

RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN NOVELS¹

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THE late nineteenth century in the United States witnessed what Professor Arthur M. Schlesinger has aptly called "A Critical Period in American Religion".² The crisis actually was a two-fold one. Firstly, there was the loss of faith resulting largely from the challenges of nineteenth-century science. And secondly, there was the question as to how the churches should cope with the new problems of an urban, industrial society. These concerns were not limited to the United States, of course, as was shown by the excellent B.B.C. talks of a decade ago that were later published as *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*,³ and in many instances American opinion was much influenced by British thought on these matters.

My specific topic is the way in which these religious controversies were reflected in some of the late nineteenth-century American novels. For this purpose I have arbitrarily selected six books published between 1884 and 1897. Three of them might be called theological novels in that they are concerned with the problem of maintaining religious faith in the modern world. They are *Esther*, by Henry Adams; *John Ward, Preacher*, by Margaret Deland; and *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, by Harold Frederic. The other three deal with the social responsibilities of the churches. They are *Annie Kilburn*, by William Dean Howells; *Murvale Eastman, Christian Socialist*, by Albion W. Tourgée; and *In His Steps*, by Charles M. Sheldon.

None of these novels, it should be pointed out at once, is outstanding in an artistic sense. No professor of American

¹ A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 30th of April 1958.

² Arthur Meier Schlesinger, "A Critical Period in American Religion, 1875-1900", *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, lxiv (Boston, 1932), 523-48.

³ *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians* (London, 1949).

literature would be likely to spend time on any of them in his lectures, and he might not even be familiar with their titles. Nevertheless, they are all significant for the student of American social and intellectual history, and it is from that viewpoint that I shall approach them. Indeed, for the historian second-rate novels often have far more value than first-rate ones, for the mediocre volumes may reflect ordinary contemporary opinion more accurately than do the great works of art.

First let us turn to the books discussing the loss of religious faith. Various influences, mostly European in origin, were undermining religious orthodoxy. These included a revulsion against the harshness of Calvinism, the impact of nineteenth-century geology and biology that can be summed up in the phrase Darwinian evolution, the Germanic Higher Criticism of the authenticity of the Bible, and the knowledge of comparative religion which disclosed the common mythological basis of many faiths, including Christianity. These developments were so disturbing, even painful, to many devout Christians and gave rise to so much talk about "The Conflict Between Science and Religion" that it is hardly surprising to find popular novels of the day discussing them.

The first in time of the three novels selected to illustrate this was Henry Adams's *Esther*, which appeared in 1884. Henry Adams was an intelligent, sensitive, subtle and extremely complicated member of one of America's most distinguished families. Great-grandson of President John Adams, grandson of President John Quincy Adams and son of Charles Francis Adams, American minister to Great Britain during the difficult Civil War period, he himself as a young man taught history for a few years at Harvard University but then, having a comfortable private income, settled in Washington, D.C., and devoted the rest of his life to writing and travel. The tremendous reputation that he has acquired in recent years stems largely from his fascinating autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*, now generally regarded as one of the classics of American literature and a landmark in American intellectual history, but his study of the medieval period, *Mont St. Michel and Chartres*, has also won great admiration and his nine-volume *History of the United States*

During the Jefferson and Madison Administrations still ranks high with the historians. In 1880, under the pseudonym of Frances Snow Compton, he published a novel called *Democracy*, which retains considerable interest as a pungent commentary upon the American system of government. Four years later, under the same pseudonym, came *Esther*.

The story centres about St. John's, a newly constructed Episcopalian church on Fifth Avenue in New York City. It is quite typical of the many elaborate edifices (no simpler word will do) which the tremendous increase of wealth and the shift in fashionable residential areas after the Civil War were causing to be built. Adams's description of the handsome glass, the striking murals, the general theatrical air and the society congregation (one almost says audience) is an accurate one. A romance develops between its young minister, the Rev. Stephen Hazard, and Esther Dudley, a wealthy girl with artistic inclinations who is working on the church's decoration. But although Esther is in love with Hazard, she cannot accept his religious ideas and, feeling this would make marriage to a minister insufferable, therefore finally rejects him. On the other hand, neither does she accept her cousin, a scientist named George Strong, who is also in love with her, because, although they are more compatible intellectually, she does not love him the way she does Hazard.

There has often been repeated the comment that Adams made about the novel in a letter in 1891, "I care more for one chapter, or any dozen pages of *Esther*, than for the whole history, including maps and indexes".¹ To some extent this is probably just one of Adams's typically perverse remarks, but it also reflects how much he had based the novel upon actual persons and places that were close to him. Esther herself, it is generally agreed, was modelled upon Adams's own wife, Marian Hooper Adams. Her cousin, the scientist George Strong, seems equally certainly a portrayal of the well-known American geologist Clarence King, who was one of Adams's closest friends. St. John's, with its lavish décor, is reminiscent of the new Trinity Church which

¹ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, 12 February, 1891 (Newton Arvin, ed., *The Selected Letters of Henry Adams* (New York, 1951), p. 158).

had been erected in Boston in the late 1870s when Adams was living in its immediate neighbourhood. Less clearly, the character of the minister, Stephen Hazard, suggests something of the immensely popular rector of Trinity, Phillips Brooks, who also happened to be Adams's second cousin.¹

Hazard is presented as a High Church Episcopalian whose interests seem as much artistic as strictly religious and whose obvious preference for the company of artists and scientists has aroused suspicions as to his orthodoxy. But actually he is completely orthodox. Adams says of him, "seeing that there was no stopping-place between dogma and negation, he preferred to accept dogma".² In his first sermon at St. John's he shows an awareness of the supposed conflict between science and religion, but argues that religion really has nothing to fear from science, since it is still religion alone that explains the ultimate mystery, the origin of the facts of science. At first he is quite confident that sooner or later he will win Esther to his views.

