GOD'S NEWER WILL: FOUR EXAMPLES OF VICTORIAN ANGST
RESOLVED BY HUMANITARIANISM

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One aspect of the current revaluation of Victorian thought and literature is the examination of the crisis of religious faith, in which the proponents of doubt and denial took different directions: they became openly cynical and pessimistic; they turned from religion to an aesthetic substitute; or they concluded that since mankind could look only to itself for aid, the primary duties of the individual were to find a tenable creed for himself and to try to alleviate the lot of others. The movement from the agony of doubt to a serene, or at least calm, humanitarianism is the subject of this study.

The discussion is limited to four novelists in whose work religious doubt and humanitarianism are overt and relatively consistent and in whose novels the intellectual thought of the day is translated into a form appealing to the middle-class reader. Their success is attested by contemporary criticism and by accounts of the sales of their books; although their work has had no permanent popularity, they were among the most discussed authors of their time.
After an introductory chapter which briefly outlines contributory social and literary currents, the relevant aspects of each author's life and works are examined in separate chapters. The earliest of these novelists, Mrs. Lynn Linton, summarized in her long novel *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland* (1885) the previous fifty years of English religious and philosophical thought as she perceived it. Years previously she had shocked the reading public with her *True History of Joshua Davidson, Christian Communist*, which seems to be the first novel in which the "devout sceptic" appears and in which his humanitarianism has a completely selfless motivation. Her later novel *Under Which Lord?* lionizes the agnostic hero and projects Mrs. Linton's dream of an eventual utopia, to be realized through the natural processes of evolution. Olive Schreiner, whose *Life on an African Farm* was a succès de scandale because of its agonizing portrayal of religious disillusionment in the very young and the heroine's transgression of the Victorian moral code, moved from a cloudy--and often trite--idealism in *Dreams* to pleas for racial and sexual equality in *Trooper Peter Halket* and *From Man to Man*. William Hale White, whose alter ego Mark Rutherford settled for a Carlylean adherence to work and a policy of person-to-person assistance, later extolled total self-abnegation in *Revolution in Tanner's Lane* and *Clara Hopgood*. Mrs. Humphry Ward, whose *Robert Elsmere* is the climactic work of the entire genre,
recapitulated the problem, compassionately showed its effects on the people it touched, and recommended a practical, enlightened philanthropy, continuing her suggestions in David Grieve. Both she and Hale White, seeing little indication of the evolutionary perfectibility of man, concentrated their efforts in both their fiction and their personal work on the physical, mental, and ethical improvement of the poor. The projects they describe are typical of many which were carried on in England between 1880 and 1920 and which are said to have been contributory to the development of modern British socialism. Thus the novel of religious doubt, only a minor aspect of Victorian literature, records a vital segment of intellectual and cultural history.
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CHAPTER I

THE CLIMATE OF DEVOUT SCEPTICISM

An anonymous Saturday Review critic, discussing in 1860 George Eliot's new novel The Mill on the Floss, protested, "But because they really occur, it does not follow that spiritual doubts and conflicts are a proper subject for a novelist." In so saying, this Victorian showed himself to be completely unaware that he was witnessing the beginning of a new trend in fiction—one so pronounced that a hundred years later a survey of the nineteenth-century British novel would be titled Search Your Soul, Eustace, and one which would become increasingly important as the twentieth-century psychological novel developed. Moreover, The Mill on the Floss as an examination of the spiritual state had a long line of progenitors—one of the direct ancestors of the novel was the "spiritual autobiography" of the Puritans, which in turn derived from sources at least as far back as St. Augustine. Robinson Crusoe is in this line, and so, in another


way, is Richardson's *Clarissa*. There have been numerous deviations, such as the romantic novel and the novel of manners, but a recurring theme of the novel has always been the examination of the inner being of its characters.

The novel is, of course, an essentially middle-class form of literature and--in spite of the *Saturday Review*'s critic--peculiarly intertwined with the life of middle-class society, both reflecting and influencing it. Like that, or any, society, it is a result of the confluence of many elements: in the case of the Victorian novel of spiritual experience, many religious and some secular elements. It must participate in the peculiar *Zeitgeist* of that era--variously called the period of religious doubt, the crisis of religious faith, the Victorian *Angst*; and it must detail whatever solution or compromise the Victorians came to. Some authors, like Hardy, portrayed their pessimism and despair. A few, like Pater and Shorthouse, turned to the contemplation of beauty. Many of the Victorian novelists, however, based their solutions on some version of the Religion of Humanity and substituted humanitarianism for the worship of the God to whom they were no longer able to tender orthodox acceptance.

Neither unorthodox belief nor humanitarianism was new; currents of both had appeared throughout the century, sometimes coinciding, sometimes separated; but in the latter part of the century many of the serious, high-minded thinkers who
rejected traditional belief turned to the concept of serving their fellowmen and thus united the two strands of thought. Literature followed; and the novels thus created, though most of them were of only temporary interest in themselves, amplify our historical understanding of what has become a major trend in twentieth-century religion.

Ironically, the most serious and earnest religious movements of the nineteenth century contributed to the crisis of faith. Neo-Calvinistic Evangelicalism, with its emphasis on the right of every man to think for himself on religious matters rather than depend on any other human authority, produced a variety of beliefs; and inevitably some thinkers arrived at the point of believing nothing at all. A. O. J. Cockshut comments, "It would be hard to overestimate the debts, both conscious and unconscious, of Victorian agnostics to Protestantism." 4 Furthermore, the Calvinistic insistence on original sin, election, and a specific experience of personal religious conviction forced some people who felt themselves outside the pale to reassess not only their positions but also, at least figuratively, the position of God. At the same time, however, since many Evangelicals were active in humanitarian enterprises—the anti-slavery movement, 5 care


for the unfortunate, and efforts at prison reform, to name a few—they were obviously instrumental in forwarding the cause of humanitarianism which the Victorians were to take up so enthusiastically.

The Oxford Movement, representing almost the opposite extreme of religious thought, also contributed both to the climate of scepticism and to the humanitarian impulse. In causing sincere men to examine their own stands, it forced some to acknowledge that their beliefs were not orthodox. Newman's insistence that there were only two alternatives—"the way to Rome and the way to atheism"—alienated many. Indeed, J. A. Froude, looking back later in "The Oxford Counter-Reformation," went so far as to say,

"Worst of all, by their attempts to identify Christianity with the Catholic system, they provoked doubts, in those they failed to persuade. But for the Oxford movement, scepticism might have continued a harmless speculation of a few philosophers. By their perverse alternative, either the Church or nothing, they forced honest men to say, Let it be nothing, then, rather than what we know to be a lie."

Extreme though Froude's statement may be, there is no doubt that the reaction to Tractarianism did promote some liberalization of thought.

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6Ibid., p. 53.


Anglicans affected by the Tractarian movement also promoted humanitarian efforts—theirs, however, probably more closely connected with the Church itself. In contrast to the former lukewarm practice of confining one's religious life to casual church attendance, church members were encouraged to participate in good works. Parishes were divided into districts which were assigned to individual members for special care and responsibility for the poor in each one. This custom could not fail to impress the middle-class mind with a knowledge of conditions among the poor and with a sense of the necessity for alleviating them.

As sincere and earnest as the more established beliefs was the trend of thought infiltrating British orthodoxy since the eighteenth century, sometimes called the "liberal Christian tradition" and sometimes "damnable heresies." Many eighteenth-century thinkers had questioned orthodox historicity and protested against the literal acceptance of the Bible. Early in the nineteenth century Coleridge introduced into England Herder's declaration of the humanity of Jesus and Lessing's distinction between "the religion of Christ and the Christian religion." He asserted that Christianity had been led astray by "the true and first apostasy, when in Council and Synod the divine Humanities of

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\(^9\) Ibid., p. 90.
the Gospel gave way to speculative Systems, and Religion became a Science of Shadows under the name of Theology." Others took up the cause of Biblical criticism, including Dr. Arnold, H. H. Milman, John Sterling, and, notably R. D. Hampden, who in 1832 summed up in a series of lectures the new arguments against orthodox dogma. Eventually his position was attacked by Newman and Pusey, and an enormous controversy ensued; the opposition of orthodoxy and liberalism within the Church of England was now an open matter. Every thinking person had to choose one or the other, and many chose what they called the side of Truth and Reason. As time went on, the translation of Strauss's Leben Jesu, Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity, and Renan's Vie de Jésus increased the pressures toward liberalism.

Another current of religious thought, this one arising in the late forties, was Christian Socialism, first propagated by F. D. Maurice, and later by Charles Kingsley and J. M. Ludlow. Keenly aware of the problems and difficulties of religious faith, Maurice chose to ignore the "systems, opinions, theories, or notions" of dogma and stress instead the religion of God (as opposed to religion about Him), God's

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10 Ibid., p. 92.

11 Badger, "Christianity and Victorian Religious Confessions," p. 94.
saving grace, and universal brotherhood. To implement his beliefs he worked diligently to improve the lot of the laboring man by encouraging workers' unions and cooperatives and particularly by founding the Working Men's College. Kingsley too preached a religion of activity and good works, to the extent that his doctrine was--unfortunately--called "muscular Christianity." Their influence was widespread and profound, and they are credited both with helping to improve the worker's lot and with opening the eyes of the upper classes to his plight. Yet they too increased the general tendency to think of religion in terms of activity rather than faith and furthered the emphasis on doing rather than on worshiping or even on being.

Obviously, secular influences also played a part in the Victorian diminution of faith. There had been, in fact, since the late eighteenth century a vigorous and overt atheistic movement; about 1840 it took its cause to the laboring classes, ridiculing orthodoxy and prophesying that the purging of superstition would free humanity for "inevitable" progress. Outwardly, the movement failed, for

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by the 1870's the optimism of its proponents had been destroyed, and by the 1890's many of their anti-theological contentions were no longer matters of general interest, having been absorbed by the liberals without the outcome the atheists expected. Yet, as F. B. Smith comments, "The transition had been arranged by their betters among the agnostics and liberal churchmen, but the working class atheists by their energy . . . had created a situation that impelled their betters to act."^{15}

More effective among the secular influences were the major currents of philosophical thought--Utilitarianism, promulgated by Bentham and J. S. Mill; Comte's Positivism, enthusiastically supported in England by such men as G. H. Lewes, Richard Congreve, and Frederic Harrison; and the new trend of thinking arising from the increased accomplishment in science and Darwin's enunciation of the theory of evolution.

Utilitarianism, at first a fairly limited concept of evaluation by the practical and tangible usefulness of things and ideas (and thereby, usually the devaluation of the supernatural, including God), became under Mill's management a step toward humanitarianism, as is evidenced by his essay, first published in Fraser's Magazine (1861), in which he insisted, among other things, that human suffering

^{15}Ibid., p. 235.
could be largely done away with by "human care and effort" and implied that promoting the welfare of others is both an obligation and the means of securing one's own happiness. Later he rather paradoxically declared, "In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility." His rationale has since been much criticized; nevertheless, as Basil Willey comments, "he knew that altruism must be taught as a religion."

Positivism, imported from France, advocated the "Religion of Humanity," by which Mill was, though uneasily, intrigued. Lewes, however, hailed Comte's Philosopie positive by declaring,

A new era has dawned. For the first time in history an explanation of the World, Society, and Man is presented which is thoroughly homogeneous, and at the same time thoroughly in accordance with accurate knowledge.

Briefly, Comte aimed at "a systematic unification of all known truth on the basis of scientific method," in which, the emphasis being on known truth, humanity was to be substituted for God and all man's energies were to be directed

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17 Ibid., p. 342.


toward improving mankind and promoting altruism. Scientific
thought was to govern progress, human persistence and care
were to replace the providence of God, and life was to be
systematic and rational, with an almost medieval integration
of religion and everyday activity. Aware of the value of
ceremony and ritual, Comte instituted a Catholic-like disci-
pline with public and private worship of Humanity, non-
theological saints' days, and even a statuette of a woman--
not unlike the Virgin Mary--as an icon of Humanity. Thomas
Huxley declared that Positivism was "Catholicism minus
Christianity" and by making it difficult to take the new
cult seriously was probably partly responsible for its
failure. Its intrinsic faults, however--authoritarianism,
excessive rationalization, and internal dissension--would
have kept it from enduring without Huxley's sarcasm. Yet
many of its catchwords and motifs have survived: the very
term "Religion of Humanity," the slogan "Live for others,"
the effort to humanize science, the idea that immortality
consists of the works of the individual or others' memory of
him. Consciously or unconsciously, many sincere agnostics
of the later Victorian period adopted in one way or another
the premise that since God does not demonstrably exist, man's
highest duty is to what does evidently exist--mankind.

20 Warren Sylvester Smith, The London Heretics, 1870-
Perhaps the most dramatic blow to orthodoxy was the 1859 publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Although Lyell and Chambers had paved the way with intelligent observation and speculation, most people were not prepared for the implications of Darwin's thesis, which they felt denied all possibility of the existence of a Creator, of Providence, or of man's soul. It seemed at first that the new discovery offered some hope for the perfectibility of man, since evolution appeared to move upward, and thus could be correlated with the already-existing theory of Progress, as Spencer and others pointed out;\(^2^1\) on the other hand, as Darwin continued his studies and eventually demonstrated "man's continuity with the brute creation," even that hope was destroyed for all but the most sanguine.\(^2^2\) Yet, as Georg Roppen comments, "the moral challenge of evolution was, from the beginning, unavoidable,"\(^2^3\) and many thinkers, both professional and amateur, tried to work out some compromise, or even some affinity, between evolution and humanitarianism.

To these theological and secular influences on the Victorian religious climate may be added others, more mechanical in nature, such as the increased dissemination of


printed material\(^{24}\) (every sect or group could get its propa-
ganda distributed easily and cheaply) and the increased
pressures of urban living, which alienated the individual
from the natural aspects of life.\(^{25}\) Though it is quite true
that many middle-class Victorians went serenely—or compla-
cently—on their way, secure in the faith of their fathers
or in the unthinking custom of religious forms,\(^{26}\) many others,
and most intellectuals, lived in agony, or perplexity and
uncertainty, or simply in bewilderment. Most of those who
could no longer accept the doctrines of the Incarnation and
the Atonement or even the New Testament miracles felt quite
strongly that the devotion and duty which had been given to
God should now be given to man. Theologically, philosophi-
cally, and practically, the new religion was to echo Comte's
motto: "Live for others." Arthur Hugh Clough, that prince
of doubters, epitomized the trend simply:

... It seems His newer will
We should not think of Him at all, but turn,
And of the world that He has given us make
The best we can...\(^{27}\)

\(^{24}\) L. E. Elliott-Binns, English Thought, 1860-1900: The
Theological Aspect (Greenwich, Conn., 1956), pp. 5-6.

\(^{25}\) J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God: Five
Nineteenth-Century Writers (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 4-5.

\(^{26}\) Roppen, Evolution and Poetic Belief, pp. 53-54.

Looking back from the vantage point of the twentieth century, Richard Altick comments sadly, "Some Victorians thought to redeem the loss of God by erecting man in his place, to worship and serve. Their descendants' tragedy is that they have lost faith even in man." The sequel was inevitable; but the later Victorians, imbued with the courage of fresh convictions, turned their faces resolutely if not always joyfully to the task of lifting—and uplifting—their brothers.

A movement is hardly a movement, however, unless it gains popular support. Philosophical ideas and profound thoughts must usually be interpreted to a wide range of people if they are to gain permanency. In nineteenth-century England, poetry and fiction performed this function by the classic method of making instruction pleasurable. From the beginning of the century much of the serious poetry and prose was concerned with the subject of the nature of God and His relationship to man and with the subject of man's relationship to other men. It is a commonplace that the Romantics wrote much of the first, and the prominence of the second emerges on slight consideration. Indeed, it has been asserted that both Romanticism and humanitarianism sprang in part from the same source—the revolt against the view expressed by Pope that "Man never is, but always to be blest." The best of Romanticism, according to the same

28 *Victorian People and Ideas*, p. 237.
writer, is basically humanitarian, including dissatisfaction with the status quo of life, faith in mankind, and love of humanity.29 Certainly Shelley exemplified all these attitudes as he rebelled against the concept of the anthropomorphic authoritarian-father God, formulated instead the faith in Intellectual Beauty which he believed offered a "way to social regeneration through the freedom of the mind," and fixed his hopes on social reform.30 Wordsworth, too, found it necessary to disregard the supernaturally revealed God and evolve his own religion as revealed by Nature, through which he saw

In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being,

and in which he identified God and Nature as one:

... a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts,
And rolls through all things.32

32 Ibid.
The indwelling of this Spirit "in the mind of man" is naturally ennobling, and Wordsworth introduced to his readers the simple, untaught rustic as a human being—not simply an object of sentimental pity as, for instance, Goldsmith had portrayed him in the previous century. In this way Wordsworth contributed to what would eventually become a movement toward "brotherhood" in the latter part of the century.

The novel in the first half of the nineteenth century tended to escapism (as the *Saturday Review* critic apparently thought it should in the latter half), or at most toward a sentimental compassion for the poor. Even Dickens, with all his moving stories of slums, factories, and poverty, had no thought of a systematic effort to remove the cause of all this suffering. The idea of the novel as a reformational device apparently did not occur. But a beginning of more constructive thinking came with Disraeli's *Sybil* and Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton* in the forties, and by the fifties the "social novel" was an accepted part of the literary scene. Newman's *Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert* (1848) and J. A. Froude's *Nemesis of Faith* (1849) introduced the novel of religious doubt, but Froude's dramatic failure (the book was publicly burned at Oxford) probably discouraged other writers from repeating his experiment for some years. On the whole, however, the more serious-minded Victorians,

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accustomed to the didacticism of instructional works and sermons, accepted the "novel with a cause" as a palatable combination of entertainment and useful information.

In the literary discussion of faith and doubt, the first really important work was Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, published in 1850. Ostensibly elegiac, it reckoned up the score of the puzzles of life—why do we live? why do we die? why is nature not "careful of the type"? It somberly expressed the Romantic alienation of the individual and added to the problems of man the growing pre-Darwinian concern for his origin and his future. Finally, and rather abruptly, Tennyson returned to an almost orthodox acceptance of God, though his renewed relationship was colored by childlike "doubt and fear," a phrase which seems reminiscent of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1845), which Tennyson apparently had not read. The effect of *In Memoriam* was varied. Many traditional Christians accepted it superficially, thinking comfortably that the theme of the poem was that the orthodox values were the best after all and what any right-thinking person must come to. A few, the editor of *The Spectator* among them, saw more clearly Tennyson's real state of mind: "There was an agnostic element in Tennyson . . . which kept reiterating 'We have but faith, we cannot know.' . . . He finds no authoritative last word such as
many Christians find in ecclesiastical authority." But many who had already faced their doubts and made an effort to come to terms with them felt that Tennyson's scale lay more heavily on the side of the doubter. Henry Sidgwick declared, "Perhaps what we sympathized with most in In Memoriam at that time, apart from the personal feeling, was the defence of 'honest doubt,' . . . and generally the forward movement of the thought." Froude wrote that it "became to many of us what [Keble's] The Christian Year was to orthodox churchmen." The fact that In Memoriam was published and approved at all, even with its tardily triumphant Prologue, shows something of the unrest of the times, an unrest emphasized by Froude's and Sidgwick's comments.

Soon after In Memoriam appeared the poems of the young Matthew Arnold, which would probably have aroused more disapprobation if they had been more widely read. He himself felt that they would gain in acceptance at a later date; and he was quite right, for his poetry now seems closer to twentieth-century thought than that of any other Victorian.

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35 Willey, More Nineteenth Century Studies, p. 102.


37 Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies, p. 251.
Arnold as a reluctant doubter probably produced more "famous quotations" on the subject than did any of his contemporaries. Particularly memorable are the poignancy of

> While we believed, on earth he went,
> And open stood his grave.
> Men call'd from chamber, church, and tent;
> And Christ was by to save.

> Now he is dead! Far hence he lies
> In the lorn Syrian town;
> And on his grave, with shining eyes
> The Syrian stars look down . . .; 38

the perception of the end of an era in "Wandering between two worlds, one dead,/The other powerless to be born"; 39 and the resigned acceptance of the substitute of human for divine love in

> The Sea of Faith
> Was once, too, at the full. . . .
> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! 40

As Arnold turned to writing essays rather than poetry, his pedagogical heritage took hold, and he made a serious effort to teach his readers, among other things, a new, tenable basis for their religion, which he perceived was endangered by the onslaghts of unbelief that by this time were

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40 "Dover Beach," in Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold, p. 162.
occuring. For his efforts he received the title "the founder of English Modernism," since he elucidated what later became a commonplace—the moral principles of Christianity as based on the "poetic truths" of the Bible and not on unverifiable history. The major object of religion is conduct or "righteousness," he wrote, but morality must be "lit up by feeling." On this basis, he felt, a form of Christianity could survive.

Arnold's friend Arthur Hugh Clough shared many of his opinions, but with even more anguish. Clough, according to A. O. J. Cockshut, was one of the very few actual doubters of the Victorian period. Others denied the validity of supernatural Christianity, no matter how much they regretted their denial; Clough remained a genuine doubter, one who could no longer accept the old faith, as he shows in "Easter Day: Naples, 1849," with its refrain,

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust;
As of the unjust, also of the just—
Christ is not risen,

but who was haunted by the possibility that he might be wrong:

41 Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies, p. 265.
42 Ibid., p. 266.
44 The Unbelievers, p. 32.
45 The Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough, p. 55.
Old things need not be therefore true,
O brother men, nor yet the new;
Ah! still awhile the old thought retain,
And yet consider it again!

The souls of now two thousand years
Have laid up here their toils and tears,
And all the earning of their pain,—
Ah, yet consider that again!46

This ambivalence very probably kept Clough from reaching his potential as a man and as a writer, and it undoubtedly robbed him of his influence over others; the man and his poetry present one of the sadder aspects of the Crisis of Faith.

The appearance of Darwin's *Origin of Species* stimulated, rather surprisingly at that time, a new movement in British fiction. A rash of novels, most of them ephemeral, began to dramatize the conflict between evolution and religion.

"Fiction had come of age," Leo J. Henken declares. "The Victorian novelist now not only dared to point out social evils and represent the wrong of classes, but was ready to take in new provinces, the great questions of whence and whether which haunted the abysses of thought."47 At first, however, the "great" questions were not really grappled with. Evolution was a novelty and as such was presented variously as the savior of mankind, the work of the devil, and an object of satire; only gradually did a tone more indicative of reason begin to appear.

46 Ibid., p. 89.

There now had evolved all of the various strands of belief and thought necessary for the "social novel" as it commonly existed in the latter thirty years of the century: religious doubt, social concern, the rise of science, and public confidence in the capability of the novelist to deal with all these. When George Eliot published Adam Bede in 1859, a new era began in the novel as surely as with the Origin of Species in science. Of this novelist, Willey comments,

"Probably no English writer of the time, and certainly no novelist, more fully epitomizes the century. . . . Starting from evangelical Christianity, the curve passes through doubt to a reinterpreted Christ and a religion of humanity; beginning with God, it ends in Deity." 48

Convinced of the fallacies in orthodoxy by Charles Hennell's Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity, she had herself translated Strauss's Leben Jesu and Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity, the latter of which affirmed "the essence of man . . . against theology and idealistic philosophy" 49 and defined God by elaborating the statement Feuerbach had made in a previous book, "Man and man, the unity of I and Thou, is God," as follows:

"God as the epitome of all realities or perfections is nothing other than a compendious . . . ."

