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ELLEN GLASGOW'S VIRGINIA DREAM

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August, 1968

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Catherine Carpenter Garrett entitled "Ellen Glasgow's Virginia Dream." I recommend that it be accepted for six semester hours of credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

William J. Sander
Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Soster B. Gresham
William L. Frank

Accepted for the Council:

OKR Barber
Chairman

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ELLEN GLASGOW'S VIRGINIA DREAM

THESIS

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council
of Longwood College in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Education.

By

CATHERINE CARPENTER GARRETT

Cumberland, Virginia

1968

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INTRODUCTION

The title of Joan Foster Santas's book Ellen Glasgow's American Dream will be of particular interest to a number of Virginians and Southerners; for this title, which seems to give national significance and a national scope to Miss Glasgow's work, will in itself be a source of pride. These Southern readers probably will be eager to accept Mrs. Santas's view that the underlying themes of Miss Glasgow's novels are representative of the American dream. However, before one accepts so broad an interpretation of Miss Glasgow's work, he should examine Mrs. Santas's conception of the American dream and see how she fits the work of the Virginia author into this vision.

Actually Mrs. Santas gives no clear, precise definition of the American dream but rather notes three versions of this dream: the New England or Puritan vision, the Western tycoon or Horatio Alger myth, and the Southern version.¹ Regarding these versions, she notes defects in the New England and the Western. The main defect of the Puritan

¹Joan Foster Santas, Ellen Glasgow's American Dream (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1965), p. 9.

heaven is that it is not to be found in this world, and the Western vision, which Mrs. Santas describes as being founded "on Sunday school maxims and admonitions from Mother,"² holds up for only a few "good boys" who do manage to make a fortune. Although Mrs. Santas explains that each dream has its own morality and methodology, she states that "only the Southern version was without a fatal flaw."³ To show that she places Ellen Glasgow's work in the Southern version Mrs. Santas says:

As it emerges from Ellen Glasgow's work the Southern dream promises and provides more than either of its counterparts. Its goal of heaven on earth is far more pleasant and appealing than either the Puritanical eternity among the angels or the precarious temporal paradise of industrial power, perhaps the more so since it does not necessarily exclude either of the others.⁴

After definitely stating in her introduction that Miss Glasgow's work portrayed the Southern version of the American dream, Mrs. Santas, in her first chapter, seems to limit the author's vision even further. For her chapter heading she uses the following statement by Miss Glasgow concerning the nature of her work:

So I determined that I would write, not merely about Southern themes, but a well-rounded social record of Virginia from the decade before the

²Ibid., p. 10.

³Ibid., p. 9.

⁴Ibid., p. 10, 11.

Confederacy down to the period in which I was then living....⁵

She contends that it was Ellen Glasgow's hope "to illuminate the Southern dream for the future by rekindling the Virginian past."⁶ Although Mrs. Santas says that this desire to write a social record appears to be an absurd ambition, nevertheless she gives Miss Glasgow full credit for achieving the ambition and says that it was done "with a scope and penetration rarely equalled in American letters."⁷ In this same chapter that seems to make Virginia traditions the true dream of Ellen Glasgow, Mrs. Santas again refers to the American dream and seemingly unites the Northern and Southern versions. She believes that if the Southern vision is understood "it may prove to be founded, peculiarly enough, on ideals of honor, responsibility, and achievement identical with rather than divided from those that shape the dream of Northerners."⁸ In concluding this chapter she even suggests the universal appeal of these same values when she says that they do not belong to a special group nor to a specific age. While this

⁵Ellen Glasgow, A Certain Measure: an Interpretation of Prose Fiction (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1943), p. 59.

⁶Santas, p. 23.

⁷Ibid., p. 25.

⁸Ibid., p. 45.

suggestion perhaps indicates that Ellen Glasgow not only realized her ambition to write a social history of Virginia but also her desire to write "of the universal chords beneath the superficial variations of scene and character,"⁹ it still does not establish Miss Glasgow's American dream. It does suggest, however, that Miss Glasgow viewed this dream through the eyes of the Southerner and more particularly through the eyes of the Virginia lady.

There is no reason to question Mrs. Santas's facts nor her interesting presentation of them; however, her view that Ellen Glasgow's vision of "a society of blessed individuals"¹⁰ represents the American dream seems a rather broad interpretation of these facts. Perhaps Mrs. Santas herself gives the key to the source of Miss Glasgow's vision when she says, "The Virginia she knew best, the Virginia of her most authentic novels, comprised only a small but unique area of the 'great South.'"¹¹

It was from this unique area, this Virginia, that Miss Glasgow wrote her social record; it was here that she searched for the "universal chords." Her hope for a better society and her vision of the blessed individual,

⁹Ellen Glasgow, The Woman Within (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1954), p. 98.

¹⁰Santas, p. 5.

