period of American History", Vol. I, Settlements, New Haven, 1934.
- Arvin, Newton, "Hawthorne", Boston, 1929.
- Arvin, Newton, (ed.) "The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals",  
Boston, 1929.
- Beard, Charles A. and Mary R., "The Rise of American Civilization", (1 vol. ed., rev. and enl.), New York, 1933.
- Billington, R.A., "The Protestant Crusade", New York, 1938.
- Blankenship, Russell, "American Literature", New York, 1931.
- Brooks, Van Wyck, "Emerson and Others", New York, 1927.
- Brooks, Van Wyck, "The Flowering of New England", New York, 1936.
- Brooks, Van Wyck, "New England: Indian Summer", New York, 1940.
- Brownson, Henry F., "Orestes A. Brownson's Early Life 1803-1844", Detroit, 1899.
- Brownson, Henry F., "Orestes A. Brownson's Middle Life, (1844-1856)", Detroit, 1899.
- Brownson, Orestes A., "The Convert; Or, Leaves from my Experience", in the works of Orestes A. Brownson, Vol. V, pp. 1-200, Detroit, 1884.

- Brownson, Orestes A., "Controversy II" in "The Works of Orestes A. Brownson", Vol. VI, Detroit, 1884.
- Brownson, Orestes A., "Popular Literature" in "The Works of Orestes A. Brownson", Vol. XIX, Detroit, 1885.
- Burton, Katherine, "In No Strange Land", New York, 1942.
- Burton, Katherine, "Paradise Planters", New York, 1939.
- Burton, Katherine, "Sorrow Built a Bridge", New York, 1937.
- Calverton, V.F., "The Liberation of American Literature", New York, 1932.
- Calverton, V.F., "Where Angels Dared to Tread", Indianapolis, 1941.
- Carpenter, Fredrick I. (ed.) "Ralph Waldo Emerson-Representative Selections, with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes", New York,
- Channing, Edward, "History of the United States", Vol. X.
- Christy, Arthur, "The Orient in American Transcendentalism", New York, 1932.
- Commager, Henry Steele, "Theodore Parker: Yankee Crusader" Boston, 1936.
- Crawford, Bartholov V. (ed.), "Henry David Thoreau - Representative Selections, with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes", New York, 1934.
- Dickinson, Thomas H., "The Making of American Literature", New York, 1932.
- Eliot, T.S., "Poems, 1909-1925", New York, 1925.
- Eliot, T.S., "Selected Essays, (1917-1932)", New York, 1932.
- Emerson, Edward W. (ed.), "The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson," (12 vol.), Boston, 1904.
- Emerson, E.W., and Forbes, W.E., "Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson", Vol. III, Boston, 1909-1914.
- Fanfani, Amintore, "Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism", New York, 1935.
- Farnham, Charles Haight, "A Life of Francis Parkman", Boston, 1900.

- Faust, Clarence H. and Johnson, Thomas H. (eds.),  
"Jonathan Edwards - Representative Selections  
with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes",  
New York, 1935.
- Foerster, Norman (ed.), "The Reinterpretation of American  
Literature", New York, 1928.
- Frothingham, Octavius B., "Transcendentalism in New England",  
New York, 1876.
- Gabriel, Ralph Henry, "The Course of American Democratic  
Thought", New York, 1940.
- Gilson, Etienne, "The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy",  
New York, 1936.
- Gorman, Herbert, "Hawthorne: A Study in Solitude",  
New York, 1927.
- Hart, James D., (ed.) "Oxford Companion to American Lite-  
rature", New York, 1941.
- Hatfield, James T., "New Light on Longfellow",  
Boston and New York, 1933.
- Hawthorne, Julian, "Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife", (2 vol)  
Boston, 1893.
- Hayakawa, S.I., and Jones, Howard Mumford (eds.) "Oliver  
Wendell Holmes - Representative Selections,  
with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes",  
New York, 1939.
- Hazard, Lucy Lockwood, "The Frontier in American Literature",  
New York, 1927.
- Holden, Vincent F., "The Early Years of Isaac Thomas  
Hecker (1819-1844)", Washington, D.C., 1939.
- Hollis, Christopher, "The Monstrous Regiment", London, 1929.
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell, "The Writings of Oliver Wendell  
Holmes", (13 vol.), Boston, 1891.
- Iannetta, Sabatino, "Henry W. Longfellow and Montecassino",  
Providence, 1938.
- Kelly, Gerald M., "St. Francis in Concord", unpublished  
M.A. thesis, St. Bonaventure's, Olean, N.Y., 1934.
- Kittredge, George Lyman, "Witchcraft in Old and New England",  
Cambridge, Mass., 1929.