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48 Nineteenth Century Thought, p. 205.

summary devised for the benefit of the limited individual, an epitome of the generic qualities distributed among men, in the self-realization of the species in the course of world history.  

The Incarnation is, according to Feuerbach, "the manifestation of man become God," Christ is "the consciousness of the species," and the Holy Spirit is "the personification of religion in religion."  

Obviously a combination of Hennell, Feuerbach, and the Positivism of G. H. Lewes made George Eliot a strong believer in a version of the religion of humanity; but like Arnold she always maintained respect and affection for orthodox religion, concerning herself, as she said, with "the lasting meaning that lies in all religious doctrine from the beginning till now."  

For her, one of the moral bases of that religious doctrine was duty—especially duty to and responsibility for one's fellow man; for there was "one comprehensive Church whose fellowship consists in the desire to purify and ennoble human life."  

These ideas were not unique, but belonged to many intellectuals of her time. More and more there was expressed some variant of the idea "Heaven will not help us, so we must help one another," and it came to be a common theme of the fiction of the eighties and nineties. As yet George Eliot did not overtly enunciate it, feeling quite correctly that

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50. Ibid.  
51. Ibid., p. xvii.  
53. Ibid., III, 175.
her reading public was not ready for it and that any effort she made toward doing good by fiction would be damaged by an obvious departure from orthodoxy. She preferred instead to stress morality, duty, and concern for the individual—the virtues exemplifying her "comprehensive Church"; and in this effort she became the progenitor of the novels the theme of which was the translation of religious doubt into humanitarian action.

By the late 1860's the crisis of faith, though shocking, could be openly discussed in the popular novel. George MacDonald did so in Robert Falconer (1868), cushioning the impact by allowing his protagonist to depart from a horrifyingly narrow version of Evangelistic faith which few of MacDonald's Anglican readers could have countenanced in the first place. The initial step had been taken, and during the remainder of the century the novel of anguish and altruism was a favorite of the avid novel reader. "Give us the Agnostic who perverts the curate in twenty minutes!" is alleged to have been a popular demand, and some writers catered to it. Others, those in the line of descent from George Eliot—and indirectly from Froude and Newman—used the novel as a vehicle for their very personal and serious beliefs, sincerely hoping to improve the world as they did so. Of these novelists, four may be selected as taking

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representative attitudes concerning the initial loss of faith, the resultant turn to humanitarian solicitude, and the questing spirit of the times. All four of these novelists, moreover, made a conscious effort to interpret the new philosophical and theological ideas on a popular basis, thus broadening--they hoped--the understanding of a reasonable basis for religion.

The earliest of these, Mrs. Lynn Linton, summarized in her long novel *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland* (1885) the previous fifty years of English religious and philosophical thought as she perceived it; but years previously she had shocked the reading public with her *True History of Joshua Davidson, Christian Communist*, which seems to be the first in which the "devout sceptic" appears and in which his humanitarianism has a completely selfless motivation. Mrs. Linton believed, though rather hazily, in the popular idea of Progress through evolution and not unnaturally assumed that social reforms and universal altruism would come about as a matter of course.

Olive Schreiner, whose *Life on an African Farm* achieved both success and notoriety in 1885, moved from a lofty and cloudy idealism to--in her later work--an urgency for consideration of women's rights and the problems of minorities.

55"The distinctive nineteenth-century phenomenon is the devout sceptic... who rejects traditional religion not because he is shallow or immoral, but because he is too earnest to accept it..." Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies, p. 221.
William Hale White, whose alter ego Mark Rutherford settled for a Carlylean adherence to work and a policy of person-to-person assistance, toyed later with the possibility of revolution in The Revolution of Tanner's Lane and with total self-abnegation in Clara Hopgood. Though his quiet, unassuming novels received little acclaim in his own day, except from those regarding themselves as the discerning minority, White almost alone among the "religious-doubt" novelists seems to have acquired a small permanent following.

Mrs. Humphry Ward, whose Robert Elsmere is the climactic work of the entire genre, recapitulated the problem, compassionately showed its effects on the people it touched, and recommended an enlightened philanthropy. Mrs. Ward was perhaps the best qualified of all the religious novelists for her chosen task. A niece of Matthew Arnold, a daughter of his perplexed brother who wavered most of his life between one religious faith and another, and a resident of Oxford for many years, she had had unique opportunities for observing the infinite complexities that were overlooked or played down by others. Mrs. Ward is also unique in the fact that she practiced what she preached; a large part of her incredibly active life was spent in productive, recognizable humanitarian work.

Although these four novelists differ widely in background, experience, and temperament, their common earnestness and sincerity in the treatment of their subject reflect the
high-mindedness with which the best of their countrymen viewed it, while the poignancy of their personal experience and observation compels our sympathy. None of them were great artists in fiction, but they have recorded, as non-fiction cannot, the personal side of an important group of theological problems and perhaps have illuminated to some extent the question of why modern churches have become so much involved in "social action." All of them achieved a considerable degree of popularity; their novels were not designed for literary permanence or fame but for the immediate purpose of rousing middle-class readers from indifference and bringing them to a realization of the potential of mankind.
CHAPTER II

MRS. LYNN LINTON: PROGRESS THROUGH EVOLUTION

One of the early novelists who used the novel of religious doubt as a vehicle for promoting personal views was Mrs. Elizabeth Lynn Linton. Since she was born in 1822 and died in 1898, her adult life covered approximately the period of Victoria's reign; and her progressive negation of faith, at least as she has recorded it, parallels the history of Victorian doubt.

The youngest daughter of a widowed Anglican minister who was curiously fanatic in his religious concern for himself and correspondingly lax in all other aspects of life, Eliza Lynn received virtually no attention as a child and provided her own varied and unsystematic education. Leaving her father's home as soon as possible, she set out to make a living as a writer and soon became, surprisingly for that period, a journalist. For the next fifty years she wrote prolifically--novels, reviews, magazine articles, letters--and parlayed her vigorous if sometimes inartistic style, her sense of timeliness, her very real convictions, and an astute instinct for commercial potential into a successful, nationally prominent career. After her death The Athenaeum commented on her independence, industry, and generosity and
added that she was "naturally . . . an essayist rather than a novelist . . . . she wrote novels simply because the novel was the accredited form of literature. If she had lived in the seventeenth century she would have written plays."\(^1\) Vineta Colby comments that the secret of her success is that "she was an irresistible force before whom there were no immovable objects."\(^2\)

Of her many novels, those which deal with religious doubt and denial are The True History of Joshua Davidson (1873), Under Which Lord? (1879), and The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland (1885). For a better understanding of this complex woman and her ideas, Christopher Kirkland must be discussed first. Written when Mrs. Linton was in her sixties, it is her account of the various religious and anti-religious positions of the Victorian period, many of which she seems to have progressively held herself; for Christopher Kirkland, ostensibly the story of a man's life, is in many respects a thinly disguised account of Mrs. Linton's own—a subterfuge which her biographer, George Somes Layard, termed "unfortunate"\(^3\) but which is perfectly comprehensible from Mrs. Linton's point of view of public interest and royalties.

\(^1\)"Mrs. Lynn Linton," Athenaeum, No. 3691 (July 23, 1898), 132.


\(^3\)Mrs. Lynn Linton, Her Life, Letters, and Opinions (London, 1901), p. 41.
(More unfortunate, perhaps, is Layard's awkward transliteration into the feminine gender in his excerpts.)

The egregiously Christian name which Mrs. Linton gives her hero is soon belied by his development. At seventeen, full of the mythology he has read voraciously—and probably full of resentment against his unparental father's dogma—Christopher quite suddenly has a revelation and an emotional experience which determine the course of his future:

I was struck by the likeness of this story [Nisus and Scylla] to that of Samson and Delilah . . . there flashed across me also the likeness between the story of Myrrha and that of Lot's daughters—of Iphigenia and Isaac . . . and of Iphigenia and Jephthah's daughter . . . With this my mind went off on the . . . track of the virgin births, when suddenly—in that strangely rapid and vivid manner in which such things come to me . . . there shot through my brain these words which seemed to run along the page in a line of light: "What difference is there between the legends of old times and the stories of Sara, Hannah, Elizabeth,—and the Virgin Mary?"

When this last name came, a terrible faintness took hold of me . . . The light grew dim; the earth was vapoury and unstable; and, overpowered by an awful dread, I fell back among the long grass where I was sitting as if I had been struck down by an unseen hand. But this physical faintness soon passed, and my mind went on following the line of thought I had begun . . .

These thoughts clung to and left me no peace night or day. Ever and ever the Mystery of the Incarnation became more and more a subject of perplexity and doubt . . . it suddenly seemed to lose its special character and to be merely one like others.4

4 Mrs. Lynn Linton, The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland (London, 1885), I, 134-139. All references to this novel hereafter will be to this edition, and footnotes will be given only for those quotations which the reader might wish to see in their original context.
Whether this episode was actually experienced by the young Eliza, as Layard obviously believes, or fabricated for Christopher, it dramatically begins his movement away from orthodoxy. Still a resident in Eden (as his father’s parish is named), he is henceforth an alien, for he has eaten of the tree of knowledge. The incident, furthermore, epitomizes the scepticism regarding Biblical infallibility which had been present in England since the 1790’s.5

Many doubts regarding orthodox Christianity, including "the minutest details of [Christ's] humanity"6 and the puzzle of the Trinity, continue to trouble Christopher's mind, and he eventually takes his problems to the kindly minister of a neighboring parish, Henry Grahame. A long series of conversations ensues, Grahame voicing all the traditional defenses against doubt and Christopher—at least in Mrs. Linton's mind—playing the part of the young Jesus confounding the sages of the temple, as he insists on the need for external, not internal, evidence for the divinity of Christ, explores the evident failure of Providence to provide for all, and questions the concepts of atonement and eternal punishment.

Although neither Grahame nor Christopher is ever willing to concede a point to the other, Christopher does find a

6 Linton, Kirkland, I, 141.
focus for his desire to believe. Through Adeline Dalrymple, a beautiful woman a few years older than himself and an ardent reader of Shelley, he is introduced to transcendentalism, pantheism, and metempsychosism. "Henceforth," he exclaims, "all things were transformed for me, and life meant a new existence as it had a new message. I . . . saw God everywhere." But the excitement and tension of his adolescent adoration of Adeline bring on brain-fever—that Victorian pitfall for the brilliant mind—and by the time he has recovered, the spiritual enthusiasm has abated. "I went back to that languid acquiescence in doctrines as they are taught, which is neither faith nor voluntary acceptance . . . and from passion and turbulence all round . . . passed into the silence of indifference."  

Reviving, Christopher quarrels with his father over Chambers' *Vestiges of Creation* and the Whewell-Brewster controversy and decides to go to London and become a writer. Here he makes the acquaintance of Herbert Spencer, Marian Evans, Froude, Morris Moore, Thornton Hunt, and George Henry Lewes, all of whom are mentioned by their real names. He meets Liberals, Bohemians, hedonistic socialites, spiritualists, and atheists; and soon he discovers that the rigorous moral code which he has always believed to be sanctioned by God and "as fixed as the everlasting hills" is simply a result of habit and superstition.

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They made morality discretionary and not compulsory; and changed the granite stability of right and wrong into a nebulous kind of individualism, where all was convertible according to convenience, and nothing was radical and superior to conditions. Thus it was that I first began to see the moral law as a question of evolution and social arrangement, void of extrinsic divine ordination.\textsuperscript{9}

Mrs. Linton does not introduce the word "evolution" by chance. It is to become, in various senses, the keynote of her book; but not yet is it to be elucidated, for Christopher must first complete the record of his total alienation from traditional religion, both by recounting the "rational" persuasion to which he is subjected and by the overlaying of several chapters of his memoirs with the investigation and refutation of nearly every nineteenth-century movement or cult requiring faith. Mrs. Linton is preparing the reader for the defense of Reason and Science that is to come.

Among Christopher's new acquaintances is a Mrs. Hulme:

In religion an atheist; in theoretical politics a socialist; despising human nature, and ... tolerant of its weaknesses and indifferent to its vices; mocking, cynical, irreverent ... she stripped every question she touched of all sacredness, all mystery, all poetry, all divinity, and reduced it to a standard as prosaic as the market-price of a pound of tallow-candles. ... She ... swept the whole universe into the same abyss of contempt.\textsuperscript{10}

According to Mrs. Hulme, the "Divine Life" is not to be found in any material aspect of the universe; immortality does not exist: "we are mere phenomena of the hour;"\textsuperscript{11} the

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., II, 49-50. \textsuperscript{10}Ibid., pp. 51-52. \textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 53.
universe is "a fortuitous concourse of atoms";\footnote{12}{Ibid.} virtue is the "expression of the needs of the time";\footnote{13}{Ibid., p. 57.} the idea of creation as the work of an "Omnipotent and Omniscient Deity"\footnote{14}{Ibid., p. 63.} is agonizing if one believes that He has also created evil. Climactically, Mrs. Hulme is "philosophically tolerant" of humanity in spite of her contempt for it simply "because she expected nothing better."\footnote{15}{Ibid., p. 67.} Christopher cannot help being influenced by her thinking, but as yet is able to retain his belief in "Divine Providence ever leading us, like little children, step by step higher and higher" (here evolution is again foreshadowed).

The first of the movements Christopher, under Mrs. Hulme's influence, attacks is Tractarianism, which is said to be "the effort of tyranny . . . to place its yoke on the necks of men. It was like Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea . . . . Once seat him on your shoulders and you will never know intellectual freedom again!"\footnote{16}{Ibid., pp. 75-76.} This trifling weakness in metaphor goes largely unnoticed by the reader, for Christopher hastens on to condemn the opposite extreme, Evangelicism.

The constricted human sympathies of these people--their hostility to science--their superstitious adherence to every word of the Bible, whatever geology or philology may say--their arrogant assumption of absolute rightness--their greater reverence for certain mystical and unprovable doctrines than for active and practical virtues--
their unnatural asceticism . . . gave me a repulsion for the whole school.\textsuperscript{17}

As an example, Christopher chooses a particularly obnoxious clergyman—"one of those ecclesiastics whose very personality sends one's blood the wrong way"—thereby evincing Christopher's own inclination to judgment by means of emotion rather than reason, a weakness of which he seems to be dimly aware but has not the slightest hesitation in recommending to his reader.

But the Reverend Mr. Caird is not the epitome of religious fanaticism. Christopher's own sister becomes a believer in the theory of the Ten Tribes—in universal Jesuitism, so that a Freethinker, a Socinian, an Evangelical, a Tractarian, have each and all been supposed by her to be so many emissaries of the Jesuits—in secret poisonings as matters of weekly occurrence—in the Apocalypse, and the Seal now being opened (witness whereof the potato disease and the phylloxera)—and in ghosts, apparitions, presentiments and warnings as among the ordinary phenomena of this solid earth.\textsuperscript{18}

In reacting against the Evangelical and Low Church consciousness of sin, Christopher sets himself to "think out the matter and to clear the question . . . from all conventionalized interpretations, going down to the foundation of things."\textsuperscript{19} Unaided, he discovers that "elemental sin does not exist"\textsuperscript{20}—all so-called sin is simply an exaggeration, through ignorance or circumstance, of natural basic human traits.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 78.  \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 89.  \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 92.  \textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
Next Christopher gives examples of unfortunate and deluded proponents of the more exotic faiths of the time (although "it was before the days of Theosophy and Occult Buddhism"), particularly Swedenborgianism, the Kaidic school of "spiritism," and mesmeric clairvoyance—all obviously unbelievable except by the most vapid and empty-headed idle rich. Violence and revolution are examined and found wanting, as Christopher concludes that they have "done as much to retard the birth-hour of true liberty as have both Russia and Rome."\(^{21}\) (Mrs. Linton graphically emphasizes the tragedy of violence in *Joshua Davidson.*) Positivism is right in its basic teachings and in its methods, but because it offers no "spiritual consolation, no beauty or poetry, it has no appeal to the masses."\(^{22}\) Christian Socialism, on the other hand, is "fastened . . . to nothing more solid than the mere poetry of Christianity"\(^{23}\) and is too impractically idealistic to accomplish anything. Secularism is too dry and formal and, moreover, has a frightening name.\(^{24}\) Unitarianism is too narrow, too lacking in humanity, and at the same time too dogmatic and too Utilitarian.\(^{25}\) However, for a long time Unitarianism is to Christopher "the nearest approach to truth that I could find,"\(^{26}\) and even when he begins to feel

\(^{24}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{26}\) *Ibid.*, III, 68.
its constriction he remains for a time in the congregation because Sir Charles Lyell, the famous geologist, finds the doctrine spiritually sufficient for himself.

Admiring the purity of life, the personal dignity, the "gentle and self-restraining virtues," the zealousness for self-improvement, and the charity of the better-class Jews ("some . . . I count still as among my dearest friends") and broadened by seeing that Jews think of Christians as idolaters and that such "Christian" functions as the Lord's Supper are simply preserved bits of Hebrew ritual, Christopher is tempted by Judaism. But he soon sees that it, like other religions, is founded on heathen superstition and therefore "tentative" and "experimental." Moreover, it is selfish and egotistic in excluding nonbelievers from its benefits.

Catholicism is investigated as Christopher falls in love with a Catholic girl, and thereafter he always retains a sentimental affection for it, but intellectually he finds it anathema: its tradition of the intercession of the saints is an insult to the intelligence; "I could not command belief in what seemed to me mere fables from end to end. . . . Their traditions are not evidence; their miracles I disbelieved; and the Councils . . . did not seem to me to carry with them strong assurance of divine inspiration. . . . Could authority and tradition harmonize impossibilities?

27Ibid., p. 111.
... who will verify the verifier?""28 Unable to find any common ground whatsoever, he and his beloved Cordelia break off their relationship, and Christopher keenly feels this enforced martyrdom: "Christ and the Church were victorious, and there were only two desolate hearts the more, and one ruined life, to add to the count of the martyrs made by Faith and Denial."29 It apparently never occurs to him or to his creator that Cordelia may be thinking sadly at the same time of the many lives ruined by doubt and denial of the Faith and believing that hers is one of them.

There is no organized group with which Christopher can concur; nor is there a form of religion to which he can honestly accede. If to believe in God's love and grace is to exclude from them those who doubt; if in prayer one must grovel and beg for that which a human father would grant generously if he could; if God's grace is sometimes not given even to those who ask for it; if unredeemed humanity must suffer because God will not hold out his hand to it, Christopher reasons in anguish, the God of religion does not exist. "I realized that I petitioned an immutable and impersonal LAW which neither heard nor heeded--which wrought no conscious ill and gave no designed favour. ... Who that has known the hour when the Father is not, and Law has taken the place of Love, can ever forget it?"30 Thus, like

28 Ibid., pp. 221-223.  
29 Ibid., p. 241.  
30 Ibid., pp. 149-152.
many another Victorian, Christopher comes to the nadir of his unbelief.

But, like the more resilient of these others, he is able eventually to count even this experience as good, for "if this darkness, this limitation, this impenetrable barrier, be really the TRUTH . . . the pain of the discovery . . . is better for the strong man than the false comfort of a cheating hope. Before all else let us have things as they are."31 Soon Christopher realizes that, as his faith has diminished, replacements for it have appeared. To fill the vacuum left by the departure of Cordelia from his life, he has taken suffering humanity to his heart: "after all, what were my individual sorrows compared with those of the race? What we now call altruism was then as much a fact under another name. And altruism is integral to my nature."32 He begins to concentrate his thoughts (though apparently not his actions; Kirkland is purely cerebral) on improving the lot of the poor and "levelling up" class distinctions by education and legislation.

In addition, Christopher has begun to interest himself in science.

Darwin first, and then the spectroscope, opened a new world to me, and one which redressed the balance and recompensed me for all the shortcomings of the old. The Unity of Nature was the core of the creed to which I owe my subsequent mental progress—the Doctrine of Evolution

31 Ibid., p. 152. 32 Ibid., II, 245.
that by which I have come to peace. The fact that we have advanced so far already makes all the future possible and reduces pessimism to absurdity; and the consciousness of fixed laws robs history of all its elements of doubt, incompleteness, and impartiality. It makes infinite amelioration dependent on man's will; and shows how by the scientific evolution of morals, systems of government, laws of health, physical well-being and education, we can accomplish things which hitherto have been only the dreams of poets and the fantasies of artists.\(^{33}\)

Kirkland rises to great emotional heights as he contemplates the glory of the era of the "emancipation of the human intellect from superstition." He praises contemporary writers, both scientific and literary--Charles Lyell, Hugh Miller, Max Müller, George Henry Lewes, George Sand, Mrs. Browning, George Eliot (though here the praise is qualified; Mrs. Linton was never able to forgive George Eliot her greatness, as the latter was not quite able to forgive Mrs. Linton her pretensions to greatness).\(^{34}\) Essays and Reviews, Bishop Colenso, Strauss's Leben Jesu, Francis Newman's Soul, Renan, Lockyer's popularization of astronomy--all are mentioned in jubilant, loving detail as the flowering of a new era. "What a glorious time it was! . . . It was the birth hour of a new Truth."\(^{35}\)

\(^{33}\) Ibid., III, 79.


\(^{35}\) Christopher Kirkland, III, 84-85.
Christopher has found--or formulated--his new religion, a compound of the Victorian credo of progress with evolution and altruism.

That mighty law of moral evolution unfolds to us greater truths; ever the development of society leads us higher and higher. . . . We make better enactments; we spread knowledge, we apply remedies; we improve conditions--all for others, not ourselves. We realize . . . the obligation of living for the future, not only for the present; for the general well-being, not only for our individual good. . . . Altruism . . . is at once our highest duty and our noblest consolation.36

Mrs. Linton borrowed the term "altruism" from the Comtists, but for most of Christopher's new philosophy she was indebted to Herbert Spencer, who, as Layard notes, was a personal friend.37 Ethical relativism, the idea of the "unity of Nature," and the invocation of Darwin as a mentor are all Spencerian trademarks. Most important from Mrs. Linton's point of view is the idea that human nature, as well as the forms of physical life, is subject to the law of Evolution and is in a state of progress toward complete adjustment to its surroundings, i.e., perfection. This state, in Mrs. Linton's mind at least, is not solely due to the desires of humanity, but is inevitable. As evil is outgrown, sympathy and concern for others will fill more of the life of each individual. So, too, Christopher reasons; and his optimism for the future is unbounded. One can bear the

evils of the world if he knows that time will heal them, and the prospect of inevitable bliss in the future is cause for present ecstasy. In his euphoria Christopher is scarcely more logical than some of the "Bibliolaters" he despises, and as he adds Huxley's new word to his proclamation he scarcely improves his standing as a devotee of Reason:

We have no explanation to give. Agnosticism has no pillar of cloud by day nor flame of fire to lead by night. . . . It has only the guidance of experience and scientific truth as its wayline. But the Wherefore and the Whither are as obscure as the Whence and the How.38

In his later years Kirkland becomes much interested in a young man, who is described as a nearly perfect example of humanity. Handsome, intelligent, mature, and rational, Arthur has as his only flaw a frail body--the result, according to Kirkland, of Nature's law of compensation. However, as a "nineteenth-century St. Paul substituting philosophy for theology and the love of humanity for faith in Christ,"39 he plans a life of doing good both with his wealth and with his intellect, which is completely devoid of religious superstition. His sudden death, after an afternoon of discussing an agnostic "Confession of Faith," destroys the hopes of his friends, but is a two-fold service to Mrs. Linton: it enables her to portray the "good" death of an agnostic as opposed to the "good" death of the Christian in the popular sentimental novel, and it provides a springboard for her

views on immortality. Instead of convincing Kirkland of the reality of immortality, as it would have in the old-fashioned novel, Arthur's death makes clear to him that the human continuation of love for the dead is the genesis of the belief in eternal life.