¹¹Ibid., p. 25.

stalwart, yet civilized, are built on Virginia traditions and the heritage of the Virginia past. Although Miss Glasgow wrote on Southern themes, her treatment of these themes marks her work as essentially Virginian rather than Southern. It is the purpose of this paper to show by examining five Southern themes that Ellen Glasgow's dream is not so much American, as Mrs. Santas maintains, as it is a Virginia dream, developed and nurtured by the author as she searches for an enduring meaning of life in the manners, customs, and beliefs that are common to her native state.

CHAPTER I

THE LAND

According to the listing found in A Certain Measure, Ellen Glasgow's better-known novels are placed in the following categories: "Novels of the Commonwealth," "Novels of the Country," and "Novels of the City." Only three novels are considered "Novels of the Country." Actually the Virginia countryside and the Virginia farm are important in most of Miss Glasgow's early novels, some of which are listed as "Novels of the Commonwealth," and to a certain extent in those later works which she calls her "Novels of the City." Time and time again the rural scene or the land itself provides the security or the sense of belonging that her characters require. Since Miss Glasgow's concept of the land remains the same throughout her novels, those urban novels which have the least to say about the land will be examined first. The meaning of the land as it is revealed in several of her early novels will then be considered. (The Miller of Old Church, which is a novel of the country, will not be a part of this study. Although its setting is rural and it contains much about the land, the emphasis of the novel seems to focus

on the classes of rural society rather than on the land and its meaning, and it will be treated in its proper place.) Vein of Iron and Barren Ground will be discussed last because here Miss Glasgow presents her most detailed and most compelling view of the land.

The belief in the land that Miss Glasgow's characters inherit has its beginnings in the very colonization of Virginia. The availability of the land and the inducement of free land to settlers were important factors in persuading colonists to leave their homeland and to settle in America. Francis Butler Simkins states that "the right to win a stake in the community through land ownership"¹ was of great importance to the English colonists. Simkins clearly indicates the continuing importance of the land when he says that "the distinctive features of Southern economic and social life were created during the Colonial period."² In considering the importance of the land in the South, one must remember that farming was never a practical occupation for colonists of the North and that their interests quickly turned to trade and manufacture. There the town and the village became important to society rather than the farm

¹Francis Butler Simkins, A History of the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 49.

²Ibid., p. 78.

and the family. The concept of the land was not quite the same for the Deep South either, for the residents of the Cotton Kingdom, not being a part of the Colonial period, could not acquire in quite the same way as Virginians the Colonial views on rural life. Thus Miss Glasgow's characters inherit a belief in the land that differs sharply from that of the North and also varies considerably from that of the Deep South. Virginia Moore in her book, Virginia Is a State of Mind, certainly attests to the importance of the land, for she considers the soil the very body of Virginia and states that "soil and climate mould men."³ She further emphasizes the importance of rural life when she says that in Virginia towns are not encouraged and are kept as country-like as possible.

In considering Mrs. Moore's statements about the importance of the land further, the urban novels, The Sheltered Life and In This Our Life, are worthy of mention not only because of their references to the land but also because of their characters' adherence to the belief in the goodness of the land and the rural way of life. General Archbald in The Sheltered Life lives in the city, but he is old, and his thoughts often wander back to his younger days

³Virginia Moore, Virginia Is a State of Mind (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1941), p. 15.

spent in the country. Remembering his old home in the country, he has these thoughts:

No other way of living has ever seemed to him so deeply rooted in the spirit of place, in an established feeling for life. Not for happiness alone, not for life at its best only, but for the whole fresh or salty range of experience. There was, too, a quality, apart from physical zest, that he had found nowhere else in the world, a mellow flavour he had never forgotten.⁴

Asa Timberlake in In This Our Life has lived in the city all of his life. However, he no longer lives in the large house of his boyhood but in a newer, smaller house that he never seems to feel quite comfortable or at home in. His Sunday afternoon visits with Kate Oliver at her farm, Hunter's Fare, become the only bright, happy events in his otherwise dull life with his mediocre job and his nagging wife. These visits to the farm give an opportunity to enjoy the quiet Virginia countryside, to take long walks and watch the hunting dogs roam the fields. Asa nourishes the hope that someday his wife Lavinia will inherit money and that he will be free at last to go to the country, but until that time his Sunday bus trip through the country and his quiet hours at Hunter's Fare

⁴Ellen Glasgow, The Sheltered Life (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1932), pp. 141, 142.

must furnish stability and meaning for his life.⁵

While General Archbald and Asa Timberlake show no particular distrust of the city, they certainly show no genuine affection for it. Theirs is the heritage of the land and the rural way of life, and this heritage is shared in Miss Glasgow's Virginia by the city dweller as well as by the farmer.

Although Ellen Glasgow's Civil War novel, The Battle-Ground, has its setting in rural Virginia, Mrs. Santas is most concerned about the source of the patriotism of the two young soldiers, Pinetop and Dan Montjoy. Mrs. Santas attributes the patriotism of the mountaineer Pinetop to what she calls "a 'religious' conviction about Virginia."⁶ Her further comments indicate that she believes that Dan's patriotism springs from Virginian romance; however, she considers Pinetop's mountain acres more likely to produce faith than romance. Mrs. Santas does not elaborate on her meaning of the term "religious" nor explain "the Virginian romance"; nevertheless, she does imply that both qualities

⁵Ellen Glasgow, In This Our Life (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1941), pp. 23, 180, 378. Throughout this paper references to material from Miss Glasgow's novels that is not quoted directly are grouped. In all cases the references in the notes follow the order of the usage of the material in the text.

