

**j. g. holland and the  
'religion of civilization' in  
mid-nineteenth century america**

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On May 20, 1888 Walt Whitman, in conversation with Horace Traubel, recalled one of the most hurtful experiences of his literary career, a rejection letter from Dr. Josiah Gilbert Holland (1819-1881), the powerful editor of *Scribner's Monthly*. Sometime after moving to Camden following his stroke in 1873, Whitman was visited by his old friend John Swinton, an editorial associate of Charles Dana on the New York *Sun*, who, the poet recounted,

urged me to offer something to Dr. Holland . . . I demurred but John persisted. 'Do it, do it!' he said. 'Why should I do it?—Why?' I asked John. He still insisted. 'For certain reasons,' he said. I sent a poem, which was rejected—not rejected mildly, noncommittedly, in the customary way, but with a note of the most offensive character. I was sick and blue at the time: the note provoked me: I threw it into the fire. I was always sorry I destroyed it: had I been well I should not have done so: it was a good specimen insult for the historian.<sup>1</sup>

One can only speculate on Swinton's motives in encouraging the unarmed Whitman to enter the lion's den. Holland's moralistic *Scribner's* was rapidly becoming the most popular magazine of the American middle class, and no doubt Whitman realized that, as a writer with a reputation for unchastity, his chances of acceptance at the magazine were remote indeed.

Although both Whitman and Holland ostensibly addressed the same broad audience of common Americans, these two writers, born the same year, had come to represent radically different conceptions of the nature



Photograph of a copy of the plaster plaque (1881) by Augustus Saint-Gaudens. The portrait was commissioned "by his widow soon after his death in 1881, [and] was modeled from photographs of Holland taken in 1876, when he was fifty-seven years old" (John Dryfhout, *Augustus Saint-Gaudens: The Portrait Reliefs*, New York: Grossman Publishers, 1969). The Latin inscription "et vitam impendere vero" is from Juvenal, Satire 4, and may be translated, "And to devote one's life to truth." Reprinted with permission from the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, Cornish, New Hampshire.

and function of literature in America, indeed of America itself. And in 1875, when Whitman submitted "Eidolons" to *Scribner's*, there could be no question as to which of the writers had been the more "affectionately absorbed" by the country, the true test or "proof of a poet," according to Whitman's 1855 preface. Poet, novelist, editor and author of books of advice and essays offering pronouncements on almost every conceivable topic of popular interest, Holland came to serve as an oracle of proper behavior and religious inspiration for a wide range of Americans in the 1860s and 70s. The appeal of this "Great Apostle to the Multitudes of Intelligent Americans who have Missed a College Education,"<sup>2</sup> as his biographer H. M. Plunkett referred to him, was based on a unique combination of qualities: even while he helped millions prepare for the demands of a new urban and industrial America, he nurtured traditional social values. Most importantly, at a time of dislocation and doubt, Holland, although not ordained, functioned as a kind of national clergyman to Protestant America, speaking trustingly and reassuringly of the common faith. Holland's great genius was his ability to articulate, in simple, forceful and affecting language, what has been called the "Religion of the American Civilization," the widely held belief that the kingdom of God was being realized in Protestant America.<sup>3</sup> At the same time he found new journalistic and creative means of bringing that message to the people at large. Perhaps no other American, not even Henry Ward Beecher, was as successful as Holland in cultivating this vast audience and touching their daily lives.

Emily Dickinson, for one, directly experienced the power of Holland's spirituality. After learning of his sudden death in October 1881, she wrote to his widow, her dear friend Elizabeth Chapin Holland, "I shall never forget the Doctor's prayer, my first morning with you—so simple, so believing. *That* God must be a friend—*that* was a different God—and I almost felt warmer myself, in the midst of a tie so sunshiny."<sup>4</sup> Holland's God was "different"—different from the familiar stern Calvinist Divinity, and the warmth of this presence, which infused his writings, was central to his broad popularity.

His *Bitter-Sweet, a Poem in Dramatic Form* (1858), which features theological discussions and sudden, moving conversions in a New England family on Thanksgiving eve, sold more than ninety thousand copies, and *Katrina, Her Life and Mine in a Poem* (1867) sold more than 100,000, making it the most popular book of poetry at the time, with the exception of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*.<sup>5</sup> Holland had first achieved national fame in 1858 with a book of advice, *Timothy Titcomb's Letters to Young People, Single and Married*. Such was the demand for the wisdom of Timothy Titcomb, that he followed it with *Gold Foil Hammered from Popular Proverbs* (1859), *Lessons in Life* (1861), *Letters to the Joneses* (1863) and other such works. Through these volumes, his popular lyceum lectures, published as *Plain Talks on Familiar Subjects* (1865), his *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1866), which reached "a sale in a very short time of nearly 100,000 copies,"<sup>6</sup> such immensely popular novels as *Miss Gilbert's Career* (1860), *Arthur Bonnicastle* (1873), *Sevenoaks* (1875) and

*Nicolas Minturn* (1877) and the familiar essays for his “Topics of the Time” column in *Scribner’s* (published as *Every-Day Topics* in two volumes, 1876 and 1882), he became a secure, but flexible source of practical and spiritual guidance for millions. As his associate Edward Eggleston wrote shortly after his death, Holland was “the most popular and effective preacher of social and domestic moralities in his age, the oracle of the active and ambitious young man; of the susceptible and enthusiastic young woman; the guide, the philosopher, and school-master of humanity at large, touching all questions of life and character.”<sup>7</sup>

Holland had no patience whatsoever for the doctrinal disputes which seemed to absorb so much of the energy of denominational leaders of the time. In one of his “Topics of the Time” essays in *Scribner’s*, for instance, he charged, “The whole Christian world has become encrusted with dogma and formalism. Great importance is attached to beliefs and creeds, and the essentials of Christianity, including its vital centre, are almost forgotten.”<sup>8</sup> His great popular appeal was due in large part to his ability to bring a non-denominational but distinctly Protestant religious vision to bear on the everyday concerns of large numbers of Americans. Here was the old New England fervor for righteous living, but without the stress on man’s sinful nature (although Holland left no doubt that as a fallen creature man had need of God’s grace.) His preaching was all the more effective in that it did not come from a pulpit; Holland was a medical, not a theological doctor. Little concerned with formal theology, Holland presented religion as essentially a matter of the heart, not the head. Through him a softened version of the traditional New England Calvinism was spread through the land. He saw no reason to argue a point that seemed to him self-evident: in that faith, first planted in Massachusetts, the American spirit achieved its true expression. As he asserted in “The National Heart,” a lecture delivered during the Civil War:

What else did Puritanism do? It planted one of the most remarkable nations of the world in the wilderness. It gave that nation a love of freedom and justice, a regard for the moral government of God, an open Bible and a free pen and tongue. It impregnated a continent with the democratic idea, and the continent has borne to it a great family of republics. . . . It governed social life by the rules of Christian propriety, and carried its religion into every sphere where religion has an office to perform.<sup>9</sup>

For Holland, Christian values and social propriety were one and the same, and with the eradication of slavery, the civilization of the United States could at last demonstrate to the world what the promise of Christianity was all about. America, he was confident, was carrying, “Christian propriety” into “every sphere” of the national life. A sentimental Calvinist, Holland was a very practical Arminian.