As Kirkland comes to the end of his nearly nine hundred pages of memoirs, he sums up his position and his creed, which are probably, in view of the evidence, Mrs. Linton's:

I stand absolutely alone, both spiritually and personally; with only my belief in the better future of humanity as a fixed point of faith, and only my desire to help on that better future as a stimulus to endeavor... This humanity, in the love of which I live, neither recognizes my devotion nor knows of me as I am; and my hold on the present is as unsubstantial as was my hope in the past. I have no resting place on earth and no surety of a home in heaven; and belief in the Divine Providence of God, which makes others resigned to their fate, has fallen from me, like the glorious dreams of my youth. The present is the smallest of our possessions; in the future lie the unmeasured potentialities. And I find in... altruistic philosophy, as well as in the confession of an absolute, immovable, and impersonal Law, as much help as the pious find in resignation to the Will of God. In each is the annihilation of self. Thus, though the day is almost over for myself... I am young, because I live in the race which renews its youth with every day that dawns; and I am not disillusioned, because I love the virtues which never fail in the mass.40

Kirkland is perhaps too reserved and perhaps too desirous of stressing Law rather than Providence to make any overt reference to the divinity of humankind, as many of his

40 Ibid., pp. 315-316.
contemporaries—and in fact Mrs. Linton herself in an earlier book—did. But in the puzzling piousness of his name, this divinity is made clear: Mrs. Linton's alter ego Christopher Kirkland, called Crishna by his intimate friends, is by reason of his realization of the divine in humanity—and solely in humanity—the Christ-bearer, the savior, in a land of churches. More than this, in his broad experience—he has seen everything and done much; he has been acquainted with the great men and great ideas of his time—he is obviously intended to be a Victorian Everyman.

Unsurprisingly, Christopher Kirkland failed to impress the reading public. Discursive and chaotic, offering little to lighten Christopher's spiritual wanderings except his brief semi-romances, it had no appeal for the average reader. Even the Athenaeum reviewer had difficulty with it, calling it a "puzzle" and a "mere contrivance for delivering lay sermons."41 Mrs. Linton, however, had so much confidence in it that, although her usual carefully plotted, reader-tested novels brought five or six hundred pounds, she arranged with her publisher Bentley that she would receive £250 cash and a five-shilling royalty on the sale of each book over a thousand.42 Of the thousand copies in the first printing, 648

41 "Novels of the Week," The Athenaeum, No. 3013 (July 25, 1885), 105.
were sold, Bentley lost £85, and Mrs. Linton's royalties did not materialize. 43  Hardly a copy can now be found, and the novel well deserves its present literary oblivion. However, as a document offering a panoramic view of the thinking of the times as seen by a reasonably intelligent but unintellectual layman, it should be of considerable interest to the social historian.

Twelve years before Christopher Kirkland, Mrs. Linton had published the book which first brought her into nationwide prominence as a novelist and as an agnostic. Piously written, with a profusion of Biblical quotations and allusions, it was nevertheless designed both to shock the reader and to forward the Communist principles which Mrs. Linton held for some years. She had apparently acquired them indirectly from Robert Owen, whom Christopher Kirkland describes as a "meliorist . . . [holding] on to his idea of philosophical communism as the ultimate outcome and regeneration of society," 44 and directly from her husband, W. J. Linton, a talented and well-known wood-engraver and "a Radical, not to say revolutionary, publicist," 45 according to a World reviewer. The same writer went on to say that Mrs. Linton was probably a Communist by virtue of association and not by

43 Ibid., p. 126.
44 Linton, Kirkland, II, 95.
45 Edmund Yates, in a review of Christopher Kirkland in World, 1885, quoted by Layard, Mrs. Lynn Linton, p. 250.
intellectual reasoning. Linton himself naively believed that a social revolution was at hand when "abstract right should take the place of godless expediency, when the reign of peace and truth, of justice without flaw, and perfect purity of life alike for men and women would begin."\textsuperscript{46} How much of his doctrine Mrs. Linton believed literally, after nine years of marriage and five years of separation from her husband, is not clear, but her acquaintance with him helped her to elucidate a version of it in \textit{The True History of Joshua Davidson}, a much more dramatic and coherent book than \textit{Christopher Kirkland}.

The story of Joshua Davidson (the name is equivalent to Jesus, the son of David) is designed to parallel closely and obviously the life of Jesus of Nazareth, but on one hand omitting Jesus' miracles and intimate communion with God, and on the other including such incidents as the author judged necessary for bringing the story into nineteenth-century focus. Joshua, like Jesus, is the son of a small-town carpenter but the descendant of kings; his family claims kinship with King Arthur. In his early teens Joshua makes himself conspicuous in his neighborhood by asking the local minister unanswerable questions, an event which his mother, like Mary, carefully preserves in her memory. As he comes to manhood, he gathers about him a group of companions who

\textsuperscript{46}Layard, \textit{Mrs. Lynn Linton}, p. 95.
acknowledge him as their leader and are willing to follow him and live by his precepts. One of these young men, John, is the narrator of the story. Supporting himself as a carpenter and taking as his subject-matter ways to a better life--physical, moral, and spiritual--Joshua begins to teach. "All came to this meeting who would; thieves and drunkards, lost women and gutter-children--no matter who: there was room for all." Eventually those who have more traditional concepts of doing good begin to denounce him as an "agitator" or "fanatic." The disapproval increases when he befriends Mary Prinseps, a prostitute, whose devotion and adoration thereafter recall the medieval tradition of an attachment between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. The concept of the Savior is preserved in the fact that although Mary says her prayers as Joshua has taught her, she is unconsciously saying them "to Joshua, grown very tall and strong." Thus Mrs. Linton not too subtly substitutes humanity for God.

Next Joshua attempts to rescue Joe Traill, an alcoholic thief. He is, of course, accused of associating with sinners, and as his reputation and influence grow he is ostracized by respectable society. Often misunderstood, sometimes persecuted, he seems curiously to be both deeply

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47 Mrs. Lynn Linton, The True History of Joshua Davidson (Philadelphia, 1873), p. 95. All references to this novel will be to this edition, and footnotes will be given only for those quotations which the reader might wish to see in the original context.
involved with and yet aloof from the wretches he attempts to save. Many love him; others, even though he is trying to help all men, suspect him and even lie in wait to humiliate or entrap him. Finally, through the denunciation of the priest whom he confounded in his youth, he is killed by an angry mob.

Yet there are necessarily differences in the stories of Jesus and Joshua, caused in part by the need for fitting the nineteenth-century situation and in part by Mrs. Linton's own leaning toward religious doubt and social reform. In his later teens Joshua goes through a period of religious uncertainty and, indeed, crisis. The first step is a rebellion against the church in his community: "though [he and his companions] prayed much and often, it was neither at church nor chapel," and they became anti-Sabbatarians. Mrs. Linton here recalls the incident of the disciples' gathering grain to eat as they passed through the field, but characteristically chooses to ignore passages such as Luke's "as his custom was, [Jesus] went into the synagogue on the seventh day." The young men believe implicitly, however, in the literal truth of the Scriptures and think "that the Example left the world was the one thing to follow and the one pattern to imitate." In his perfect confidence, Joshua attempts to move a rock by prayer, to handle a snake, to eat

48 Ibid., p. 19.
black briony berries. The rock remains stubbornly motionless; the snake bites him; the poison berries almost kill him. He is profoundly shaken: "It was the first struggle between Faith and Law, Revelation and Nature, through which every inquiring mind has to pass; and it was a bitter one." He recovers, however, and takes what Mrs. Linton regards as a more logical view: "[God's] word is not to be accepted literally, and not to be acted on in all its details. The laws of Nature are supreme, and even faith cannot change them. Can it be that much of that Word is a parable?" So he and his friends begin to construct their own imitation of Christ and, after an investigation of churches and creeds, reject them all. After much meditation Joshua announces his own carefully formulated creed, which he is to follow the rest of his life:

I have proved to myself the sole meaning of Christ: it is Humanity. I relinquish the miracles, the doctrine of the Atonement, the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus, and the unelastic finality of His knowledge. He was the product of His time; and if He went beyond it in some things, He was only abreast of it in others. . . . Neither He nor His disciples imagined more than the communism of their own sect; they did not touch the throne of Caesar, or the power of the hereditary irresponsible Lord. Their communism never aimed at the equalization of classes throughout all society. Hence, I cannot accept the beginning of Christian politics as final, but hold that we have to carry on the work under different forms. The modern Christ would be a politician. His aim would be to raise the whole platform of society, he would not try to make the poor contented with a lot in

49Ibid., p. 27. 50Ibid., p. 28.
which they cannot be much better than savages or brutes. He would work at the destruction of caste, which is the vice at the root of all our creeds and institutions. He would not content himself with denouncing sin as merely spiritual evil; he would go into its economic causes, and destroy the flower by cutting at the roots—poverty and ignorance. He would accept the truths of science, and he would teach that a man saves his own soul best by helping his neighbor. That, indeed, he did teach; and that is the one solid foothold I have. Friends, Christianity according to Christ is the creed of human progress, not that of resignation to the avoidable miseries of class . . . . It is the doctrine of evolution, of growth; and just as Christ was the starting-point of a new era of theological thought, so is the present the starting-point of a new era of social fact. Let us then strip our Christianity of all the mythology, the fetichism [sic] that has grown about it. Let us abandon the idolatry with which we have obscured the meaning of the Life; let us go back to the MAN, and carry on His work in its essential spirit in the direction suited to our times and social conditions. . . . I have come out into the upper air of action; into the understanding that Christianity is not a creed as dogmatised by churches, but an organization having politics for its means and the equalization of classes as its end. It is Communism. Friends! the doctrine I have chosen for myself is Christian Communism—and my aim will be, the Life after Christ in the service of humanity, without distinction of persons or morals. The Man Jesus is my master, and by His example I will walk.31

Thus Mrs. Linton sets the keynote for her crusade—the substitution of a new social order for revealed religion. It is never necessary for Joshua to think again; unlike Christopher, who thinks continually but seldom acts, Joshua is a man of action.
As Joshua first goes into his vocation of helping humanity, the differences between his work and that of Jesus are those necessitated by the difference in civilizations: whereas Jesus' ministry was predominantly rural, Joshua's is in the London slums, where the need is greatest. As time goes on, however, and Joshua sees the uselessness of the efforts of the single individual, he becomes interested in labor organizations and helps to form the International Working Men's Association; for, as his friend John explains,

> If working men would free themselves from the fetters in which capital and caste have bound them, it must be their own class-fraternization all over the world. If labour is to make its own terms with capital, it must be by the coercive strength of the labourer. . . . Yet the International represented no class enmity with him. . . . It was a means of class-advancement by peaceable and noble efforts, not of universal destruction by violent or ignoble ones.  

In opposition to philanthropic do-gooders, Joshua holds that "sin and misery are the removable results of social circumstances, that the poverty, ignorance, and class-distinctions consequent, are at the root of all the crimes and wretchedness afloat," and that the blame lies on the Christians who have exalted "Jesus of Nazareth, that poor, unlearned man of the people . . . into God and now worship [him] with gorgeous ceremonial, while despising every one of the social doctrines He and His disciples preached!"  

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52 Ibid., pp. 145-146.  
54 Ibid., p. 226.
When the Communist rebellion of 1871 breaks out, Joshua goes to Paris "to help in the cause of humanity. . . . To help in the establishment of an organised liberty like the Commune--that seemed the best thing any man loving his fellow-men could do." Mrs. Linton praises the selflessness of "these latter-day Christ-men" who briefly govern France and implies that a continuance of their government could mean a modern Utopia; but the distrust and cynicism instilled by previous French rulers will not permit the continuance of the regime. Unreasoning violence breaks out, and the senselessness and tragedy of violence is graphically illustrated by the death of Mary Prinseps, who has fortuitously arrived in Paris to be with Joshua. "It grew clearer and clearer, as the days passed by, that the cause of the freedom of Paris, and with Paris of Europe--the cause of the rights and better organization of labour--was lost for the hour and that hope only was left for the future."  

When Joshua returns to England he finds his personal situation worse--he is "besmirched with the Communistic doctrines of liberty, equality, and fraternity." In spite of this opprobrium, he again takes up his lecturing, which is by now entirely political, and travels throughout England "explaining the Communistic doctrines and showing their apostolic origin." Though not defending the mistakes of

55 Ibid., pp. 230-231.  
56 Ibid., pp. 235-236.  
57 Ibid., p. 261.
the Parisian fiasco, he defends the basic Communist creed as "the logical outcome of Christianity in politics." He advocates "the abolition of priestly supremacy in a man's social and daily life," equal rights for labor, human equality in all phases of life, care for the poor, increased responsibility for the strong, and the "right of the people to self-government." Unexciting as this list may seem a hundred years later, it was exacerbating to many of his audience then, partly because the language in which it is expressed, even filtered through the normally sober narrator John, sounds highly inflammatory. At last, as Joshua himself has foreseen, he is killed by a mob—not crucified, but beaten and kicked to death. Like Jesus, he leaves his disciple John "not only desolate but uncertain." John perplexedly mulls over the contrasts between his faith in Joshua and society's contempt for him and criticizes the fixed traditions of supposed Christians who do not want to make "any change in social relations; they only attack the sinners for whose sin society is originally responsible." The story ends with John's anguished expression of bewilderment: "Who can make the dark thing clear?"—a cry which the conscience-stricken reader is supposed to answer for himself.

58 Ibid., p. 263.  
59 Ibid., pp. 263-264.  
60 Ibid., pp. 277-278.
Joshua Davidson was an immediate success. Three editions were sold in three months, and by 1890 it had reached a tenth edition in England and been widely pirated in America. Twenty-five years later, in Mrs. Linton's obituary, The Athenaeum was to look back and call it "an exceedingly clever pamphlet disguised in the shape of a story," which was a "great success" and "quite altered her standing in the world of letters." Perhaps it was even more clever than the Athenaeum writer perceived. Agnostics throughout England hailed it as the authentic voice of truth. Frederic Harrison, the Positivist leader, commented, "It afforded me new singular matter for reflection." The theistic minister Charles Voysey sent Mrs. Linton as a token of his appreciation "a copy of [his] New Koran and some recent sermons on Atheism." John Bright complimented it publicly, and the famous atheist Charles Bradlaugh bought a thousand copies for distribution. At the same time more naive readers saw it as a sincere and reverent attempt to portray the life of Jesus as he would have lived it in the nineteenth century. Nearly twenty years later the New England Review—perhaps so far removed from the British scene as not to be familiar with Mrs. Linton's reputation as a sceptic—lauded it as precisely

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63 Layard, Mrs. Lynn Linton, pp. 179-180.
the gospel "which Jesus the son of David would speak to London and Boston, did he come to them today." The writer regards Joshua Davidson as a reverent allegory which makes clear the "cosmopolite gospel and the 'evolution of Christianity' of which we now hear"; he ignores consciously or unconsciously Joshua's explicit denial of "the miracles, the doctrine of the Atonement, the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus." In his commentary may be seen how far the acceptance of humanistic-humanitarian doctrine had penetrated orthodoxy in twenty years' time.

Under Which Lord? (1879) offers a contrast to Mrs. Linton's other religious novels. Avoiding Christopher Kirkland's formlessness and Joshua Davidson's simple didacticism, it is a genuine novel with a carefully constructed plot and an abundance of clearly delineated characters. It is true that many of the events are unrealistic and sensational, but this defect is common to many of the popular novels of the time and probably even contributed to their popularity. In this book may be seen the characteristics which won Mrs. Linton years of support from the reviewers, the publishers, the circulating library, and the general reader: vigor, suspense, pathos, temptation, a dash of love-interest, and a liberal amount of shock-value. When Mrs. Linton in her old age attended a large public function

64 "Editors' Table," New England Magazine, VI (April, 1892), 266-267.
and was seated next to a bishop, it was in her capacity as the author of Under Which Lord? that the incongruity was perceived.\textsuperscript{65}

Under Which Lord? does not deal with the loss of faith, for the hero, Richard Fullerton, is a confirmed agnostic from the beginning. Most of the story is comprised of the struggle between Fullerton and the vicar, Launcelot Lascelles, for the possession of Mrs. Fullerton's soul, in a way reminiscent of a medieval treatise but with reversed sympathies. Characteristically, Mrs. Linton weights the scales for her own side by presenting to her largely Protestant readers a frightening representation of Christianity: Lascelles is a Jesuitical, near-Catholic priest who flirts with his feminine parishioners (thus "Launcelot") and preys on their emotions for the sake of "the Church," which he apparently confuses at times with himself. In contrast, Richard Fullerton is the epitome of dignity and honor, and his avocation of lecturing to local workmen on evolution, science, and the fallacies of revelation is based on a purely unselfish desire to free them from the shackles of superstition. It is unnecessary to detail here the course of Lascelles' devious machinations which deprive Fullerton one by one of the loyalty of his men; his daughter (led by Lascelles' Romish sister, she abandons the Church of England

\textsuperscript{65}Layard, Mrs. Lynn Linton, p. 364.
and becomes a nun); most of his fortune; and, temporarily, the love of his wife. More relevant are the picture of Fullerton's faithfulness to his creed and his serene view of the future as he lies dying:

Before his mind, marshalled in grand and long procession, passed thoughts of the noble victories over superstition and the glorious truths made manifest, the peace of nations, the spread of knowledge, the abolition of vice and misery and ignorance, the sublime light of universal freedom and the unfettered progress of humanity which would inform and govern the future through the supreme triumphs of True Knowledge.

"Man the God incarnate!" he said; "yes, the myth was true."66

Fullerton and his creator shared the dream of one segment of the Victorian world, impractically composed of the Godwinian theory of Progress, rebellion against orthodoxy, pseudo-Reason, and unrealistic faith in that magic word, Evolution. Perhaps every age has its impossible dream; few have had one more roseate. In this dream, however, may be seen the growing nineteenth-century concern, abstract and theoretical though it was, for the poor and underprivileged; the increasing feeling that man's welfare depends, so far as it can be affected at all, on man; and a new, self-directed coalescence of the human determination to find divinity.

CHAPTER III

OLIVE SCHREINER: UNIVERSAL UNITY AND MINORITY RIGHTS

It is difficult for most of today's readers to understand the wide appeal which Olive Schreiner had during her life. To us her work seems inconsequential; to her contemporaries it heralded a new era. Forrest Reed, in The Eighteen-Eighties, recalled that her major novel, The Story of an African Farm, "gave rise to the Woman's Rights Novel, the Religious Doubts Novel, and the Sex Novel." He went on to comment, however, "To myself the book appealed profoundly, and in an ancient copy lying on the table before me, quite a jungle of marked passages remains to show me where I was moved, if not, alas, to show me why."¹ On the centenary anniversary of her birth a writer in the New York Times Book Review noted that the current generation had never heard of her. "And if that generation inquired . . . 'Why should we have?'--we confess we'd be pretty mute."² A few moderns are less derogatory; in 1961 Isak Dinesen called African Farm

¹Quoted by Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Reading (Boston, 1935), p. 362.
"one of my favorite books," and in 1968 Doris Lessing praised it as "one of the few rare books. For it is in that small number of novels, with Moby Dick, Jude the Obscure, Wuthering Heights... which are on a frontier of the human mind."³

As contradictory as the opinions about her writing are the opinions regarding Olive Schreiner herself. Havelock Ellis called her "in some respects the most wonderful woman of her time."⁴ Frank Harris thought she was a "pretty little Jewess" (he was wrong) with too high an opinion of herself.⁵

Even her biographers are in disagreement. Her husband, S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner,⁶ in his detailed biography pictured her as a childlike, irresponsible genius whose own statements about herself were not to be trusted; and in his edition of her letters he sometimes felt it necessary to insert in brackets an explanation that what she was saying was erroneous or simply untrue. In contrast, Vera Buchanan-Gould, author of the highly adulatory biography Not Without Honour and a passionate admirer, discounts as male prejudice and jealousy many of Cronwright-Schreiner's comments and

⁴Havelock Ellis, My Life (Boston, 1939), p. 229.
⁵Frank Harris, Contemporary Portraits, Fourth Series (New York, 1923), pp. 290-291.
⁶Cronwright added his wife's name to his own when they were married.
insists on his unreliability almost as strongly as he insists on that of his wife. Since the lady's unmitigated enthusiasm seems unrealistic, readers are left with at best a confused idea of Olive Schreiner's actual temperament and work. Most of the outward details of her life can, of course, be corroborated from other sources.

Olive Schreiner was born in South Africa, the ninth child of a dedicated missionary and naturalized British citizen, Gottlob Schreiner, and his wife Rebecca Lyndall, who had joined the missionary movement in a moment of religious fervor and discovered too late that she had no real vocation for it. Although she remained a religious woman, it is possible that her suppressed rebellion against the strictures of her husband's Evangelical faith had some bearing on her daughter's later rejection of all formal religion. Two stories are told of early incidents which also shook Olive's faith. The first is that on discovering the Sermon on the Mount in the Book of Matthew she rushed to her mother crying, "Look what I've found! It's what I've known all along! Now we can live like this!" To her surprise she was reproved for her enthusiasm—though gently—and discovered "for the first time that people did not want to live like that, although it was God's commandment which they professed to accept." She never again felt the same way about religion.7

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The second incident was the death of her beloved baby sister when Olive was nine years old; she said years later that this was the event which "first made me realise the falsity of what I had been taught and made a free-thinker of me." The shock of her sister's death caused her to lose faith in a loving, fatherly God; but later, sitting by the child's grave as she often did, she "was happy as though the baby, herself, wild nature, and the 'endless existence' were one and the same." Whether this story is completely factual or was unconsciously constructed by the projection of later thoughts, the feeling of the unity of all things was an integral part of her religion throughout her life.

Under her well-educated mother's instruction Olive was a precocious reader, devouring everything she could get her hands on. Tennyson and Milton were read aloud while her mother performed the innumerable duties required by a large family. At sixteen the girl was lent a copy of Spencer's First Principles, which her husband says "would seem to [have an effect] comparable with that which Wordsworth's poems had on John Stuart Mill." She herself wrote Havelock Ellis much later, "I always think that when Christianity

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9Life, p. 70.
10Ibid., pp. 82-83.
burst on the dark Roman world it was what that book was to me, I was in such complete, blank atheism."\textsuperscript{11}

At seventeen she recorded in her journal the following reading: "Carl Vogt, \textit{Lectures on Man}, P. R. Exce [sic] Homo. \textit{Vestiges of Creation. The Past and Present Life of the Globe}, Page. \textit{Student's Rome}, Liddle. \textit{The Spanish Conquest of America}, 4 vols. \textit{Principles of Political Economy}, Mill." During the next year she reviewed Mill and read Buckle's \textit{History of Civilisation}, Darwin's \textit{Descent of Man}, and Russell's \textit{History of the Heroes of Medicine}. At nineteen she was able to purchase Emerson's \textit{Essays}, for which she had been hunting three years, and declared that Emerson "lifted her into a higher atmosphere and seemed the expression of her highest self." In this year she began to work as a governess, and after recording the re-reading of Spencer and a perusal of Prescott's \textit{History of the Reign of Philip II}, she kept no systematic list of reading in her journal, though she did mention in the next two years \textit{Prometheus Unbound}, Mill's \textit{Logic}, Huxley's \textit{Lay Sermons}, and Darwin's \textit{Plants and Animals}.\textsuperscript{12} This imposing list indicates, at the very least, an intelligent and inquiring mind with an iconoclastic leaning, and in some of it can be perceived the basis of much of her future thinking.