⁶Santas, p. 59.

were developed by the land.

Certainly Dan Montjoy and Pinetop are widely separated in social background, but each portrays basically the same love for his cherished spot of Virginia. This love of Virginia is obviously the source of patriotism for Pinetop; however, for Dan, the love of the land becomes the source of strength at the close of the War. Uneducated and poor, Pinetop comes from the mountains of Virginia, where he has eked out a living on a thin and rocky soil. Pinetop, who never owned a slave and never expects to, joins the fight.⁷ He does not declare his love for his mountain home, but he does show this love when he explains his thoughts about going into battle:

Bless your life, as I stood out thar I didn't see how I was going to fire my musket, till all of a jiffy a thought jest jumped into my head and sent me gangin' down that hill. 'Them folks have set thar feet on ole Virginny,' was what I thought. 'They've set thar feet on ole Virginny, and they've got to take 'em off damn quick.'⁸

Young Dan Montjoy, who lives with his grandparents at Chericoke, merely accepts the beauty of the valley, the woods, and the fields under cultivation. But the War changes all that. When he struggles home after Appomattox, it is with

⁷Ellen Glasgow, The Battle-Ground (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1902), pp. 289, 443.

⁸Ibid., p. 323.

a tremendous sense of loss that he views the destruction on all sides. His home is gone, so many of the wooded areas have been destroyed, the fields are overgrown, and yet the land remains. The land and his love for Betty Ambler are all that are left of his youthful dreams. The land gives him the courage and the means to begin life anew.⁹

Although W. J. Cash, Clement Eaton, and Francis Simkins all agree on the rural nature of the South and the importance of the land in Southern culture, Mr. Simkins certainly recognizes the differences in areas of the South when he makes the following statement:

The mode of life of the Cotton Kingdom ran counter to the progressive thinking of the age. Its rulers had no time to develop the liberality of spirit and culture which for two centuries had characterized the slaveholding aristocracy of the Atlantic seaboard. Throughout its short existence of scarcely four decades, the Cotton Kingdom was fundamentally marked by the isolation and rawness of the frontier.¹⁰

While these observations have an important bearing on Southern class society, they are also pertinent to a discussion of the land.

In this Deep South that has been described as a frontier, large plantation owners equated their acres with

⁹Ibid., pp. 290, 291, 498, 502.

¹⁰Simkins, p. 154, 155.

wealth and social position. Small farms were of little significance, for cotton was king, and cotton was a great devourer of land. Since the smart operator had to continually acquire and clear new fields, he had no time to develop a sense of belonging or of closeness to the acres of home. The only security that the land seemed to bring was a questionable financial security based on fluctuations of the cotton market. William Faulkner's novels certainly have the reputation of portraying life in the Deep South, and his characters do not have a special attachment to the land, nor do they gain any inner stability from the familiar fields. Thomas Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom! takes up land in Mississippi, carves out a plantation, and builds a mansion, but he gains no sense of belonging and no real love of home. Quentin Compson, who narrates the story in Absalom, Absalom!, can quickly deny that he hates the South, but the panic that he feels clearly shows that no ties of land or place bind him to his South.¹¹

In sharp contrast to the large plantations of the Cotton Kingdom is the small peanut farm in the Tidewater section of Virginia that Miss Glasgow uses as a setting

¹¹ William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (The Modern Library; New York: Random House, 1936), p. 378.

for The Voice of the People. There is no hope here of enlarging the meager holding of land, and it is only with a great deal of hard work that Nicholas Burr's family can make a living. Nicholas is more fortunate than most young men of his class since he does acquire an education and political prominence, but he knows full well what labor the farm requires. Often in his youth, he was in the fields and plowing by daybreak.¹² In spite of his youthful toil, he is aware, when he becomes older, of the special qualities an area acquires for those who call it home. Coming back to the familiar scenes, he describes his Virginia as "a country where each ragged inch of ground wears its strange, distinctive charm, where each rotting worm fence guards a peculiar beauty for those who know it...."¹³

Obviously the charm of the home fields does not impress Mrs. Santas as an important aspect of Vein of Iron and Barren Ground. Although she finds many surface similarities between the novels, she says that Miss Glasgow uses "land and depression in the respective novels as materials

¹²Ellen Glasgow, The Voice of the People (The Old Dominion Edition; Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1933), pp. 27, 28, 34, 35.

¹³Ibid., p. 263.

for salvation."¹⁴ She does note, however, that actual farming was never a way of life for the Fincastles in Vein of Iron and that the land merely has symbolic value for them. One must certainly agree that the land is not the means of livelihood for the Fincastle family, but one must also remember that Miss Glasgow does not intend to show that the love of the land and the cultivation of the soil are the same thing.