While Holland had achieved a position of rare eminence and had grown wealthy from his royalties, speaking fees and his partial ownership of the prosperous *Scribner’s*, he prided himself on remaining true, as

Eggleston remarked, to “the common people whom he loved with a tenderness, which reacted upon his life and character.” This affection was returned with “a love not often given to any man, and this genuine interest and admiration which met him at every side he recognized with grateful and unaffected frankness. . . . People visited his summer home, in the Thousand Islands, as though making a pilgrimage to a shrine, and carried away relics of every kind, begging sometimes for even a handful of pebbles out of the road-way as mementos.”<sup>10</sup> Such a pilgrimage enabled these Americans to express their gratitude for the guidance of one who served as both exponent and embodiment of the common American faith. It was impossible for him to condescend to the people; he remained one of them.

Holland, rising from the excruciating poverty of his childhood, symbolized the promise of America as a land where material opportunity was yet consecrated to higher uses.<sup>11</sup> His inventive but improvident father for a time manufactured parts for carriage wheels and had owned a carding machine, but even the modest success he apparently achieved for a few years before Josiah’s birth in Belchertown, Massachusetts in 1819 was undercut by the cheaper cloth being turned out by the factories which began springing up all over New England in the years after 1820. As was the case with countless marginal families, the Hollands were forced to take up a nomadic existence, moving about in western Massachusetts—to Heath, back to Belchertown, to Granby, then to South Hadley and finally to Northampton—in search of an opportunity that would enable the family to escape its poverty. Young Josiah’s schooling was constantly interrupted, both by illness and the necessity of working in a factory to help support the family.

The stains of factory dye came to affect more than his hands. Both parents were devout Christians, and Holland’s mother cherished the dream that her son, who displayed unusual literary talent, would become an ordained minister. But it was out of the question that the family could support Josiah throughout the four years of college required for entrance into divinity school. Instead, after periods of teaching penmanship and other subjects in rural schools, he apprenticed himself in a medical office for two years; after spending two terms of three months each at the Berkshire Medical College in Pittsfield, Holland was able to take a major step toward the professional security that he coveted by opening a medical practice in Springfield in 1844.

But the literary Holland was unable to earn a living as a physician and was forced to return to teaching. He accepted a position in a commercial college in Richmond, Virginia. He then served for a year as superintendent of schools in Vicksburg, Mississippi, returning to Springfield in 1849, where he joined Samuel Bowles in editing the influential *Republican*. The two made an exceptional team; Bowles concentrated on the hard news while Holland took charge of developing the “proprietary” or home portion of the paper.<sup>12</sup> He contributed book reviews, articles on cultural topics and several popular serials which he brought out in book form, including *History of Western Massachusetts* (1855) and a novel, *The Bay-Path*,

*A Tale of New England Colonial Life* (1857). The major theme of his editorial essays was the practical application of Christianity, as in his “Sunday Thoughts” column, which appeared on Saturdays, in time for the Sabbath.

The would-be clergyman had at last found a pulpit for his non-doctrinaire, Christ-centered faith, and he soon realized that he could minister far more effectively to the needs of more people through the pages of the *Republican* than if he occupied a conventional pulpit. Those needs were great. As church historians have demonstrated, institutional religion in the middle decades of the nineteenth century in America was comparatively weak; it “did not seem to be in a strong position to provide the paradigm of order required by the psychological needs of the population.”<sup>13</sup> Holland instinctively knew how to minister to those needs and he did so by taking religion into the “proprietary” section of the daily paper.

He recognized that while Sunday sermons provided some theological guidance to the modest portion of the population which attended church, the people at large needed help with the multitude of problems, petty and serious alike, that they faced everyday. No one, for instance, seemed to be concerned with the honest, hard-working farmer and his well-meaning spouse whose marriage simply was not working. Holland well understood the needs of people who faced the challenge of adjusting, as his father had not been able to do, to a rapidly changing America, and one in which new scientific ideas were beginning to undermine the bases of traditional religious faith. He knew at first hand, as historian Stephan Thernstrom has written, that “a defining characteristic of the life style of the unskilled laborer . . . was that he was *unable to support his family unassisted*.”<sup>14</sup> But he also knew that if one developed the requisite habits of hard work, a tough self-reliance in an uncaring world and an eye for opportunity, one could move up, as he was demonstrating.

His salary during his first year on the *Republican* was \$480; the second year it was increased to \$700. The following year he borrowed \$3,500 to purchase a quarter-interest in the paper.<sup>15</sup> He saw the hunger of his readers for practical advice to enable them to do as he was now doing: earn a decent living so that they could raise their families securely. At Bowles’ suggestion he wrote a series of twenty-four letters of advice, employing the *nom de plume* of Timothy Titcomb, a name borrowed from Thackeray.<sup>16</sup> The success of these letters, totally unexpected, was so great that he gathered them together as *Timothy Titcomb’s Letters to Young People, Single and Married* and convinced Charles Scribner to publish the volume, in 1858. Timothy Titcomb became as popular with a national audience as he had been with the readers of the *Republican*. Holland had found a way to extend his ministry beyond western Massachusetts to the entire nation.

He dedicated the book to Henry Ward Beecher, who served as an inspiration to him in bringing religion beyond the confines of the pulpit. Beecher, he wrote in the preface, was “doing more than any other American for the elevation of the standard of Christian manhood and womanhood.”<sup>17</sup> In using the newspaper, fiction, poetry—and later, the

lyceum lecture and the literary monthy—for this purpose, Holland also became a notable American pioneer in finding ways to overcome the limitations of traditional pulpit preaching. In this regard, Bowles' biographer George S. Merriam, speaking at a memorial service following Holland's death, put Holland's achievement in perspective by observing that the Doctor was "essentially a preacher" whose

life fell at a time when a new engine of influence is supplementing and in a degree supplanting the old. While those who speak from the pulpit are glad to number their hearers by hundreds, the daily editor counts his by tens of thousands. While the church is anxiously debating how it can reach and hold the people, every man looks on his doorstep for the morning paper. . . . It was the especial distinction of Dr. Holland that he used the newspaper's power to serve the preacher's purpose. He enlarged and ennobled the function of journalism by putting it to a new and higher use.<sup>18</sup>

The common people to whom Holland was plighted in a life-long marriage were not, by and large, college-educated. Certainly they had not gone to Unitarian Harvard, and they were not readers of Emerson or even, many of them, Longfellow. Nor were they the Irish immigrants, who were only too willing to work for less than the native-born. They did not include the Jewish peddlers, who, Timothy Titcomb warned, had to be watched very carefully lest they snatch an unearned dollar at the expense of the unwary young woman left in charge of the home (143). His Protestant readers had their roots in the country, but faced the challenge of adjusting to the more complex world of cities. They needed to develop a broad range of personal skills and habits, from dressing appropriately to saving money and—when they had made enough— spending it in a dignified manner. Most of his readers would have agreed wholeheartedly with Timothy Titcomb that "if, at the age of thirty years, you find yourself established in a business which pays you with certainty a living income, you are to remember that God has blessed you beyond the majority of men" (21).

Although poverty threatened the improvident and those with only the skills of the manual laborer, there were opportunities for occupational and social advancement in this new America. To quote again from Thernstrom, "the evidence of a modest trend toward increased mobility from the bottom of the occupational scale into business, professional and white collar callings is fairly pervasive."<sup>19</sup> But the young man from the farm who wanted to take advantage of these opportunities had to be prepared. In Timothy Titcomb he had a plain-talking and realistic friend and advisor who was willing to provide practical advice. In the series' succeeding volumes, Holland would refine his message and apply it to the professions and diverse social situations.