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 82. \textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 81-118, passim.
In 1881 Olive went to England, where two of her brothers already were, with the intention of becoming a doctor. This plan was soon discarded, partly because of ill-health (she suffered from severe asthma all her adult life); but she hesitantly submitted for publication her novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, which she had painstakingly written and revised over a period of years, working late at night after her long days as a governess with extra housekeeping and shopkeeping duties. The fourth publishing company she approached—Chapman and Hall—accepted the novel on the advice of the reader, George Meredith. In January, 1883, the book was published under the pseudonym of Ralph Iron.

*The Story of an African Farm* is a curious novel, its organization awkward and its aim apparently uncertain. Forrest Reed was right in his assessment of it as a woman's rights novel, religious doubts novel, and sex novel, though it did not as he said "give rise" to any of these; and perhaps in the fact that it is all three of them its failure lies; there is no unity of purpose. It is, however—given the date of writing—a moving story; and it is a profoundly felt story, for of the three major characters, each is an extension of the personality of the author.

The narrative begins, as the title indicates, on a farm in South Africa. The farm is owned, though she scarcely realizes it, by a small, plain English girl named Em, whose dying father hastily married an uneducated and rather gross
Boer woman in order to assure that Em and the farm would be cared for until the child grew up. With Em lives her pretty cousin Lyndall, who has not only no parents but very little property. Waldo, the son of the old German overseer, is the girls' playmate. It is the characters of these three which comprise the various aspects of their creator. Lyndall is vivacious, curious, and rebellious; Waldo is a thoughtful, moody introvert; and Em (the name Olive was called by in childhood) represents her modest, unassuming "housekeeping" nature—a comparison she specifically made, though her husband denied that she possessed any such characteristics.

Almost immediately the reader is catapulted into anguish. Waldo, whose father Otto is a very devout, unworldly old man (he is based on Gottlob Schreiner), has come to have a precocious and unchildlike—though somewhat childish—preoccupation with religion. He lies awake at night thinking agonizedly of all the people in the world who at each tick of the clock die and go to hell. While watching the sheep he carefully builds an altar of small stones and lays on it, in lieu of the lamb he cannot afford, the mutton-chop intended for his dinner. Innocently and trustfully he prays that God will give him a sign by sending down fire to burn the sacrifice as He did for Elijah. As the boy waits through the long afternoon for the fire to come, he reasons that God is trying him, but when he understands at last that
the miracle will not take place, he decides in despair that he is not of the Chosen and that God hates him. As he goes home,

... the milk-herd came walking out of the cow-kraal with two pails. He was an ill-looking Kaffir.

"Ah!" thought the boy, "perhaps he will die tonight and go to hell! I must pray for him, I must pray!"

Then he thought—"Where am I going to?" and he prayed desperately.¹³

Two years later he is still in despair; at night while his father sleeps he goes out into the fields and cries. "I love Jesus Christ," he finally admits to himself, "but I hate God"; and he no longer prays for mercy, for he knows he is irrevocably lost. "There are some of us," the author editorializes, "who in after years say to Fate, 'Now deal us your hardest blow, give us what you will; but let us never again suffer as we suffered when we were children.'"¹⁴

Later, when the girls are twelve years old and Waldo is fourteen, they fall into a conversation stimulated by the Physical Geography Waldo is reading. Em says quite solemnly that God put in place the hillock where they are sitting "by wanting to," but Waldo and Lyndall are unable to accept the simplicity of her argument—thus signifying their growing philosophical sophistication. Indeed, Waldo's explanations

¹³Olive Schreiner, The Story of an African Farm (London, 1883), pp. 17-18. All references to this novel hereafter will be to this edition, and footnotes will be given only for those quotations which the reader might wish to see in their original context.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 20.
are quite Darwinian. Waldo by this time has regained much of his original relationship with God and, as is not uncommon in early adolescence, has ecstatic dreams of His presence. Only occasionally is he troubled by doubts, most of them arising from discrepancies in the Bible:

Why did the women in Mark see only one angel and the women in Luke two? Could a story be told in opposite ways and both ways be true? . . . Could Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite "put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer"? and could the Spirit of the Lord chant paeans over her . . . and no voice cry out that it was a mean and dastardly thing to lie, and kill the trusting in their sleep? . . . Was there nothing always right or always wrong? 15

The peace of the farm is shattered by the intrusion of a half-comic, half-sinister character, Bonaparte Blenkins. Although the children see immediately that the stranger is a fraud, old Otto befriends him, gives him clothing, and persuades Tant' Sannie, the Boer woman, to let him stay. Otto's kindness enables the newcomer to insinuate himself into Tant' Sannie's good graces and eventually through lies and exaggerations to make her believe that the old man has gossiped about her and to turn him off. Preparing to leave, on foot, with no money, the old man dies of a heart attack; and Bonaparte becomes the overseer. Now Bonaparte turns his malignity to Waldo, treating him harshly and finally beating him and locking him in the fuel-house. Waldo is defiantly

15 Ibid., p. 50.
rescued by Lyndall, but he never again has faith in God; he had "prayed aloud, very loud, and got no answer. . . . That was a long wild night, and wild thoughts came and went in it; but they left their marks behind them for ever; for as years cannot pass without leaving their traces behind them, neither can nights into which are forced the thoughts and sufferings of years." But when Tant' Sannie discovers Bonaparte's duplicity and drives him in his turn away from the farm, Waldo gives his tormentor food, a hat, and two shillings, all the money he has. Denying the source, he lives its teachings.

Here the narrative breaks off abruptly. Apparently the author feels she has not adequately delineated the pangs of childhood doubt. She begins again, this time with an unnamed, presumably representative child who can possibly be identified with Waldo or with Lyndall, but who is essentially the author herself, for at seven the child has the experience with the Sermon on the Mount which Olive Schreiner recounted to her husband as her own. The child is much puzzled: "The grown-up people are very wise, and they say it was kind of God to make hell, and very loving of Him to send men there, and besides, He couldn't help Himself, and they are very wise, we think, so we believe them--more or less." As the child grows older, she is assailed by more doubts, which she understands as the temptations of the

\[16\text{ Ibid., p. 122.}\]
devil: "Is it good of God to make hell? Was it kind of Him to let no one be forgiven unless Jesus Christ died? . . . Do you love Him? You will be lost if you don't . . . Is it right there should be a chosen people?"

Sometimes she has a brief sense of forgiveness and exaltation, but the mocking doubts recur. She tries to find comfort in the beauty of the world made by a loving God, but sees in this world death and evil. At last,

We are not miserable. Why should we be? We eat and drink, and sleep all night, but the dead are not colder. And we say it slowly, but without sighing, "Yes, we see it now; there is no God . . . There is no justice . . . There is no order; all things are driven about by a blind chance." . . . Existence is a great pot, and the old Fate who stirs it around cares nothing what rises to the top, and what goes down, and laughs when the bubbles burst. And we do not care.8

The years-long agony over, she again becomes interested in what she has neglected while she was engrossed in it: the acquisition of knowledge, Nature, life itself. There comes a time when she can at least perceive order:

This thing we call existence, is it not a something which has its roots far down below in the dark, and its branches stretching out into the immensity above, which we in the branches cannot see? Not a chance jumble; a living thing, a One. The thought gives us intense satisfaction . . . . And so, it comes to pass in time, that the earth ceases for us to be a weltering chaos . . . all is part of a whole, whose beginning and end we know not . . . . and we begin to live again.19

Like Joshua Davidson and Christopher Kirkland, the girl has without any aid come to a profound conclusion, and one which is singularly in keeping with some of the philosophy of the times.

The Story of an African Farm returns to its original narrative. The children are now fourteen and sixteen; Lyndall has gone away to school, and Waldo is quite alone in his thoughts and feelings, for good, simple little Em is quite unable to comprehend them. A stranger comes by one day; he and Waldo fall into conversation. Waldo indicates something of his mental state, which as usual is perplexed and disturbed, and the man tells him an allegorical story of a hunter who catches sight of the great bird Truth and longs to possess her. Trying to find her, he catches birds which sing of a "Human-God," of Immortality, and of Reward-after-Death; but he sets them free, for they are "of the brood of Lies." He is told by a wise man that to find Truth he must "wander down into the Land of Absolute Negation and Denial, "find the mountains of stern reality," and "climb them; beyond them lies Truth." He will never hold her, but may be fortunate enough to pick up one silver feather from her wing; when enough of those feathers have been gathered and woven into a net, "in that net Truth may be captured. Nothing but Truth can hold Truth." Through temptation and hardship the hunter makes his way to the mountains and spends his life and strength not only in climbing the mountain but in cutting a
path for those who will follow. As he dies, a feather flutters down and rests on his breast.  

Summarized, and as a matter of fact in its original form, the allegory is obvious and rather trite, but it epitomizes the search of many Victorians for a belief without the fallacies of orthodoxy and for what some of them considered a necessary corollary—the giving of oneself to humanity. "By the steps that I have cut they will climb," says the hunter; "by the stairs that I have built they will mount." One of the proud moments of Olive Schreiner's life came when she was told that this story had been read to Herbert Spencer on his deathbed.  

After he has told his story the stranger congratulates Waldo on his good fortune in living on the farm, where he can "build stone walls and dig earth for relief" instead of succumbing to the temptations that await the disillusioned unbeliever in a more "civilized" environment. (We are told that the stranger smokes, drinks brandy, reads philosophy, and loves "better than books or brandy that which it had been better had he loved less." Perhaps he speaks from experience.) At the end of his visit he gives Waldo "an old brown volume" which "may give you a centre round which to hang your ideas." This episode is obviously based on Olive's

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20 Ibid., pp. 164-176. Italics are the author's.
21 Life, p. 298.
receiving, at the same age, Spencer's *First Principles*, but the title of the book is not mentioned. The gift has apparently much the same effect on Waldo as the loan of Spencer had on Olive; Waldo is sometimes sad and uncertain after this time, but never completely adrift.

The narrative turns to Em, who at sixteen is old enough to take possession of the farm and is planning to marry Gregory Rose, a handsome, effeminate, fatuous boy who has become attracted to her through propinquity. Radiantly Em welcomes her beautiful cousin Lyndall home from school, not suspecting that Gregory will instantly fall in love with Lyndall instead. Lyndall has become in her absence a vigorous proponent of women's rights, and the lectures she delivers on the downtrodden state of her sex temporarily turn the novel into a treatise. (We can only marvel at the patience of Waldo as he sits through them.)

Gregory's admiration for Lyndall becomes so obvious that Em, loving both of them and willing to make any sacrifice for those she loves, breaks her engagement. At this point Em's role in the novel is most apparent: this particular kind of sacrifice was very important to Olive Schreiner, and she repeats the same motif in her later work. Em represents more of Olive's self than she admitted to her husband—a passionate, quixotic generosity which undoubtedly was a factor in her later humanitarian efforts.
As if the denial of religion in the first part of the book were not shocking enough, a new affront to conservative Victorianism occurs. Lyndall's urgency to avoid the usual subservience of women causes her to refuse to marry the wealthy, handsome Englishman she has met while at school, even though she knows she is to have a child. She does concede, reluctantly, for she has no money, that she will have to let him take her away from the farm: "I cannot marry you because I cannot be tied; but if you wish, you may take me away with you, and take care of me; then when we do not love any more we can say goodbye."

The Englishman fulfills his part of the bargain; but when we next see Lyndall her baby has died a few hours after its birth, and she herself is dying of one of the unnamed lingering illnesses so common in popular novels. After weeks of suffering and of alternate hope and despair, the end comes. She is alone.

The old strong soul gathered itself together for the last time; it knew where it stood.
Slowly raising herself on her elbow, she took . . . a glass . . . . Her fingers were stiff and cold. She put the pillow on her breast, and stood the glass against it. Then the white face on the pillow looked into the white face in the glass. They had looked at each other often so before. It had been a child's face once, looking out above its blue pinafore; it had been a woman's face, with a dim shadow in the eyes, and a something which had said, "We are not afraid, you and I; we are together; we will fight, you and I." Now to-night it had come to this. The dying eyes on the pillow looked into the dying eyes in the glass; They knew that their hour had come. She raised one hand and pressed stiff fingers against
the glass. They were growing very stiff. She tried to speak to it, but she would never speak again. Only the wonderful yearning light was in the eyes still. The body was dead now, but the soul, clear and unclouded, looked forth.

Then slowly, without a sound, the beautiful eyes closed. The dead face that the glass reflected was a thing of marvellous beauty and tranquillity. The Grey Dawn crept in over it, and saw it lying there.

Had she found what she sought for—something to worship? Had she ceased from being? Who shall tell us? There is a veil of terrible mist over the face of the Hereafter. 22

The Good Death of the agnostic has again occurred, just as it did in the novels of Mrs. Linton. There is, however, a new element here. Lyndall in her extremity has no one but herself; yet she gains fortitude and "tranquillity" from the contemplation of the face in the mirror. "Had she found what she sought for—something to worship?" Lyndall, Mrs. Schreiner wanted her readers to perceive, has found her divinity in humanity and realized its oneness with what the author soon presents as the Universal Unity.

Waldo, in the meantime, has traveled from place to place, seeking an obscurely visualized fortune; but, realizing what he has always suspected, that his happiness lies with Lyndall, he returns to the farm, only to learn of her death. Here is the crucial test for Waldo's firm agnosticism, for the temptation to slip back into belief only for the sake of comfort is great:

It is for this hour—this, this—that men blind reason and cast out thought! For this hour—

22 Ibid., pp. 324-325.
this, this—they barter truth and knowledge, take any lie, any creed, so it does not whisper to them of the dead that they are dead! O God! God! for a Hereafter! . . . They are the tears that fall into the new-made grave that cement the power of the priest.23

There is no comfort for Waldo, however, in orthodox religion. Lyndall died "with her knee unbent, with her hand unraised, with a prayer unuttered," and so, according to all the rules, is doomed to hell. Nor is there comfort in "nineteenth-century" Christianity, into which "modern unbelief and thought have crept," for according to its eclectic doctrine, hell does not exist and everyone goes to heaven; but the whole idea of heaven and immortality is absurd—in what form, at what stage of life, are the dead to be resurrected?

"Transcendentalism" is of no aid, for the bereft Waldo loves a human Lyndall, not a "spiritual essence."

He fell into perfect silence. And, at last, as he walked there with his bent head, his soul passed down the steps of contemplation into that vast land where there is always peace; that land where the soul, gazing long, loses all consciousness of its little self, and almost feels its hand on the old mystery of Universal Unity that surrounds it. "No death, no death," he muttered; "there is that which never dies—which abides. It is but the individual that perishes, the whole remains. It is the organism that vanishes, the atoms are there. It is but the man that dies, the Universal Whole of which he is part reworks him into its inmost self. Ah, what matter that man's day be short!—that the sunrise sees him, and the sunset sees his grave; that of which he is but the breath has breathed him forth and drawn him back again. That abides—we abide."

23 Ibid., p. 328.
For the little soul that cries aloud for continued personal existence for itself and its beloved, there is no help. For the soul which knows itself no more as a unit, but as a part of the Universal Unity of which the Beloved also is a part; which feels within itself the throb of the Universal Life; for that soul there is no death.

"Let us die, beloved, you and I, that we may pass on for ever through the Universal Life!" In that deep world of contemplation all fierce desires die out, and peace comes down.  

So Waldo, calmed and at last comforted, drops back into the routine of life on the farm. He takes an especial pleasure in the phenomena of Nature, for "when in the present there is no craving and in the future no hope . . . with a beneficent tenderness, Nature enfolds you." He sits one day on the ground at the side of the wagon-house, surrounded by the symbols of a new beginning--baby chicks, flowers, butterflies--and thinking that in spite of all "life [is] a rare and very rich thing." When Em comes out of the house she finds him sitting quite still, with the little chickens climbing over him. They know that he too has become one with the Universal Unity. This loose amalgam of Emerson and Spencer represents a popularization of Victorian philosophy which was probably much more palatable to the reader than were Mrs. Linton's preachments, partly because Waldo, even with his dramatic emotionality, is a more realistic and sympathetic character than Mrs. Linton's stick figures.

24Ibid., pp. 332-333. 25Ibid., p. 343.
The reception of *The Story of an African Farm* was mixed. The first edition was very small; probably Chapman and Hall did not wish to gamble any substantial amount on it. Twenty-five years later Mrs. Schreiner said that Chapman had warned her "just to put in a few sentences saying that Lyndall was secretly married to that man . . . [or] the British public would think it wicked!" She refused, and to a certain extent Chapman was right. The *Athenaeum* critic was apparently so shocked, or so puzzled, that he decided to be totally non-committal. His review is quoted in its entirety:

"The Story of an African Farm" shows considerable power. Mr. Iron has followed no recognized model of romance, but contrives to tell his tale in a series of studies illustrating the wild life of an ostrich farm, and setting before the reader with striking vigour the problems which trouble a strong intelligence and an imaginative ambition remote from any possibility of culture. His descriptions are wonderfully graphic and his pathos is forcible. The book is altogether too melancholy to be altogether pleasant, but Mr. Iron obviously writes about what he knows with a successful result which is well deserved.27

After this cautious and uninformative review, it is not surprising that some small-town libraries ordered copies on the assumption that they were getting "merely an account of colonial life in which anyone might find interest"; and in view of the explosive content it is also not surprising that

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26 Life, p. 156.
they were shocked and dismayed when it arrived. One
library announced publicly that "the committee declined to
order such books as Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African
Farm* or Heine's *Essays*, and they will not allow Fielding,
Smollett, Swift, Sterne and the other older dramatists [sic]
to appear on the shelves of the institution"--a declaration
rather pleasing than otherwise to the author, who was thus
bracketed, as her husband said, with a "splendid company."\(^2^9\)

Yet three editions were necessary before the end of
the year, and twelve more appeared during the author's life-
time. Eventually the novel was translated into French,
German, Dutch, Russian, and even Esperanto.\(^3^0\) On its third
edition, in 1887, the *Spectator* finally reviewed it, grimly
heading the article "An Agnostic Novel."

Among liberals and intellectuals, however, *African Farm*
was extremely successful. Havelock Ellis reviewed it in the
*Indian Review*, saying that although it was not "fine art or
... sound doctrine ... what delighted me ... was ...
the touch of genius, the freshness of its outlook, the firm
splendour to its style, the penetration of its insight into
things."\(^3^1\) Olive and Ellis soon formed a permanent and last-
ing friendship, and in his autobiography he said of her,

\(^2^8\) Colby, *The Singular Anomaly*, pp. 105-106.

\(^2^9\) Life, p. 156.

\(^3^0\) Vera Buchanan-Gould, *Not Without Honour: The Life and

\(^3^1\) Ellis, *My Life*, p. 226.
"She was in some respects the most wonderful woman of her time." Other friends included Bernard Shaw, Beatrice Webb, Eleanor Marx, Edward Carpenter, and Arthur Symons. Symons commented, "I can now realize all that can be told of women, of the great women, and I feel that Olive Schreiner is the greatest of them all. The George Sands and George Eliots pale before her incredible ardency." 

Considering on one hand this circle of admirers and on the other the disapproval expressed by conservative readers, one might conclude that *African Farm* had no popular appeal at all; but it must have had a great deal, for Marie Corelli's biographer records that it "definitely put [Corelli's] Thelma's nose out of joint and all Marie's friends raved ecstatically and talked a great deal about intellect and power and sense of tragedy." Boarding-school girls, forbidden to read the dangerous story, smuggled it into their dormitory rooms. Floyd Dell in his popular study *Women as World-Builders* (1913) looked back at Olive Schreiner as having "shown the way to a new freedom of the body and the soul." Edith Lees wrote in 1914, "Thirty years ago two significant and apparently insignificant

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32 Ibid., p. 229.  
33 *Life*, p. 185.  
35 Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Reading*, p. 363.  
36 Quoted by Colby, *The Singular Anomaly*, p. 103.
matters drove thinking women further towards the emancipation. One was the publication of . . . The Story of an African Farm, and the other was the performance of Ibsen's Doll House. Ibsen and Olive Schreiner led the way, and thousands of feet have followed them."

Perhaps, however, the most direct evidence of popular consumption is Olive's comment in a letter to Havelock Ellis, "Everyone here is very kind to me. Sometimes when I go to pay a chemist he says he can't take anything from the author of The African Farm."

The success of African Farm was not to be repeated. The author's lack of discipline and organizational ability, her bad health, and the perfectionism which kept her endlessly re-writing and refusing to finish anything—all these prevented her from publishing another major work in her lifetime. Three small books of short stories and allegories, a novelette, a few political pamphlets and articles, and a book-length essay called Woman and Labour were the total published output in her remaining thirty-seven years. After her death her husband published her juvenile novel Undine, which has value only in its seminal relation to African Farm, and From Man to Man, an unfinished full-length novel. In these later works the loss of faith is not an issue, for the

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37 Quoted by Buchanan-Gould, Not Without Honour, p. 221.
38 Letters, p. 177.
author had, as the psychologists say, "ventilated" this portion of her emotional thinking, and among the people with whom she now associated, agnosticism was taken for granted. Some of her writings, however, do show her as giving direction and focus to her developing humanitarian instincts.

"Three Dreams in a Desert," in *Dreams*, is an allegorical prophecy of the future of woman, continuing the enthusiasm for women's rights expressed by Lyndall in *African Farm*. The dreamer sees two great figures, one lying and one standing, in the desert. The recumbent figure, which is of course woman, has not moved for untold ages, not since in the youth of the world when "she stooped low to give suck to her young, and her back was broad [the Age-of-dominion-of-muscular force] put his burden of subjection on to it, and tied it on with the broad band of Inevitable Necessity." As the dreamer watches, the tyrant dies, killed by the Age-of-nervous-force with the knife of Mechanical Invention; but the man-figure who stands beside the woman does not move to help her as she struggles to rise. In fact, he moves away from her, tightening the cord that binds them together and hindering the struggle, for he does not understand what she is trying to do; but slowly she rises nevertheless. In the second dream Woman is seeking the land of Freedom and is told by a wise old man that to get there she must go "down the banks of Labour through the water of Suffering"; she must part with her mantle of Ancient-received-opinions and her
shoes of dependence and wear only the white garment of Truth. Her loneliness, alienation, and sacrifice are unimportant, for the path she is painfully making will be followed by so many thousands that some day the whole human race will make its way to the land of Freedom. In the third dream the dreamer sees a land where

brave women and brave men walked hand in hand. And they looked into each other's eyes, and they were not afraid. . . .

And I said to him beside me, "What place is this?"

