THE SOCIAL-GOSPEL NOVELISTS' CRITICISMS OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

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The social-gospel novel is a religious novel based on the presuppositions of social Christianity, one of the most important religious movements in America in the period between the Civil War and World War I.[1] The social-gospel novels echo the theology and social philosophy of the movement: God is immanent in this world, working out His purposes through men and institutions; there can, therefore, be no distinction between the sacred and the secular; because God is the father of all men, all share alike in his goodness and are organically related to and responsible for each other; institutions as well as individuals must be redeemed; and the Kingdom of God is an earthly as well as a heavenly kingdom.

The genre had its beginning in the early 1880's -- the earliest example I have been able to find is Washington Gladden's "The Christian League of Connecticut," published in The Century Magazine in 1882 and 1883 -- reached its peak in the late 1890's with the publication of Charles M. Sheldon's best-seller In His Steps (1897), and declined in the first decade of the twentieth century. I have been able to locate sixty-two novels written by forty-three authors which can be classified as social-gospel novels.[2]

Propagandistic rather than literary in purpose, these novels were one of the most spectacular and effective methods of acquainting Americans with social Christianity. Grier Nicholl points out that between 1865 and 1885 about one novel a year devoted to social Christianity appeared in the United States and that from 1886 to 1914 about three or four a year appeared (2). These novels, moreover, had a wide circulation. In His Steps, the best known of the type, is repeatedly reported to have sold over thirty million copies, though eight million is probably a more accurate estimate.[3]

Of little interest as belles-lettres, the social-gospel novels are, nevertheless, important for American social and intellectual history as evidence that even during the complacent Gilded Age their authors were making many Americans aware of the serious social problems of the age and that they incisively and vigorously criticized the resulting social evils.

A universal judgment of the social-gospel novelists was that the Kingdom of God could not be served merely by converting the individuals and leaving the institutions of society unregenerate, for personal salvation was often little more than "refined selfishness" (Mason, 226, and Tourgeé,

Murvale Eastman, 122). This movement away from exclusive emphasis on individual salvation and individual altruism to an increasing emphasis on social salvation can be clearly traced in the American religious novel. Social criticism and Christian social reform had always been a part of American fiction. As early as 1851 Sylvester Judd in Richard Edney and the Governor's Family shows how Edney builds a settlement house in a slum area and brings rich and poor together in one church (Nicholl, 20). But the criticism was usually leveled at individuals, not at institutions, and the reforms had usually been directed toward changing individuals. Whether the alteration in the individual modified the society was of secondary importance.

Christians, indeed all men of good will, had always been admonished in fiction, as in sermons, to give charity to the poor. With few exceptions novels written before the late 1880's which can be said to have a social emphasis, like T. S. Arthur's temperance fiction -- Temperance Tales (1844), Ten Nights in a Bar-Room (1854) and Bar Rooms at Brantley (1877) -- Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1853), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's Hedged In (1870) -- which deals with the problem of the unwed mother -- and The Silent Partner (1871) -- which deals with the exploited laborer -- all treat the problem of injustice in society by showing that it is the Christian's duty to reform the saloonkeeper and convert the drunkard, to repent and see that justice is done to the slave, to show Christian charity to the unwed mother so that her soul might be saved and to convert the factory owner, not primarily that he might help his employees in times of trouble but that he might go to heaven and take his employees with him. Christian social emphasis, then, even as late as the 1880's was basically an individual matter. These novelists may feel, as Arthur and Mrs. Phelps do, that society is corrupt, but their concern is to redeem people from that corrupt society as much as to change the society.

But the social-gospel novelists, following Shailer Mathews and other leaders of the movement argued for "the application of the teachings of Jesus and the total message of Christian salvation to society, the economic life, and social institutions . . . as well as to individuals,"[4] though only a few insisted upon a thoroughgoing change in society, and for most the change was a superficial one. In general, however, they saw the futility of the individual altruism stressed by earlier novelists. Indeed, the Rev. Mr. Strong in Washington Gladden's The Christian League of Connecticut holds that " 'lazy and indiscriminate charities' " result in " 'a rapid increase of the pauper class in all our cities and large towns.' "[5] Margaret Sherwood in An Experiment in Altruism dramatized the insufficiency of personal generosity by having one of her characters, sent by a city charity organization, take two aprons to a woman in a slum area. Going through dirty streets, climbing up dark and filthy stairs, she finds the woman -- diseased, shrunken, helpless, cold, hungry and dirty -- with two miserable little girls crawling around her crying for food. Standing there, stupefied, the altruist

realizes that her gift of two gingham aprons -- no matter how pure her motives may be -- will not touch the conditions which had given rise to this misery (30-32).