Certainly Ada Fincastle, who grows up in Shut-in Valley, loves the mountains and the valley that have always been home to her and her people. However, she rejects the familiar scene and willingly seeks a new life in Queenborough because she has shut herself off from her community since the birth of her child. She has had Ralph McBride's child but must wait for marriage until he returns from service in World War I. Ada, her father, her aunt, and her child move to Queenborough, where Ada must work and help provide for her family. These are difficult days for Ada, and even Ralph's safe return and her marriage do not make her life a joyful or an easy one. The Depression does involve Ada more in the life of her neighbors, but she and her family always seem a part of the valley, and their days in Queenborough do not strengthen or enrich their

¹⁴Santas, p. 200.

lives.¹⁵ It is not until she and Ralph return to their mountain home that she gains a feeling of peace and a hope that life again can be good. This homeward journey is not, of course, a return to agriculture, but as Blair Rouse says, "a return to their spiritual home."¹⁶

Although Mrs. Santas devotes a chapter in her book to the novel Barren Ground, her interest in this chapter is not the land, but her own search for the basis of Miss Glasgow's dream as revealed in the novel. She does emphatically say that the land or the "mystique of the land" is not of primary importance in Barren Ground.¹⁷ Nor would she have her readers believe that Ellen Glasgow's views are one with the Agrarians. It is possible, however, to agree with Clement Eaton's statement that "No historian has portrayed so realistically and poignantly as has Ellen Glasgow in the novel Barren Ground the effect of impoverished soil on Southern men and women...."¹⁸ and yet accept Mrs. Santas's contention that the soil itself and the final blooming of

¹⁵Ellen Glasgow, Vein of Iron (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1935), pp. 15, 277, 395, 396.

¹⁶Blair Rouse, Ellen Glasgow (Twayne's United States Authors Series; New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1962), p. 121.

¹⁷Santas, p. 147.

¹⁸Clement Eaton, A History of the Old South (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949), p. 461.

the once barren ground is not the theme of this novel.

Miss Glasgow in her introduction in the Old Dominion edition of Barren Ground makes the following statement:

In Barren Ground, as in The Sheltered Life, I felt that the scene, apart from the human figures, possessed an added dimension, a universal rhythm deeper and more fluid than any material texture. Beneath the lights and shadows there is a brooding spirit of place, but deeper still beneath the spirit of place there is the whole movement of life.¹⁹

Mrs. Santas agrees that the feeling for "place" is important, but she believes that the shared things of the place are of more vital concern.²⁰ One can accept the fact that there are many emotions and both tangible and intangible things that make a certain area cherished and special, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at the true meaning of the place if those things that have made it special are stripped away.

Certainly the land and the spirit of place are essential elements in Barren Ground. These worn-out Virginia acres might have no value for others, but they are important to Dorinda Oakley. Barren fields, broomsedge, and hard work are the facts of life for Dorinda as she grows up on the farm of her parents near Pedlar's Mill. It is not

¹⁹Ellen Glasgow, Barren Ground (The Old Dominion Edition; Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1933) p. viii.

²⁰Santas, p. 148.

until an unfortunate love affair comes that she leaves home. Betrayed by her lover, she leaves immediately for New York, where she must await the arrival of her child, but where she also hopes to avoid bringing shame to her family. Although she loses the baby, she is fortunate in finding employment and in gaining the friendship of her employer. She has a comfortable life in New York, but it is a way of life that does not satisfy her and one from which she gains no sense of purpose. One evening in the park, the Virginia fields call her home.²¹ Dorinda's thoughts in the midst of this strange sensation are recorded in the following way by

Miss Glasgow:

For the first time since she had left home, she felt that earlier and deeper associations were reaching out to her, that they were groping after her, like tendrils of vines, through the darkness and violence of her later memories. Earlier and deeper associations, rooted there in the earth, were drawing her back across time and space and forgetfulness.²²

Dorinda returns to Old Farm and from this time forth her life has a purpose and a determination that it has lacked before. It is true that she has learned to live without love, but this, in a sense, is a bargain that she has made. The fields that begin to flourish under her care enable her to come to terms with life and to attain the confidence

²¹Ellen Glasgow, Barren Ground, pp. 4, 241, 242.

²²Ibid., p. 244.

and courage that belong to the victorious.²³

Thus from her earliest novels to her latest, Miss Glasgow's works reveal the importance of the cherished spot of soil and of the familiar scene. The land need not be fertile nor highly productive; the rural dwellings need not be the mansions of the Deep South. For the spirit of place is not an economic commodity, nor does it signify an agricultural basis for life. It is that rootedness in one's environment that brings a sense of security and a sense of unity with life.