And he said, "This is heaven."
And I said, "Where is it?"
And he answered, "On earth."
And I said, "When shall these things be?"
And he answered, "In the future." 39

This is the allegory about which Amy Wellington said in her preface to the 1919 edition of Dreams,

it has served as an inspiration to English-speaking women wherever the woman movement is felt or heard. . . . She has seen, across the burning sands of woman's unrest, the blue waters of a new ideal,—men and women dwelling together hand in hand [sic] as equal lovers and fellow workers. She has visioned that ideal in all the glory of imaginative prose, and it is becoming real to us. 40

"In a Ruined Chapel," also in Dreams, deals with the recurrent idea of the divinity of humanity and with the Universal Unity recognized by Waldo in African Farm. The dreamer sees an angel appealing to God to tell him how to

39 Olive Schreiner, Dreams (Boston, 1919), pp. 53-70.
40 Ibid., p. xix.
help a mortal who so far has proved totally unable to accept help. The angel then goes to the mortal and "unclothe[s] a human soul." As the mortal looks at the progressive baring and re-clothing, he recognizes first himself; then God; then his fellow man, whom he has always hated. "How beautiful my brother is!" he exclaims. 41

"The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed" in the same volume is a long, involved story in which the dreamer is conducted through a series of lurid adventures in hell, where he sees the wickedness and insanity of man. Then he is taken to heaven, where in succession he sees and longs to join the people who "shine" on the plants to make them grow; the workers who dig the shining stones to make a mighty crown; and the mighty, suffering laborer on a solitary peak, who makes the music of heaven. He is unfit for all these activities, and God sends him back to earth. In the morning he wakes, discouraged, to hear the sounds of the great city outside; suddenly he realizes that what the passers-by are seeking is the music which he could not imitate in heaven, but can now recall. He rises to the sunlight of a new day and a new purpose. 42

Even with the dubious aid of Olive Schreiner's consciously simple, Biblically-inspired language, these allegories,

41 Schreiner, Dreams, pp. 83-96.
42 Ibid., pp. 117-163.
like that of the hunter in *African Farm*, are obvious, even tedious. In spite of the contemporary cries of "exquisite art," "winged with aspiration," and "grand passages," they seem to the twentieth-century reader forced and insipid. What made them popular in their time (there were twelve editions in English and several in other languages) was their timeliness, the author's very real sincerity, and the infinite capacity of her audience for submitting to didacticism. Critics who had remained silent at or disapproved of *African Farm* gushed sentimentally over *Dreams*; one wonders what Havelock Ellis and Bernard Shaw thought. But "Three Dreams in a Desert," at least, seems to have made a genuine contribution toward the emancipation of women.

In 1897, living in Africa again and appalled by the tensions which were to culminate in the Boer War, Olive Schreiner published *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, a book which might be termed a novelette, but which has also been called a "political pamphlet" and a "polemical allegory." It is at once an expose of the white men's cruel treatment of the African natives, with particular reference to the policies of Cecil Rhodes, and an appeal to

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44 Ibid., p. 100.
45 "Recent Books--French and English," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, CLXI (April, 1897), 477.
46 Colby, *The Singular Anomaly*, p. 86.
the better nature of humankind. The attention-getting
device employed is the one which Mrs. Linton used, though
more restrainedly, in Joshua Davidson--Jesus is a character
and speaks for the author. In the twenty-four years since
Joshua Davidson, the practice of using Jesus as a character
had become fairly widespread. In America Lew Wallace had
written Ben Hur; W. T. Stead, a journalistic friend of Mrs.
Schreiner, had created a sensation with If Christ Came to
Chicago. Marie Corelli had created Christ-figures in both
A Romance of Two Worlds (1886) and Barabbas (1893). "It is
wonderful to imagine how it is that so many writers in the
present day have taken upon them to introduce into their not
very sublime histories this extraordinary Interlocutor," ex-
claimed the Blackwood's critic. Ignoring the fact that some
of the offenders were men, he went on, "Are these ladies
[Linton, Corelli, Schreiner] God that they can divine and
express what would be the words of our Lord on any subject,
or his opinion?" His reproof was no doubt lost on Mrs.
Schreiner, who had several times pre-empted the voice of God
to express her own opinions in her allegories.

In the "political pamphlet" Peter Halket, not quite
twenty-one, is an English soldier in the colonial army.
Separated from his troop one night, he meets a linen-robed
stranger who listens quietly while Peter speaks with naive

callousness about the activities of the army and the atrocities committed against the natives. The stranger says that he too has seen atrocities. In answer to Peter's questions, he says that he belongs to "the strongest company on earth," the members of which may be known by a sign. Peter does not know what the sign is, and the author finds it necessary to explain to the reader in a footnote that it is, "By this shall all men know that ye are disciples, in that ye love one another." The stranger describes at length some of the members of his company, who have done good for others at great cost to themselves, and he details with intense bitterness the activities of an unnamed sinner who is unmistakably Rhodes. At last Peter, who after all has been brought up by a good mother, decides to join the "company." With a series of Biblical injunctions the stranger departs. When Peter is next seen, he is in trouble with the Captain of his earthly company for defending a captured black who is accused of spying. In a rage, the Captain has set Peter to guard the wretched, tightly-bound man and ruled that he is to be executed the next morning—-and that Peter is to be the executioner. In the night Peter cuts the black's bonds and hands him a bag of food, but the poor fellow's hasty departure is noisy enough to rouse the camp. When the men rush to the scene, Peter is lying dead, shot in the chest. There is no doubt among the more perceptive of them that the Captain has shot him in revenge for the loss of the black, and one of
them says, "I hardly know whether it is not better for him now than for us." As the stranger promised, the seed of goodness has been planted, and some day "they shall stand . . . shoulder to shoulder, white man with black . . . for men shall say, 'Are we not brethren and the sons of one father?"

Apparently it occurred to no one to question the use of the "Jesus myth" by one who did not believe in it, but Peter Halket was nevertheless a center of controversy. The Blackwood's critic found nothing good to say for it in a four-page review. After the use of Jesus as a character, he protested against the injury done Cecil Rhodes, who should have sued the author; and most of all he attacked the insinuations against English officers and soldiers:

Is this the kind of thing which troopers in South Africa do? Do they torture wounded and helpless prisoners? . . . Are our young men who go there, in troops, from English houses full of the love of God and pity for suffering men, so callous to such proceedings as to look on, thinking it fun? . . . What has Mrs. Schreiner to produce in support of her horrible assertion? Without evidence, we refuse to believe.48

The second edition of Peter Halket had as frontispiece a photograph of three blacks hanging dead from trees, with eight or ten white men standing around them in the poses of satisfied hunters.

48 Ibid., p. 480.
Most reviews were kinder. The Athenaeum, which had been caught napping when African Farm was published, remembered the English reputation of the author and praised it freely, making use of such expressions as "a remarkable literary success" and "a powerful and most impressive picture of the struggle between the forces of good and evil." The exemplary tales told by the stranger are said to have "rare grace" and "vigour of expression," and the climactic ending, with Peter's death and the comments of his comrades, is "the most touching episode in a book as conspicuous for its dramatic force and artistic construction as for the impressive moral it is intended to convey."\[49\]

Seen in perspective, Peter Halket is neither merely an exercise in polemics nor a remarkable literary masterpiece. It is more than a political pamphlet; for the character of Peter has some dimensional quality, and his detachment from the world, which is indicated by the fact that in the latter part of the story we no longer see into his mind, is well handled. The obtrusiveness of the author, however, is as usual overpowering. The Blackwood's critic pushed his point too far, perhaps, but there is some justice in his complaint that a human writer can hardly voice completely divine ideas for over a hundred pages.

\[49\] "Literature," The Athenaeum, No. 3618 (February 27, 1897), 478-479.
Olive Schreiner, though, looked upon the writing of Peter Halket as a part of her duty to the world, and writing it was far from being her only activity in what she regarded as the public interest. With her husband, she took an active part in anti-war activities during the Boer War and later during World War I. She tried to better the lot of the black and fought for a more democratic South Africa, both by writing and by delivering lectures. Always, however, her major interest was the improvement of the position of women, an interest climaxed by publication of Woman and Labour, which was known in the early nineteenth century as "a trumpet call . . . to a vital crusade" and as "the Bible of the women's movement."50

From Man to Man, Mrs. Schreiner's posthumous novel, was in part another result of this interest. Begun before 1880, shortly after she had read Darwin's Descent of Man, it was her favorite project, worked and re-worked for thirty years. Even so, it was not quite finished when she died, and her husband added to it a summary of the remaining narrative—an act judged superfluous by Vera Buchanan-Gould, who jealously wished to protect her idol's masterpiece from any tampering by a member of the inferior sex.51 Published in 1926, the

51 Not Without Honour, p. 204.
novel was much less successful than it would have been earlier, partly because of a lack of timeliness and partly because the long years of revision had produced inconsistencies of thought.52

In From Man to Man, the author explores the difficult position of women of the Victorian period, using as examples two sisters. The younger--beautiful, naive Bertie--is because of an early indiscretion hounded by the "Christian" women of the community into prostitution, disease, and an early death. The older and wiser sister, Rebekah (another extension of Olive), is respectably married, but continually wounded and humiliated by her husband's philandering. Thus Olive Schreiner offers two representative problems of women. Rebekah's maturation--though more implied than described--and her eventual independence and dignity are intended to make her a model for feminine behavior, and the author hoped "that From Man to Man will help other people, for it will help to make men more tender to women, because they will understand them better; it will make some women more tender to others; it will comfort some women by showing them that others have felt as they do."53

Near the end of the narrative Rebekah is having a long talk with her small sons and her adopted daughter Sartje, a

52Colby, The Singular Anomaly, p. 94.
53Letters, p. 28.
half-Negro child who is the result of one of Rebekah's husband's liaisons (though, incredibly, he does not know the child is his). The oldest little boy has refused to walk with Sartje because other boys laugh at him. Rebekah tells the children a series of stories to help them formulate their standards for life, and this series probably represented for Mrs. Schreiner the distillation of her own life's philosophy. The first story is a "dream" that "suddenly there has arrived among us a strange, terrible new race of people coming . . . perhaps from the nearest star . . . . they were like us in body and mind, but with terrible white faces . . . as white as the driven snow."54 The newcomers, in brief, treated the people of the earth with scorn and contempt for their ignorance and primitive savagery, calling them "The Inferior Races." Gradually the people of earth began to despise themselves as they were despised; only a few were strong enough to work and wait for a better day. The dream breaks off abruptly: "I do not know how it ends," says Rebekah, but "they came from another planet and might say, 'Those earth men and women, what are they to us?' . . . But we cannot say so of any men or women living."55 The next story is a Darwin-like history of mankind which, beginning with a "great silence" and the first appearance of shell-fish

54 Olive Schreiner, From Man to Man (New York, 1927), p. 397.
55 Ibid., p. 403.
and progressing through the pre-human and primitive stages of man's history, is meant to show the children that since all men came from the same beginnings, none has the right to despise another. Rebekah's story goes on to show the material and cultural debt of white men to those of other races and moves on to the duty of the present time:

the most that any man can hope for, and the most that any nation can hope for, is this: The man, that, in the one little hour of life that is given him, he may be able to add one tiny grain, so small perhaps that no eye will ever see it, to the heap of things good and beautiful which men have slowly been gathering together through the ages;--the nation, that, when its time to pass comes as it comes to all, it may have added to the things good and beautiful, which humanity lays up through the ages for the use of all, one layer, perhaps one thin layer, but that so well and truly laid that all coming after shall say--"It was nobly done!"56

Olive Schreiner, like Mrs. Linton, believed in Spencer's evolutionary theory of progress. Unlike Mrs. Linton, however, she did not hold that the progress was automatic; each individual has a responsibility to help make the dream come true. In contrast to Christopher Kirkland with his vague and theoretical "altruism," Rebekah preaches her creator's gospel of willingness to work and suffer for humanity and the certainty that love is of man and is owed only to man, for man and God are one.

56 Schreiner, From Man to Man, pp. 427-428.
CHAPTER IV

WILLIAM HALE WHITE: DUTY AND SACRIFICE

Mrs. Linton and Mrs. Schreiner read widely, indiscriminately, and not very profoundly about the ideas and philosophies of their day. Mrs. Linton founded her personal creed on the catch-phrases and rationalizations she dignified with the name "Reason"; Olive Schreiner based hers on an intuitive, half-mystical blending of current ideas with her own feelings. William Hale White, in contrast, slowly and painfully erected his defenses against the stark desolation of unbelief by careful, scholarly study in the spare moments withheld from a life already overburdened with uncongenial work and domestic burdens, and by the unremitting, though not always successful, effort to apply to his own life the grand principles which he had learned.

Born in 1831 in Bedford, John Bunyan's home, and brought up in the Independent (later called Congregational) Church, White acquired in his youth the Puritan habits of thought which he was never to drop completely. His father, a printer and an admirer of Byron and Carlyle, communicated to him a love of literature. About the age of eighteen the boy wrote a letter to Carlyle, the answer to which he treasured the rest of his life. More to please his mother than as a result
of any personal conviction, he began at about the same age to prepare for the ministry, but he found himself unable to refrain from asking questions about "the formation of the canon and the authenticity of the separate books"\(^1\) of the Bible and was accordingly expelled from New College in 1852. For the next several years he worked for a publisher of radical literature and for several newspapers, but principally as an employee of the Admiralty Office, a position he held until his retirement. Although he was considered an efficient civil servant, the work was uncongenial, and the long-continued, crippling illness of his wife robbed his private life of any possible enjoyment. At about thirty he completed a translation of Spinoza's *Ethics*, though he did not publish it for twenty years; and at fifty he began secretly to write the confessional novels, intended to relieve him of the burden of his own thoughts, which were published under the pseudonym of Mark Rutherford. Under his own name, from about 1860, he wrote many periodical articles on a variety of subjects--architecture, literature, religion and philosophy, astronomy, and public affairs.

Of his half-dozen short novels the first two, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* and *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance*, are so directly related to Hale White's own life and

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\(^1\)William Hale White, *The Early Life of Mark Rutherford by Himself* (London, 1913), p. 64.
experience that there is a tendency to make the identification complete;² the two books seem, however, to delineate a rather morbid aspect of White's personality, or perhaps the man he might have been if he had actually gone into the ministry. Only the first two chapters of the Autobiography appear to be completely factual.

In his Autobiography, Mark Rutherford looks back on his childhood as a normal and comparatively happy one, except for the rigidity and gloom of the Sundays of the Calvinistic Independents. The description of these Sundays is almost classic: the cold dinner, the boring Catechism studies, the hypocritical prayer, and the interminable sermon in which "the minister invariably began with the fall of man; pronounced the scheme of redemption, and ended by depicting in the morning the blessedness of the saints, and in the evening the doom of the lost."³ At fourteen Mark is told that he should be "converted," and though he has no particular feeling about the matter, other than those of duty and a desire to conform to the mores of the community, he is, he says:

²Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Reading (Boston, 1935), p. 74.

³William Hale White, The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford (New York, 1899), p. 7. All references to this novel hereafter will be to this edition, and footnotes will be given only for those quotations which the reader might wish to see in their original context.
obliged to declare myself convinced of sin; convinced of the efficacy of the atonement; convinced that I was forgiven; convinced that the Holy Ghost was shed abroad in my heart; and convinced of a great many other things which were the merest phrases. . . . I had no experience to give, and I was excused on the grounds that I had been the child of pious parents, and consequently had not undergone that convulsion which those, not favored like myself, necessarily underwent when they were called.4

After the "conversion," life goes on just as before, except that he goes to prayer-meetings.

When Mark, like Hale White, is sent to a Dissenting College to study for the ministry, he--but no less than many of his classmates--is psychologically and emotionally unprepared; the course of study, however, is not designed to give him this preparation, but to instill in him the pat answers, the unquestioned precepts, and the rigid "systematic theology" of the single textbook. He remembers later,

We had to read sermons to the President in class, and no sermon was considered complete and proper unless it unfolded what was called the scheme of redemption from beginning to end. So it came to pass that about the Bible, as I have already said, we were in darkness. It was a magazine of texts, and those portions of it which contributed nothing in the shape of texts, or formed no part of the scheme, were neglected. Worse still, not a word was ever spoken to us telling us in what manner to strengthen the reason, to subdue the senses, or in what way to deal with all the varied diseases of the soul of man which we were to set ourselves to save. All its failings, infinitely more complicated than those of the body, were grouped as "sin," and for these there was one quack remedy. If the patient did not like the remedy, or got no good from it, the fault was his.5

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The German philosophy and higher criticism which are making so much stir among more enlightened people are never mentioned in this school; indeed, their conversation does not "turn even on our religion, so far as it [is] a thing affecting the soul."  

In this spiritual desert, Mark's heart is "altogether untouched by anything I heard, read, or did." But in his third year he discovers Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, and like John Stuart Mill finds his life immeasurably altered:  

It conveyed to me no new doctrine, and yet the change it wrought in me could only be compared with that which is said to have been wrought on Paul himself by the Divine apparition. . . . it excited a movement and growth which went on till, by degrees, all the systems which enveloped me like a body gradually decayed from me and fell away to nothing. Of more importance, too, than the decay of systems was the birth of a habit of inner reference and a dislike to occupy myself with anything which did not in some way teach the soul, or was not the illustration or embodiment of some spiritual law. . . . God is nowhere formally deposed, and Wordsworth would have been the last man to say that he had lost his faith in the God of his fathers. But his real God is not the God of the Church, but the God of the hills, the abstraction Nature, and to this my reverence was transferred. . . . Wordsworth unconsciously did for me what every religious reformer has done; he re-created my Supreme Divinity; substituting a new and living spirit for the old deity, once alive, but gradually hardened into an idol.  

Mark does not as a result of this change become, as he says, "immediately heretical," but, realizing that the dry doctrines  

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6 Ibid., p. 17.  
7 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
he hears have once been based on "the necessities of human nature," begins to reach back toward that necessity: how did the atonement really appear to Paul, or sin to the prophets? He soon discovers, however, that in his denomination it is "precisely this reach for a meaning which constitute[s] heresy. The distinctive essence of our orthodoxy was not this or that dogma, but the acceptance of dogmas as communications from without, and not as born from within." Soon his original and "not quite sound" thinking is observed and reproved by the president of the college, who admonishes him to adhere to the "old story of which, Mr. Rutherford, you know, we never ought to get weary; an exhibition of our exceeding sinfulness; of our safety in the Rock of Ages, and there only; of the joys of the saints and the sufferings of those who do not believe."

At this point the story of Mark Rutherford begins to deviate from that of William Hale White, in literal fact but not in the development of his thinking. Graduated and in his first pastorate, Mark begins to try to humanize religion and give it relevance to the lives of the members of his congregation. To his dismay they are totally uncomprehending and disapproving. The shock plunges him into a depression (he calls it "hypochondria") which lasts for months, and from the threat of which he is never again free. On the advice

\[8\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 20.} \quad 9\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 23.}\]
of a doctor, who thinks he is suffering from a physical weakness, he tries wine as a stimulant and soon finds himself rapidly drifting toward alcoholism. With considerable agony he stops drinking and eventually begins to recover from the depression. Meeting about this time a newspaper compositor, Edward Gibbon Mardon, who seems friendly, he pursues the acquaintance, only to find that this attractive, intelligent man is an agnostic who seldom goes to church. Of what value is a sermon based on a myth? When Mark with conscious liberality says that "the Christ-idea [is] true whether it was ever incarnated or not in a being bearing His name," Mardon answers,

Pardon me . . . but it does very much matter. It is all the matter whether we are dealing with a dream or with reality. I can dream about a man's dying on the cross in homage to what he believed, but I would not perhaps die there myself; and when I suffer from hesitation whether I ought to sacrifice myself for the truth, it is of immense assistance to me to know that a greater sacrifice has been made before me—that a greater sacrifice is possible. To know that somebody has poetically imagined that it is possible, and has very likely been altogether incapable of its achievement, is no help. Moreover, the commonplaces which even the most freethinking of Unitarians seem to consider as axiomatic, are to me far from certain, and even unthinkable. For example, they are always talking about the omnipotence of God. But power even of the supremest kind necessarily implies an object—that is to say, resistance. Without an object which resists it, it would be a blank, and what then is the meaning of omnipotence? It is not that it is merely inconceivable; it is nonsense, and so are all of these abstract, illimitable, self-annihilative attributes of which God is made up.10

10 Ibid., pp. 51-52.
Irvin Stock theorizes that Mardon here speaks with the voice of White himself, as he "ruthlessly attacked in those days his remaining orthodox beliefs." Stock's theory is strengthened by the fact that though no more conversations with Mardon are recorded verbatim, Mark's faith consistently and agonizingly declines: "The struggle . . . was tremendous. The dissolution of Jesus into mythologic vapour was nothing less than the death of a friend dearer to me than any other friend I knew." Even worse is the crushing thought that immortality does not exist, a conclusion based at least partly on the idea that Nature can hardly be "so careful about individuals" as to preserve them infinitely; Nature's immortality is "aspiration after more perfect types" and is therefore not consonant with the existence of an orthodox heaven.

Mark sees Mardon as seldom as possible, for his talk, Mark says, "darkened my days and nights"; but "none the less did the process of excavation go on. It often happens that a man loses faith without knowing it." Eventually, finding nothing in orthodox faith he can preach to his congregation, he resorts to "taking Scripture characters, amplifying them by the hints in the Bible, and neglecting what is

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12Autobiography, p. 54.
13Ibid., p. 55.
supernatural."\textsuperscript{14} Most of the members of his uneducated congregation hardly notice any difference in his sermons, but one deacon accuses him of preaching a "tainted flood of human philosophy" and a "German gospel." Rather than argue the charges Mark resigns. Mardon urges him to give up the ministry altogether: "You have no right to be preaching anything doubtful . . . I profess no belief in God, and no belief in what hangs upon it. Try and name now, any earnest conviction you possess, and see whether you have a single one which I have not got."\textsuperscript{15} Mark insists that he does believe in God, or at least in "an intellect of which these laws governing the universe are the expression."\textsuperscript{16} Mardon cannot shake him, though Mark gets little consolation from this fragment of faith.

Based on it, Mark becomes the minister of a Unitarian church, in the hope that here he can at least do no harm and will not have to deliver sermons which go against his conscience. He finds here, however, no freer thought than in the Independent congregation: "I do not think that I ever had anything to do with a more petrified set. . . . They were perfectly orthodox, except that they denied a few orthodox doctrines." The people are cold and rigid; their meanness and paucity of soul is symbolized by the Sunday

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 18. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 87. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
dinner at which Mark is asked if he will have potatoes or cabbage. At last his loneliness and isolation become intolerable, and he leaves the Unitarian church as well. It is worth noting here that Mark, who is by this time about twenty-five, has mentioned or described many unpleasant Christians and only one or two who were genuinely good and loving people. It might be considered that he was disillusioned by Christians even before he lost faith in Christianity.

After several humiliating experiences Mark, like White, becomes an assistant to a publisher of sceptical books, obtaining the position by a qualified denial of a literal belief in miracles; scepticism is apparently as bigoted as belief. The work, which includes some selling and some delivering and collecting of books, is not suitable for the sensitive Mark; an element that makes it bearable, however, is his association with the publisher's niece, Theresa. The real-life counterpart of the publisher Wollaston is John Chapman, who during the time Hale White worked for him was, as well as a publisher, the editor of the Westminster Review; and Theresa is the fictional representation of Marian Evans, who was the junior editor. Theresa is said to be a faithful copy of George Eliot as Hale White knew her in the 1850's: direct, honest, intelligent, unconventional, and sympathetic.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17}Stock, William Hale White, p. 107.
this last quality so strongly appealing to the young man at this particular time of his life that he proposes a new beatitude, "Blessed are they that heal us of self-despising."\textsuperscript{18}

It is perhaps no coincidence that Hale White and Marian Evans both worked on translations of Spinoza at the same time; some of the philosophy which is attributed to Theresa here, particularly that in regard to punishment and reformation of wrongdoers, is Spinozistic.

About this time Mark finds that his old friend Mardon is dying. On going to see him, he finds Mardon "perfectly self-possessed" and decrying the egotistical and unrealistic wish for immortality. His last words to Mark are, "Learn not to be over-anxious about meeting troubles and solving difficulties which time will meet and solve for you."\textsuperscript{19} He dies calmly and painlessly, just as the dawn turns to a magnificent sunrise. At the funeral a Unitarian minister declares that Mardon will "live as every force in nature lives for ever; transmuted into a thousand different forms; the original form utterly forgotten, but never perishing."\textsuperscript{20}

Again we see the Good Death of the unbeliever (by this time we feel it virtually mandatory) as contrasted with the fears and terrors previously observed to be engendered by the thought of death in the young, supposedly Christian Mark.