The evils of this life, then, could not be attacked only on an individual basis. Men must be redeemed not only for eternity but also from the poverty, squalor and misery of this life. Increasingly convinced as the century progressed that human misery comes more often because of an industrial and social system "built upon the law of competition, the law of beasts by which the greedier and stronger snatch the portion of the weak" than by the individual's transgression of the law of Christ, the novelists argued that the unchristian social system must be brought under Christian judgment (Ibid., 12). Archibald McCowan in Christ the Socialist speaks for the more radical social-gospel novelists when he asserts that if Christ were on earth today he would not approve of the injustices of the representatives elected to political offices, the extortions practiced upon the people by monopolies and trusts and the many other acts of injustice made possible by an unchristian arrangement of the social order (74-75). The main character in Sheldon's The Crucifixion of Phillip Strong tells his congregation that it is their duty not only to save the individual but also to make Milton a cleaner town, to purify the municipal life, to help relieve physical distress and to understand the problems of labor and capital (161-162). The Christian, therefore, must act directly upon the social order and work for its reconstruction.

But the assumption of the social-gospel novelists that social evils must be changed by action upon the institutions rather than upon individuals was not often very thoroughgoing. Both Davies and Nicholl have correctly pointed out that most of the novels reject any drastic social changes, usually returning to the old idea that "all that is needed is not a change of system but a change of heart within the individual to follow Christian principles" (Davies, 357). Nicholl points to three different solutions -- none very radical -- advanced by the novelists: (1) motivating the upper classes to take particular kinds of Christian social action to ameliorate the poverty of the poor in the slums and of the laborer in industry, (2) quickening the church to work for social betterment in deprived areas and (3) changing completely the social patterns and moving peacefully toward a Utopian society. In all three cases, however, even when the change begins with the individual, its effect on society is as important as its effect on the individual and its effect on this life is more important than its effect in the afterlife.

Whether the solutions of these novelists to very difficult problems were profound or viable is not, however, the point of this paper. They did succeed, as I shall show, in dramatizing the evils involved in the increasing inequalities of wealth with great fortunes concentrated in a few hands while masses of people were experiencing great poverty; they described graphically the squalor and misery of urban slums and of conditions of labor

in the factories; they delineated the sharp conflict between labor and capital; and they reacted against the churches' complacent attitude toward social problems.

Sharply criticizing the American economic system which resulted in the squalor and debasement of life in the slums, Bellamy in Looking Backward describes the situation: pale babies "gasp out their lives amid sultry stenches"; hopeless-faced women deformed by hardship retain no trait of womanhood except weakness; and swarms of half-clad brutalized children fill the air with shrieks and curses as they fight and tumble among the garbage that litters the courtyards (265).[6]

A more usual method of dramatizing the injustices of the American economic system was to contrast the affluence of the rich with the squalor of the poor. No one was more successful in this contrast than William Dean Howells, who, though not a social-gospel propagandist shared many of their presuppositions. In Annie Kilburn Howells condemned the so-called Christian method of relieving want and poverty by the patronizing impersonal, superior-to-inferior charity of the rich. In The Traveler from Altruria Howells' Utopia is "strictly Christian and dates back to no earlier period than that of the first Christian commune after Christ" (35). With Basil March in A Hazard of New Fortunes Howells was interested in "Christianity as a system of economics as well as a religion (II, 74). Never officially joining the Church of the Carpenter, organized as a socialist church by W. D. P. Bliss in Boston, Howells was nevertheless deeply influenced by the socialism of these committed Christians.[7]

Like the social gospelers Howells became increasingly concerned with the division of American society into rich and poor. As early as 1889 in Annie Kilburn he portrayed the gulf between old Hatboro with its rich and established families and the laboring and common families who lived on the wrong side of the tracks. But it was in his two Utopian novels that Howells most explicitly depicted the differences between the rich and the poor. In Through the Eye of the Needle Aristides Homos, who comes from Altruria where conditions are more humane than in the United States, sits in the brilliant luxury of a millionaire's apartment and listens to its inhabitants talk about charities for the poor.