But there is also a strong streak of feminism in Esther. She refuses to be the kind of woman who would accept certain religious ideas simply because they are her husband's, which basically is exactly what Hazard expects her to be. The precise nature of Esther's objections is never explained in detail, except that she comes from a family which simply seems to have lost all interest in religion. She has obviously been influenced by her father, Mr. William Dudley, who pays for a pew at St. John's because "society needs still that sort of police", though he suspects that on that score "he could get more police for his money by giving to the Roman Catholics".³ But he never attends any services and has considerable contempt for clergymen. Why he feels this way is not clear, though the fact that he comes from an old New England family suggests he has carried the pre-Civil War rational Unitarianism of upper class Boston merchants to its logical sceptical conclusion. Esther's upbringing

¹ Henry Adams, *Esther*, Robert E. Spiller, ed. (New York, 1938), pp. xii-xiii, xvii; Robert A. Hume, *Runaway Star: An Appreciation of Henry Adams* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1951), p. 146; J. C. Levenson, *The Mind and Art of Henry Adams* (Boston, 1957), pp. 200-1; Elizabeth Stevenson, *Henry Adams: A Biography* (New York, 1955), pp. 123-5, 177-9.

² Adams, *Esther*, p. 208.

³ *Ibid.* p. 207.

seems to have been very much like Adams's own, which he describes in his autobiography as follows : " The children reached manhood without knowing religion, and with the certainty that dogma, metaphysics, and abstract philosophy were not worth knowing." ¹

Esther's problem, therefore, is not so much a loss of religious faith as it is an inability to find it. After she becomes engaged to Hazard, she desperately reads a great deal of theology which must have been quite dull going, but she merely finds such concepts as the Trinity, the Atonement, miracles, apostolic succession and the Thirty-nine Articles confusing and incomprehensible, while the physical resurrection of the body strikes her as " a shocking idea " .²

In her despair she confers with her scientist cousin, George Strong, described as " a full-fledged German Darwinist " ³ who, however, is not a biologist, but a professor of palaeontology " who looked at churches very much as he would have looked at a layer of extinct oysters in a buried mud-bank " .⁴ But although he is called the " freest of free thinkers " , who is on record as declaring " the whole church a piece of superstition " ,⁵ Strong feels no particular mission to attack the church and indeed would like to ease Esther's path : ⁶

Strong's notion was that since the Church continued to exist, it probably served some necessary purpose in human economy, though he could himself no more understand the good of it than he could comprehend the use of human existence in any shape. Since men and women were here, idiotic and purposeless as they might be, they had what they chose to call a right to amuse themselves in their own way, and if this way made some happy without hurting others, Strong was ready enough to help.

But Esther pushes him : ⁷

" Tell me what you think about religion ! "

Strong drew himself together with a perceptible effort : " I think about it as little as possible," said he.

" Do you believe in a God ? "

" Not in a personal one."

" Or in future rewards and punishments ? "

" Old women's nursery tales ! "

¹ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams : An Autobiography* (Boston and New York, 1918), p. 35.

² Adams, *Esther*, p. 298.

³ *Ibid.* p. 207.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 219.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 219, 200.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 219-20.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 269.

It is typical of Adams's complete scepticism, however, that he refused to place any more faith in science than in religion. When serving as his father's secretary in England, he learned about Darwinism probably considerably before most Americans who were not professional scientists, and also carefully studied Lyell's work in geology, but he never erected these ideas into a new dogma. His comment on Darwinism in his autobiography was just a shade too self-consciously offhand: "He did not even care that it should be proved true, unless the process were new and amusing. He was a Darwinian for fun."¹ Thus Strong also declares, "Mystery for mystery science beats religion all hollow. I can't open my mouth in my lecture-room without repeating ten times as many unintelligible formulas as ever Hazard is forced to do in his church."² He tells Esther, "There is no science which does not begin by requiring you to believe the incredible."³

Finally she asks him point blank: ⁴

"Is science true?"

"No!"

"Then why do you believe in it?"

"I don't believe in it."

Esther does not find much consolation in Strong's argument that a minister's wife does not need to understand miracles any more than a mathematician's wife has to understand the first axiom of Euclid. She at last convinces Hazard of the impossibility of their marriage, after he has pursued her to Niagara Falls, when she exclaims: ⁵

"after a violent struggle with myself, I found I could not enter a church without a feeling of—of hostility. . . . I never saw you conduct a service without feeling as though you were a priest in a Pagan temple, centuries apart from me. At any moment I half expected to see you bring out a goat or ram and sacrifice it on the high altar. How could I, with such ideas, join you at communion?"

In the final analysis, therefore, it was really Esther's knowledge of comparative religion rather than her command of modern science that made belief impossible for her.

Although Adams's earlier anonymous novel, *Democracy*, had caused quite a stir and produced a flurry of speculation as to its

¹ Adams, *Education*, p. 232.

³ *Ibid.* p. 199.

² Adams, *Esther*, p. 191.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 295-6.

suggest that Esther made the wiser decision. To be sure, Helen has far more religious faith to begin with than Esther. Raised in a small village by an uncle who was the Episcopalian rector there, she had learned her catechism as a child, was confirmed as a young girl and was a faithful member of the choir ; in short, “ a very well-bred and modest young woman, taking her belief for granted, and giving no more thought to the problems of theology than girls usually do ”.¹ Indeed, it is too bad she could not have met Esther’s Stephen Hazard, for apparently she would have had none of Esther’s scruples about accepting his views. But instead she marries John Ward, even though from his viewpoint she is not a Christian but a sinner doomed to eternal damnation. Like Hazard, however, he cannot believe that the power of his religious faith will fail to convert her eventually.

But, although Helen is not especially intellectual and never shows any awareness of the problems posed by Darwinism or comparative religion that presumably proved such stumbling blocks to Esther, she does find the doctrines of a narrowly rigid lower class Presbyterian congregation increasingly repellant. Soon after her arrival in Lockhaven she is horrified to discover her maid singing a hymn with these sentiments : ²

“ My thoughts on awful subjects roll,
 Damnation and the dead.
 What horrors seize the guilty soul,
 Upon the dying bed !
 “ Where endless crowds of sinners lie,
 And darkness makes their chains,
 Tortured with keen despair they cry,
 Yet wait for fiercer pains ! ”

She is even more horrified to discover that this is actually sung in her husband’s church. Soon Helen is shocking the congregation by what seems to it one heretical opinion after another. She does not believe in original sin, eternal punishment, a literal Hell or a God who is cruel and wicked. She finds all these ideas completely repulsive and obviously does not think belief in any of them is essential for salvation.

The church members are so dismayed at having their minister’s wife deny the basic doctrines of the denomination that

¹ Margaret Deland, *John Ward, Preacher* (Boston and New York, 1889), p. 42.