Holland had the capacity to grow; after 1863 he no longer wrote as "Timothy Titcomb," and as editor of *Scribner's* he did not treat the domestic topics that were so important to Titcomb. He became far more cosmopolitan and tolerant and his readership widened. Yet the Titcomb books continued to sell well and "Timothy Titcomb" continued to

reinforce the appeal of Josiah G. Holland. An analysis of *Letters to Young People, Single and Married*, then, will prove helpful in understanding how Dr. Holland came to function as “the most popular and effective preacher of social and domestic moralities in his age,” to use Eggleston’s words.<sup>20</sup>

Holland-Titcomb was concerned, of course, with matters of propriety in the conventional sense. He intoned that “young men generally would doubtless be thoroughly astonished if they could comprehend at a single glance how greatly their personal happiness, popularity, prosperity, and usefulness depend on their manners” (31). Manners were absolutely necessary, he warned, to preserve “the machinery of society from destruction.” For “in a world of selfish interests and pursuits, where every man is pursuing his own special good, we must mask our real designs in studied politeness, or mingle them with real kindness, in order to elevate the society of men above the society of wolves” (32-33). Paradoxically, Holland’s recognition of the bitterly competitive nature of everyday life did not prevent him from boasting of America as a Christian nation. And so he instructed his readers in “that style of manners which combines self-respect with respect for the rights and feelings of others, especially if it be warmed up by the fires of a genial heart,” for such a style is “to be coveted and cultivated, and it is a thing that pays, alike in cash and comfort” (34).

Holland spoke plainly and forcefully, but did not attempt to buttress his assertions by citing abstract principles drawn from the Bible or other texts, as was typically the case with contemporary moralists, including Henry Ward Beecher, whose successful *Lectures to Young Men* (1844) was an obvious model for Holland. He dealt with the common, everyday subjects that were were of immediate interest to readers for whom theological disquisition was irrelevant. He argued for a more familiar style, complaining that the “young had been preached at . . . but . . . rarely . . . talked to” (vii).

He urged young men to be careful about their dress so as not to “offend by singularity, nor by sloveliness” (34). There were absolute standards of cleanliness and he preached that all men should “make a conscience” of “clean boots and finger-nails, change their linen twice a week, and not show themselves in shirt-sleeves if they can help it.” For the upwardly mobile, he warned that no man should “know by your dress what your business is” (34). One must find a way to make an attractive, distinctive appearance without being loud or ostentatious.

To solve this problem, he offered his theory of the “*dress centre*,” which he defined as

a nucleus from which the rest of the dress should be developed. . . . The cravat, the vest, the hat, the bosom, the coat-collar, may either of them be this idea. . . . A beautiful cravat, sustaining a faultless dicky, is about all a man can stand without damage, in the way of elegant dress. This should form the centre. . . . Coarsest clothes, developed from an elegant neck-tie, or an elegant central idea of any kind, become elegant themselves, and receive and evolve a glory which costs absolutely nothing at all, except a few brains, some consideration, and the reading of this letter. (36)



By following Holland's advice, the young man—assuming he had the taste and money to purchase a “beautiful cravat”—could be confident that he would achieve just the right balance of individual distinction and conformity to the perceived social norms.

On the other hand, Holland was well aware of the many immoral and dangerous practices that brought sure ruin—first in this world and then in the next. He warned against the use of profanity, of tobacco (smoked or chewed), alcohol (he proscribed wine as well as hard liquor), and all “impure thoughts” about women. Of such thoughts, he warned “the only proper way to treat such a habit as this is to fly from it—discard it—expel it—fight it to the death” (44). (Could he be referring to masturbation?) Holland elevated correct behavior in matters of personal habits almost to the level of religious commandments; correctness of dress and speech slide imperceptibly into potentially mortal sins.

To his credit Holland did not fall into the trap of making the search for wealth into a religion or of tolerating self-seeking at the expense of others. His was not the gospel of great wealth; he complained in his “Topics of the Time” column in *Scribner's* of the obscene displays and immoral habits of the Jim Fiskes and Jay Goulds of the Gilded Age. The antagonist of his novel *Sevenoaks* is based loosely on Fiske and of course this evil character is amply punished for his sins. Holland regularly denounced the purveyors of the cult of instant success in America, those who seemed to promise that anybody could reach any station in life if he only worked hard enough to get there. Holland well knew that the truth was different; he urged his readers to think of success as making the most out of the station in life which God had marked out for them, no matter how humble. Holland preached what might be called an “enabling gospel of moderate means,” a gospel of wealth sufficient to enable a man to build the true American church, a dignified home, where, in the bliss of domestic life, the family could worship the Creator.

Of course Holland supported the organized churches and was a leader of his church in Springfield and later in New York City. But so highly did he value “the Christian home” that he treated it as a temple and refuge, an impregnable bulwark against every conceivable evil which might threaten the American way of life:

As I have said before, the hope of America is the homes of America. If you to whom I write will each for himself and herself make these homes the noble institutions Heaven designs they shall be, this generation shall not pass away before the world shall look upon a people the like and the equal of which it has never seen. A generation shall take possession of the land full of dignity, love, grace, and goodness, glowing with a patriotism as true as their regard for home is sacred, and showing that the strength of the nation is forged under the smoke that rises from its happy household fires. (228)

Here several of Holland's central themes—Protestant piety, middle class

respectability and a superior Americanism—are combined in a cult of Christian propriety.<sup>21</sup>

The votive goddess of the domestic temple was of course the wife. No one could more rigidly insist on a separation of the respective spheres of men and women based on a conception of the radically different natures of the sexes than Dr. Holland. He claimed to idolize woman, who, if she be “pure, beautiful, intelligent, and well-bred,” is the “the most attractive object of vision and contemplation in the world” (85). She is closer to God than man is, for it is “in womanhood” that God “most delights to show the beauty of the holiness and the sweetness of the love of which he is the infinite source” (86). Yet how easily could woman betray the high destiny to which she was called! She could do so by unchaste acts—from which there could be no recovery. That scarcely needed to be said. But she could also betray that high calling if she attempted to assume an active role in the world of affairs. Clearly, God, in creating her as decidedly the weaker of the sexes, had no such intention.

Holland condemned as “masculine” all those women “who want the vote” or an equal place with men in the work place. He explicitly counselled women to accept dependence as the condition ordained of them by God:

Your bodies are smaller than those of men. You were not meant to wrestle with the rough forces of nature. You were not meant for war, nor commerce, nor agriculture. . . . You are to be protected by men. They build your houses; they guard your persons. It is entirely natural for you to rely upon them for much that you have. . . . It is not a menial relation, nor one which detracts from your dignity in the least. The circle of human duties is only complete by the union of those of man and woman. . . . You are never to quarrel with this arrangement. You will only make yourself unhappy by it, because, by quarrelling with God’s plans, you essentially unsex yourself, and become a discord. Therefore, recognize your dependence gladly and gracefully. Be at home in it, for in it lies your power for influence and good. (155-56)

Could a clearer, more forthright statement advocating what today most would call an inferior position for women be found? Holland carried what Barbara Welter has called “the cult of true womanhood” into the 1860s and 70s.<sup>22</sup> This rigid separation of roles may seem cruelly ironic at a time when millions of women were forced to work hard in textile mills and other factories and, of course, as domestics, to help support their families. Paradoxically, Holland’s own wife had a keen eye for the commercial value of his writings and helped guide the course of his career. But Holland was not, as he admitted, writing for the poor or for the very rich, but for the middle class—or those struggling to enter it.

As might be expected, Holland tried to justify an explicitly double standard of morality for the sexes. “Even an utterly godless man,” he wrote, “unless he be debauched and debased to the position of an animal,” deems a Godless woman as “without excuse. He looks on her

with suspicion. . . . He would not trust her” (159). And yet he charged women with a crucial function, to “soften and refine men.” For men in the natural state—men without women—“become savage and sinful” (158).