²³Ibid., p. 524.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL CLASSES

Unless one chooses to doubt Miss Glasgow's own remarks about her work, there can be no question about her intention to write in the form of fiction a social history of Virginia. As previously noted in the introduction, Mrs. Santas congratulates Miss Glasgow on the accomplishment of this task. However, Miss Glasgow undertakes the dual task of relating the customs and manners of Virginians while at the same time correcting some of the erroneous beliefs about the social order in Virginia. In A Certain Measure, Miss Glasgow explains her purpose in the following way:

I began a history of manners that would embrace those aspects of Southern life with which I was acquainted. I intended to treat the static customs of the country, as well as the changing provincial fashions of the small towns and cities. Moreover, I planned to portray different social orders, and especially, for this would constitute the major theme of my chronicle, the rise of the middle class as the dominant force in Southern democracy.¹

In this chapter on the social classes of Virginia, the aristocracy will be considered first since it is the most important social order at the time of The Battle-Ground,

¹Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 4.

the novel which Miss Glasgow considers the beginning of her social history. The gradual weakening of this order will then be discussed. The failure of the aristocracy to live up to its responsibility leads to Miss Glasgow's stated theme: "the rise of the middle class as the dominant force in Southern democracy." To be more exact it is the rise of individual members of the middle class to positions of leadership and authority, for some members of this social order do not rise but become more like the poor white. Since the middle class does embrace such a large group and since there is so great a variation in the definition of the term "poor white," the social class of poor whites will be considered in connection with the higher order, the middle class, and since Miss Glasgow's novels portray very few poor white characters, this category of the social order will be discussed last for the purpose of clarity rather than importance.

To write social history, one must first understand social order or strata of society, and that in itself is a difficult task. Ellen Glasgow is on firm ground when she accepts the fact that there was an aristocracy in Virginia, for both Simkins and Cash state that such an aristocracy existed. In fact they both say that Virginia aristocracy

was the model of society for the Old South.² Cash explains the aristocracy of Virginia in much the same way as do the authors of Cavalier Commonwealth, who grant that such a social order existed but show that it arose not from the noble lineage of the planter but from his "worth and service."³ In further remarks about Southern aristocracy, Cash implies that the cotton planters of the Deep South failed to recognize that Virginia aristocracy developed over a period of years and that land and slaves in themselves did not make the planter an aristocrat. Although there were certainly some aristocrats and gentlemen in the Deep South, many of these planters of the Cotton Kingdom apparently confused personal wealth with "worth" and had neither the time nor the talent for "service."

In his writing Faulkner is as aware as Cash of the lack of aristocratic background in many of the Mississippi planters. In Absalom, Absalom!, he notes in the genealogy "Thomas Sutpen - Born in West Virginia mountains, 1807. One of several children of poor whites, Scotch-English stock."⁴

²W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South (Vintage Books; New York: Random House, 1941) p. 5.
Simkins, p. 151.

³William E. Hemphill, Marvin W. Schlegel, and Sadie E. Engelberg, Cavalier Commonwealth, History and Government in Virginia (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1957) p. 125.

⁴William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, "Genealogy."

Although Sutpen acquires a plantation, a mansion, and the title of Colonel in the War Between the States, he remains an adventurer and a rough frontiersman. Not only does he lack the outward manner and behavior of the Virginia aristocrat, but he lacks the more important qualities of worth and service.

Ellen Glasgow too expected her aristocrats to have large holdings in land and wealth, for according to historians the Virginia aristocrats were successful businessmen. In addition, however, she expected them to be men of responsibility and integrity whose lives reflected the qualities of gentlemen and whose way of life possessed "grace and beauty."⁵ She presents such a character, Peyton Ambler, in The Battle-Ground. The governor of the state prior to the time of the novel, Peyton Ambler has demonstrated his political ability and concern. He owns Uplands, a large plantation where many slaves, both house servants and field hands, depend upon him. Kind in his treatment, he refuses to sell his slaves when they become ill, and his wife comments that the quarters are filled with "infirm darkies." Not only is he reluctant to sell slaves, but he buys ones he does not need to prevent families and loved ones from being separated. The governor's

⁵Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 13.

two daughters are young ladies who have been trained by governesses, and they and his wife are the hostesses who make life at Uplands gracious and hospitable. A man of conviction and sober thinking, the Governor uses all his influence to keep Virginia in the Union, for he loves both Virginia and the United States. Only the call for troops from Virginia can persuade him to take up arms, for, although he is a man of conviction, he is also a person of loyalty, and he cannot go to war against the South. Governor Ambler's death from a battle wound is doubly tragic; he dies in a war that he has tried so hard to prevent, and his death and that of others like him mark the end of the Old Virginia aristocracy.⁶

Since Miss Glasgow uses The Battle-Ground to show the end of the true aristocratic tradition in Virginia, it is only natural to expect that her novels of a later period will show the decay of this social order.⁷ In the novel, The Miller of Old Church, to which Miss Glasgow gives the dates 1898-1902,⁸ she shows the weakness of the aristocratic Gays. The Gays differ somewhat from Ellen Glasgow's aristocrats in earlier novels since the Gays are comparative

⁶Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, pp. 45, 69, 70, 278, 279.

⁷Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 13.

⁸Ibid., p. 4.

newcomers in Old Church and have not owned their land for generations. Old Jonathan Gay purchased Jordan's Journey when the last of the Jordans died.⁹ Miss Glasgow's story centers not on old Jonathan but on the period when young Jonathan Gay and his mother Angela are at Jordan's Journey after the death of old Jonathan.