² *Ibid.* pp. 46-7.

they soon inform Ward he must set his house in order. They also complain that he has not been giving as many hell-fire sermons since his marriage as he should. Ward has indeed modified his preaching so as not to antagonize his wife. As he had feared, he only alienates her further when he reverts to a plea for foreign missions as essential to save the heathen from their otherwise inevitable fate of eternal misery.

Helen in her way remains as stubborn as Esther, also refusing to pretend to believe things which she does not. Moreover, when her husband quotes the Bible to her as final authority, she denies its literal inspiration. When finally the church threatens to have her brought up for disciplinary action, Ward orders Helen to leave him and sends her back to her uncle's home. By now Mrs. Deland has got her story into an apparently insoluble deadlock, which she resolves by the convenient device of having Ward die of a mysterious illness.

The fact that Helen's uncle, Dr. Howe, is an Episcopalian minister enables Mrs. Deland also to present a contrast between the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches. In so doing, presumably she was drawing upon her own childhood experiences. Raised by a paternal uncle who was as strictly Presbyterian as the name Campbell would suggest, on visits to her maternal grandparents she had attended the gentler Episcopalian services. Dr. Howe is presented as an amiable gentleman who drinks sherry, while John Ward is a rabid tee-totaller who, when asked if he would permit liquor to be used to save a life, replies, "Death is better than sin".¹ In his religious views Dr. Howe is conventionally moderate, being neither dogmatic nor questioning. He obviously has strong doubts about the literal interpretation of the Bible and is shocked to learn that Ward preaches that the unconverted are eternally damned, even if it is logical Presbyterian doctrine. This may be consistent, says the rector, "but that doesn't alter the fact that he's a fool to say such things. Let him believe them, if he wants to, but for Heaven's sake let him keep silent! . . . It will be sure to offend the parish, if he consigns people to the lower regions in such a free way."² All

¹ Margaret Deland, *John Ward, Preacher* (Boston and New York, 1889), p. 69.

² *Ibid.*, p. 189.

of which merely shows that he knew his upper class Episcopalian clientèle better than he knew Ward's lower class Presbyterian following.

On the other hand, he is annoyed with his niece for not agreeing with her husband on what he considers relatively unimportant matters which a woman should not discuss anyway. He is horrified when Ward takes these religious differences so seriously as to expel his wife, largely because to have a woman in his family separated from her husband is socially embarrassing. When asked by his sister what explanation he will give of this awkward development, "I'm sure I don't know", he answered impatiently; "anything but the truth".¹

Actually Mrs. Deland has an ambivalent attitude towards both denominations. She feels considerable respect for the strength and integrity of Ward's convictions, coupled with horror for their implications. She is more sympathetic towards Episcopalian mildness, but cannot resist some gently satirical thrusts at its polite indifference to religious dogma and greater concern for maintaining social appearances. When the story ends, the widowed Helen remains with her uncle to take care of him, but she no longer attends church because she finds she has lost all religious faith. Mrs. Deland herself ended up as a Unitarian, in the minds of some people a fate not very different from Helen's.

Although *John Ward, Preacher* attracted far more public attention than *Esther* and has been listed among what Frank Luther Mott calls the "better sellers" of 1888,² it did not have the tremendous success of an English novel of the same year which was also religious in theme and was also an early novel by a young woman who was destined to have a long literary career. This was *Robert Elsmere*, by Mrs. Humphrey Ward, which caused as much of a sensation in the United States as in England and indeed sold even more widely there. When reprinted in America, it promptly went through nine editions and sold some 500,000 copies in the first year and at least a million copies over the following decade.³ The two novels were quite unconnected,

¹Margaret Deland, *John Ward, Preacher* (Boston and New York, 1889), p. 434.

²Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York, 1947), p. 323.

³Ibid. pp. 180-1.

and their simultaneous appearance was entirely accidental, as was also the odd fact that Mrs. Deland's hero had Mrs. Ward's surname.

Actually a rapid examination reveals important differences between them. A superficial contrast is that in Mrs. Ward's book it is the minister who loses his faith and the wife who remains fanatically orthodox, just the reverse of the situation in *John Ward, Preacher*. It would probably be unwise, however, to make too much of the fact that in the American novels it is the women, Esther and Helen, who show inquiring minds and an insistence upon forming their own opinions, unlike the more conventional Englishwoman, Mrs. Elsmere, for the next American novel to be considered will be closer to Mrs. Ward's formula. More important is the difference in intellectual content between the two novels. The far greater intellectual sophistication of Mrs. Ward, a member of the famous Arnold family who knew all the current movements of thought in England, is seen in her complete familiarity with the German Higher Criticism, and this is what undermines Elsmere's belief in miracles and the supernatural basis of Christianity, whereas Mrs. Deland's Helen feels nothing more complex than an intuitive aversion to Calvinist dogma.

The third of our theological novels, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, which appeared in 1896, is more like *Robert Elsmere* than is *John Ward, Preacher*. The author, Harold Frederic, was a native of upstate New York who became a journalist, ending as the London correspondent of the *New York Times* and therefore living in England for several years before his death in 1898. He wrote several local colour and historical novels which were largely laid in the Mohawk Valley where he had grown up. Unlike Mrs. Deland, he was a rapid writer, at the rate of 4,000 words a day, often sending the rough drafts directly to the printer.¹

In *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, the most important of his books, he turned to the religious life of the same area of upstate New York.² Having so far learned something about Episcopalianism in both New York City and a small village and about

¹ "Harold Frederic", *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1928-58), vii. 7.

² As far as his own beliefs were concerned, he is said to have become an ardent Christian Scientist, or at least was sufficiently under the influence of the doctrine that inadequate medical attention in his final illness was felt to have

Presbyterianism in a mill town, with this novel we turn to a scathingly realistic description of Methodism in Octavius, New York, located in the midst of that countryside near Utica, Syracuse and Ithaca which still startles foreign visitors with its incongruous classical place names, to which Theron Ware has just come as the new minister. Frederic is said to have engaged in careful research on the Methodists before writing,¹ and certainly every unattractive detail is there. There is a description of a camp meeting, nine days of primitive Wesleyanism, and of the unsavory happenings among the visiting crowds on dark summer nights. There is a description of a love-feast with its singing, praying and Amens. There is a description of the hysterical atmosphere of a revival meeting, leading to the rush of penitent sinners to the altar rail. There is a description of the unscrupulous methods used by two professional fund raisers of more than dubious antecedents, who are brought in to end the church's deficit. There is a description of the hymn singing at a prayer meeting as heard by the minister next door :²

Through two wooden walls he could detect the conceited and pushing note of Brother Lovejoy, who tried always to drown the rest out, and the lifeless, unmeasured weight of shrill clamor which Sister Barnum hurled into every chorus, half closing her eyes and sticking out her chin as she did so.