> They tossed the ball back and forth with a lightness the Americans have, and I could not have believed, if I had not known how hardened people become to such things here, that they were almost in the actual presence of hunger and cold. It was within five minutes' walk of their warmth and surfeit; and if they had lifted the window and called, "Who goes there?" the houselessness that prowls the night could have answered them from the street below, "Despair!" (81).

The effect is heightened by Homos' description of the elaborate apartment

of his hosts, the Makelys, with its piano, works of art, library and expensive furniture contrasted with the miserable tenement houses in the slums with their rotten floors, dark and crazy staircases, oozing walls, broken windows and vermin crawling everywhere in which families of a dozen people are huddled in one room (7). The esoteric meals of the rich with their oysters, consomme, stewed terrapin, lamb chops, red head duck, Nesselrode pudding, fruit, cheese and coffee with sausages, caviare, radishes, celery and olives interspersed, not to mention cigars and drinks, are contrasted with the meager bread and often actual hunger of the poor (71-2). Such a plutocracy where the "man who needs a dinner . . . is never asked to dine" is trenchantly described and ruthlessly condemned by Howells (74). Tourgeé has his spokesman, Murvale Eastman, deplore the extent to which the materialism of the rich has created the gulf between rich and poor and therefore imposed almost insurmountable barriers between the classes (55-64). Other social-gospel novelists dramatized the same striking contrasts and condemned them, though not with Howells' skill.[8]

In Looking Backward Bellamy dramatized the dangers of such inequality. Julian West pleads with his affluent friends not to ignore the plight of the poor. Speaking to the friends assembled at his fiancee's dinner for him, he is uncomfortable thinking of what he has seen in the poverty-stricken areas and asks them why they have stopped their ears to shut out the doleful sounds of strangled souls. "I have been in Golgotha," he says. "'I have seen Humanity hanging on a Cross!'" And he asks them, unsuccessfully at that moment, to consider those who live "'lives that are one agony from birth to death'" (267). Many thousands of readers were affected by such pleas in the Gilded Age.

The novelists were aware, moreover, that the poor not only lived in squalor at home but worked under debased conditions in the factories then just developing in the American industrial system. Sensitive to the abject working conditions of the laborer, Bellamy, Deland and Beard depicted the factories in which he worked, noisy with the perpetual clang and clash of machinery, with their floors "so crammed with machinery . . . as to allow bare room for the workers to writhe about among the flying arms and jaws of steel, a false motion meaning death or mutiliation" (Bellamy, Equality, 54). In The Wisdom of Fools Deland portrayed human beings who "stand half naked in the scorch of intense furnaces, reeking with sweat," men who work "where the crash of exploding slag or the accidental tipping of a ladle might mean death." The results are "guant and stunted creatures, hollow-eyed, with bleared and sodden faces, whose incessant toil to keep alive had crushed out the look of manhood, and left them silent, hopeless, brutish, with only one certainty in their stupefied souls: 'men don't grow old in the mills'" (96).

Conditions of life in the slums and of working conditions and their effect on men were voluminously described -- usually with amazing frank-

ness, honesty and courage and not without considerable effect -- in these novels.

The social-gospel novelists, furthermore, reflected the "central concern of social gospelers throughout the last twenty years of the [nineteenth] century," the labor problem (Hopkins, 80). When Julian West in Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward wakes up from his long sleep, one of the first questions he asks is " 'What solution, if any, have you found for the labor question? It was the Sphinx's riddle of the nineteenth century' " (35). Murvale Eastman in Tourgée's novel calls " 'the relation between the man who works for a living and the man who hires for profit the most difficult problem of our time,' " and he dedicates himself to " 'apply reason and justice to such difficulties and to find a cure for them' " (181).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century America had been converted from a peaceful agricultural country into an urban nation of bustling factories. This change had had adverse effects on American labor. Between 1881 and 1900 over a million men were unemployed. Between 1860 and 1890 the national wealth increased from sixteen to seventy-eight and one-half billions of dollars, more than half of which was held by one-third of one per cent of the population. Wages, on the other hand, declined from $400 to $300 a year in the decade from 1870 to 1880 (Hopkins, 79-97).