In writing about this novel in his study of Ellen Glasgow, Louis Auchincloss contends that even when slipping the aristocrats dominated the scene. He then gives this description of Angela Gay:

Mrs. Gay is everything that old Virginia wanted a woman to be — lovely, helpless, indolent and ignorant, and she conceals behind these qualities an inner force that enchains and destroys all those around her: her brother-in-law, his mistress, her sister Kesiah (a magnificent portrait of an ugly old maid rejected by a world that idolizes beauty) and finally her own son.¹⁰

I would question only the first part of Mr. Auchincloss's statement, "Mrs. Gay is everything that old Virginia wanted a woman to be." Certainly Carl Bridenbaugh in his book, Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South, has exposed the myth of the leisure of the plantation, and the mistress of the plantation was expected to be

⁹Ellen Glasgow, The Miller of Old Church (The Old Dominion Edition; Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1933), pp. 15,16.

¹⁰Louis Auchincloss, Ellen Glasgow (Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 33; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1964), p. 21.

neither helpless nor indolent.¹¹ As further proof that Mrs. Gay was not what Virginians wanted their women to be, one can go back to that period of true aristocracy that has just been discussed. Here Miss Glasgow describes the aristocratic Mrs. Ambler:

She was not a clever woman in a worldly sense, yet her sympathy, from the hourly appeals to it, had grown as fine as intellect. She was hopelessly ignorant of ancient history and the Italian Renaissance; but she had a genius for the affections, and where a greater mind would have blundered over a wound, her soft hand went by intuition to the spot.¹²

However, the rest of Mr. Auchincloss's indictment stands. In Mrs. Gay, Miss Glasgow shows a decaying aristocracy, for Mrs. Gay is so eager to remain aloof, to be considered a fine lady, that she shuts herself off from what she considers the lower elements of her community. She wishes to be served, not to serve. Her supposed delicate heart is simply a convenient invention that allows her to be told only what she desires to hear and enables her to pretend ignorance of anything unpleasant. Even in death, her son Jonathan manages to conceal the true nature of his "shooting accident," and after his death, friends and family do not sadden her with the story of Jonathan's marriage to

¹¹Carl Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), p. 17.

¹²Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, p. 69.

Blossom Revercomb, a young lady of inferior social station. Angela is thoroughly selfish and even evil in her demand that her life be kept sheltered and comfortable.¹³

Unlike his mother, Jonathan is weak rather than evil. He would have enjoyed being a fine country gentleman, but he has only the desire and the aristocratic name.¹⁴ He does not have the qualities of leadership and responsibility that the post-war years demand. Dominated by his mother, unsure of his own convictions, and disliked by his socially inferior neighbors, he is never more than a likeable young man who is of no importance to his community.

Unfortunately the decay of the aristocracy was not confined to rural areas but was evident in Virginia cities also. Perhaps as tragic as the actual weakening of the aristocratic class was its pathetic struggle to keep up appearances, to perform the artificial niceties, and to live up to a set code of manners. If one judges by Faulkner's work, this clinging to a code of manners is not as important in the Deep South as it is in Virginia. Faulkner's residents of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, do not even burden themselves with the usual show of politeness and courtesy that one expects in the South. Faulkner's The

¹³Glasgow, The Miller of Old Church, pp. 66, 68, 386, 390.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 347, 348.

Sound and the Fury and Miss Glasgow's The Sheltered Life are of the same period, the early 1900's. However, there is no pretense of graciousness nor manners in the Compson household in The Sound and the Fury. Mrs. Compson whines and complains; Jason bullies his family about and never hesitates to belittle them even though he himself is stealing from his own niece. He does become enraged when his idiot brother Benjy is brought into town, but this outburst seems the result of Jason's embarrassment rather than his concern for Benjy. The decay of this family has stripped its members of family pride and love and even kindness, if, indeed, these qualities ever existed.

In The Sheltered Life, Miss Glasgow's characters live in calm and beauty. Nevertheless, the calm and beauty are deceptive, for Miss Glasgow's characters have their periods of quiet desperation and their confrontations with unpleasant situations which are not material for their conversations. In a neighborhood that is rapidly changing from good to poor and in one in which industry and the lower classes are moving ever closer, General Archbald, his daughters, his daughter-in-law and his granddaughter, and their neighbors, the Birdsongs, live in a manner as aristocratic and elegant as the neighborhood once was. Going to the Springs at the proper time, speaking and behaving in

the proper way, and associating with the proper people are all a part of the code of manners that they accept as a way of life. Their desire to hold fast to an out-moded social standard does not save them from the tragedy that innocence and the evasion of reality bring; however, their tragedy is not the same as that of the failing Compsons.¹⁵ Perhaps this is a trite statement and one that would be typical of a Virginian, but even the shell of manners preserves a certain dignity for Miss Glasgow's characters that Faulkner's residents of Mississippi lack.