There are the "Licensed Exhorters—an uncouth crew, with country store-keepers and lumbermen and even a horse doctor among their number . . .".³

And above all there is a picture of the small town penny-pinching narrowness and intolerance of the Methodists, such as the opposition to allowing street cars to run on Sundays and the distinction between going to a menagerie to see the animals, which is educational, and going to a circus, whose women in tights make it evil. Soon after their arrival in Octavius the Wares learn that the church trustees will not allow milk to be delivered to the minister's home on Sundays, and Mrs. Ware is contributed to his comparatively youthful death. (Ibid.; *Daily Telegraph* (London), 27 October, 1898).

¹ Everett Carter, *Howells and the Age of Realism* (Philadelphia and New York, 1950), p. 244.

² Harold Frederic, *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (Chicago, 1896), p. 196.

³ Ibid. p. 10.

instructed to take the flowers off her bonnet. And there is Brother Pierce's injunction to Theron as to the kind of preaching the members expected : ¹

" We don't want no book-learnin' or dictionary words in our pulpit. . . . What we want here, sir, is straight-out, flatfooted hell—the burnin' lake o' fire an' brimstone. Pour it into 'em, hot an' strong. We can't have too much of it. Work in them awful deathbeds of Voltaire an' Tom Paine, with the Devil right there in the room, reachin' for 'em, an' they yellin' for fright ; that's what fills the anxious seats an' brings in souls hand over fist."

It is a realistic exposé of small town life that obviously anticipated the work of Sinclair Lewis a quarter of a century later in *Main Street* and *Elmer Gantry*, even to the ugly names of characters like Erastus Winch, and it is significant that Lewis was familiar with the book.²

To be sure, Frederic makes it clear that the church in Octavius was considered a reactionary survival of primitive Methodism even by other devout members of the denomination, but the young Rev. Theron Ware, when he first arrives from a slightly more enlightened parish, is himself no paragon of social polish or intellectual breadth. He has almost no knowledge of music or literature, he cannot read any foreign languages, he thinks George Sand was a man and he does not recognize what an electric door bell is the first time he encounters one. His meagre library consists almost entirely of volumes like *Bible Lands, Rivers and Lakes of the Scriptures* and *Bible Manners and Customs*. His success as a minister is obviously not because of any intellectual leadership or, as it turns out, even any great spiritual integrity, but because of an oratorical skill in the pulpit that is largely emotional and rhetorical.

Theron's religious downfall begins in the same fashion as Robert Elsmere's. He decides to write a book, a fatal decision, as in each case it soon reveals what little knowledge the minister actually has and how much he has simply taken second-hand information for granted without ever questioning it. But now Theron falls under certain new influences which, in his opinion, lead to his intellectual emancipation.

¹ Harold Frederick, *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (Chicago, 1896), pp. 43-4.

² Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street*, (London, 1923), p. 70.

The first of these is Catholicism. Although the Roman Catholic Church by now had become a major religious denomination in the United States, it receives little attention in most of the religious novels of the period, which were written by persons of Protestant background who had scant knowledge of or sympathy for this development in American life. But, in addition to his blistering description of Methodism, Frederic gives a careful and understanding picture of the local Irish Catholic community, which now has the largest church in town, with an especially lively account of a Catholic picnic with all its beer drinking.

He also indicates clearly all the prejudices a person of Theron's background automatically has against Irish Catholics. But then Theron accidentally stumbles onto the death-bed scene of an Irish labourer, and, obviously witnessing Catholic ritual for the first time, is impressed by its beauty. Through this episode he meets the local priest, Father Forbes, based on an actual Modernist Catholic priest whom Frederic had known in Utica, New York, and is even more startled to hear from him a highly sophisticated account of the origin of supreme unction. From further association with Father Forbes Theron acquires an introduction not only to comparative religion, with lectures on the similarities between Biblical and ancient Irish mythology, but also to such niceties of life as eating dinner in the evening, fine cooking, wine drinking and smoking, all of this occurring in luxuriously furnished rooms lined with more books than Theron has ever seen in a private home.

Through the priest Theron also meets a physician, Dr. Ledsmar, who has written a book on serpent worship, grows orchids in a conservatory in order to test some of Darwin's theories and experiments with feeding opium to a Chinese manservant. Next we find Theron reading Renan, Lecky, John W. Draper and Robert G. Ingersoll and rapidly losing his original simple faith.

All this is quite heady stuff for Theron, but even more educational are his contacts with an exotic red-headed Irish Catholic heiress named Celia Madden, who expresses the sort of *fin-de-siècle* cult of art for art's sake that made reading the *Yellow Book* so racy in the 1890s. She emphasizes the Greek pagan

elements in Christianity, smokes cigarettes and plays Chopin late at night in her studio for Theron while he lounges upon cushions, drinking benedictine, amidst a profusion of draperies, rugs, divans, naked statues and peacock-blue leather walls. At such moments Frederic's usual realism deserts him entirely, and Celia seems to anticipate not so much a character in Sinclair Lewis as the late Miss Theda Bara.

It is a tribute to Frederic's subtlety that for a long time the reader shares Theron's conviction that the provincial minister is undergoing an admirable intellectual broadening like that of Robert Elsmere, but eventually it becomes apparent that Theron is not a person of Elmere's integrity and that we are actually witnessing the disintegration of a shallow, egotistical individual. Various episodes disclose Theron's basic cheapness and moral cowardice. The climax comes when, on the basis of one slight kiss from Celia, he pursues her to New York, assuming that she understands him much better than the unsophisticated wife whom he now constantly disparages as being no longer his intellectual equal. But when Celia rejects him, Theron has a complete collapse and is put back on his feet only by the devoted care and common sense advice of the two Methodist fund raisers mentioned earlier, who turn out to be the most interesting and admirable characters in the book. At the end Theron, reunited with his wife, has left the ministry and is headed for a new life in Seattle, on the west coast of the United States, with an ominous indication that he intends to turn his showy brand of rhetoric to a political career. Senator Theron Ware of Washington, we fear, is not too far off.