In the struggle between capital and labor which resulted, many of the social-gospel novelists were critical of capital and sympathetic with labor. William Dean Howells in Annie Kilburn presented the problem of capital and labor through the eyes of Ralph Putney, a member of Old Hatboro aristocracy, who nevertheless sympathized with the people of Over-the-tracks-Hatboro because he was an alcoholic. Possessing intelligence, insight and good taste, Putney with his ironic keenness saw both sides of the problem. Life is ideal in Hatboro, Putney ironically tells Annie, for it is " 'a community where there is neither poverty nor richness, and where political economy can show by the figures that the profligate shop hands get nine-tenths of the profits, and starve on 'em, while the good little company rolls in luxury on the other tenth' " (93).

Murvale Eastman, Albion Tourgée's prepossessing young minister of the Church of the Golden Lilies, which just recently moved uptown into a newer and more fashionable residential area, leaving its working-class members behind, becomes aware of the problem when during a strike he receives a letter asking him why he has never discussed the problem of labor and capital. The writer of the letter wants him to use this opportunity to teach the poor to be content with their lot, a not unusual request, for many Christians felt that it was the will of God that some people should be poor -- therefore they should learn to accept their poverty with Christian submission -- and that servants should be obedient to their masters according to the command of the Bible -- therefore strikes or any kind of protest by the workers were not Christian.

Eastman, deciding to learn more about the problem, goes to work for a street car company as a driver. Discovering to his surprise that the company takes better care of its horses than of its drivers, that the drivers are known by numbers instead of names, that their working facilities are most inadequate and that they are severely penalized even for minor infractions of company rules, Eastman becomes sympathetic with the problems of labor and attempts in a series of sermons on Christian Socialism to convince his rich congregation of the need for changes in the economic system.[9]

Though sympathetic with labor, these novelists were not always sympathetic with labor unions and rarely agreed with the methods used by labor to obtain its ends. The Rev. Mr. Stanton in Sheldon's The Heart of the World tells Harvey, the labor leader, that the labor union as it now exists in Lenox is a " 'Godless institution,' " interested in bread alone (196).[10] In The Crucifixion of Philip Strong, however, the Rev. Mr. Strong plans a series of Sunday night services "in which his one great purpose was to unite the church and the labor unions in a scheme of mutual helpfulness" (196).

Always sympathetic with workers on strike, the novelists were seldom sympathetic with the strike as a weapon and never with the strike as a weapon of class warfare. Indeed ministers in these novels often deterred the workers from going on strike. This attitude is understandable, for, as Walter Fuller Taylor in The Economic Novel in America (Chapel Hill, 1942) has pointed out, the American economic novel, of which the social-gospel novel is a part, is largely a native American product, almost completely unaffected by Ruskin, Morris, Marx or Tolstoy, or any other foreign influences, though Howells was influenced by Tolstoy. In general these novels depicted the strike as a futile method of obtaining improved conditions of work and higher pay. Sheldon distrusted the strike and would never have it used. Even Woods and Converse, who were more sympathetic toward unions than Sheldon, deplored strikes. Howells in his picture of the transportation strike in New York would seem to agree with Conrad Dryfoos who thinks strikes wrong in principle and knows that the strikers will lose, but " 'I shall feel sorry if they didn't succeed, for I believe they have a righteous cause, though they go the wrong way to help themselves' " (A Hazard of New Fortunes, II, 227). In no novel do the workers win a strike or accomplish anything significant with it. Picturing the brutality, disorder and suffering caused by the strikes, the novelists deplored the general deleterious effect strikes have on human nature.

Though effective in creating an awareness of poverty and the problems of modern industrialism, the solutions proposed by the social-gospel novelists were superficial. With too few exceptions they felt that stewardship of wealth could control the excesses of large corporations, that all the problems of industry could be solved if factory workers were converted to Christianity and that Christian ethics -- especially the law of love -- if applied to business would solve the labor problem, control excessive profits

and keep big business from exerting too much influence on government. Though naive themselves, they were, however, a powerful force to counteract the view of Dwight L. Moody and others that the misery and suffering of the laborer existed because they "have become lost from the Shepherd's care. When they are close to Him, under His protection, they are always provided for."[11] They knew that Andrew Carnegie was wrong when he said that "those worthy of assistance, except in rare cases, seldom require assistance. The really valuable men of the race never do, except in case of accident or sudden change."[12] They knew what Moody and Carnegie did not know, that the worker was caught in a jungle in which only the strong survived and the weak were extinguished and that the workers were frequently at the mercy of an often chaotic economic system.