On some matters Holland was liberal: he wanted a more serious educational program for women than the abysmal finishing schools they attended, and he felt more social contact between the sexes before marriage would be all to the good. Yet he insisted that woman remain dependent. Having in one sense “feminized”<sup>23</sup> his religious vision by domesticating it in the features section of the daily paper, he exacted a compensating victory: the woman who now bore the major responsibility of civilizing man, raising the family and caring for both young and old would be at once idolized and enslaved in her home, her temple and prison.

While encouraging upward mobility, he also preached acceptance—of the capitalist system’s stern demands of hard work and life’s inevitable suffering. He helped his vast readership adjust to that which they could not change. He well knew the unexpected tragedies of life, having himself lost three sisters to illness, as well as having endured childhood poverty. But even the most painful of life’s experiences could be accepted, he wrote in those letters directed to married couples.

When men and women have conceived and accepted the idea that . . . that which we call evil—toil, poverty, sorrow, pain, and temptation to sin—is intended for the development of power and the discipline of passion; when they see that life tends upwards, and is only a preparation for another sphere and a better, and that all that surrounds them is perishable . . . then they can have a conception of what true marriage is. (249-50)

With this promise of a joyful reunion, not only between husband and wife, but with the children who had been taken from them prematurely, Timothy Titcomb ended his *Letters*. All the manners that he taught, all of his depiction of the absolute importance of hard work, marital respect and faithfulness, the importance of religion and of the separate roles ordained of the sexes, was at last gathered up into a tearful vision of man’s joyous passage into that higher, better realm beyond this one.

For Holland himself, the publication of *Letters to Young People* marked the beginning of his rapid passage into that higher, better realm on the earthly America known as prosperity and celebrity. Such was his success as novelist, poet, lyceum speaker and familiar essayist, that by the later years of the 1860s Holland, according to his biographer, was probably the most widely-read and best-paid writer in America.<sup>24</sup> As he became a national figure, in great demand on the lecture circuit, he of necessity withdrew gradually from the *Republican*, formally ending his connection in 1867.

As might be expected, Holland’s extraordinary popular success became a matter of threatening concern to writers seriously committed to their craft. In 1874 William Dean Howells, for instance, wrote Edmund Clarence Stedman that he was “in a perfect maze of doubt as to what the effect of criticism on a book may be. [Holland’s] Arthur Bonnicastle, ignored by all the critical *authorities*, sells 25,000; Turgueneff’s *Liza*, 1000,

with the acclaim of all the people of taste. come si fa?"<sup>25</sup> What could be done? Howells had tried—and clearly failed—to use the power of his own criticism to squash the Doctor.

In an 1865 review of *Plain Talks on Familiar Subjects* in the *Nation*, he had called Holland a "heavy and trite" writer who "rehearses his commonplaces with a dignified carefulness and a swelling port of self-satisfaction." The popularity of this writer, Howells remarked, "suggests uncomfortable ideas of the facility of literary success in this country, and goes far to prove that reputation is the only thing still to be had cheap among us; that while [every-day commodities] are exorbitantly dear, fame, like consolidated milk, is within the reach of the humblest resources."<sup>26</sup> Two years later Howells was equally damning in an *Atlantic* review of Holland's long poem *Katrina*, which he judged "puerile in conception, destitute of due motive, and crude and inartistic in treatment."<sup>27</sup> His review did little to influence the work's phenomenal sales, and so Howells as editor of the *Atlantic* ceased to review Holland. The sensitive Holland, hungry for the critical recognition that eluded him, carried on the feud by refusing to notice Howells in *Scribner's*, prompting Stedman to write in a letter to Howells

H. number I will not review  
The poems of H. number II,  
Because he can't defend 'em;  
H. number II has nothing done  
With novels of H. number I,  
For fear he must commend 'em!  
(Not by H.H.)<sup>28</sup>

In his *Nation* review, however, Howells was willing to consider the other side of the question: that writers such as Holland might in fact "do a great deal of good to commonplace people" by presenting the truth to them, even through "smoked glasses," and hence reach an audience that simply would not respond to the more complex, demanding work of "men of genius." He noted that many critics who conceded that Holland's popularity was merely "factitious" still defended him as a positive influence on ordinary people, and concluded by asserting that "we desire to give Mr. Holland's admirers and apologists the benefit of this doubt."<sup>29</sup> Remarkably—and to the credit of both men—the two did resolve their feud, Howells writing to his father in April 1878 that he had "met and made up all old sorrows with Dr. Holland, which I was glad to do."<sup>30</sup> This reconciliation led to an agreement between them for the serial publication of Howells' *A Modern Instance* in Holland's magazine.<sup>31</sup>

But was Holland's popularity merely "factitious," that is, artificial, based on a formula calculated to appeal to the widest public? Or was it based on a deeper relationship between writer and audience and one in which the writer is both true to himself and serves a genuine need? In the most important early review of Holland's work, James Russell Lowell, writing in the *Atlantic*, provided an implicit answer to this question by

arguing that Holland's *Bitter-Sweet* is "truly an original poem,—as genuine a product of our soil as a golden-rod or an aster. It is as purely American . . . as purely New-English,—as the poems of Burns are Scotch. We read ourselves gradually back to our boyhood in it, and were aware of a flavor in it deliciously local and familiar,—a kind of sour-sweet, as in a *frozen-thaw* apple. From the title to the last line, it is delightfully characteristic." Lowell conceded the faults of the work when judged by ordinary critical standards, but professed his willingness to "forgive him all faults, in our thankfulness at finding the soul of Theocritus transmigrated into the body of a Yankee." No doubt such praise must have struck Lowell as excessive when he came to think about it, but the review does say a great deal about the poem's appeal to readers.<sup>32</sup> Such was the demand for the poem that the Scribner company kept the work continuously in print for more than sixty-five years, the last edition coming in 1923.

Lowell recognized that the source of Holland's appeal was his ability to represent—in all its facets—a definite ethos, that of the rural New England of the opening decades of the century. As these New Englanders moved westward or into the cities, they carried with them memories of their native region. And to the appeal of region was added that of class; throughout his career Holland continued to speak to and for thrifty, responsible, God-fearing, hard-working middle class Americans. Certainly not critical readers, they were nevertheless willing to read novels and poems which were entertaining, morally uplifting and not demanding or ambiguous about the nature of good and evil. Holland shared the values of these readers; his world was theirs, and he was fearful of doing anything which might jeopardize his intimate relationship with them. As his biographer reports, after Holland's literary success had give him financial security, Noah Porter, the Yale President and his former pastor at the Second Congregational Church in Springfield, had "urged him to go abroad and reside, to study and observe and enlarge his knowledge of men and ideas. He had answered that he was afraid he should lose the hold he had upon what he deemed his strength, viz., his New England blood, and his familiarity with the convictions and manners and faith of his own people. These he regarded as his capital . . . and he did not care to relax the energy of these convictions, nor the tenacity of these associations."<sup>33</sup> That he would think of his relationship to his audience as his "capital" may tell us something about his notion of literary vocation. And in fact, as an editorialist in *Scribner's* he would champion laissez faire capitalism, elevating it to an article of faith in the broad national religion that he defined in those years. But as he rewarded virtuous, moral behavior in his fiction, so in the moral economy of the world his readers expected that he, as a talented, hard-working and virtuous man, would be rewarded with the outward, material signs of success.

For most of the 1860s Holland remained in Springfield, where he constructed a large but not ostentatious home, "Brightwood." In the winter months in the years 1858 to 1868 he travelled thousands of miles on the lyceum circuit, lecturing on such topics as "The Elements of Personal

Power,” “Fashion,” “Working and Shirking” and “Cost and Compensation.” The Springfield *Republican* reported on March 17, 1860 that Holland had “concluded at Belchertown last evening a season of ninety lectures, involving constant travel through a period of four months and a half. Within a period of sixteen months he traveled nearly 20,000 miles, and delivered 156 lectures and public addresses.”<sup>34</sup> In this way he reached many who did not even read his books.