The book is nearly always described as having caused a "sensation",¹ though it never seems to have become a best-seller. It was also published in England in the same year under the title of *Illumination* and apparently caused a similar stir, largely, one suspects, as an exposé of life among the strange Americans. Thus the *Pall Mall Gazette* observed, "Mr. Frederic's picture of the ideas and habits of this backwoods

¹ William Peterfield Trent *et. al.*, *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (New York, 1947), iii. 92; Spiller, *Literary History*, i. 635; Grant C. Knight, *The Critical Period in American Literature* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1951), p. 107. This is varied by the *DAB*'s terming it a "succès de scandale", vii. 7.

Methodist community is a revelation", while the *Morning Post* described it as "full of pictures of ways of life with which we on this side of the Atlantic are not familiar". Mr. Gladstone hailed it as "a masterpiece of character drawing".¹

Over the years the novel has maintained its reputation as a minor classic. In *Main Street*, noted for its detailed realism, the heroine, Carol Kennicott, discusses the novel with the local French and English teacher, and we can take the word of Sinclair Lewis that it was exactly the book that the would-be intelligentsia in a small Minnesota town in the early 1900s would have been reading.² In more recent years it has been acclaimed, with considerable exaggeration, as being "among the four or five best novels written by an American during the nineteenth century".³ Perhaps the greatest proof of its continued appeal came in 1951, when a character in a detective story named Thereon [sic] explained that he was so called "because my mother had just read a book about someone called Thereon Ware".⁴ In view of Theron's record, it seems an odd choice, though it turns out to be an appropriate one for this particular person.

In addition to the problem of the loss of faith, the other major religious issue of the late nineteenth century was the churches' adjustment to the new social and economic problems posed by the rise of industry and urbanism. The most disturbing of these developments were the spread of monopolies, the elimination of small businessmen, often by unfair methods of competition, the increasing inequalities of wealth, with great fortunes concentrated in a few hands as contrasted to the deep poverty of masses of people, the growth of urban slums, recurrent unemployment and the series of violent strikes that announced the emergence of sharp capital-labour antagonism.

With all this went a suspicion that the churches had identified themselves too much with the employer class and hence had become too conservative in their outlook, upholding *laissez-faire*

¹ See the excerpts from various British publications quoted at the beginning of the English edition, Harold Frederic, *Illumination* (London, 1896).

² Lewis, *Main Street*, p. 70.

³ Carter, *Howells and the Age of Realism*, p. 239.

⁴ Helen McCloy, *Alias Basil Willing* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1957), p. 58.

and individualism, opposing labour organizations and reform efforts and neglecting the problems of the poor.¹ A conspicuous demonstration of this class alignment was the way that, as cities grew, churches left the older neighbourhoods to follow the upper middle-class to new districts, where they erected the impressive structures of the sort so well depicted in *Esther*. But in becoming congregations of the prosperous business and professional elements in society, at the same time the churches were losing their hold upon the poorer labouring population, whom they left untended in the slums.

The result was the movement known as the Social Gospel, which argued that churches must be less concerned with individual salvation in the afterlife and more concerned with social problems on this earth, and especially show more interest in the condition of the working class. This led not only to many ministers expressing a greater sympathy for the reform movements of the day but also to the development of what became known as institutional churches, which provided social services in poor neighbourhoods, services similar to those of the new settlement houses. Another indication of this concern was the appearance of the Social Gospel novel, "a distinct and peculiar literary form developed over a quarter of a century by a series of lay and clerical authors", which, according to Henry May, was the "Social Gospel's most spectacular and eventually most successful medium".²

Of the three novels selected to represent this genre, the first chronologically was *Annie Kilburn*, by William Dean Howells, published in 1888. Of the writers we are considering, Howells was the most distinguished professional novelist. Born in Ohio, he had lived in Boston for a number of years when he was editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* but later moved to New York City to be on the staff of *Harper's Monthly*. He also wrote a large number of novels depicting American middle class life, of which the most famous is *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, which made him one of the pioneers of realism in the United States. Frederic, for example,

¹ The churches' attitude in the period 1861-76 has been described as "The Summit of Complacency". Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York, 1949), pp. 39-87.

² *Ibid.* p. 207.

was a great admirer of Howells and deliberately modelled his realism upon him.¹ But until the middle 1880s Howells had been a conservative who accepted the philosophy of *laissez-faire*, who voted for the Republican Party and whose realism was limited to what he himself described as the more smiling aspects of American life.

But then came a profound change in Howells's views. Like others of his conscientious middle-class contemporaries, he was shocked to learn of growing class conflict in the United States. One episode contributing to this awareness was a street-car strike in New York in 1886 which later was to play an important part in another of his novels, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, but the event that most disturbed him was the trial and execution of the Chicago anarchists involved in the Haymarket Affair of 1886. Howells was one of the few who dared to challenge what seemed to him a shocking instance of judicial murder.

All this caused Howells to lose much of his earlier complacency and to become concerned about matters to which he had formerly been indifferent. He began to feel considerable guilt over his comfortable existence compared with the plight of others. This made him responsive to the ideas of social critics like Henry Demarest Lloyd, Henry George and Edward Bellamy. Especially he fell under the influence of Count Tolstoy's Christian Socialist philosophy and for a while even called himself a socialist.²

As a consequence, in the late 1880s and early 1890s Howells's novels turned from a consideration of individual problems to a concern with the problems of society. The first of these was *Annie Kilburn*. The story tells how Annie Kilburn, a wealthy orphaned young woman, returns to her native town of Hatboro' in the interior of Massachusetts after several years abroad. What had been a typical attractive little New England village,

¹ Carter, *Howells and the Age of Realism*, p. 240.

² For the background of Howells's social interests, see Walter Fuller Taylor, "On the Origins of Howells's Interest in Economic Reform", *American Literature*, ii (March, 1930), 3-14 and "William Dean Howells and the Economic Novel", *American Literature*, iv (May, 1932), 103-13; Carter, *Howells and the Age of Realism*, pp. 170-85; Edwin H. Cady, *The Road to Realism: The Early Years 1837-1885 of William Dean Howells* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1956), pp. 244-5; May, op. cit., p. 211.

originally called Dorchester Farms, has become a manufacturing town, first of hats (hence the new name of Hatboro'), then of shoes and finally of stockings, with an influx of Irish, French-Canadian and Italian immigrants constituting the labour force. At the same time South Hatboro' has developed into a fashionable summer resort. These changes have created much sharper class distinctions than had existed previously, a matter of constant concern to Howells.