The social-gospel novelists, then, castigated the American economic system for its incompatibility with Christian principles: its inefficiency and waste, both of human energy and material, its competitive spirit which makes men dishonest and heartless, its failure to provide economic security. These injustices they brought to the attention of a wide reading public, thus creating a climate in which change could take place.

The most stringent criticism of the social-gospel novelists was reserved for the American Protestant Church, which they felt was too closely identified with the principles and interests of the rich, was too preoccupied with worldly success, had perverted the teachings of Christ to justify the oppression of the poor, was so concerned with creeds and doctrines, centered in otherworldly salvation, that it neglected the Christian state here and now, and had denied the poor an opportunity to worship.

The novelists had reason to be disturbed at the churches' neglect of the poor. The Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, pastor of one of the wealthiest churches, had complained that the odor of workingmen among his congregation was offensive to more genteel nostrils, and the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, whose large salary and handsome royalties permitted him to enjoy driving his fine horses around New York City, had been offended when railway employees found a dollar a day inadequate for a decent living:

> It is said that a dollar a day is not enough for a wife and five or six children. No, not if the man smokes or drinks beer. It is not enough if they are to live as he would be glad to have them live. It is not enough to enable them to live as perhaps they would have a right to live in prosperous time. But is not a dollar a day enough to buy bread with? Water costs nothing; and a man who cannot live on bread is not fit to live. What is the use of civilization that simply makes men incompetent to live under the conditions that exist?[13]

The church, the novelists complained, controlled by the rich who dominated the Board of Trustees, was more interested in becoming a financially successful operation than in helping the poor. George R. and Lillian

Chester in The Ball of Fire have one of their characters condemn the churches' profits earned from property in the tenement districts, thus perpetuating distress they should have been alleviating. The rich, the novelists charged, had changed the gospel of Jesus to suit their own needs, or, indeed, to have dismissed Jesus completely from the church. In Woods, A Web of Gold, Mr. Godfrey, echoing a comment about Christ and the modern world similar to one found in the episode of Christ and the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamozov, tells Hazard, a rich industrialist who thinks of himself as a good Christian, the story of a

> man who was seen in Spain some centuries ago. He said very little. He only stood quietly by the church door and watched the people go in; but he was arrested and brought before the Inquisition; and the judges said to him, "See here, we know who you are, and we don't wish you any harm, if you will just go away quietly. But the fact of the matter is, that your method does not work well; you gave it a fair trial in Judea a long time ago, and you got yourself crucified; we are running the church now, and we propose to make it a success; so we want nothing whatever to do with you. If necessary, to keep you from interfering with us, we are quite prepared to crucify you over again" (271-272).

Mr. Hazard, though he thinks the story overdrawn -- impossible, in fact -- nevertheless congratulates those who rejected the Man: " 'They were long-headed business men, these fellows.' "

The church, moreover, not only perverts the teachings of Christ so that it can ignore the poor but also unabashedly justifies its oppression of the poor. Religion, argues Jonas Underwood in Tourgeé's Murvale Eastman, Christian Socialist,

> tends to make the strong stronger and the weak weaker; [it] palliates the failure of the strong to do right and magnifies the tendency of the weak to do wrong. . . . In extolling mercy it has forgotten justice. It preaches kindness, but is careful not to rebuke greed. To the kindly man it is a snare; to the hard one an opportunity. It honors achievement and despises failure. It esteems the strong and pities the weak. It builds churches for the rich and chapels for the poor (21).

The rich Christian, moreover, " 'finds himself under no obligation to see that his schemes to obtain wealth do not result in impoverishment for others' " (120). The church exists to protect a man's right to acquire as much as he can, but it does not concern itself with " 'preventing impoverishment -- making the yoke easy and the burden light to those stricken with toil.' " To the doers, the burden-bearers of society, the church acknowledges no duty of betterment, of sympathy or of encouragement (120). Indeed, the church often acted, unconsciously at times but sometimes

consciously, as if business and property were "the two absolutely sacred things in American religion,"[14] forgetting the teachings of Jesus who would have the church "lessen human woes, increase the sum of human happiness" (Tourgée, Murvale Eastman, 122-123), and incline "men to apply the Christ spirit to collective human relations" (Ibid., 273).