Holland knew how to grow in tune with his great audience, and in 1867 he at last decided that a change in his life was in order. He took his family to Europe for two years, touring Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy, visiting art museums and generally absorbing the culture of the Continent. “It is worth twenty years of work to roam over these old fields of art and civilization,” he wrote his publisher Charles Scribner.<sup>35</sup> Typically, he saw the trip not as a vacation or a reward for hard work well done, but as a “pilgrimage which was to broaden his mind, develop his aesthetic taste, increase his acquaintance with universal human nature, and fit him worthily to occupy the lofty niche of pure and uplifting influence then preparing for him.”<sup>36</sup>

That “lofty niche” would be, of course, *Scribner’s Monthly*, and the agent on earth who was assisting in its “preparation” was an Indiana lawyer-businessman named Roswell Smith, an evangelical Christian. The two had become acquainted on one of Holland’s lecture tours and they arranged to meet in Geneva where, while standing on a bridge, they discussed the prospects of editing a magazine. Charles Scribner had offered Holland the editorship of the faltering *Hours at Home*. But, as Holland recounted the conversation in a June 1881 essay on “*Scribner’s Monthly—Historical*,” when he told Smith “that instead of entering upon the editorship of an old magazine, I should like to start a new one, he [Smith] announced himself ready to undertake, as business manager, an enterprise of that kind with me.” The result was *Scribner’s*—later *The Century*—a magazine that would set new standards in popular appeal, in the quality of its art work, in its broad religious impact and in many other ways, including profitability. As he reported in that 1881 essay, the magazine, which began with a circulation of 40,000 in November 1870, grew so rapidly that it had “largely surpassed” the initial goal of 100,000, enabling the editors to look forward “to an edition of one hundred fifty thousand.”<sup>37</sup>

Upon his return to America in 1870 Holland moved from Springfield to New York, later purchasing a fine home on Park Avenue. Perhaps nothing better symbolized the growing urbanization of America in the post-Civil War years than Holland’s move to the metropolis. But he was not so much abandoning his small town readers as joining with them in confronting an increasingly urban and industrial America. By moving to New York, Holland was asserting that the city need not be a place of sin and corruption, Bunyan’s *Vanity Fair*. On the contrary, he was determined that *Scribner’s*, which was very much a product of the greatest of American cities, would be an influence for the purest thought and the most

noble aspiration. He chose to name the magazine for his publisher, Charles Scribner, who, he wrote in his "Topics of the Time" column in the first number, November 1870, has been "associated for many years with what is purest and best in American literature."<sup>38</sup> He assured his readers that nothing in the least bit suspect would be allowed to enter a magazine that was intended to find a place in that holy of holies, the home of the American family.

The Scribner firm owned only forty percent of the magazine's stock. The remainder was held equally by Smith and Holland, giving them working control. The magazine, unlike *Harper's*, its great rival for middle class readers, was not a mere appendage of the publishing firm with which it was associated. It did not serve as a showcase for a publisher's books. Nor was it controlled by a religious denomination and so expected to push the party line. Instead, it was free to develop a larger social and moral purpose, an identity reflective of its editor's perception of the world. As the title page proclaimed, it was "An Illustrated Magazine for the People. Conducted by J. G. Holland."

Clearly the extraordinary commercial success of the magazine would not have been possible without the business genius of Smith, who oversaw the firm's finances and realized that in a mass market one had to spend money in a big way to realize large returns.<sup>39</sup> And Holland, especially in the closing years of the decade, when his health was weak, came to rely on his able editorial staff, headed by Richard Watson Gilder, who steered the magazine in a more cosmopolitan and aesthetic direction than the editor alone would have taken. But the magazine was Holland's creation, an expression of his personality and vision of America, an urban pulpit from which he could address a national audience on questions of public policy as well as the religious and social topics with which he was associated.

In his first "Topics of the Time" Holland assured his vast following that the magazine would be entirely worthy both of a publishing house that had earned an unblemished reputation "before the Christian people of the country" and of an editor who had "in books, newspapers, periodicals, and public addresses . . . met [his readers] many times during the last twenty years." Further, because of the "pronounced popular demand for the pictorial representation of life and truth," the magazine would be amply illustrated, and so accessible to all, "young or old, learned or illiterate." In 1881 he credited the success of the magazine largely to "its superb engravings, and the era it introduced of improved illustrative art," which had been the work of Gilder and A. W. Drake, the "superintendent of the illustrative department" (22:303). Holland was a positive genius in combining moral purpose with accessibility.

Holland's initial promise to "treat all living questions of morals and society" (1:106) signified a radical change in magazine-making for a literary magazine. Robert Underwood Johnson, an editorial associate of Holland's, observed that the "boldness" with which *Scribner's* entered debate on political, social and religious topics represented "an innovation in the magazines of that time," distinguishing it from other "periodicals of

the same class," which avoided "the controversial subjects of religion and politics." *Scribner's* "had had admirable predecessors, for instance *Harper's* and the *Atlantic*, but none that aimed directly at leadership in political, religious, artistic, and social opinion," as it did.<sup>40</sup> No doubt the astute Holland realized that lively treatments of politics and religion would contribute to the magazine's popularity, but he could not have foreseen that the new policy would also profoundly influence the editorial policies of its competitors. Yet in an essay marking the eighth anniversary of the magazine, November 1878, he analysed the changes in American publishing that the success of *Scribner's* had prompted. "The old-time magazine was very largely a record of literary dilettanteism. . . . Now, every reader of a magazine expects to see all the topics of leading interest in the life of the nation and the world treated in its columns, and it is for this reason, very largely, that the periodical dealer has supplanted the country bookseller, nearly everywhere" (17:47).

From the start, *Scribner's* was committed to a primary concern with American subjects and the publishing of American novelists and poets. Holland's announcement in "The Magazine's New Year," November 1875, of *Scribner's* "American policy" served to confirm a long-standing practice: "As in the realm of fiction, so in the department of philosophical and speculative discussion, we propose to make the magazine specifically American, so that all the questions of the time, relating either to others or ourselves, shall be treated from the American stand-point" (11:123).

The most controversial topics for the magazine in the early years seemed to be those relating to religion. Positioned strategically as a Christian, but non-denominational magazine, *Scribner's* regularly attacked the theological rigidities of the denominational "machines." In the first number, Holland published Reverend W. C. Wilkinson's "The Bondage of the Pulpit," which charged that many ministers lacked the courage and intellectual independence to rebuke the sins of their congregants because of institutional constraints. Wilkinson expanded upon these charges in February 1871. Robert Underwood Johnson recalled that Wilkinson's controversial essays were followed in 1873

by a series of a rather arid sort by the Reverend Augustus Blauvelt, setting forth progressive [theological] ideas. . . . These articles awakened violent opposition and criticism from the denominational papers, which were directed against the editor . . . and the writers. In the battle royal that followed . . . Holland's fighting qualities—courage, tenacity, candor, give-and-take—were seen at their best and his defense of scholarship . . . and particularly his pleas for tolerance, aided materially in laying the foundations for the larger freedom in religious thinking which we now enjoy. He was the outstanding figure in a strenuous and important conflict.<sup>41</sup>

In taking on the religious press in the name of freedom of thought and speech, Holland could be devastating: "Orthodox and heterodox alike have been welcome in these pages," he wrote in "The Bondage of the Pulpit" in November 1877, "and the liberty of the latter has always



seemed to make them more interesting writers. The orthodox are always running their machine, whether as politicians or sectarians, and never dare to get outside of it. We never fail to know what they are going to say. We have been hearing it for nearly sixty years, and, while it did very well for the first thirty, the reiteration becomes tiresome” (15:127).