\textsuperscript{18} Autobiography, p. 132. \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 134.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 136.
The fictional editor of Mark's memoirs, Reuben Shapcott, brings them to a close here, indicating that Mark "did not go off into absolute denial" and that although he defended the right to speculate on the unknowable, "the long conflict died away gradually into a peace not formally concluded, and with no specific stipulations, but nevertheless definite. He was content to rest and wait." 21

Willard L. Sperry 22 has evolved an analysis of the Autobiography (which Wilfred Stone 23 has expanded and applied to the author) and its sequel, Mark Rutherford's Deliverance, by showing that Mark goes through "the natural stages of a religious awakening: negation, new birth, renunciation, and affirmation." Sperry sees the arid period of his early years as the "negation" and the reading of Lyrical Ballads as the beginning of the "new birth." The new birth does not, as one might think, solve all problems; in fact, it creates problems. To be true to the new concept of God he must rid himself of the familiar ways of orthodoxy, his hope for immortality, and, as may be seen by Mardon's dying injunction, his fondness for metaphysical thinking. The Deliverance completes the progression to "affirmation." In

21Ibid., p. 139.


23Religion and Art of William Hale White (Stanford, Cal., 1954), pp. 43-100.
our context, the resolution of Angst by humanitarianism, it may be said that the Autobiography shows the anguish of the loss of faith, an anguish from which, unlike the Linton and Schreiner characters, Mark never completely recovers; the Deliverance, however, "creates a world where anguish is not despair"\textsuperscript{24} and describes Mark's gradual turning of his mind outward toward ways of alleviating the anguish, or the despair, of others as well as himself.

At the beginning of the Deliverance Mark, now calmer and more mature, obtains commissions from two newspapers to report the debates of the House of Commons--"work which would have been disagreeable enough, if I had not now ceased in a great measure to demand what was agreeable... what was I that I should demand exceptional treatment? Thousands of men and women superior to myself are condemned... to almost total absence from themselves."\textsuperscript{25} One of his problems is the complete lack of any appreciation for his efforts. He feels that he is writing for a void; only twice does he have any indication whatsoever that anyone has read


\textsuperscript{25}William Hale White, \textit{Mark Rutherford's Deliverance} (New York, 1899), pp. 2-3. All references to this novel hereafter will be to this edition, and footnotes will be given only for those quotations which the reader might wish to see in their original context.
his journalistic output with sufficient interest to respond to it.  

The worst of Mark's work is that he is forced to live in London, completely separated from "the pure sky and the landscape," and finds "that hope, faith, and God [seem] impossible amidst the smoke of the streets," a fact pointed out by J. Hillis Miller. Mark goes so far as to say, paradoxically, that there is an unexpectedly evil side to the literature which implies "that true humanity and a belief in God are the offspring of the hills and the ocean," for, if this is true, the other side of the coin would be that those who see only the London slums cannot believe in God. As Mark and his fellow journalist M'Kay walk through the filthy streets, the hopelessness and squalor they see seems to corroborate this idea. The author's descriptions

26 This part of the story is White's actual experience in his own journalistic work. One of the two indications that his work was read is described as follows: "At another time, when Parliament was not sitting, I ventured, by way of filling up my allotted space, to say a word on behalf of a now utterly forgotten novel. I had a letter from the authoress thanking me, but alas! the illusion vanished. I was tempted by this one novel to look into others which I found she had written, and I discovered that they were altogether silly." Deliverance, p. 7. Interestingly enough, the "authoress" was Mrs. Linton, whose gushing letter of thanks for White's appreciation of Joshua Davidson was discovered by Wilfred Stone among the papers of Mrs. Dorothy Vernon White, Hale White's second wife. Religion and Art of William Hale White, p. 135.

27 Deliverance, p. 5.

28 The Disappearance of God (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 4-5.

29 Deliverance, p. 5.
have been said to surpass those of Gissing in their unmitigated dreariness and gloom: 30

As we walked over the Drury Lane gratings of the cellars a most foul stench came up, and one in particular I remember to this day. A man half dressed pushed open a broken window beneath us, just as we passed by, and there issued such a blast of corruption, made up of gases bred by filth, air breathed and rebreathed a hundred times, charged with odours of unnameable personal uncleanness and disease, that I staggered to the gutter with a qualm which I could scarcely conquer. At the doors of the houses stood grimy women with their arms folded and their hair disordered. Grimier boys and girls had tied a rope to broken railings, and were swinging on it. The common door to a score of lodgings stood ever open, and the children swarmed up and down the stairs carrying with them patches of mud every time they came in from the street. The wholesome practice which amongst the decent poor marks off at least one day in the week as a day on which there is to be a change; when there is to be some attempt to procure order and cleanliness; a day to be preceded by soap and water, by shaving, and by as many clean clothes as can be procured, was unknown here. There was no break in the uniformity of squalor; nor was it even possible for any single family to emerge amidst such altogether suppressive surroundings. All self-respect, all effort to do anything more than to satisfy somehow the grossest wants, had departed. 31

Not only is there no sense of God or of spirituality in this wretched area, but the "atheist mission" is exerting all possible influence to prevent its arising. Mark and M'Kay attend a few of the meetings,


31 Deliverance, pp. 24-25.
where we were entertained with demonstrations of the immorality of the patriarchs and Jewish heroes, and arguments to prove that the personal existence of the devil was a myth, the audience breaking out into uproarious laughter at the comical delineations of Noah and Jonah.  

At one meeting there is a debate between a Christian preacher and a famous atheist (identifiable as the debate between Father Ignatius, a Benedictine Anglican, and Charles Bradlaugh which Hale White reported in *The Birmingham Post*).  

The Christian offers all the old conventional and unconvincing arguments, but is totally unable to sway a single person—a demonstration of the failing attraction and increasing irrelevance of traditional Christianity. Mark and M'Kay, however, have nothing but scorn for the sceptics who "spend so much time in picking the Bible to pieces when there is so much positive work for them to do. . . . To waste a Sunday morning in ridiculing such stories as that of Jonah [is] surely as imbecile as to waste it in proving their verbal veracity."  

M'Kay who has "a passionate desire to reform the world," is tormented by the daily spectacle of degradation and misery and resolves to do something to alleviate it. Mark is in sympathy with him, but the question of what to do is difficult.

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32 Ibid., p. 13.
34 *Deliverance*, p. 16.
Without money or backing, they can do nothing to relieve material or physical suffering. Their own religious beliefs are so elemental and tenuous that they hesitate to promote them. If he had an opportunity to preach in St. Paul's Cathedral, Mark says, his sermon would have to be, "Dear Friends, I know no more than you know; we had better go home." M'Kay persists, however; he rents a room and announces a meeting, in which he tells the few assembled curiosity seekers that he offers them a chance to "find some quietude, instruction, and what fortifying thoughts he [can] collect to enable men to endure their almost unendurable sufferings," and that he means "to teach Christ in the proper sense of the word,"\(^{35}\) by which he means Christ as a human example. This speech is received with indifference and derision, but M'Kay is steadfast. Mark continues, though doubtfully, to support him, and in this effort Mark may be seen as taking his first positive step to do something for someone other than himself. Their efforts are largely unsuccessful. Mark, at least, is in the existential position of working toward a goal he believes unrealizable while sustained by no tenable creed in his own mind, simply because the situation demands the effort. He never is able to make the easy transition of some other doubters from "God takes care . . ." to "Since God will not take care of us, we must

\(^{35}\)Ibid., pp. 27-28.
take care of each other." With no confidence in his effectiveness he works stoically at M'Kay's mission, having little success and hoping for none. The two men do not "convert Drury Lane, but [save] two or three." A coal porter, a waiter with an alcoholic wife, an eccentric commercial traveler, an office drudge filled with tormenting aspirations and speculations--"such were some of our disciples." To each one M'Kay and Mark try to give the exact, personalized help he needs. "Our main object was to create in our hearers contentment with their lot, and even some joy in it," says Mark. "That was our religion." 36

In the work Mark achieves a degree of happiness.

I had once more gained a road, a religion, in fact, and one which essentially was not new but old, the religion of the Reconciliation, the reconciliation of man with God; differing from the current creed in so far as I did not lay stress on sin as the cause of estrangement but yet agreeing with it in making it my duty of duties to suppress revolt and to submit calmly and sometimes cheerfully to my Creator. This surely, under a thousand disguises, has been the meaning of all the forms of worship that we have seen in the world. 37

To rest in scepticism or indifference is not enough, Mark insists. Each person must make the effort to find "some faith" which he can hold as his own. The fact that he will not have a "completed system, perfect in all points" must not deter him. There are no answers to the problems of

36 Deliverance, p. 83. 37 Ibid., p. 84.
tribulation and death, and it is foolish to waste time trying to understand everything: "No theory of the world is possible. The storm, the rain slowly rotting the harvest, children sickening in cellars are obvious; but equally obvious are an evening in June, the delight of men and women with each other, in music, and in the exercise of thought."  

It is not doubt which makes life unbearable, but the dogmatism which lies under doubt. It is dogmatism, therefore, which must be avoided at all costs. If belief is unsatisfactory, so is denial:

The proper attitude, the attitude enjoined by the severest exercise of the reason is, I do not know; and in this there is an element of hope, now rising and now falling, but always sufficient to prevent that blank despair which we must feel if we consider it settled that when we lie down under the grass there is an absolute end.

The traditional emphasis on personal salvation is also to be avoided; a concern with one's own future life is selfish and short-sighted, for one should be concerned with that within himself which is worthy of salvation—"immortal truth. If the truth lives, we live, and if it dies, we are dead." Ideally, one should make every effort to "replace the care for self . . . by a care for the universal," an effort which may seem to be out of the reach of man, but which is implied by "every ordinary unselfish act."  

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38 Ibid., p. 85.  
39 Ibid., p. 86.
mother's concern for her child, for instance, is a "sublime anticipation" of the ideal. 40

Immediately after this meditation, Mark begins again to tell of the work he and M'Kay are doing in the slums, as if to emphasize his belief that concern for another--M'Kay's concern for the slum-dweller, like that of the mother for her child--is an approach to the "care for the universal." As Nature contains an "infinite Pity, healing all wounds, softening all calamities, ever hastening to alleviate and repair," so man at his best, or even at less than his best, exhibits pity, compassion, and love.

Men are not to be debarred by reason of weakness from doing what little good may lie in reach of their hands. Had we attempted to save scholars and thinkers we should have deserved the ridicule with which no doubt we shall be visited. We attempted to save nobody. We knew no salvation ourselves. We humbly attempted to bring a feeble ray of light into the dwellings of two or three poor men and women... 41

Benevolence is not the only outlet for Mark's increasing ability to love. At this point he encounters the woman with whom he was in love in his youth, the engagement having been broken when Mark perceived the incompatibility which his departure from orthodoxy necessarily involved. Now ready to accept individuals as themselves rather than as responses to his own expectations, he regains his affection for her and they marry; Hale White in several of his novels seems to

40 Ibid., pp. 87-88.  
41 Ibid., p. 92.
parallel human love with salvation. Mark and Ellen's life together is difficult and complicated by his long work hours and inadequate pay, the gulf between him and his young stepdaughter, and Ellen's critical illness; but at last, with most of the problems solved, they go on a Sunday picnic. Here they experience a few hours of Wordsworthian happiness. Another Bedford pilgrim, Mark has reached his own Beautiful City; and it is the end of his pilgrimage, for a month later he is dead of a heart attack.

What, exactly, is the "deliverance" of Mark Rutherford? He uses the word only once, when he refers to Ellen's recovery from typhoid fever. The presence of the word in the title, however, suggests hope and even adds some suspense to a narrative otherwise devoid of all suspense. The cynic might say that in a life so plagued by outward and inward problems the "deliverance" is his death itself. Wilfred Stone indicates that it is the achieving of "peace in the face of pain and hardship"; 42 certainly this is what happens to Mark, and the concept is at least a contributory theme in White's other novels. Yet there is something more. Mark has moved from the tortured self-centeredness of his youth to a mature acceptance of other people and a sincere desire to do good. His progress has been so much like that of Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh, that one might almost suppose that White wrote

42Religion and Art of William Hale White, p. 104.
with the pages of *Sartor Resartus* open before him. From utmost misery and doubt Mark has passed through the Centre of Indifference, where he, like Teufelsdröckh, though less dramatically, has said, "Fly then, false shadows of Hope; I will chase you no more, I will believe you no more. And ye, too, haggard spectres of Fear, I care not for you." Mark learns to recognize the importance of Annihilation of Self, the revelation of God in Nature, and the need of humanity for compassion: "The poor Earth, with her poor joys, was now my needy Mother, not my cruel Stepdame; man, with his so mad Wants, and so mean Endeavours, had become the dearer to me; and even for his sufferings and sins I now first named him Brother." He learns also that man has no vested right to happiness; as Teufelsdröckh asks, "What Act of Legislature was there that thou shouldst be happy?" or, as Mark puts it, I remember the day and the very spot on which it flashed into me, like a sudden burst of the sun's rays, that I had no right to this or that--to so much happiness, or even so much virtue. What title-deeds could I show for such a right? Straightway it seemed as if the centre of a whole system of dissatisfaction were removed, and as if the whole system collapsed.

Mark comes to understand that "there is in man a HIGHER than

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44. Ibid., p. 171.  
45. Ibid., p. 174.  
Love of Happiness: he can do without Happiness,"\textsuperscript{47} and he "lays well to heart" the precept, "Do the Duty which lies nearest thee."\textsuperscript{48} At last, Teufelsdröckh says, "The mad primeval Discord is hushed . . . deep silent rock-foundations are built beneath, and the skyey vault with its everlasting Luminaries above instead of a dark wasteful chaos, we have a blooming, fertile, heaven-encompassed World."\textsuperscript{49} Mark makes this description concrete as he tells of the final Sunday afternoon picnic. Away from the noise, misery, and smoke of London, they are sitting on a high hill near Guildford.

Every now and then [the wind] died down to almost nothing, and then slowly swelled and died again, as if the gods of the place were engaged in divine and harmonious talk. By moving a little . . . we beheld the plain all spread out before us, bounded by the heights of Sussex and Hampshire. It was veiled with the most tender blue, and above it was white on the horizon and deepened by degree into azure over our heads.\textsuperscript{50}

The "rock-foundations" below, the sky above, and the beauty of a "heaven-encompassed" world are Mark's as well as Teufelsdröckh's, and for much the same reasons if not in the same order of importance—acquiescence in the overall scheme of things, adherence to duty, and love of humanity.

Hale White's next novel, \textit{The Revolution in Tanner's Lane}, published in 1887, also tells the story of a man whose

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{47}Carlyle, \textit{Sartor Resartus}, p. 174.
  \item \textsuperscript{48}Ibid., p. 177.
  \item \textsuperscript{49}Ibid., p. 178.
  \item \textsuperscript{50}Deliverance, p. 127.
\end{itemize}
philosophy of life moves from the cramped Calvinism of the Independents to the detachment of a truly independent thinker. This transformation is accomplished, however, without visible pain. In the first half of the novel Zachariah Coleman is a devout Independent, with only his tolerance and affection for the free-thinking Frenchman Caillaud and his daughter Pauline to indicate any difference from the rest of the congregation; in the last half, after a break of twenty years, he is represented as—or at least implied to be—a devout sceptic, and the exact steps in this metamorphosis are omitted.

This break in time in The Revolution of Tanner's Lane makes it an unsatisfactory novel in more ways than one; it is really two separate stories connected only by the fact that Zachariah is a character in both of them. The novel gets its name from the "revolution" in and liberation of the church in Tanner's Lane in the latter story, a revolution entirely irrelevant to the first story or to the life of Zachariah. The attitudes of the author as shown in Revolution in Tanner's Lane, however, form a bridge from the religious acquiescence and the attention to duty of Mark Rutherford to the ideal of self-abnegation expressed in a later novel and for this reason are worth consideration.

In 1814 Zachariah is a young printer, married to a completely incompatible wife and struggling to accept his ill fortune as the will of God to which he must submit.
Almost accidentally he becomes involved with the "Friends of the People," a radical organization. The group sponsors a march on London, intended to be a peaceful demonstration for universal suffrage, annual Parliaments, and increased rights for the poor. Zachariah, Caillaud, and others, realizing the foolhardiness of the march as it gathers ill-prepared and emotional volunteers, nevertheless accompany it in the hope of exercising some control. Through a series of unfortunate mishaps Caillaud kills a soldier; he and Zachariah are henceforth hunted men. At last Caillaud is captured and sentenced to hang, whereupon Zachariah leaves his secure hiding place and goes to visit him, placing friendship above safety and, naturally, being imprisoned as an accessory himself. Caillaud dies serenely, in spite of the fact that "this does not happen to be one of those revolutions that men will remember"; for he considers his sacrifice for the sake of the unfortunate the only possible course for a man of honor. For the rest of Zachariah's life he cherishes the memory of the noble Caillaud. In this novel White sets up the ideal of total self-abnegation for the sake of the poor and the oppressed which he only hinted at in The Deliverance of Mark Rutherford. He also first articulates the thought of death for one's cause; but perhaps this too is dimly foreshadowed in the epigraph of the Deliverance, a quotation from an

anonymous Greek author: "Having death for my friend, I
tremble not at shadows."

Two others of White's novels, Miriam's Schooling and
Catherine Furze, are only tangentially connected with his
recurring theme of sacrifice for humanity. Miriam learns
the rewards of resignation and acquiescence; Catherine dis-
covers the saving grace of human love. In Clara Hopgood,
however, White brought to a climax his development of the
concept of the private and public giving of oneself for
humanity.

Clara and Madge Hopgood are the daughters of a bank
manager, now dead, who was an unusual man in his indifference
to religion and his concern for the education of his daughters.
Both of them have studied for a time in Weimar, where "in
the evening, they could see Egmont or hear Fidelio, or talk
with friends about the last utterance on the Leben Jesu"--an
education which has completely unfitted them for life in
Fenmarket, where they are considered "odd, not to say a
little improper" because they read books and know what is
going on in the world. In an early chapter the reader is
allowed to observe the sisters in a chess game, in which
their contrasting natures are made clear: Madge, the younger,
plays impetuously and carelessly, never troubling to work
out a strategy for the game. Clara, however, declares, "The
planning and the forecasting are the soul of the game. I
should like to be a general and play against armies and
calculate the consequences of manoeuvres." With feminine
directness the girls bring the conversation around to
matters of love, and Madge declares that she would no more
use her head in love than she does in chess; only instinct
would serve.

Before long she has an opportunity to test her theory,
and she falls in love with the attractive but mediocre Frank
Palmer. Frank returns her feeling, and the romance is for a
time very happy. Soon, however, Madge begins to see Frank's
intellectual inferiority to her. He has no opinion whatever
on Tennyson's poems, and when he decides to memorize some-
thing to please her he chooses Wordsworth's "Intimations of
Immortality," which she regards as "cloudy" and meaningless. 52
Still, the fact that he took the trouble to please her is
significant, and his affectionate charm holds her spellbound
until the event occurs which causes Madge to cry dramatically
to her mother, "What is the worst that can happen to a woman?
... It has happened to me, mother; your daughter has
wrecked your peace forever!" Certainly this predicament is
not uncommon in the Victorian novel, but Madge's reaction to
it is. Knowing that she can never be happy with Frank and
wishing to save him disgrace and unhappiness, she flatly

52 In 1897 Hale White reviewed Wordsworth's poems in The
Athenaeum and attacked "Intimations of Immortality" as one of
the weaker poems: "it is desultory [and] will not stand
examination . . . by the reason." Athenaeum, No. 3648 (Sep-
tember 25, 1897), 412.
refuses to marry him: "I know what you are going to say. I know what is the crime to the world; but it would have been a crime, perhaps a worse crime, if a ceremony had been performed by a priest, and the worst of crimes would be that ceremony now. I must go." The family moves to London. Madge, as is natural, is much depressed, and not the least of her troubles is the sense of what she has done to her mother and sister.

Had she believed in the common creed, her attention would have been concentrated on the salvation of her own soul; she would have found her Redeemer and would have been comparatively at peace; she would have acknowledged herself convicted of infinite sin, and hell would have been opened before her, but above the sin and the hell she would have seen the distinct image of the Mediator abolishing both. Popular theology makes personal salvation of such immense importance that, in comparison therewith, we lose sight of the consequences to others of our misdeeds. The sense of cruel injustice to those who loved her remained with Madge perpetually.

The penalty they pay for her misdeeds is even more stringent than Madge is able to imagine. When her "condition" becomes apparent to the London landlady, they are ordered to leave their lodgings; and Mrs. Hopgood in hunting for another place to live is exposed to cold and rain, becomes ill with "inflammation of the lungs," and dies. With her dies her annuity, and the girls are faced with the problem of life for three people on seventy-five pounds a year.


Clara is able to find employment in a bookshop, where although the working conditions are bad the employer is kind and she is able to spend her spare moments in reading Carlyle. Here she meets Baruch Cohen, a Jewish lens-maker who has spent much of his life in study and thought.

He believed after a fashion in the Jewish sacred books, or, at any rate, read them continuously, although he had added to his armoury defensive weapons of another type. In nothing was he more Jewish than in a tendency to dwell upon the One, or what he called God, clinging still to the expression of his forefathers although departing so widely from them. In his ethics and system of life, as well as in his religion, there was the same intolerance of a multiplicity which was not reducible to unity. He seldom explained his theory, but everybody who knew him recognized the difference it wrought between him and other men. There was a certain concord in everything he said and did, as if it were directed by some enthroned but secret principle.

The name "Baruch" and the word "ethics" are keynotes here, for, as Wilfred Stone remarks, Cohen "is the very embodiment of Spinoza's unorthodox Hebraism." Earlier, it may be recalled, White had translated Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics*, and the influence of this man, called "the patron saint of unbelievers," affected him for the rest of his life. The concept of God as "infinite substance with infinite


56 *Religion and Art of William Hale White*, p. 162.

attributes"\textsuperscript{58} as opposed to the anthropomorphic God, the concept of the union of body and mind, and the doctrine of immortality as "not a continuance of existence" (as the minister at Mardon's funeral predicts in the \textit{Autobiography}) were all ideas which Hale White strove to accept as his own and which he incorporated into his books. Since he wrote a new preface to his translation between 1892 and 1894, obviously the influence was renewed just before he wrote \textit{Clara Hopgood} in 1895. Like Spinoza, Baruch Cohen is a lens maker, had a father who came from Holland, believes in mathematics as the "foundation" of the universe, and falls in love with a girl named Clara.\textsuperscript{59} Oddly enough, Cohen is in some ways also very much like his author; White, in his eagerness to identify himself with Cohen, has damaged his character's consistency. The creation of this genuinely admirable figure, however, adds significance to the narrative, and Cohen and Clara's mutual, though unspoken, love ennobles both of them.

Baruch was now in love. He had fallen in love with Clara suddenly and totally. His tendency to reflectiveness did not diminish his passion: it rather augmented it. The men and women whose thoughts are here and there continually are not the people to feel the full force of love. Those who do feel it are those who are accustomed to think of one thing at a time, and to think upon it for a long time. "No man," said Baruch once "can love a woman unless he loves God." "I should

\textsuperscript{58}William Kelley Wright, \textit{A History of Modern Philosophy} (New York, 1941), p. 100.

say," smilingly replied the Gentile, "that no man can love God unless he loves a woman."
"I am right," said Baruch, "and so are you."60

In spite of Clara's reciprocal feeling, however, she cannot let him declare himself.