Annie has returned vaguely anxious to do good, especially something that will improve the condition of the working people and bridge the social gulf that so distresses her. But what can she do? She considers becoming a nurse among the sick poor, but she has no training. She contemplates making nourishing little dishes for them, but this hardly seems enough. She sends an ailing child away to the seashore, but all that happens is that it dies there. Therefore she leaps at a proposal of the summer people to present some amateur theatricals to raise money for a Social Union, which will provide a reading room and restaurant for poor people. At this point Annie, who herself is a Unitarian, seeks the support of the Congregationalist minister, the Rev. Julius Peck, and is astounded by his opposition.

Peck is a former hand in a cotton mill who worked his way through school and has a strong feeling of identification with the working class. He opposes the amateur theatricals and the Social Union scheme on the ground that it is mere charity which still maintains social distinctions and displays no genuine feeling of brotherhood. In a sermon to his congregation Peck expounds his social philosophy at length. After describing the disturbing problems of the day, the growth of trusts, the destruction of small business and the rise of class warfare between the rich and poor, he argues that equality is more important than liberty. He insists that ¹

in the truly Christian state, there shall be no more asking and no more giving, no more gratitude and no more merit, no more charity, but only and evermore justice; all shall share alike, and want and luxury and killing toil and heartless indolence shall all cease altogether.

But opposition develops in the person of the well-to-do merchant, William Gerrish, who is one of the leading laymen in

¹ W. D. Howells, *Annie Kilburn* (New York, 1891), p. 240.

Peck's church. Whereas in the theological novels the conflict is between a minister and his beloved, one of whom believes and the other does not, in the Social Gospel novels the conflict is usually between a liberal minister and a conservative businessman who dominates the church. In this instance Peck's opponent, whom Howells describes very unattractively as a self-made man notorious for his harsh labour policy, is so incensed by Peck's sermon that he marches himself and his family out of the building in the middle of the service and starts a campaign to oust Peck from his post.

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Meanwhile, Annie has been gradually absorbing Peck's philosophy until she becomes "the fiercest apostle of labour that never did a stroke of work . . .".² She had once "expected to be a sort of Lady Bountiful here; and now I think a Lady Bountiful one of the most mischievous persons that could infest any community".³ Her conclusion is that charity is played out, and only justice can cope with poverty: "Those who do most of the work in the world ought to share in its comforts as a right, and not be put off with what we idlers have a mind to give them from our superfluity as a grace."⁴ For a while she wants to go off to Fall River to become a mill hand herself, but

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newspapers and delivering many public lectures. In the last few years before his death in 1905 he served as the American consul in Bordeaux.¹

Murvale Eastman, Christian Socialist appeared in 1890 and the scene is laid in a large northern city similar to Buffalo, New York, or Cleveland, Ohio. One of its leading religious organizations is the Church of the Golden Lilies, probably Presbyterian, which quite typically has just moved uptown into a newer and more fashionable residential area, leaving its working-class members behind. Tourgée's description of the church, named for its handsome stained glass windows, is reminiscent of Henry Adams's portrayal of St. John's in *Esther*. Once again there is also a young, good-looking new minister from a well-to-do family of good social standing, this time named Murvale Eastman.

When a street-car strike occurs in the city, similar to the one in New York that had attracted Howells's attention a little previously, Eastman receives a letter asking why he has never discussed the problems of capital and labour so as to teach the poor contentment with their lot. Eastman decides that first he must learn more about the problem and so, instead of going away to the seashore for his month's summer vacation as is generally assumed, he secretly goes to work as a driver of one of the horse cars. The first thing that shocks him is to discover that the company takes better care of its horses than its drivers. Convinced by his experience that the churches have neglected social problems, he announces that for a year he will devote his sermons to the subject of Christian Socialism and soon organizes in connection with his church a group known as the League of Christian Socialists.

At first glance it seems as though we have moved on to a far more radical position than was expressed in *Annie Kilburn*. Christian Socialism, of course, had originated in mid-century England with Frederick D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley and had recently been revived there by a High Church Anglo-Catholic element in the Church of England. In the United

¹ "Albion W. Tourgée", *Dictionary of American Biography*, xviii. 603-4; *Who's Who in America 1903-1905* (Chicago, 1903), p. 1494; Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel*, pp. 493-4; Mott, *Golden Multitudes*, p. 323.

States a radical Episcopalian clergyman, the Rev. William D. P. Bliss, organized a Society of Christian Socialists in 1889, the year before *Murvale Eastman* came out, which claimed that the teachings of Jesus led inevitably to Socialism. Although it was a short-lived organization that never amounted to much, the idea of Christian Socialism was very much in the air at the time Tourgée wrote.¹

It turns out, however, that Murvale Eastman does not have anything so extreme in mind at all when he organizes his League of Christian Socialists. Though he is aware that the early Christians practised communism, he declares that the experiment had proved a failure. Unlike Howells, Tourgée also seems to have little use for George's single tax, Bellamy's Nationalism or "the pessimistic foulness of Tolstoy".² According to his spokesman, Eastman, Socialism means only a desire to improve social conditions, and Christian Socialism means nothing more than the application of Christian principles to social problems.

Three major issues disturbed Tourgée. The first was the employers' lack of consideration for their workers as persons. Thus, as a street-car driver, Eastman strongly objected to being known merely as Number 46. When later he has a chance to outline to the company the reforms he favours, they consist of nothing more startling than using the names of workers rather than numbers, providing a better waiting room for them, emphasizing rewards for good conduct rather than penalties for bad and once a year giving the employees the whole of one day's proceeds, preferably at Christmas.

In the same way, the accomplishments of the League of Christian Socialists after its first few months seem something of an anti-climax. One company has been induced to rescind its rule against employees wearing beards, another has dropped its requirement that its workers buy their uniforms only from one firm which is more expensive than others, and there has been a drive against obscene literature.

¹ William D. P. Bliss, *The Encyclopaedia of Social Reform* (New York and London, 1897), pp. 251-8.

² Albion W. Tourgée, *Murvale Eastman, Christian Socialist* (Montreal, 1889), p. 214.

The second situation that distressed Tourgée was that small businesses were being forced out of existence with the result that many middle-class people were becoming proletarianized, though that is not the precise word he used. He felt very strongly that something must be done to revive self-employment and to create a diffusion of ownership among a large number of small merchants and manufacturers. Profit sharing seemed to be his chief hope.