A man of decided opinions, Holland as editor was also committed to the principles of free and open discussion, he wrote, “we are all the time publishing opinions which we do not believe in. We should not be disposed to suppress a plea for socialism or communism, if it were well written, by a true and honest man . . .” (15:127). So far as I know, no “plea for socialism or communism” appeared in the magazine during Holland’s life, but his ability to open *Scribner’s* to diverse ideas while maintaining its established “drift and purpose” is one mark of his greatness as an editor and of his tolerance as a human being. The *Nation* observed in its memorial notice that “Some of his most intimate associates were moreover those whose intellectual tastes and methods were quite unlike his own, and here also he was manly and tolerant”.<sup>42</sup>

The moral heart of *Scribner’s* was his own “Topics of the Time” column, essays on a wide variety of social, political, cultural, religious and artistic subjects, and these columns came to be read almost as scripture by Holland’s growing following. They were his “Letters to the Americans,” familiar epistles directly applying the message of the Gospels to the concerns of everyday life in America, a country which, in Holland’s eyes, had been elected by God to carry the message of Christ into a new world, that is, a new world geographically, the physical America; a new world politically, the democratic America; a new world religiously, a world where a new, purer Protestant faith would grow and flourish; and finally, a new modern world distinguished by its development of an industrial society which promised financial security for the hard-working and a new level of culture for all.

The magazine, while advocating traditional religious and social values, brought a number of radical innovations to the field of magazine publishing: it cultivated advertising on a large scale, printed the names of its contributors, simplified the subscription process by pre-paying postage, and pioneered in developing the techniques of making high-quality reproductions and used them on a scale never before seen in a magazine. Holland’s own poetry and serialized novels<sup>43</sup> played no small part in the popularity of the magazine, but his “Topics of the Time” column was the direct channel for his annunciation of his compelling vision of the “religion of the American civilization” of the 1870s.

The recent defeat of France by the Germans, for instance, led him to comment in May 1871 on the baleful influence of the Roman Catholic Church, “a church organization hoary with experience and perfectly united in its object—that object being the perpetuation of its own power, at whatever cost, against all the encroachments of freedom and free thought.” He warned the Catholic countries that “nothing but universal education—instituted, controlled, and directed by the State—and a free

Bible with free men to preach its truths, can save the whole Latin race from fatal degeneration and decay.” Clearly, then, the future belonged to the Protestant nations: “The Teuton blood, with its affiliations, is the blood of the future. The Teutonic languages are the languages of the future; and Protestant civilization, under various forms and phrases—moving through various modes of progress—is the civilization of the future. [No one can] point to a single Catholic nation that is making progress to-day, and to a single Protestant nation that is not!” (2:94) Similar anti-Catholic sentiments may be found in Holland’s long poem *The Marble Prophecy* (1872), and he warned of the potentially dangerous influence of the Catholic Church in America in “The Riot of Romanism,” September 1871 (2:546).

On the other hand, reflecting his broadening outlook over the course of the decade and his growing tolerance of religious diversity, he became far less hostile to American Catholics, writing in April 1879, “Let not the Catholic think for a moment that he has nothing to learn of the Protestant, and let not the Protestant think that he holds truth to the exclusion of his Catholic brother” (17:900). Here too Holland moved in step with public opinion; church historians have detected a definite lessening of anti-Catholicism in America after 1876.<sup>44</sup> It was not that Holland moved closer to the Church of Rome; that was unthinkable. Rather, consistent with his denigration of dogma and theology, he became increasingly suspicious of all religious institutions. For him, the quest for salvation was an individual matter.

But there were doctrinal limits. Flexible as Holland was on theological matters, he most certainly was not Unitarian, and in “Hepworth and Heterodoxy,” April 1872, he exulted in the defection of George Hughes Hepworth (1833-1902), formerly a prominent Unitarian minister in New York, to Trinitarian beliefs. His was a Christ-centered Protestantism, and he asserted as axiomatic that “the mightier the Christ of a Church is, the mightier the Church, as an influence for good in the world” (3:745-46). Within certain broad parameters, which excluded such deviant sects as the Mormons and the Shakers, what mattered for Holland was not the intellectual content but the emotional depth of the Christian experience. Not associated as a minister with any one denomination, he could mark out and occupy a ground common to all. While there remained many institutional divisions, American Protestants, as Robert Handy has observed, longed “for wholeness,” and this found expression in the “interest in some kind of Christian union” and “more concrete satisfactions in the advance of Christian civilization in the nation. Here was the real bond of Protestant unity,” emphasized by “stressing the Christian character of civilization” as a whole.<sup>45</sup> Through his attacks on the denominational “machine” in the name of a larger faith, Holland articulated this longing for a “Christian wholeness” in America. Not finding a Congregational Church within easy reach of his Park Avenue home, he was quite content to join the nearby Brick Presbyterian Church, at Fifth Avenue and Thirty-seventh Street.

He used *Scribner's* to enshrine those religious observances and practices which brought the entire nation together in the common American faith. For instance, in the number for December 1870, which was released late in November, he urged the widest possible observance of Thanksgiving as a religious celebration which would reaffirm the Puritan heritage of America. Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July were, for Holland, the two uniquely American holidays and he urged that both be celebrated as sacred events within the American civil religion. Thanksgiving was especially important as a means for city dwellers to renew their rural roots.

Each year, when Christmas, Easter and July Fourth rolled around, Holland, with an unassuming ease combined with moral fervor, defined the special significance of the holiday experience. Protestant faith, unbounded patriotism, an instinctive understanding of the daily lives of his vast readership and an appreciation of the power of religion as a means of uniting the family enabled him to preach—without seeming to preach—with extraordinary effect. He supplemented the message of the established churches and reached millions who remained outside them.

Holland's regular reminders of the Puritan and rural origins of the American political and religious faith did not imply a retreat from the cultivated life of the city. Reflecting the influence of his European sojourn, he became a kind of booster of the fine arts in America, especially in New York City. In his July 1874 column, for instance, he argued that "if New York is to be worthily great, she must be something more than a commercial city" (8:366-67). The great cities of Europe are centers of art and culture which uplift their visitors, but tourists to New York "get no uplift by or through us"; they "find the city absorbed in its trade and speculation, full of the vulgar display of wealth, and devoted to driving and light amusements." And so Holland identified the city's pressing need as "a great gallery." In urging support for the recently established Metropolitan Museum of Art, Holland claimed that such an institution would "greatly change for the better the tone of society, and powerfully modify the civilization of the country." As a newspaperman in Springfield, Holland had "opposed the theater as an immoral institution,"<sup>46</sup> but now he preached the civilizing influence of high culture and even came to enjoy the legitimate theater, praising "the writer of '*H.M.S. Pinafore*'" as "a public benefactor, worthy of any reward we can make him." Of course, the moralist in Holland would not entirely disappear, and in the essay, "Vulgarity in Fiction and on the Stage," May 1879, he excoriated the "average playwright" for his reliance on "coarseness," "profanity," and the "half-disguised" obscenities (18:133-34).

Still, Holland's willingness to speak of the benefits to be derived from high culture and his celebration of American civilization in *Scribner's* reflects a basic shift in the thinking of many American evangelicals in the post-war years. As Robert Handy has observed, "In the earlier period, the priority of the religious vision was strongly . . . maintained; it was Christianity *and* civilization. . . . In the latter part of the century, however . . . civilization itself was given increasingly positive assessment, chiefly

because it was understood to have absorbed much of the spirit of Christianity."<sup>47</sup> This shift is evident in both *Holland* and *Scribner's*; however, he always was careful not to confuse categories: "culture" could never take the place of religion and civilization was worthy only as it embodied Christian values.