One of the most effective methods of criticizing this alliance of the rich and the church was to depict a rich Christian, prominent and even dominant in the church, who is much concerned with a pure creed and a blameless personal life but who is ruthless in his oppression of the laboring man. Howells set the pattern for such a character in 1889 in his portrayal of Mr. William Gerrish in Annie Kilburn. Mr. Kishu in Tourgée's Murvale Eastman, Christian Socialist (1889), Mr. Gordon in Sherwood's Henry Worthington, Idealist (1899), Mr. Hazard in Wood's A Web of Gold (1890) and Mr. Watson in Converse's The Burden of Christopher (1899) are all cut from the same bolt of cloth. Each is rich, a self-made man who has come quickly up the Horatio Alger trail. Each is a prominent churchman who adores his Creator but browbeats his employees. Each believes in keeping his religion separate from his business. Ostentatiously pious, emphasizing otherworldly evangelism and the promises of Christ, each is basically kind to the poor, giving liberally to charity, even making occasional trips to the slums to hand out his money in person; but each is opposed to any social reform. Each believes that it is the privilege of the employer, "the fiat of Christian civilization," to squeeze every dime possible from his employees (Tourgée, Murvale Eastman, 385). Believing that Christ would rather see weak souls "impoverished, dwarfed, weakened, enslaved," or even dead rather "than that the least tittle of the rich man's right to control the earth and its fulness for his own behoof and enjoyment should fail," each believes that "the rich man is the prop of civilization and the mainstay of Christianity. He builds the churches, endows the schools, and should be allowed to plunder at will, in order that he may disburse at his own good pleasure" (Ibid., 385).

The church, controlled by the rich, failed to help the poor not only materially but also spiritually. As early as 1882 Washington Gladden complained of the barrier between the churches and the poorest classes and insisted that the first task of the church was to demolish this barrier (Gladden, III, 59). Throughout the period the novelists held that the poor were being denied the right to worship since the churches had moved out of the poorer sections. In a scene frequently repeated in his other novels, Sheldon in The Heart of the World has Bruce Harvey, president of the mill union, conduct the Rev. Frederick Stanton on a tour through the industrial district of Lenox, pointing out that squalor and saloons are there but churches there are none (Chapter V). In The Crucifixion of Phillip Strong Sheldon has the Rev. Mr. Strong complain that the seven churches in Milton

have " 'no living connections whatever with nearly one half of the population and that the most needy half' " (89).

But, even while the social-gospel novelists severely judged the evils and injustices inherent in the organization of American society-- economic, social and spiritual -- and while they insisted upon changes in the ordering of that society, almost all were confident that the Kingdom of God would soon be realized upon the earth. All that was needed was to sweep away the injustices of the nineteenth century, for the nature of man was essentially good. Change the environment, and "it will be found that human nature in its essential qualities is good, not bad, that men by natural intentions and structure are generous, not selfish, pitiful, not cruel, sympathetic, not arrogant, godlike in aspiration, instinct with divine impulse of tenderness and self-sacrifice, images of God indeed" (Bellamy, Looking Backward, 234-235).

But it is not only man that is good. The universe itself is kindly disposed toward reasoning men. If men will follow their more kindly impulses, if they will listen to the voice of God within, the world order, controlled by a kindly and benevolent God, will smile approvingly on their efforts to improve the quality of human life. It follows, then, that "the history of mankind is a history of progress. . . . That the world, as a whole, is perceptibly better off, freer, wiser and purer, than it was even a hundred years ago . . ." (Woods, Metzerott, Shoemaker, 264). The novelists dreamed hopefully of "a paradise of order, simplicity, convenience, and beauty, in contrast to the squalor, disorder, and ugliness of nineteenth-century American life" (Nicholl, 261).

Only a few authors caution their readers against a too easy acceptance of the essential goodness of man and nature. The occasional complaint about the difficulty of implementing the good world, as for example in Sherwood's An Experiment in Altruism (214-215), is no more than a slight expression of surprise that people are not more quickly responsive to good. But Annie Kilburn in Howells' novel discovers to her chagrin that as a result of her attempt to help with the development of a worker's social union, true lovers are separated and a wife is unfaithful to her husband. Annie's attempt to help a poor child by sending him to the seashore results in his death.