The final problem was that modern urban life had destroyed neighbourliness and what Tourgée calls "mutuality of relation". Therefore one of the characters decides to devote his fortune to building a clubhouse for poor families, which in particular would contain playrooms and nurseries where mothers could leave their children, a project strongly reminiscent of Annie Kilburn's Social Union.

With so limited a programme in actual practice, it no longer seems strange that several well-to-do businessmen in the church prove quite willing to join the League of Christian Socialists. Even so, the group arouses antagonism in some circles. Once again a conflict develops between the reform-minded minister and the wealthy layman. Eastman's enemy is Wilton Kishu, the man who has actually given the land on which the church stands and who has been accustomed to have the church do exactly as he dictates. Tourgée's picture of the businessman has the merit of emphasizing that Kishu's chief passion is not for wealth but for power and prestige. His anger at Eastman is not so much that he fears Eastman's doctrines threaten his property as that they question his right to dominate the church.

He tries to secure Eastman's ouster from the Ministerial Association on the ground of doctrinal unsoundness concerning hell and eternal punishment, thus introducing an element of the theological novel. Like Gerrish in *Annie Kilburn* he fails, but Eastman, like Peck, resigns from the Association rather than become a subject of controversy and involve the churches in any endorsement of what is admittedly an uncertain experiment. Somewhat melodramatically, Kishu then determines to blow up the church rather than allow it to pass out of his control, but, at the last moment, a picture of Christ reminds him of the sacrilege he is about to commit. He suffers a stroke, and, when he recovers

he has been saved from sin and converted to Christian Socialism, Murvale Eastman variety.

Although Henry May calls the book "the best known" of several such social gospel novels at the end of the 1880s¹ and a current critic declares that it "deserves a place among the best of the works of the last two decades of the century on the economic and social problems of an expanding capitalism",² Tourgée displayed far less literary skill than did Adams, Mrs. Deland, Frederic or Howells. The novel is both diffuse and didactic, as well as having several romantic and confusing subplots involving a kidnapped child, a mysterious woman in black, a crippled opium addict, the restoration of a large fortune to a defrauded heir and a strange opal that dates from the early Christian era. Tourgée has remained best known for his novels of southern life, in which the current concern over racial problems has renewed some interest. The account of his life in the *Dictionary of American Biography* does not even mention his having written *Murvale Eastman* and, of the six novels we are considering, it is the only one not included in the *Oxford Companion to American Literature*.

Bad though it is, it is not as bad as our last novel, *In His Steps*. With it we hit rock bottom from a literary viewpoint. But, as Frank Luther Mott has observed, "As literature, it is nothing less than amateurish; as a social document, it has first-rate importance".³ Its author, Charles M. Sheldon, was born in New York State in 1857, attended Eastern schools and then in 1889 was called to Topeka, Kansas, to become the minister of the new Central Congregational Church. He is, therefore, the only actual minister among our six writers. Topeka gave him his first acquaintance with modern urban problems. After he had been there a few months, he put on some old clothes and spent a week going about the city seeking work, thus acquiring first-hand evidence on the plight of the unemployed. It is not clear

¹ May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, p. 208.

² Becker, "Albion W. Tourgée", p. 29.

³ Mott, *Golden Multitudes*, p. 197. Cf. Wagenknecht's verdict that it has "no literary quality whatever", but "is the outstanding example among a vast number of religious books, most of which never get into literary histories" (*Cavalcade of the American Novel*, p. 491).

whether he had been inspired by reading *Murvale Eastman*, which appeared about the same time, or whether this is merely an example of life imitating art, if we can use that word for Judge Turgée's efforts.

Inspired by his experiences, Sheldon next spent several weeks incognito among all the chief social groups in the city. As a result he concluded that the church should be more concerned with social questions and, again like Eastman, decided that he would henceforth devote his Sunday evening sermons to discussing them. With a flair for the dramatic, however, he did this in the form of stories, at the rate of a chapter a week, each of them continued over an entire year, which later a Congregationalist journal in Chicago, the *Advance*, first serialized and then printed in book form.¹

None of these ever achieved the sensational success of *In His Steps*, originally delivered in the winter of 1896. Its great appeal was due both to the times and to Sheldon's particularly effective method of presentation. His timing was excellent. The years from 1893 to 1897 were ones of acute economic depression producing widespread social unrest. In the year 1894 alone there had been a national railroad strike which the federal government suppressed by sending in troops, there had been the march to Washington, D.C., of a group of unemployed known as Coxey's Army demanding government aid, Henry Demarest Lloyd had published his influential attack upon monopolies entitled *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, the United States Supreme Court had aroused criticism by declaring a federal income tax to be unconstitutional, and a radical farmers' third party, the Populists, had polled a million and a half votes. Agitation was so rampant in Sheldon's own state that in the very year the young minister was telling his story a young journalist named William Allen White wrote a famous editorial, "What's the Matter With Kansas?"

Thus there could hardly have been a moment better suited for Sheldon's message, but the particular form in which he cast it greatly enhanced its effectiveness. The First Church of the city

¹ Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps*: "What Would Jesus Do?" (Chicago, 1898), p. 3; Mott, *Golden Multitudes*, pp. 193-4; May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, p. 209; Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism* (New Haven, Conn., 1940), p. 142.

of Raymond is a Middle Western counterpart of Adams's St. John's and Tourgée's Church of the Golden Lilies. It is attended by all the leading citizens, it is famous for its fine choir, the sermons are noted for their good taste and the minister, the Rev. Henry Maxwell, is addressing only the employer class and has no contact with the residents of the city's slum area, known as the Rectangle.

In the midst of one of Maxwell's Sunday sermons comes a dramatic interruption from a tramp, a former printer displaced by a new linotype machine, who has been unable to find work and has received no help from the presumably religious church people. He poses the problem of the church's identification with the upper class and its failure to reach the poor : ¹

It seems to me sometimes as if the people in the city churches had good clothes and nice houses to live in, and money to spend for luxuries, and could go away on summer vacations and all that, while the people outside of the churches, thousands of them, I mean, die in tenements and walk the streets for jobs, and never have a piano or a picture in the house, and grow up in misery and drunkenness and sin—

At this point he collapses and presently dies. Maxwell is so disturbed that in his next sermon he asks for volunteers to take a pledge not to take any action during the coming year without first asking, "What would Jesus do?" Several of the most prominent members of the congregation, including the superintendent of the railroad shops, a millionaire merchant, the president of the local college, a young club man, a newspaper editor, an heiress and a talented young singer agree to do so. Each week Sheldon's audience returned to find out what happened to each of them, as absorbed as they were later to be in "The Perils of Pauline", and even the modern reader is equally curious as to how it will all work out.²

¹ Sheldon, *In His Steps*, p. 15.