As one might expect, then, Holland waged a continuous war against the very notion of art for art's sake. "Art is not a master, but a minister," he wrote in "A Heresy of Art," April 1872. "The simple fact is that every work of art of every sort is really and permanently valuable in proportion to the value of the truth which it fittingly enshrines." But here Holland clearly felt himself to be on the defensive, wondering why more "Christian men and women have not more openly protested against" the new aesthetic theories (3:744-45). On this point, however, he was unwavering. In *Scribner's* he attacked writers, including Byron, Swinburne, Poe, Thoreau and Whitman, whom he considered immoral. He praised instead Longfellow and Whittier, in whose work he found a "faith [that] still stands by the revelations of 'The Great Book'" (3:745). While *Scribner's*, reflecting both the broadening of Holland's sensibility and the strong influence of his associate Richard Watson Gilder,<sup>48</sup> became the very model of aesthetic magazine-making, Holland refused to alter his priorities, warning in "Art as a Steady Diet," published in January 1879, "Art is a very thin diet for any human soul. There is no new gospel in it" (17:439).

Just as Holland waged war on the heresies of a heathen art, so too he attacked a range of heresies—actual and imagined—in the realm of politics and society. His enemies were trade unions, any attempts to inflate the currency (he practically enshrined the Gold Standard), paupers and tramps, welfare schemes and all efforts to involve the government in promoting social welfare. The only reform that really mattered, he asserted in February 1876, was religious reform of the sort offered by such evangelists as Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey, whom he called "eminent radicals after the Christian pattern, who deal with the motives and means furnished them by the one great radical reformer of the world—Jesus Christ himself. They are at work at the basis of things. To them, politics are nothing, denominations are nothing, organizations are nothing, or entirely subordinate. Individual reform is everything. After this, organizations will take care of themselves" (11:581). From this interpretation of Christian morality, there simply could not be any sanction for direct governmental involvement in the social order. The social reforms that Holland did advocate were predictably safe: civil service reform, temperance, expanded public schools and the like.

Poverty, he argued in "The Prudential Element," December 1878, is the fault of the poor: "If the poor people of England," he wrote, "had taken for the last few centuries the gold that wealth has paid them for work in honest wages, and used it only in legitimate expenses, if they had not debauched themselves with drink . . . the pauper class would be too insignificant to talk about." The lives of the rich, in contrast, characteristically display "periods of heroic self-denial, of patient industry, of

Christian prudence. Circumstances did not make these men rich. The highest moral prudence made them rich” (17:296-97). The “Popular Despotism” that he condemned was not that of the rich over the poor, but of the poor over the rich. He cited the example of the paper hanger who demanded \$10.00 per day! “It is a hard word to say,” he wrote in January 1879, “but the trade-union is a nursery of that monster whose shadow sometimes darkens the earth with menace, and which men call ‘The Commune’” (17:440). The beneficial effects of the 1873 Depression, he observed in “Investments for Income,” December 1874, were that it wrung speculation out of the economy (9:250). It also weakened the disposition of workers to form trade unions, as he had written in “Rich and Poor,” February 1874 (7:495-96). For Holland, laissez faire economic principles were articles of faith.

Religion, finally, in all its dimensions, from the proper management of the Sunday school to the irrelevance of Darwinism, is the predominant subject of his essays. Repeatedly he turned aside the challenges to belief by simply asserting the religious nature of man and the evidence of Christ at work through the Church. In January 1879, he offered his pity to the scientist, whom he pictured “standing in the presence of the Everlasting Father, studying and endeavoring to interpret his works, [but] refusing to see him, because he cannot bring him into the field of his telescope, or into the range of a ‘scientific method’” (17:437-38). In delivering his “Lay Sermon for Easter” in the April 1880 *Scribner’s* he assumed what he set out to prove: “The facts of the resurrection of Christ and the immortality of the soul find their highest, nay, their overwhelmingly convincing testimony, in the birth and continued existence of the Christian religion” (19:938-39). That there was a Dr. Holland, a man who brought hope, reassurance, continuity and order into a chaotic, threatening world was itself a fact of great spiritual significance for millions of Americans. Unlike Henry Ward Beecher, whom he steadfastly supported, nothing even remotely suspect ever came near him. Instead, in such essays as “The Reconstruction of National Morality,” published in April 1876, and “Falling from High Places,” published in April 1878, he offered acute analyses of why, in the post-war years, so many Americans, including prominent Christian leaders, had succumbed to the temptation of attempting to obtain great riches dishonestly. Such was the sanctity of Holland’s own life that he seemed to offer a living, earthly warrant for the promise of eternity that he pictured in his writings.

The news of his instantaneous death in 1881 from a heart attack brought great distress. Emily Dickinson, in the first of three letters to Mrs. Holland at this time, wrote of her deep grief and her regret that she had not seen him before his death: “If that dear, tired one must sleep, could we not see him first?” In offering consolation, she invoked Holland’s own message: “Heaven is but a little way to one who gave it, here. ‘Inasmuch,’ to him, how tenderly fulfilled!” She opened the third letter by reminding his widow that

After a while, dear, you will remember that there is a heaven—

but you can't now. Jesus will excuse it. He will remember his shorn lamb.

The lost one was on such childlike terms with the Father in Heaven. He was passed from confiding to comprehending—perhaps but a step.

The *safety* of a beloved lost is the first anguish. With you, that is peace.<sup>49</sup>

For the community of believers to which Holland preached, there could be no doubt for his eternal safety. An American saint had risen, and it seemed that his star would shine forever.

Seven years later, however, Whitman, after recalling for Traubel that hurtful rejection letter, commented on how quickly Holland's influence had waned in the 1880s:

'Holland is a dead man—there's hardly anything of him left today: he had his strut and is passed on: he was a man of his time, not possessed of the slightest forereach.' 'Back of him everything, before him nothing,' I [Traubel] said. Exactly, exactly: the style of a man who . . . can tell the difference between a dime and a fifty cent piece—but is useless for occasions of more serious moment.<sup>50</sup>

Holland's literary reputation had been buried in the wake of major changes in American literature, changes which had troubled Holland greatly in the closing years of his life. The increased attention being given to the immoral Whitman, the insane Poe and the anti-social, non-Christian Thoreau particularly distressed him. "There is a morbid love of the eccentric abroad in the country," he warned in "Our Garnered Names," an October 1878 essay, "which, let us hope, will die out as the love of nastiness had died out" (16:896). Yet Holland's warning went unheeded: despite his strong objections, Edmund Clarence Stedman insisted on including appreciative articles on Poe and Whitman as part of his "Poets of America" series for *Scribner's*.<sup>51</sup> The editor, aware that Stedman had the support of Gilder and Johnson and would have been able to publish the series elsewhere, was forced to acquiesce: "Edgar Allan Poe" appeared in May 1880 and "Walt Whitman" was published that November.

Holland's suspicion of a radical change in the national taste around 1880 has since been confirmed by scholars. Henry Nash Smith commented on the "sensationalism that increased so markedly in the later 1870s," as reflected in the exploits of such a popular dime novel hero as Deadwood Dick. Also, Smith noted "that there is certainly a more perceptible awareness of sex as physical fact in the stories published after 1880 than in the 1860s."<sup>52</sup> Such had been Holland's influence on American literature in the fifteen-year period immediately following the Civil War that one of his detractors spoke of those years as "the Holland age of letters."<sup>53</sup> The changes in literary taste must have represented to Holland both a sign of national decay and a threat to his unique position as representative American. Further, the decade of the 1880s witnessed an explosive growth in the American economy, immigration on an unprecedented scale and

labor and other social problems of such complexity that Holland's easy solutions must have seemed increasingly irrelevant.