Sometimes, too, the issues which exercised the novelists seem extremely minor as when Sheldon condemned baseball for desecrating the Sabbath (The Miracle at Markham, 14). And Sheldon surely overemphasized the impact of the saloon when one of his characters asserts that it " 'has done more harm than any one thing in our civilization' " (His Brother's Keeper, 180).

On the other hand, the novelists slighted, as did the social gospelers, some of the most important problems of the late nineteenth century. The post-war injustices toward the Negro are treated specifically in only one novel -- Albion Tourgée's Pactolus Prime (1890) -- though Sheldon, Woods

and Gladden do touch on the problem. Nor did the novelists consider the problem of international conflict important. Except that Earnest Clare in Metzerott, Shoemaker, advocates loving one's enemies and abstaining from violence and that John King in Sheldon's John King's Question Class objects to the government's spending too much money for battleships, there is little evidence of concern with the problem of war and peace. Hopkins points out, however, that "in the large, social Christianity was not concerned with the problems of war, imperialism, race, democracy or the use of force" (319).

In spite of their weaknesses, however, the social-gospel novelists did succeed in making Americans aware of the shame of slums and poverty, of poor wages and working conditions in an affluent society, of the culpability of the church for its acquiescence in the injustices of the rich and of its lack of concern for suffering and poverty. They helped to break down the two-century-old separation of religion from economic and political matters and to revive the idea that religion has some relation to public as well as private morality. They helped to make possible the acceptance of the social creeds adopted by the Methodist Church and the Federal Council of Churches in 1908 in which the principles of the social gospel were clearly announced. And they may in a small way have prepared the American reading public for a more ready acceptance of realistic fiction since that public had already met prostitutes, destitution and depravity -- often sympathetically presented -- in the social-gospel novel.

The novels are, on the whole, neither profound nor aesthetically satisfying, but they do reveal that American religious novelists were aware of new conditions brought about by industrialization and that they could describe these conditions often perceptively and with some insight and sometimes movingly. And at least in Howells' A Hazard of New Fortunes the influence of the social gospel made it possible to condemn incisively and effectively the weaknesses of American social institutions. "'What iss Amerigan?'" Lindau asks:

> Dere iss no Ameriga any more! You start here free and brafe, and you glaim for efery man de righdt to life, liperty, and de bursuit of habbiness. And where haf you entedt? No man that vorks with his handts among you hass the liperty to bursue his habbiness. He iss the slafe of some richer man, some gompany, some gorporation, dat crindts him down to the least he can lif on, and that rops him of the marchin of his earnings that he might pe habby on. Oh, you Amerigans, you haf cot it down goldt, as you say! You ton't puy foters; you puy lechislatures and goncressmen; you puy gourts; you puy gombetitors; you pay infentors not to infent; you atfertise, and the gountingroom sees dat de etitorial-room toesn't tink (II, 91).

So disgusted is Lindau with the state of affairs that he renounced his pension, which he has been receiving for losing his arm in the Civil War: " 'I would sdarfe before I dake a bension now from a rebublic dat iss bought oap by monobolies, and ron by drusts and gompanies, and ralroadts andt oil gompanies' " (II, 92). While the social-gospel novelists would not agree with Lindau's renunciation of the whole American system -- Howells certainly did not -- they are not, on the other hand, satisfied with an America that encourages the development of men like Jacob Dryfoos, mean, ferocious, avaricious. " 'I am not very proud when I realize that such a man and his experiences are the ideal and ambition of most Americans'" (I, 297), Basil March tells his wife. The present condition of American life will not do he concludes:

> Some one always has you by the throat, unless you have some one in your grip. I wonder if that's the attitude the Almighty intended His respectable creatures to take toward one another! I wonder if He meant our civilisation, the battle we fight in, the game we trick in (II, 251).

This condition is certainly not the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, the ideal of the social gospel. Basil March longs for an economic world so ordered that those who work will rest and eat and not be harassed with any question as to how this repose and his provision shall come. But instead we live in an economic chance-world in which there is " 'pushing and pulling, climbing and crawling, thrusting aside and trampling underfoot; lying, cheating, stealing; and when we get to the end, covered with blood and dirt and sin and shame, and look back over the way we've come to a palace of our own or the poor house . . . I don't think the retrospect can be pleasing' " (II, 253). Howells and the social-gospel novelists looked for the evolution of the Kingdom of God within the institutions of society. This meant that the words of Jesus " 'ought to speak to us of this world as well as the next' " (Howells, Annie Kilburn, 239) and that Christianity must emphasize conduct and "the life that now is," rather than be content to treat "the life that is to come" (Sheldon, Richard Bruce, 29). Therefore an unjust economic system such as the one Howells and the social-gospel novelists describe must be brought to the attention of Americans in order that it might be reformed.