This decline of the aristocracy and the changes in social customs that it brought were even more difficult for young ladies who were raised under the aristocratic tradition and the code of chivalry than they were on men. Eaton says that the practice of chivalry was nourished by aristocratic plantation society and that chivalry was actually the basis of the code of gracious manners.¹⁶ This is his explanation of the effect of this code on women:

The chivalric or romantic ideal dictated that the women should be highly feminine and that they should look up to the male as the protector and the oracle of worldly wisdom. They were shielded from hearing profane or sexy language, and convention required them to blush at

¹⁵Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, pp. 192, 193, 6,7, 394, 395.

¹⁶Eaton, p. 452.

the mention of sex. Their functions were to marry early, stay within the sphere of the home, raise numerous children, and uphold religious tradition.¹⁷

The problem was particularly vexing for widows and unmarried ladies who did not have financial resources. They were forced to live on the generosity of relatives or by doing handwork at home. The only other alternative, which was accepting employment outside the home, meant breaking the social code.

Gabriella Carr in Life and Gabriella lives with her mother in impoverished circumstances. They and some of the maiden ladies that live in the same dwelling are barely able to manage financially, but, while people of their acquaintance may take in sewing at home, work in a commercial establishment is below their social standing.¹⁸

Gabriella finally revolts against what Miss Glasgow describes as a "world of decay and inertia,"¹⁹ and accepts a position in a department store. Actually Gabriella's mother and those contemporaries of Gabriella who are so concerned about the "taint of trade" were trying to preserve what they considered an aristocratic way of life, but they had

¹⁷Ibid., p. 452

¹⁸Ellen Glasgow, Life and Gabriella (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1916), pp. 13, 35.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 75.

forgotten that hard work was one of the qualities that helped establish the old Virginia aristocracy.

With its loss of vigor and its clinging only to the outward appearances of gentility, the aristocratic class was not able to retain its dominance in the days after the Civil War when real fortitude was needed. It is only natural then that elements of the middle class, which was always the largest group, would rise to positions of greater importance. In spite of the fact that Northern abolitionists claimed that the South was inhabited by haughty aristocrats, debased poor whites and black slaves, it is much easier to verify the fact that the middle class was the largest social order and to explain its rise in influence than it is to clarify completely or actually define "middle class." In pointing to a middle class, the authors of Cavalier Commonwealth say that a large percentage of Virginians owned their own lands and add that the aristocrats exerted "an influence out of all proportion to their numbers."²⁰ Eaton states that "there existed a large body of yeoman farmers below the Potomac who constituted a true middle class."²¹ Two factors cited by authorities on the South give explanation concerning the rise of inferior social

²⁰Hemphill, Schlegel, and Engelberg, p. 125.

²¹Eaton, p. 455.

orders. Shields McIlwaine, who writes about the Southern poor white, makes the important distinction between Southern class and caste when he says "Miss Glasgow has added a much-needed footnote to the Northern view of the trash: the Old South never refused - after definite proof - to recognize ability and character, regardless of class."²² In discussing Southern social customs which he says originated in the Colonial period, Francis Simkins lists as one of the most important the desire of Southerners to climb up into the circle of their betters rather than to pull them down.²³

No difficulty exists really in accepting the fact of the existence of a middle class or of acknowledging that members of one class could with effort raise themselves into a higher social order, but the problem of establishing the bounds of the middle class must still be considered. Miss Glasgow herself uses several terms to describe her characters from this social class. She refers to Abel Revercomb in The Miller of Old Church as "The better type of plain countryman who forged ahead."²⁴ In Barren Ground, she considers the Abernathys, the Greylocks, the Pedlars,

²²Shields McIlwaine, The Southern Poor-White from Lubberland to Tobacco Road (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 188.

²³Simkins, p. 78.

²⁴Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 127.

and the Ellgoods "good people." "In Virginia," she says, "this class was known, and is still known, as 'good people,' a label that distinguishes it from the aristocratic estate of 'good families.'"²⁵ To further establish this class as a middle class she says that these people "stand as a buffer class between the opulent gentry and the hired labourers."²⁶ Mr. McIlwaine and Miss Glasgow do not agree, however, on the bounds of the social classes, for he lists the Revercombs in The Miller of Old Church as poor white and hints that the families in Barren Ground are also a part of this poor white class.

In her discussion of Miss Glasgow's treatment of social classes, Mrs. Santas suggests that Ellen Glasgow "sacrificed sociological precision in treating a class in favor of attention to 'fringe' members of that class."²⁷ She then makes the following observation:

The fact is that Miss Glasgow was interested only in one 'type' of protagonist, and although she was actually equally concerned to discover this 'type' among poor whites and 'good people' as well as among aristocrats, we ought to expect that her Abel Revercombs and Nick Burrs will resemble in character and ambitions not only her Dorinda Oakleys and Ada Fincastles more closely than they do their own 'typical' families, but that both these 'classes' of heroes and heroines, whether poor white or 'good people,' will be closer in perceptions and desires to Ellen Glasgow's well-meaning

²⁵Ibid., p. 157.

²⁶Ibid., p. 157, 158.