But in another sense, Whitman was wrong about Holland's literary demise. Judged by sales figures, his popular appeal remained strong until well into the twentieth century. In 1894 Charles Scribner's Sons boasted, "The extraordinary popularity of Dr. Holland's works shows no falling off from year to year. Already the sale of his books has reached the enormous total of about three-quarters of a million copies, and his audience is constantly widening. His appeal is to the universal popular heart."<sup>54</sup> Making allowance for the proclivity of publishers to inflate their claims, we must recognize the continuing strength of Holland's hold on the "popular heart" of his contemporaries. I have mentioned that such was the continuing demand for *Bitter-Sweet* (1858) that the Scribner firm kept it in print until 1923.

But of course as Whitman remarked, Holland's writing had no "forereach," and his work has not attracted new readers. For this reason he has escaped the attention of literary scholars. And because he was not a prominent clergyman and produced no systematic theology, he has not been studied by church historians. But that should not in any way detract from his significance. For as "the most popular and effective preacher of social and domestic moralities of his age," he played a unique role in mid-nineteenth century America. Certainly, if we want to comprehend the cultural aspirations of a broad spectrum of middle class Americans at this time, then the works of J. G. Holland and all he came to symbolize in the popular imagination serve as essential guides. Holland had the ability to grow with his vast following, helping them to meet the challenge of responding maturely to the demands of an urban America. Perhaps Whitman had something of this in mind in concluding his statement to Traubel: "But Holland was all right: he did his deed in the Holland way: why should we ask or expect him to do more?"<sup>55</sup>

Holland's extraordinary popularity attests to the needs of millions of Americans to receive a message that was at once practical, yet spiritual, challenging, yet reassuring, realistic, yet hopeful, traditional in its religious language, yet nondenominational, universal in its rhetoric, yet insistently nationalistic. Where Dr. Holland was, there was to be found the center, the pulpit, of the American civil religion. He gave substance to that invisible but potent church which continues to exist beyond the formal religious establishments of the land. Much as Ben Franklin had and as Dale Carnegie would, he pointed the way to achieving material success in capitalistic America. He helped his vast following adjust to the demands of an urban and industrial age and he implicitly reconciled the challenge of the new science with the imperative need to believe. As radio and television evangelists do today, he found new ways to bring his Christianity to the church and unchurched alike. Yet there was nothing meretricious about J. G. Holland: such was his personal integrity that he embodied all that he preached. His career tells us a great deal about the centrality of religion in

the culture of the nineteenth century, and it is highly suggestive as well for our consideration of the continuing evolution of religion in America.

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## notes

1. Horace L. Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 1 (Boston, 1906), 184.
2. H. M. Plunkett, *Josiah Gilbert Holland* (New York, 1894), 99.
3. Robert T. Handy uses this phrase to characterize the period 1860-1890 in *A Christian America*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1984), 82-100. Handy's source is Samuel Harris, *The Kingdom of Christ on Earth* (Andover, Massachusetts, 1874), 175.
4. Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 3 vols., (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), 3:713. Dickinson did not date the three letters, but they were clearly written in the aftermath of Holland's death, October 12, 1881.
5. Sales figures from Edward Eggleston, "Josiah Gilbert Holland," *Century Magazine*, 23 (December, 1881), 165; and Plunkett, 48, 73.
6. Plunkett, 58.
7. Eggleston, 164.
8. Josiah Gilbert Holland, "Checks and Balances," *Scribner's Magazine*, 17 (February, 1879), 597-98.
9. Josiah Gilbert Holland, *Plain Talks on Familiar Subjects* (New York, 1866), 214.
10. Eggleston, 167.
11. Biographical information is drawn from Plunkett, Eggleston and Theodora Van Wagenen Ward, ed., *Emily Dickinson's Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951).
12. My source for Holland's association with the *Springfield Republican* is George S. Merriam, *Life and Times of Samuel Bowles*, 2 vols. (New York, 1885).
13. Maxine Van De Wetering, "The Popular Concept of 'Home' in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American Studies*, 18 (1984), 8.
14. *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), 22.
15. Plunkett, 28.
16. Merriam, 1:201.
17. Josiah Gilbert Holland, *Timothy Titcomb's Letters to Young People, Single and Married* (New York, 1858), v. Future page references will be given in the text.
18. Reprinted in Merriam, 1:200-201.
19. Thernstrom, 220.
20. Eggleston, 164.
21. Van De Wetering argues that the cult of "home" arose to fill the void caused by the lessening of the influence of the churches. Holland certainly upheld this "cult" throughout his career, from *Letters to Young People* to his editing of *Scribner's*, where the suitability of a literary work for the middle class family became an essential test.
22. "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18 (Summer, 1966), 151-74.
23. I use the term in the sense employed by Ann Douglas in *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977).
24. Plunkett, 72.
25. George Arms and Christoph K. Lohmann, eds. *Selected Letters*, 6 vols. (Boston, 1979-83). 2(1979):80. Letter dated December 8, 1874.
26. William Dean Howells, "Concerning Timothy Titcomb," *Nation*, 1 (November 23, 1865), 659.
27. William Dean Howells, Review, *Atlantic Monthly*, 20 (December, 1867), 764.
28. Laura Stedman and George M. Gould, M.D., *Life and Letters of Edmund Clarence Stedman*, 2 vols. (New York, 1910), 1:526-27. Letter dated December 7, 1874.
29. "Concerning Timothy Titcomb," 659.
30. *Selected Letters*, 2:196. Letter dated April 14, 1878.
31. The novel ran in *The Century*, the name the magazine assumed in November 1881, from December 1881 through October 1882.
32. James Russell Lowell, Review, *Atlantic Monthly*, 3 (May, 1859), 652.
33. Plunkett, 101.
34. Quoted in Ward, 61.
35. *Ibid.*, 79.
36. Plunkett, 74.
37. *Scribner's Monthly*, 22 (June, 1881), 302-03.
38. *Scribner's Monthly*, 1 (November, 1870). Future quotations from "Topics of the Time" will be identified in the text using volume and page numbers.
39. Arthur John, *The Best Years of the Century* (Urbana, Illinois, 1981), 95. My discussion of the *Scribner's* owes much to John's thorough scholarship.



40. Robert Underwood Johnson, *Remembered Yesterdays* (Boston, 1923), 87; 82.
41. *Ibid.*, 86-87.
42. *Nation*, 33 (October 20, 1881), 316.
43. Holland published three novels in the magazine, *Arthur Bonnicastle*, *Sevenoaks* and *Nicolas Minturn*.
44. Handy, 89.
45. *Ibid.*, 96-97.
46. Merriam, 1:62.
47. Handy, 95.
48. John credits Gilder with being the magazine's "guiding spirit" in making it "a spokesman for the arts and an exemplar of good taste," 81.
49. Dickinson, 3:712-13. Dickinson did not date the letters, but they were obviously written in October of 1881.
50. Traubel, 1:184-85.
51. For a discussion of this episode as well as an analysis of Whitman's relationships with the leading monthlies, see my "Whitman and the Magazines," *American Literature*, 44 (May, 1972), 222-46.
52. *Virgin Land* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970), 102; 106.
53. Benjamin T. Spencer, *The Quest for Nationality* (Syracuse, New York, 1957), 295.
54. Advertisement following the text in Plunkett.
55. Traubel, 1:185.