A husband was to be had for a look, for a touch, a husband whom she could love, a husband who could give her all her intellect demanded. A little house rose before her eyes as if by Arabian enchantment; there was a bright fire on the hearth, and there were children round it; without the look, the touch, there would be solitude, silence and a childless old age, so much more to be feared by a woman than by a man. Baruch paused, waiting for her answer, and her tongue actually began to move with a reply, which would have sent his arm round her, and made them one for ever, but it did not come. Something fell and flashed before her like lightning from a cloud overhead, divinely beautiful, but divinely terrible.

"I remember," she said, "that I have to call in Lamb's Conduit Street to buy something for my sister. I shall just be in time."61

The "lightning" which has flashed for Clara is the sudden knowledge that Cohen would be a perfect husband for Madge. With the calculation of the general she long ago wished to be, she plans her strategy of throwing the two together. As she has foreseen, she is successful; Madge's future happiness and that of her baby are secure; in spite of the tears Clara has shed in private, she is able to tell Madge with complete sincerity that she is "perfectly happy."

Some weeks before this event, Clara had the opportunity of meeting Mazzini, the famous Italian patriot and revolutionary, who has stirred her imagination. Now she returns

60 Clara Hopgood, p. 223. 61 Ibid., p. 265.
to him and volunteers to join his forces. Eighteen months later she is dead, and Baruch and Madge never find out any details of her death. When their daughter at the age of ten asks why Aunt Clara went to Italy and died, Baruch answers, "Because she wanted to free the poor people of Italy who were slaves." 62

Irvin Stock declares that this is "the saddest of Hale White's endings," for Clara's sacrifice for Madge is unknown and misunderstood. 63 This pronouncement heightens the drama of the novel, to be sure, but it is not completely justified. Clara's sacrifice for Madge is never known, but to have it known would spoil it. She does not go to Italy as a broken-hearted refugee from love, as may be seen in Mazzini's probing of her motives: "Is it a personal disappointment which sends you to me, or love for the cause? It is not uncommon to find that young women, when earthly love is impossible, attempt to satisfy their cravings with a love for that which is impersonal." Clara answers steadily, "My motives are perfectly pure." The love which she could have given Baruch has been put entirely aside for the greater good of Madge's happiness, and the sacrifice of her love for one person is only the preliminary to the sacrifice of her

62 Ibid., p. 298.
63 William Hale White, p. 220.
life for many. Years later Mazzini says to Madge, "The theologians represent the Crucifixion as the most sublime fact in the world's history. It was sublime, but let us reverence also the Eternal Christ who is for ever being crucified for our salvation." Clara's sacrifice and death may thus be seen as the result of White's intentional effort to create a Christ-figure, one of the Victorian prototypes for the many such characters in twentieth-century fiction. She is a realization of the dream of Mrs. Linton's Richard Fullerton: "Man the God Incarnate! . . . Yes, the myth was true."

Shortly after the Autobiography and the Deliverance had appeared, William Dean Howells commented that they were "two books which may yet mark a new era in English fiction."

Though White has never been widely or popularly acclaimed, he has been praised by such diverse authors as D. H. Lawrence, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, Stephen Crane, and Andre Gide. Much of the praise was for his trenchant style, his enshrinement of truth, and his insight into the soul. Howells says, "Throughout his doctrinal stumblings and gropings Mark Rutherford finds his happiness only in that highest good which Christ taught in the highest degree--good to others.

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64 Clara Hopgood, p. 298.
66 Merton, Mark Rutherford, p. 165.
This is the key-note of his story, touched throughout, but never with maudlin pathos or rhetorical flourish." It was a keynote he was never to lose.

67 "Editor's Study," p. 485.
CHAPTER V

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD: "GAIN AND LOSS"

Mrs. Humphry Ward's Robert Elsmere marks the zenith of the novel of religious doubt. A compendium of the religious attitudes of the period, it was intended by its author to be a thoughtful, relatively objective popularization of the new religious thinking. Its success was far beyond her expectations. Seven editions in three-volume form were sold in four months, and over 44,000 copies of the inexpensive one-volume edition in two years. It has been said that Mrs. Ward "reflected in her books the controversial issues of her youth long after the world had passed them by." However, the popular demand for Elsmere, and indeed for many of her later books, indicated that only a part of the world--the intellectual elite--had passed by the controversial issues she described. The popularity of her novels also indicated that--surprisingly, in view of her intellectual upbringing--she had an acute sense of what her readers would like and how to convey her information palatably. Vineta Colby comments,

Her books said what her readers wanted to hear--not so much smugly confirming their prejudices and preconceptions as airing their questions.

marshaling pertinent evidence and information, and finally guiding but not pushing them to a more rational, enlightened position. Mrs. Ward's readers knew that, although more learned than most of them, she was "one of us."²

Some commenters have taken Mrs. Ward's Robert Elsmere to be, like Mrs. Linton's Christopher Kirkland, a disguised autobiography. The novel has been described as

a piece of confessional literature, profoundly autobiographical and written not in a state of calm resignation and retrospect like The Autobiography [of Mark Rutherford], but with much sorrow and suffering, the author being frequently "shaken with tears" during its composition.³

Even a cursory examination of Mrs. Ward's early life should show the error of this assumption.

The granddaughter of Dr. Thomas Arnold and niece of Matthew Arnold, Mary Augusta Ward was born in 1851 and grew up in what might be considered a rarefied intellectual environment and one in which religious concerns predominated. When she was fourteen her father Thomas moved to Oxford, where he had for some years a lectureship in history.

During this same year she wrote in her diary,

Read Uncle Matt's Essay of Pagan and Mediaeval Religious Sentiment. Compares the religious feeling of Pompeii and Theocritus with the religious feeling of St. Francis and the German


³Margaret M. Maison, The Victorian Vision: Studies in the Religious Novel (New York, 1961), p. 256. The source of the quotation "shaken with tears" is not given; the implied event does not appear in either Mrs. Ward's memoirs or her daughter's biography.
Reformation. Contrasts the religion of sorrow as he is pleased to call Christianity with the religion of sense, giving to the former for the sake of propriety a slight pre-eminence over the latter. ⁴

Oxford in 1865 was still stirred by talk of *Origin of Species, Essays and Reviews,* and the movement for abolition of the disabilities of Dissenters. The sermons, the lectures, and the conversations about new religious and scientific ideas were a part of everyday life in the Arnold home. In addition, Mary's intelligence and studiousness made her, even at this early age, interesting to her father's intellectual friends. She became something of a protégée of Mark Patterson, the sceptical Rector of Lincoln, and J. R. Green, the historian, who both encouraged her in her study of early Spanish literature and history. When, at twenty, she married Humphry Ward, a fellow and tutor in Brasenose College, her circle of acquaintances widened; she became, for instance, a close friend of the T. H. Greens. Her enthusiasm and intellectual curiosity led her not only to make friends but form a great many decided opinions. She wrote to her father in 1871,

> Just now it seems to me that one cannot make one's belief too simple or hold what one does believe too strongly. Of dogmatic Christianity I can make nothing. Nothing is clear except the personal character of Christ and that view of him as the founder and lawgiver of a new

society which struck me years ago in Ecce Homo.
And the more I read and think over the New Testament the more impossible it seems to me to accept what is ordinarily called Christianity.⁵

In 1876 a Mrs. Arthur Johnson began to paint her portrait and noted in her own diary,

She talked of deep, most interesting subjects, and attention to the arguments and drawing too was too much for one's head! I was surprised at the full extent of her vague religion. Jowett is her great admiration and Matt Arnold her guide for some things. She is great on the rising Dutch and French and German school of religious thought, very free criticism of the Bible, entire denial of miracle, our Lord only a great teacher. . . . And yet it is all a striving after righteousness, sincerity, truth.⁶

The next year Mary Ward was asked to write a number of lives of early Spanish ecclesiastics for the Dictionary of Christian Biography, an employment which stimulated her interest in the problems of Christianity and, as her daughter says,

she began to feel the enormous importance to the believer of the historical testimony on which the whole fabric rested, while her keen historical imagination enabled her to grasp the mentality of those distant ages which produced for us the literature of the New Testament. . . . At the same time she became more and more attracted by the romance and mystery of Christianity when stripped of the coating of legend which pious hands had given it.⁷

This process of thought, which Mrs. Ward herself later referred to as an "intellectual experience,"⁸ has elsewhere

⁵Ibid., p. 33. Italics mine.
⁶Ibid., p. 28.
⁷Ibid., p. 32.
⁸Mrs. Humphry Ward, A Writer's Recollections (New York, 1918), I, 222.
been summarized: "Her investigations into the great problems of the value of testimony as to historic facts resulted in the loss of all faith in the supernatural element of Christianity, a process which she has reproduced most faithfully in Robert Elsmere." That a woman of whom it had already been said that she spoke of "entire denial of miracles, our Lord only a great teacher" should have "lost her faith" only at this juncture is incredible.

The incident which, according to Mrs. Ward, caused her to write Robert Elsmere was a sermon preached by John Wordsworth in 1881, in which he declared that the causes of unbelief "were (1) prejudice; (2) severe claims of religion; (3) intellectual faults, especially indolence, coldness, recklessness, pride, and avarice." Appalled by what she considered an attack on "the patient scholars and thinkers of the Liberal host, Stanley, Jowett, Green of Balliol, Lewis Nettleship, Henry Sidgwick, my uncle," Mary Ward determined to "show England what was really going on" by "a picture of actual life and conduct." It was some years before she began to write the novel, however, during which time she published a children's book, a short novel, and several "socio-literary" periodical articles, and translated Amiel's

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10 *A Writer's Recollections*, I, 224.
11 Ibid.

Journal Intime from French to English. In 1885 her apprenticeship was over, and she began to write Robert Elsmere. To finish it required two years of writing and nine months of revising and proof-reading.

Christopher Kirkland was an introvert from the beginning. Mark Rutherford found it difficult to make friends. Robert Elsmere, however, is a well-balanced, sociable, basically normal young man—at school "keen about everything, bright, popular, excellent at games"; at college "a youth of many friends" whom it was "not only delightful, but profitable to love." At Oxford Robert is exposed to two men whose lasting influence on him is carefully calculated to represent two varieties of the new religious thought. Langham, his tutor, is a man whose agnosticism has robbed him of purpose and interest in life—reminiscent of Clough, but said by Mrs. Ward's daughter Janet Trevelyan to be modeled on Amiel. In contrast, the other influence on Robert is Henry Grey, based on the Oxford thinker T. H. Green. Grey is a Hegelian idealist, and his lay-sermon on "Death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness" is a revelatory experience for the freshman Robert:

What did the Apostle mean by a death to sin and self? What were the precise ideas attached to

12 Mrs. Humphry Ward, Robert Elsmere (London, 1914), p. 46. All references to this novel hereafter will be to this edition, and footnotes will be given only for those quotations which the reader might wish to see in their original context.

13 Ibid., p. 51

14 Trevelyan, Life, p. 51.
the words "risen with Christ? Are this death and this resurrection necessarily dependent upon certain alleged historical events? Or are they not primarily, and were they not, even in the mind of St. Paul, two aspects of a spiritual progress perpetually re-enacted in the soul of man, and constituting the veritable revelation of God? Which is the stable and lasting witness of the Father: the spiritual history of the individual and the world, or the envelope of miracle to which hitherto mankind has attributed so much importance?15

When at the end of his college career Robert suddenly announces that he has decided to "take orders," Grey, after a pause, says, "You will probably be very happy in the life. The Church wants men of your sort." Langham's response is different: "Well, after all, the difficulty lies in preaching anything. One may as well preach a respectable mythology as anything else." When he goes on to say that mythology is "simply ideas, or experiences, personified," Robert disagrees. "I don't understand you... To the Christian, facts have been the medium by which ideas... have been communicated to man. Christian theology is a system of ideas indeed, but of ideas realized, made manifest in facts." Langham considers all that Robert has to say on the subject and concludes, "He imagines he has satisfied his intellect, and he has never so much as exerted it."16

Before Robert is established in his first parish, he falls in love with and marries Catherine Leyburn, a deeply religious young woman with "a delicate austere charm" and a

15Ibid., p. 58. 16Ibid., pp. 65-66.
passion for rectitude and charitable works. Catherine is intended to represent staunch, traditional Christianity; Janet Trevelyan says that she is a composite of Mrs. Ward's "own kinswomen."¹⁷ For some months they live in blissful happiness; Robert is happy in his work and popular with his parishioners, while Catherine, the ideal minister's wife, supports him wholeheartedly and works among the poor. On Grey's advice, however, Robert tries to reserve some time for "the intellect," and when Langham comes to visit he finds the young man reading Darwin, though insisting, "But the old truth remains the same." He is also reading in the well-stocked library of Squire Wendover and writing a historical paper. He has progressed far enough to be aware of the value of "testimony," the effect of the time and the environment on what any given writer has to say. "It is enormously important," he says, and Langham comments silently, "I should think it is; the whole of orthodox Christianity is in it, for instance!"¹⁸

Robert serenely continues his studies, however, quite unaware that he is sharpening both his historical and his scientific senses for the crisis which is to come. It soon arrives, when he decides to read the book The Idols of the Market-place written by Squire Wendover, who has spent his

¹⁷Life, p. 51.
¹⁸Ward, Robert Elsmere, p. 199.
life in study, particularly in Germany. The book is one in which "each stronghold of English popular religion had been assailed in turn. . . . The Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Gospels, St. Paul, Tradition, the Fathers, Protestantism and Justification by Faith, the Eighteenth Century, the Broad Church Movement, Anglican theology--the squire had his say about them all." Robert reads far into the night.

Suddenly it was to Robert as though a cruel torturing hand were laid upon his inmost being. His breath failed him; the book slipped out of his grasp; he sank down in his chair, his head in his hands. O what a desolate intolerable moment! Over the young idealist there swept a dry destroying whirlwind of thought. Elements gathered from all sources--from his own historical work, from the squire's book, from the secret half-consciousness of his own mind--entered into it, and as it passed it seemed to scorch the heart. 19

Elsmere, however, is not an adolescent Christopher Kirkland, to be conquered in a moment's time. He throws himself vigorously into his work and his studies. Wendover, however, perceives that he is suppressing something. "his religious foundations are gone already, if he did but know it," the older man reflects with grim satisfaction. Deliberately he sets himself to free Robert's excellent mind from the superstition he feels hampers it. He reveals to the young minister the great, though as yet unpublished work of a lifetime--an enormous "History of Testimony." He speaks with particular eloquence on the origins of Christianity, and

19 Ibid., p. 280.
for Elsmere, that hour and a half . . . represented the turning-point of life. . . . In obedience to certain inevitable laws and instincts of the mind, he had for months been tempting his fate, inviting catastrophe. None the less did the first sure approaches of that catastrophe fill him with a restless resistance which was in itself anguish.\(^\text{20}\)

The conversation is not recorded; only a "few fragmentary utterances" are given, and those are Wendover's. W. E. Gladstone in his famous critical article "Robert Elsmere and the Battle of Belief" was to speak bitterly of this omission:

The book speaks indeed of the "long wrestle of the two men," and the like. But of Elsmere's wrestling there is no other trace or sign. What weapons the Rector wielded for his faith, what strokes he struck, has not even in a single line been recorded. The discourse of the Squire points out that theologians are men who decline to examine evidence, that miracles are the invention of credulous ages, that the preconceptions sufficiently explain the results. He wins in a canter. . . . A great creed, with the testimony of eighteen centuries at its back, cannot find an articulate word to say in its defence.\(^\text{21}\)

It is quite true that in this scene the arguments for denial are emphasized, but Mrs. Ward no doubt expected her readers to know the arguments for faith so well that they could read them in for themselves in one brief passage:

> Every now and then the inner protest of an attacked faith would break through in words so full of poignancy, in imagery so dramatic that the squire's closely-knit sentences would

\(^{20}\text{Ibid., p. 316.}\)

\(^{21}\text{Nineteenth Century, XXIV (May, 1888), 769.}\)
be for the moment wholly disarranged. On the whole, he proved himself no mean guardian of all that was most sacred to himself and Catherine, and the squire's intellectual respect for him rose considerably.\textsuperscript{22}

Left alone after the discussion, however, Robert is unable to turn his thoughts from it. Picking up an early critical work by Wendover, he begins to read, but finds it impossible. There rises before him the "image of a purely human Christ--a purely human, explicable, yet always wonderful Christianity. It broke his heart, but the spell of it was like some dream-country wherein we see all the familiar objects of life in new perspectives."\textsuperscript{23} Elsmere has stepped over the line between faith and devout scepticism, and his life is irrevocably altered. For the next several months he is full of misery as he struggles with his own thoughts and tries to keep Catherine, for her own sake, from discovering his state of mind.

The very closeness of Robert and Catherine betrays them, however, for Catherine does see and recognize some small part of her husband's problem. Aware that Christians sometimes go through "difficulties," she waits patiently and lovingly for him to resolve them, even regretting that her own constant and serene faith has not permitted her to have any experiences from which she can help him. The waiting is in vain, however, for one day at the Squire's Robert hears a young

\textsuperscript{22} Ward, Robert Elsmere, p. 316.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 320.
Catholic arguing religion with the old man and is shocked by the sudden realization that his sympathies are not with the Christian. His heart has followed his reason, and he has nothing left. He catechizes himself:

Do I believe in God? Surely, surely! ... Do I believe in Christ? Yes,—in the teacher, the martyr, the symbol. ... But in the Man-God, the Word from Eternity? ... Every human soul in which the voice of God makes itself felt, enjoys, equally with Jesus of Nazareth, the divine sonship and "miracles do not happen"!

It was done. He felt for the moment as Bunyan did after his lesser defeat.\(^{24}\)

Cockshut points out that this passage, perhaps one of the most revealing in the literature of doubt, is given particular poignancy by the mention of Bunyan: the final, decisive recognition that faith is gone is paradoxically like a seventeenth-century conversion.\(^{25}\) Suddenly, instead of crushing sorrow for lost faith Robert feels a "sense of liberty--of infinite expansion."

His elation is immediately erased by the thoughts of the damage his changed feelings will do to his work and to Catherine. Only a curious faith in the example of the human Jesus upholds him. Resolutely he tells Catherine of his change, and the effect on her is what he expects. She sits "stunned, realising with awful force the inadequacy of her

\(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 342. Italics are Mrs. Ward's. The phrase "Miracles do not happen" is quoted from Matthew Arnold.

own fears." Presently she appeals to him, "Did not—did not—Jesus live, and die, and rise again?—can you doubt—do you doubt—that he rose—that he is God—that he is in heaven—that we shall see Him?" Without realizing it, she has touched on the very items that form the basis of his denial—the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the immortality of the human soul. Patiently he explains that "Christ is risen in our hearts, in the Christian life of charity" and that miracle is a "natural product of human feeling and imagination." He adds, "I see God's purpose in quite other proportions. . . . Christianity seems to me small and local . . . . It is not that Christianity is false, but that it is only an imperfect human reflection of a part of the truth."26

For Robert, honesty demands that he resign his comfortable living, since he can neither preach what he does not believe nor compromise by delivering meaningless platitudes. The Elsmeres move to London, where he endeavors, at first unsatisfactorily, to find work among the poor. He attaches himself to a Broad Church vicar who has made the very compromise with conscience which Robert has rejected. Finding his position here difficult, he begins to work under the auspices of a Unitarian group, though he does not become a Unitarian himself. In the beginning he concentrates his work on school-age boys. He has a storytelling hour, and

26 Ward, Robert Elsmere, p. 365.
a "scientific Sunday School" inspired by Huxley's Lay Sermons. Soon he is asked to give a working men's club a series of lectures on the modern interpretation of the New Testament. The core of his teaching is love and service:

He is risen. Not . . . in the beautiful outworn forms and crystallizations of older thought. He is risen—in a wiser reverence and a more reasonable love; risen in new forms of social help inspired by his memory, called afresh by his name. Risen—if you and your children will it—in a church or company of the faithful, over the gates of which two sayings of man's past, into which man's present has breathed two meanings, shall be written:—"In Thee, O Eternal, have I put my trust": and—"This do in remembrance of Me."27

Robert also spends much time in speaking to the wealthy and interesting them in philanthropic work. Most of his time, however, he spends on work with individuals—sending an alcoholic woman to a hospital, comforting a man dying of cancer, reclaiming a wayward boy. Eventually, when he sees that his work in the secularist workmen's club has really borne fruit, he proposes a new, church-like organization which will advocate the greatness of the human Jesus and his teachings.

With the help of wealthy friends whom Robert has convinced of the worthiness of his cause, the organization—"The New Brotherhood of Christ"—begins to take shape. Land is bought, buildings are erected or remodeled, and the great adventure is launched. On the day of the formal opening

27 Ibid., p. 499. Italics are Mrs. Ward's.
those who wish to belong register for membership and receive the "silver badge, bearing the head of Christ" which is to be the symbol of the brotherhood. As the weekly services are developed, they include prayer as an act of adoration, not of petition; a critical explication of a portion of the Gospels, a carefully chosen hymn or psalm, and a prayer of "commendation of the individual, the Brotherhood, the nation, the world, to God." The meeting is dismissed with "Go in peace, in the love of God, and in the memory of His servant, Jesus." Members are encouraged to celebrate their memory of Jesus at their everyday meals in a ceremony not unlike that of the Lord's Supper, and they are required to contribute both money and time, in whatever amount they can, to the Brotherhood and its work.

Although the New Brotherhood thrives, its founder does not. Exhausted from his labors, Elsmere goes with Catherine to the seashore for a vacation. Attempting to save a drowning man, he takes a "gastric and lung chill" which precipitates a "tubercular disease of the larynx." Friends take him to Algiers in the hope of a cure, but the effort is useless. He is brought back to England, where he serenely awaits death, resisting Catherine's efforts to bring him back to the "true comfort--the true help--the Lamb of God sacrificed for us." His only uncertainty seems to be in a

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28 Ibid., pp. 578-579.
wistful desire for a life after death so that he will not be separated from Catherine forever, but even here he is "like a scrupulous child that dares not take for granted more than his father allows him to know." For the rest, he is quite content in his confidence in a God Who cannot be realized in words--"we can only live in Him and die to Him."\(^29\)

After his death Catherine, though her ardor for her own creed never lessens, attends the services of the Brotherhood and devotes her time and money to its causes. The Brotherhood survives and expands, for, though Elsmere's brilliant leadership is gone, "his effort was but a fraction of the effort of the race."\(^30\)

Far from being autobiographical, Robert Elsmere is a carefully planned and organized survey of the Victorian religious scene, with a clearly delineated example of each of the types with which the author is concerned. Elsmere is, of course, the voice of Mrs. Ward's concept of the Modernism of Matthew Arnold; and he may also be considered as the symbol of the change from the old religion to what his creator expected to be the new--a change marred by "the rending asunder of bones and marrow"\(^31\) but culminating in freedom and serenity.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 603.  
\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 604.  
\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 355.
Catherine is the representation of Calvinistic Christianity. She is rather a controversial figure: Clara Lederer calls her a "repellent, evangelical monster"; but Huxley, when he read the novel, wrote to Mrs. Ward that Catherine was "the gem of the book--she reminds me of her namesake of Siena." Andrew Lang, probably more interested in Catherine's literary quality than her saintliness, simply called her "dull." These extreme assessments are altogether too extreme. Catherine is portrayed as skilfully as any other character in the novel, and a reader at all sympathetic with the nobler aspects of Calvinism can give her both admiration and compassion. She is unlike the stereotype of the narrow Evangelical: the perfect earnestness and sincerity of her love of God and of His Son do not lessen her concern for humanity or her enthusiasm for good works, and she is quite capable of giving and receiving human love. Her faults, if they must be called faults, are her rigidity and her inability to tolerate what she feels is Robert's "heretical" faith. Her intolerance is based partly on her conviction that no one comes to the Father but by Jesus Christ and partly on fear that her love for Robert will cause her, in her passionate desire to be one with him,

32 "Mary Arnold Ward and the Victorian Ideal," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, VI (December, 1951), 205.
33 Trevelyan, Life, p. 68.
34 Amy Cruse, After the Victorians (London, 1938), p. 34.
to succumb to his way of thinking. In Catherine’s suffering, Mrs. Ward explores, as no other Victorian writer did, the effect on other people of an individual’s loss of faith. In the end, Catherine has not surrendered, but in a subtle way she has lost her battle:

She would live and die steadfast to the old faiths. But her present mind and its outlook was no more the mind of her early married life than the Christian philosophy of to-day is the Christian philosophy of the Middle Ages. She was not conscious of change, but change there was. She had, in fact, undergone that dissociation of the moral judgment from a special series of religious formulae which is the crucial, the epoch-making fact of our day.