² Actually Sheldon was not quite as original as either his Topeka audience or subsequent readers may have supposed. In 1894 a British journalist, William T. Stead, after investigating social conditions in Chicago while visiting the World's Fair there, had published a widely read exposé entitled, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, which had suggested that in such a case Jesus would want all to follow in his footsteps and reform social conditions. Stead at least noticed how similar Sheldon's approach was and in a later English edition of his own book subtitled it, "The precursor of *In His Steps*" (Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel*, pp. 146-7).

The superintendent of the railroad shops develops Tourgée's interest in better facilities for the workers and decides that Jesus would set up a room for the employees to drink coffee and to hear fifteen minutes uplifting talks, thus benefiting them both physically and morally. But next the superintendent encounters a more fundamental issue. He discovers that the company is violating the Interstate Commerce Act, the federal law regulating railroads. He reports the violation, resigns his position and has to go back to his old job as a telegraph operator.

The other volunteers manage to avoid such severe penalties for their new attitude. The merchant studies the career of Titus Salt, the English industrialist from the Bradford area, and announces that henceforth "He would engage in business for the purpose of glorifying God, and not for the primary purpose of making money" and that he will try to develop more loving relations with his employees on the basis of considering them chiefly "in the light of souls to be saved".¹ In order to know them better he starts holding meetings with them, with the result that several of them burst into tears, presumably of appreciation. His reward is that, when he becomes ill later, his workers are extremely sad and offer to give him whatever help they can.

The college president decides that it is time for professional men to enter politics to end corruption and eliminate the menace of the saloon. Rallying the leading men in the church into political activity for the first time in their lives, he almost wins the next election. The young wastrel turns to reforming another neglected social group, his fellow club men, and gets them to change many of their habits, especially gambling. The newspaper editor eliminates all accounts of prize fights, crimes and scandals, bans advertisements for liquor and tobacco, decides future editorials will judge all issues on their moral rather than partisan aspects and finally concludes that Jesus would not issue a Sunday edition. The results are nearly disastrous financially, but the young heiress, who has been feeling guilty about her wealth, much like Annie Kilburn, gives the editor a five hundred thousand dollar endowment to continue to run the paper along Christian

¹ Sheldon, *In His Steps*, p. 90.

lines. Then, after studying the current movements for institutional churches and settlement houses, and especially the work of Arnold Toynbee in the East End of London, she decides to use the rest of her fortune to establish a lodging house for shop girls in the slum area.

The talented singer refuses an excellent job because she does not think Jesus would sing in a travelling comic opera and instead devotes herself to singing at revival meetings which some local evangelists are conducting in the Rectangle and ends by giving music lessons to the slum residents. As for the minister himself, he realizes that he must make greater efforts to reach the working classes whom he has so long ignored. But increasingly he becomes preoccupied with the fight against the liquor traffic, in his view the greatest social evil of the day, a reflection of the sentiment which for so many years made Kansas the symbol of the prohibition cause.

Meanwhile, the movement also spreads to Chicago, where unemployment and slum conditions are even more disturbing. The minister of a fashionable church and an Episcopalian bishop, both also filled with guilt at their comfortable, even luxurious, lives, resign their posts in order to turn a former brewery warehouse into a settlement house, while a once frivolous society girl joins them to teach girls going into service "plain cooking, neatness, quickness, and a love of good work".¹

Actually, however, Sheldon proves no more radical than Howells or Tourgée. He expresses their same middle-class attitude in his rejection of extreme solutions like the single tax or Socialism and his insistence that following Jesus does not mean anyone has to do anything so drastic as giving away all his wealth. All that is needed is not a change of system but a change of heart within the individual to follow Christian principles.

If *In His Steps* has the least literary merit of all the novels we have considered, it nevertheless has enjoyed the greatest popularity. Published by the *Advance* in 1897 after the usual serialization, it had sold 100,000 copies by June of that year before it was discovered that the copyright was defective.

¹ Sheldon, *In His Steps*, p. 245.

Thereupon sixteen publishers quickly siezed upon it and presently thirty British firms also issued it ; at one time a penny edition was sold on the streets of London. Not only have new editions continued to appear right up to the present day, but it has been translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Russian, Turkish, Welsh, Hungarian, Japanese, Persian, Armenian, Hindu and Esperanto and has also been both dramatized and filmed. As a result it is widely reputed to have become one of the greatest best-sellers of all time, second only to the Bible, though Frank Luther Mott has shown that popular estimates of its having sold thirty million copies are almost certainly greatly exaggerated. Nevertheless, it may well have had a sale of two million in the United States and of six million more in other parts of the world.¹

In conclusion, of the theological novels *Esther* best reflects the conflict of science and religion, with Adams taking a highly cynical viewpoint as to the ultimate validity of either. Mrs. Deland showed how an insistence upon strict Calvinist dogma could produce in reaction a complete loss of faith. Frederic suggested how demoralizing the impact of the Higher Criticism could be upon a minister of inherently weak character.

As for the Social Gospel novels, they all demonstrate both the strength and the limitations of the middle class conscience. Nothing could document better the extent of strong guilt feelings over the growth of poverty, economic inequality, class distinctions and the churches' neglect of the working class. None of them, however, is actually written from the viewpoint of the labourers themselves ; the problems are always viewed through the eyes of the middle class. Hence there is a rejection not only of revolutionary violence but also of any drastic changes in the social system. Instead, it is hoped that drawing people's attention to their Christian obligations will be sufficient to improve conditions. Particularly striking is the almost complete lack of interest in either Negro rights or international relations, the two issues which would loom largest to the modern American liberal.

¹ Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel*, p. 142 ; Mott, *Golden Multitudes*, pp. 195-7 ; Knight, *The Critical Period in American Literature*, p. 123.

These novels are admittedly neither valuable as pieces of literature nor profound in their solutions of extremely difficult problems, but nevertheless they are revealing guides to what was disturbing sensitive, conscientious middle-class Americans in the closing years of the nineteenth century.