- Lathrop, G.P. (ed.), "The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne", (12 vol.), Boston and New York, 1899.
- Lodge, H.C., (ed.), "The Education of Henry Adams", Boston, 1933.
- Longfellow, Henry W., "Works of Henry W. Longfellow", (ed. de luxe), New York, 1907.
- Longfellow, Samuel, "Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow", (2 vol.), Boston, 1886.
- Lowell, James Russell, "Literary Essays", (4 vol.), Boston, 1890.
- McDowell, Tremaine (ed.), "The Romantic Triumph", New York, 1933.
- Macy, John A., (ed.), "American Writers on American Literature", New York, 1931.
- Mather, Edward, "Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Modest Man", New York, 1941.
- Matthiesen, Francis O., "American Renaissance", New York, 1941.
- Maynard, Theodore, "The Story of American Catholicism", New York, 1941.
- Miller, Perry, "Orthodoxy in Massachusetts", Cambridge, Mass., 1933.
- Miller, Perry, "The New England Mind", New York, 1939.
- Miller, Perry, and Johnson, Thomas H., "The Puritans", New York, 1938.
- Morison, Samuel E., "The Puritan Presence", New York, 1936.
- Morison, Samuel E., "Builders of the Bay Colony", Boston and New York, 1930.
- Morse, John T., Jr., "Life and Letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes", (2 vol.), Boston, 1896.
- Mumford, Lewis, "The Golden Day: A Study in American Experience and Culture", New York, 1926.
- Farrington, Vernon L., "Main Currents in American Thought", Vol. I, "The Colonial Mind", Vol. II, "The Romantic Revolution in America", New York, 1927.

- Perry, Bliss, "Emerson Today", Princeton, 1931.
- Perry, Bliss (ed.), "The Heart of Emerson's Journals",  
Boston, 1926.
- Riley, Arthur J., "Catholicism in New England to 1788",  
Washington, D.C., 1936.
- Riley, Woodbridge, "American Thought: From Puritanism to  
Pragmatism and Beyond", New York, 1915.
- Santayana, George, "Winds of Doctrine", New York, 1912.
- Shea, Leo Martin, "Lowell's Religious Outlook"  
Washington, 1926.
- Shepard, Odell (ed.), "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow - Repre-  
sentative Selections, with Introduction, Biblio-  
graphy, and Notes", New York, 1934.
- Schlesinger, Arthur H (Jr.), "Orestes A. Brownson: A Pil-  
grim's Progress", Boston, 1939.
- Scudder, Horace E. (ed.), "The Complete Poetical Works of  
Henry W. Longfellow", Boston, 1893.
- Scudder, Horace E. (ed.), "The Complete Poetical Works of  
James Russell Lowell", Boston, 1897.
- Shuster, George M., "The Catholic Spirit in America",  
New York, 1927.
- Spiller, Robert E. (ed.), "The Roots of National Culture:  
American Literature to 1830", New York, 1933.
- Swift, Lindsay, "Brook Farm", New York, 1900.
- Taylor, Walter Fuller, "A History of American Letters"  
(with bibliography by Harry Hartwick),  
New York, 1936.
- Thoreau, Henry D., "Complete Works," (5 vol.), Boston, 1929.
- Trevelyan, G.M., "English Social History", New York, 1942.
- Tyler, Moses Coit, "History of American Literature, 1607-1765"  
New York, 1878.
- Trent, W.P.; Erskine, John; Sherman, S.P.; and Van Doren,  
Carl, "Cambridge History of American Litera-  
ture", (4 vol.), New York, 1917-1921.

- Van Doren, Carl, "The American Novel," New York, 1921.
- Warren, Austin, (ed.), "Nathaniel Hawthorne - Representative Selections, with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes", New York, 1934.
- Wendell, Barrett, "A Literary History of America",  
New York, 1901.
- Whalen, Doran (pseud.), "Granite for God's House: The Life of Orestes Augustus Brownson", New York, 1941.
- Whitman, Iris Lillian, "Longfellow and Spain", New York, 1927.
- Wingfield-Stratford, Esme, "The History of British Civilization", New York, 1932.
- Winters, Yvor, "Maule's Curse", Norfolk, Conn., 1938.

PART TWO: ARTICLES CONSULTED

IN PERIODICALS AND ENCYCLOPEDIAS

- Barry, William, "Calvinism" in Catholic Encyclopedia III,  
pp. 198-204, New York, 1913.
- Buckley, Frank, "Thoreau and the Irish", The New England Quarterly, Vol. XIII, No. 3, Sept., pp. 389-400.
- Carpenter, Frederick I., "Bronson Alcott: Genteel Transcendentalist", The New England Quarterly, Vol. XIII, No. 1, March, 1940, pp. 34-48.
- Carpenter, Frederick I., "The Genteel Tradition: A Re-interpretation", The New England Quarterly, Vol. XV, No. 3, September, 1942, pp. 427-443.
- Gavigan, Walter V., "The Doctor Looks at Religion: Dr. Holmes and the Church", The Catholic World, April, 1933, CXXXVII, 53-59.
- Gavigan, Walter V., "Longfellow and Catholicism", The Catholic world, October, 1933, Vol. CXXXVIII, 42-50.
- Hecker, Isaac, "Emerson's Prose Works", The Catholic World, May, 1870, Vol. XI, pp. 202-211.
- Hecker, Isaac, "Thoreau and New England Transcendentalism", The Catholic World, June 1878, Vol. XXVII, pp. 289-300.