As the words indicate, Catherine is here symbolic of what happens to traditional religion in a time of religious upheaval: try as it will to remain steadfast, it is inevitably altered by its contact with the new thought, and this alteration is one of the major themes of the novel.

Professor Grey, one of Elsmere’s advisers, represents the liberal-intellectual segment of Victorian life. His real-life prototype, T. H. Green, a professor at Balliol in Oxford, propounded a Liberal version of Idealism which is said to have superseded Utilitarianism in England and to have been the basis for the social-action programs which were to come.36 His theology, principally derived from

35 Ward, Robert Elsmere, p. 558.
Hegel, was based on secular humanism; it abandoned miracle, supernatural dogma, and private religious experience for self-denial, good works, and altruism.\textsuperscript{37} Green's teaching was very effective; many of his students became political and social reformers, and he is said to have influenced the thinking of such diverse people as A. C. Bradley, Arnold Toynbee, and Sir Ernest Barker and such opposing organizations as the London Ethical Society (an agnostic organization) and the Christian Social Union.\textsuperscript{38} Mrs. Ward's Grey is modeled on Green in appearance, temperament, and philosophical thought, and Robert's altruistic impulse probably comes from Grey's teaching; but he also performs a representative function, showing Mrs. Ward's concept of an ideal, enlightened philosophy.

Robert's other adviser, Edward Langham, is modeled on Amiel, whose \textit{Journal intime} Mrs. Ward had translated, and is "perhaps the most convincing version in fiction of the condition the late Victorian agnostics most dreaded."\textsuperscript{39} Langham's loss of faith in God is only a preliminary to a loss of faith in humanity as a whole and in himself, his own values, and even his everyday actions.

The uselessness of utterance, the futility of enthusiasm, the inaccessibility of the ideal, the practical absurdity of trying to realise any of the mind's inward dreams: these were

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 30. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{38}Ibid., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{39}Cockshut, \textit{The Unbelievers}, p. 145.
the kind of considerations which descended upon him, slowly and fatally, crushing down the newly springing growths of action or of passion. 40

Handsome and intellectually brilliant, Langham lives in dreary ennui with only an occasional flash of brittle cynicism. His presence in the novel demonstrates Mrs. Ward's conscientious effort to be fair and objective in displaying both the good and the bad sides of agnosticism.

The third major agnostic type is Squire Wendover, based on the Oxford professor and Rector of Lincoln, Mark Pattison, who is also thought to have another fictional parallel in George Eliot's Casaubon. 41 Like both Pattison and Casaubon, Wendover spends his life writing a ponderous historical work which is never published. Like Pattison, he has a family background of mental instability (though Pattison did not have Wendover's final lapse into madness) and a religious history which has progressed from Puritanism through Anglicanism and Puseyism to Rationalism. In his memoirs Pattison wrote,

I passed out of the Catholic phase, but slowly, and in many years, to that highest development when all religions appear in their historical light, as efforts of the human spirit to come to an understanding with that Unseen Power whose pressure it feels, but whose motives are a riddle. . . . There was no conversion or change of view: I could no more have helped what took

40 Ward, Robert Elsmere, p. 53.

place within me than I could have helped being ten years older.\textsuperscript{42} Squire Wendover could have written the same words. Mrs. Ward's picture, drawn from her friendship with the eccentric man who had urged her to scholarly activity, becomes, however, an example of the attack on orthodoxy by the adherents of science, German criticism, and historicism.

Mrs. Ward intimates that there are two kinds of traditional Christians--those who are innocent enough never to have felt a doubt and those who have deliberately repressed their doubts. Catherine, brought up by an exaltedly pious father, is an example of the first kind. The second is represented by Robert's fellow priest Newcome--"a Ritualist clergyman in cassock and long cloak--a saint clearly, though perhaps . . . an irritable one. But he had the saint's wasted unearthly look, the ascetic brow high and narrow, the veins showing through the skin, and a personality as magnetic as it was strong."\textsuperscript{43} Newcome appears to be simply a tediously fanatical clergyman, but Robert respects him for his ten years of heroic labor in the London slums. Taking advantage of the younger man's sympathy, Newcome urges him vehemently to give up his interest in scholarship and learning and "trample on the lusts of the mind no less than the lusts of the body." When, months later, he finds Robert struggling with doubt, Newcome bares his soul:

\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 30. \textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 163.
I have been through darker gulfs of hell than you have ever sounded! Many a night I have felt myself mad--mad of doubt--a castaway on a shoreless sea; doubting not only God or Christ, but myself, the soul, the very existence of good. I found only one way out of it, and you will find only one way. . . . Trample on yourself! Pray down the demon, fast, scourge, kill the body that the soul may live! . . . Fling away the freedom which is your ruin. There is no freedom for man. . . . Better be the Lord's captive than the Lord's betrayer!44

The repressed violence indicated by the repetition of the word "trample," the agonizing self-restraint, the implicit masochism--all are characteristic of the Christian who believes only through rigid self-direction or through fear, but not with his heart. As Mrs. Ward reminds her readers in another context, "'Axioms are not axioms,' said . . . Keats, 'till they have been proved on our pulses.'"

To complete her gallery of contemporary figures, Mrs. Ward adds, though without much emphasis and with carefully restrained praise, a "devoted and orthodox Comtist." Wardlaw and his wife participate in the Comtist rituals and expend all their spare time in teaching and helping the poor; their lives are dull and arbitrarily limited,

but the more Robert knew of them the more profound became his admiration for that patent spirit of social help which in our generation Comtism has done so much to develop, even among those of us who are but moderately influenced by Comte's philosophy, and can make nothing of the religion of Humanity.45

44 Ibid., p. 329. Italics are Mrs. Ward's.
All these varied and contrasting characterizations show the full scope of the religious scene in Mrs. Ward's day. The successful agnostic and the failure; the pure Christian and the one defiled by his self-flagellation; the humanitarian who is not a believer in God—these are the result of Mrs. Ward's careful effort at objective and balanced portrayal. Summed up, they show something of the idea of "loss and gain" in the alteration of religious principles, an idea which John Henry Newman had advanced forty years earlier in his one novel, Loss and Gain. Mrs. Ward titles the final section of Robert Elsmere "Gain and Loss," reminding the reader of Newman but changing the emphasis. Each of her characters both gains and loses, though the balance varies. Mrs. Ward recognizes both the joyous affirmation and the cost of discipleship in the new faith.

Robert Elsmere was published on February 24, 1888. During the next month it was reviewed by most of the major periodicals, but without any indication of the excitement it was to cause. According to Janet Trevelyan, the British Weekly "wept over it"; the Academy compared it to Adam Bede; the Saturday Review "slated it"; the Times called it "a clever attack on revealed religion." Mrs. Ward's favorite review was that of Walter Pater in the Church Guardian; he called the novel a "chef d'oeuvre" of that kind of quiet evolution of character through circumstance, introduced into English literature by Miss Austen and carried to perfection.
in France by George Sand." By the end of March public interest had been aroused; the first edition of 500 copies was exhausted and the second, the beginning of a long series of reprints, had appeared. When Matthew Arnold went to a house party at the home of Lord Pembroke in early April, he found "all the guests there reading it or intending to read it" and added, "George Russell says it is all true about Gladstone's interest in the book." 46

Gladstone was already writing his long review "Robert Elsmere and the Battle of Belief," which appeared in Nineteenth Century in May and eloquently pleaded the cause of orthodoxy. It defended the idea of miracles, the rites and ceremonies of the Church, the necessity of the recognition of sin, the value of "dogma," and the divinity of Christ. Many of the periodicals began to review the article with the novel, and the popularity of Robert Elsmere was accordingly increased; if Gladstone could spend twenty-three pages refuting it, the average reader could spend a few hours reading it. The story of the traveler in London who saw in one omnibus twelve people reading Elsmere was topped by the story of the woman fighting her way through a crowd, hugging a copy of Nineteenth Century and inquiring of a friend, "Oh, my dear, have you read Weg on Bobbie?" 47 Hundreds of people

46 Trevelyan, Life, p. 55.
47 Ibid., p. 64.
wrote to Mrs. Ward praising or denouncing the novel. Ministers preached sermons on it; dinner party guest quarreled over it; literary societies wrote papers on it; "letters to the editor" about it were featured in many newspapers.48

In America, Robert Elsmere was, if possible, more popular than in England. The International Copyright agreement had not yet been completed, and American publishers regularly and systematically "pirated" English books. The Manchester Guardian estimated that by March, 1889, 200,000 copies of Robert Elsmere had been sold in the United States, of which three-fourths were pirated editions. One company made Mrs. Ward a "gift" of a hundred pounds, the only payment she received from an American publisher.49 An enterprising soap company gave as a premium copies of both Elsmere and Gladstone's review to the purchaser of one cake of soap. A Boston drama company produced a "comedy version" for the stage, which fortunately Mrs. Ward was able to stop; and one company published a book of romantic adventures with the deceptive title of "Robert Elsmere's Daughter--a companion story to Robert Elsmere--by Mrs. Humphry Ward."50

More agreeable from Mrs. Ward's point of view was the letter of Oliver Wendell Holmes, who called Elsmere "a medicated

48 Cruse, After the Victorians, p. 34.
49 Life, p. 74.
50 Ibid., pp. 75-76.
novel, which will do much to improve the secretions and clear the obstructed channels of the decrepit theological system." W. R. Thayer wrote,

No book since Uncle Tom's Cabin has had so sudden and wide a diffusion of readers; and I believe that no other book of equal seriousness ever had so quick a hearing. I have seen it in the hands of nursery-maids . . . shop-girls . . . frivolous young women . . . business men, professors, students, and even schoolboys. 51

In London ambitious workingmen's groups attempted to adopt ideas from the "New Brotherhood." In 1889 Mrs. Ward, having visited one of these organizations, began to see the possibility of making the Brotherhood live. In 1890 a "Committee," largely Unitarian, agreed on a plan to establish a Settlement for work among the poor but especially for "an improved popular teaching of the Bible and the history of religion, in order to show the adaptability of the faith of the past to the needs of the present." 52 The basic principles of this teaching were to be, of course, those enunciated in Robert Elsmere. The Settlement was soon established; in 1894 the Committee received a gift which enabled it to build its own building. For many years the establishment was called the Passmore Edwards Settlement in honor of the donor of the building; after Mrs. Ward's death it was re-named the Mary Ward Settlement. During the rest of her life the work of the Settlement was one of Mrs. Ward's major

51 Ibid., p. 77. 52 Ibid., pp. 81-82.
interests. Although the Bible teaching was not very successful, the work of the Settlement with children was extremely effective.\(^\text{53}\)

Having established her reputation as a novelist, Mrs. Ward continued to write novels throughout most of her busy life. None of them ever had the financial success or popularity of *Robert Elsmere*; some of them, indeed, were hardly above the level of magazine fiction. Some of her novels were intended simply as entertainment; others did have a propagandistic element. *Marcella* (1894) and *Sir George Tressaday* (1896) recommended political reforms for social betterment. *Helbeck of Bannisdale* (1898) was a rather melodramatic tragedy of an agnostic girl married to a Catholic, but the interest was in the conflict of personalities rather than any crisis of faith. *Eleanor* (1900) included as a minor character a priest who was defrocked for his interest in Darwin. *The Case of Richard Meynell* (1911) was an attempt to repeat the success of *Elsmere* by characterizing a young Elsmere-like clergyman who, though free of orthodox belief, tries to stay within the Church and rid it of some of the encumbrances of tradition. The doctrinal aspects of the story lack force, however, and the vitality lies in Meynell’s romance with Mary Elsmere, Robert’s daughter grown to womanhood. Mrs. Ward’s only novel after *Elsmere* to treat seriously

\(^{53}\)Ibid., pp. 123-142, 187-206, passim.
the era of religious doubt and its relation to humanitarian-ism was *The History of David Grieve* (1892).

*David Grieve* is a lighter, more readable book than *Robert Elsmere*, for the theological musings, reasonings, and agonizings are largely absent. The plot is somewhat more complicated; one might almost say there are two protagonists, David and his sister Louie. Whereas David is steady and righteous—though agnostic—Louie is wild and rebellious and comes to what proper Victorians no doubt considered an appropriate bad end. It is David, however, who exemplifies the social and humanitarian concerns which Mrs. Ward carries over from *Robert Elsmere*.

David and Louie Grieve, orphaned at seven and five years old, live with their uncle Reuben and his wife Hannah. Hannah resents the children, and her harsh treatment of them gives them no reason to feel drawn by her religion, that of the Evangelical sect of Christian Brethren. At fifteen David is briefly fascinated by a revival-like series of prayer-meetings, but is unable to achieve the ecstatic "conversion" experience of his friends. Coincidentally, just at this time his relationship with his aunt becomes intolerable, and he runs away. When next the reader sees him, he is a young man of nineteen, an assistant to a bookseller in Manchester, and an avid reader of Voltaire and other French philosophers. Largely because contacts with Christianity have been so unsatisfactory, his acceptance of scepticism is
complete and enthusiastic. He attends the Secularist meet-
ings at the Hall of Science, and his Baptist employer calls
him an atheist; "I don't call myself anything," he says.
"I'm all for this world; we can't know anything about
another."\textsuperscript{54}

As soon as David has saved enough money, he opens his
own shop. Intelligent, patient, and industrious, he builds
his business slowly but competently. In spite of insoluble
problems with the difficult Louie, whom he has brought to
live with him, and a broken love affair of his own, he ex-
pands the business to include printing. In his spare time
he reads avidly—Berkeley's \textit{Dialogues}, Huxley's \textit{Lay Sermons},
Hume, Emerson, Carlyle, Ruskin. Berkeley is his favorite:

It was his first serious grapple with the funda-
mental problems of knowledge. And, to a nature
which had been so tossed and bruised in the
great unregarding tide of things, which had felt
itself the mere chattel of a callous universe,
of no account or dignity either to gods or men,
what strange exaltation there was in the general
suggestion of Berkeley's thought! The mind, the
source of all that is; the impressions on the
senses, merely the speech of the Eternal Mind to
ours, a Visual Language, whereof man's understand-
ing is perpetually advancing, which has been
indeed contrived for his education; man, naturally
immortal, king of himself and of the senses, in-
alienably one—if he would but open his eyes and
see—with all that is Divine, true, eternal: the
soul that had been crushed by grief and self-
contempt revived at the mere touch of these vast

\textsuperscript{54}Mrs. Humphry Ward, \textit{The History of David Grieve} (New
York, 1892), p. 186. All references to this novel hereafter
will be to this edition, and footnotes will be given only
for those quotations which the reader might wish to see in
their original context.
possibilities like a trampled plant. Not that it absorbed them yet, made them its own; but they made a healing stimulating atmosphere in which it seemed once more possible for it to grow into a true manhood. The spiritual hypothesis of things was for the first time presented in such a way as to take imaginative hold without exciting or harrowing the feelings; he saw the world reversed, in a pure light of thought, as Berkeley saw it, and all the horizon of things fell back.\textsuperscript{55}

David wishes passionately to live "a life devoted to thought"--to learn until "in Berkeley's language, the darkness part, and it 'recover the lost region of light!'" Briefly he is tempted by the "way of faith" as a quicker way to achieve his aim--the way of faith as exemplified by his friend Dora, a saintly but unintellectual Ritualist--but the thought of the Passion-week sermon which he attended with her dissuades him.

What foolish, sentimental emphasis, what unreality, yet, what a show of it!--an elegant worthless jumble of Gibbon, Horace, St. Augustine, Wesley, Newman, and Mill, mixed with cheap picturesque--with moonlight on the Campagna, and sunset on Niagara--and leading, by the loosest rhetoric, to the most confident conclusions. He had the taste of it in his mouth still.\textsuperscript{56}

David continues his philosophical speculations in preference to this mindless sentimentality.

The business prospers; it becomes "Grieve and Co." and not only sells books but publishes "pamphlets of a political, social, or economical kind" to supply mechanics' institutes and political associations. David is able to work out a

\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 429. \textsuperscript{56}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 430.
profit-sharing system with bonuses to be paid on wages and only a nominal profit for himself, out of which he plans to expend part for "various purposes connected with the well-being of the workers." What he calls "the gospel of getting on" has no appeal for him--

to square the whole of this mysterious complex life to it--to drop into the grave at last, having missed, because of it, all that sheds dignity and poetry on the human lot, all that makes it worthwhile or sane to hope in a destiny for man diviner and more lasting than appears--horrible!57

Eventually, "over years of critical analysis and controversial reading," David works out his own version of Christianity--"positive, fruitful, and human"--which he hopes, as he writes in his diary, "will be the Christianity of the future." Other than remarking in the same entry that he has been reviewing "the whole course of German thought since Schleiermacher," he does not elucidate this new religion in his journal. The didacticism of Robert Elsmere is considerably toned down; Mrs. Ward is trying--as much as her scholarly interests allow--to emphasize experience rather than formal philosophy in David Grieve. The practical humanitarian sense, by which Mrs. Ward lays out detailed plans for improving the condition of the "better-class working-man," therefore, is more evident in David Grieve than it was in Robert Elsmere.

57Ibid., p. 453.
David continues to keep his journal. In it he wonders at the mentality of a man who can profess himself a follower of the Divine spirit but can be so intolerant as to resent freedom of thought and speech in others. He puzzles over the Christian acceptance of a God who interferes arbitrarily with "the ordinary sequences of nature," the preference of the "impulse to imagine," and the paradoxical refusal "to know" where the Bible is concerned. David has by this time abandoned the philosophy of Berkeley: it takes no account of the suffering in the slums. He is again attracted by high church ceremony and ritual, but finds it empty of meaning. "The new English phase of Kantian and Hegelian thought" seems finally to be his answer. Mrs. Ward is, of course, referring again to the teachings of T. H. Green.

As David becomes older, his influence reaches beyond his own workers; he is known as charitable and ready to help any who are needy. "We are not our own--we are parts of the whole. Generations of workers have toiled for us in the past. And are we, in return, to carry our wretched bone off to our own miserable corner!--sharing and giving nothing?" Later, near the close of the novel, he writes, "It is daylight plain to me that in the simplest act of loving self-surrender there is the germ of all faith, the essence of all religion. Quicken human service, purify and strengthen

\[58\text{Ibid., p. 523.}\]
human love, and have no fear but that the conscience will find its God!" 59 

Thus Mrs. Ward presents again the good agnostic—with a difference—David exemplifies an aspect of her thinking which she explained as supplementary to the "intellectual presuppositions" of Robert Elsmere:

the other side of the Greenian or Modernist message—i.e., that life itself, the ordinary life and experience of every day as it has been slowly evolved through history, is the true source of religion, if man will but listen to the message in his own soul, to the voice of the Eternal Friend, speaking through Con-science, through Society, through Nature. 60 

Thus David is a practical man in a secular business rather than a minister like Robert. He reaches the "Modernist" viewpoint not from the starting point of the established Church but from the fringes of Evangelicalism. He is of tougher fiber than Robert, and his humanitarian outlet consists of offering practical material benefits to his men rather than the idealistic dream of transforming their lives by teaching them a new religion—a dream which Mrs. Ward's Settlement was also to find impracticable.

David's practical profit-sharing idea had an ironic result, however. Because of the success of Elsmere, Macmillan paid an extravagant price for the American copyright

59 Ibid., p. 554. 
on David Grieve (the Copyright Bill having become law). A year and a half later Mrs. Ward wrote to her English publisher,

Mr. Brett told me . . . that owing to the description of profit-sharing in David Grieve and the interest roused by it in America, their American branch adopted it last year for all their employees. Then in consequence of David there were no profits to divide! 61

Inexplicably, David did not sell well in the United States. It was better appreciated in England, where it was acclaimed as "the best novel since George Eliot," but even here there were derogatory reviews; the British Weekly called it "an almost absolute failure." 62 Most of the adverse criticism was for the romantic and melodramatic adventures of David and Louise in Paris; none, apparently, was for the pages of didactic philosophy incorporated into the novel as David's diary. According to Mrs. Ward herself, David Grieve elicited more personal response from her readers than did any of her other novels. 63

To assess the precise amount of Mrs. Ward's influence on the substitution of humanitarianism for revelatory religion is difficult. Her popularity has been explained on the basis that she said what everybody else was already thinking. Yet the enormous sales of her books and the enthusiastic--

61 Trevelyan, Life, p. 97.
62 Ibid., p. 99.
though varied--reader response indicates that if this explanation was true she was at least giving a voice to what people were thinking and more probably indicates that she was also giving them a direction in which to think. Other authors of novels of religious doubt discussed the problem and gave tentative or visionary answers. Mrs. Ward made a serious effort to present it objectively, in its true dimensions, calculating the "loss and gain," and then to offer what she felt was a viable way to channel either the worship of Jesus or a vague theistic aspiration into helpful service. That what she said was convincing is attested by the establishment of the Mary Ward Settlement and others like it.

From Mrs. Linton's easy optimism to Mrs. Ward's practical, organized benevolence seems a long way; yet Christopher Kirkland and Robert Elsmere were published only three years apart, and the whole era of the principal novels of religious doubt lasted less than thirty years. In this period of time readers passed from accepting Mrs. Linton's Joshua Davidson as a rather ambiguous fantasy, which they could interpret to please themselves, to Mrs. Ward's David Grieve and Hale White's Clara Hopgood, in which scepticism is taken for granted.

In Joshua Davidson Mrs. Linton discouraged belief in miracles, gave a humanistic interpretation of the sonship of Jesus, and recommended, though she did not outline, aid to the needy; and in Christopher Kirkland and Under Which Lord?
she voiced the transient and facile theory of the evolutionary perfectibility of man. It remained for others to embody in the novel a workable method of alleviating the Victorian religious unrest in a way acceptable to the Victorian conscience. Olive Schreiner, who though English was not a resident of England, chose minority rights as her specific field of endeavor. Hale White and Mary Ward, recognizing the need of the English poor, concentrated their efforts in both their fiction and their personal work on physical, mental, and ethical improvement. The projects they describe are typical of many which were carried on in England between 1880 and 1920 and which are said to have been contributory to "the development of modern British socialism and the concept of the Welfare State."64 Thus the novel of religious doubt, only a minor aspect of Victorian literature, records a vital segment of history.

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