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Footnotes:

[1] The roots and subsequent development of social Christianity are discussed in Charles Howard Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915 (New Haven, 1940) and Paul A. Carter, The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel (Ithaca, New York, 1954), which covers the years from 1920 to 1940. Hopkins (140-148) surveys the

social-gospel novels. Wallace Evan Davies, "Religious Issues in Late Nineteenth-Century American Novels," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XLI (March, 1959), 228-259, discusses Howells' Annie Kilburn, Tourgée's Murvale Eastman, Christian Socialist and Charles M. Sheldon's In His Steps as examples of novels dealing with the social responsibilities of the church. The only other studies of the genre I have been able to locate are Henry F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (New York, 1949), 207-213, Grier Nicholl's Ph.D. dissertation "The Christian Social Novel in America, 1865-1918" (Department of English, The University of Minnesota) and Grier Nicholl's "The Christian Social Novel and Social Gospel Evangelism," Religion in Life, XXXIV (Autumn, 1965), 548-561.

[2] A bibliography of these novels is appended to this article. It would be foolish to claim that the bibliography is complete. I am indebted to Mr. Grier Nicholl's dissertation for calling my attention to a considerable number of novels of the type that I had missed. Mr. Nicholl's bibliography of American Christian social novels -- a classification somewhat broader than the social-gospel novel -- includes seventy-seven novels written in the period from 1865 to 1918. While all of the novels listed in the bibliography share all of the presuppositions of the social gospel, they do so in varying degrees, particularly in regard to the methods by which society can be redeemed. Mr. Nicholl has correctly pointed out that only a few of the novelists were as thoroughgoing in their social Christianity as were the leaders of the social gospel; yet all the novelists assume that the Kingdom of God must be an earthly as well as heavenly kingdom, that society is corrupt and that individual charity and good will are not enough to create a Christian society, but that the patterns of society as well as the individual must be redeemed.

[3] Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947), 195-197.

[4] Shailer Mathews, "Social Gospel," A Dictionary of Religion and Ethics, ed. Shailer Mathews and G. B. Smith (New York, 1921), 416-417.

[5] Washington Gladden, "The Christian League of Connecticut," The Century Magazine, New Series III (December, 1882), 189. See also Holland, 59, 271-272.

[6] Other realistic portrayals of human degradation are to be found in Equality, 54-55, 62-63; Converse, 111; and frequently in the novels of Sheldon, i.e., In His Steps, 48-49, 64 et passim.

[7] See Clara and Rudolph Kirk, "Howells and the Church of the Carpenter," The New England Quarterly, XXXII (June, 1959), 185-206, for a thorough study of Howells' relationship with Christian socialism and the Church of the Carpenter.

[8] See, for example, Donnelly, 70-71; Peck, 106; Bellamy, Looking Backward, 267-268; Fiske, 100; Reed, 11; White, 323; and Cowan, 265-266.

[9] Woods, Metzerott, Shoemaker and A Web of Gold; Converse, The Burden of Christopher; and Sheldon, Richard Bruce, The Crucifixion of

Phillip Strong, In His Steps, Robert Hardy's Seven Days, His Brother's Keeper and The Heart of the World are other novels in which the novelists' sympathy with the working man is evident.

[10] Other novelists to express anti-union views are Smith, 190-191; Sheldon, His Brother's Keeper, 176; and Quick, 341-342.

[11] Moody quoted in William G. McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism (New York, 1959), 254.

[12] Quoted in Gail Kennedy, ed., Democracy and the Gospel of Wealth (Boston, 1949), 8.

[13] Quoted in H. F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (New York, 1949), 94. The quotation originally occurred in The Christian Union magazine. Beecher not infrequently made similar statements.

[14] Howells, A Traveler from Altruria, 224. Cf. with Andrew Carnegie's statement in 1899 that "upon the sacredness of property civilization itself depends." Quoted in Kennedy, Democracy and the Gospel of Wealth, 8. E. P. Roe's novels earlier in the century echo Carnegie's view.

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