²⁷Santas, p. 128.

aristocrats such as Laura Wilde and General Archbald than are such fallen aristocrats as the Jonathan Gays or Little Jenny Archbald.²⁸

Undoubtedly Miss Glasgow does search for protagonists who portray certain qualities of character and determination. In the first place, it would seem rather foolish to write of "the rise of the middle class" unless one was sure that members of such a class had the opportunity and the ability to rise. Secondly, Ellen Glasgow does not base her observations on the Abolitionists' view of Southern society nor on the views held by the Cotton Kingdom, but on society in Virginia. Certainly she is searching for the virtues of the old Virginia aristocracy which she believes some members of the middle class possess. Not only does she endow the rising members of this class with the qualities of the old aristocracy, but she finds in them a vigor and the courage that enable them to face the present age and build toward a better future.

In looking more closely at Miss Glasgow's middle-class characters, one finds that the "plain countryman" Abel Revercomb is born of parents of the poorer white class. His father appears to have been a plain dirt farmer who was rather shiftless, but his mother with her strong Calvinistic beliefs seems to be a stronger and more determined person than

²⁸Ibid., p. 129.

her husband. Abel Revercomb not only works hard, but he is also ambitious and eager to learn. He even leaves his home in his youth and works in a factory for a year in his attempt to educate himself. He continues to read although the rest of his family thinks this is a foolish pasttime. Self-employed as a miller, Abel manages his business well and enjoys a good reputation in his community. While he lacks the social elegance and refinement of his aristocratic neighbor, Jonathan Gay, Abel not only gains political influence but is recognized as a leader in the rural community of Old Church. Possessing neither wealth nor aristocratic name, Abel rises to his position of influence by qualities that are more durable than are the material assets of money and social standing.²⁹

Dorinda Oakley in Barren Ground actually has in her background two distinct levels of the middle class. Her mother's people are Scotch Calvinists who are educated and who represent a much higher social level than her father's people. The Oakleys are apparently toward the bottom of the middle class, and, although her father is honest and hard-working, he has neither the ability nor the initiative to improve himself or his lot in life. After a brief stay

²⁹Glasgow, The Miller of Old Church, pp. 41, 42, 43, 171, 14, 15, 367.

in New York, Dorinda Oakley comes back to the worn-out fields and broomsedge. By hard work and skillful management she reclaims those fields and transforms Old Farm into a profitable, well-run, modern farm. There is something in Dorinda, perhaps the "vein of iron" that Miss Glasgow mentions so often, that does not allow her to accept defeat and debasement easily. Interested in building up and restoring her land and, in a sense, her own family and herself, Dorinda is not afraid of new methods and new ideas. Her perserverance is an example to those who would sit idly by, accepting defeat in life. Her status in her community is fashioned by her willingness to accept work and responsibility and by her endurance as she strives for a better and a more meaningful way of life than her mother and her father have known.³⁰

Thus Abel Revercomb, Dorinda Oakley, as well as Ada Fincastle in Vein of Iron, whom Mrs. Santas mentions, and other heroes and heroines of the middle class refuse to give in to life and drift down to the level of the poor whites but instead accept the challenge of life and the problems of their particular age. They seek to establish values of worth and dignity, and they adhere to these values as they seek to make a better life for themselves.

³⁰Glasgow, Barren Ground, pp. 7, 8, 9, 476, 477.

In his discussion of these same characters, Shields McIlwaine, whom Mrs. Santas quotes and whose criticism she accepts as sound, implies that entirely too many of these poor whites, as he calls them, are rising above their class. While he praises Miss Glasgow as a pioneer for writing about the poor white of her state, he adds that she has told "particular, not general social truth."³¹ I believe that Mr. McIlwaine has overlooked several important facts in making this statement, for his concern is the poor white and Miss Glasgow's is the middle class. Miss Glasgow certainly shows that while some members of the middle class rise and become a dominant force many others do not. Abel Revercomb is superior in every way to his two brothers, Abner and Archie. Abner apparently lacks the ability to improve himself, and Archie lacks the ambition.³² Dorinda Oakley's brother is irresponsible and indifferent to any demands of family pride or loyalty. It nearly breaks his mother's heart when she feels compelled to lie to get him out of difficulty with the law.³³ Another important consideration is the fact that Miss Glasgow actually did not write of the lowest levels of the whites. She verifies this herself in

³¹McIlwaine, p. 191.

³²Glasgow, The Miller of Old Church, pp. 46, 51, 52.

³³Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 324.

an interview with Blair Rouse.³⁴ In the thirteen novels that comprise her social history of Virginia, only one, The Voice of the People, has a hero, Nick Burr, whom Miss Glasgow calls poor white and even here the term "poor white" is in quotation marks.³⁵ However, Miss Glasgow does not suggest that Nick is the usual poor white nor that his rise to prominence is a simple matter. Aristocratic Judge Basset befriends young Nick and sees that the worthy but poor youth has a chance for an education. From the contempt of the house servants for the poor-white boy up to Eugenia Battle's momentary doubt of the grown man, the author shows that Nick's rise to the position of governor is difficult and certainly the unusual rather than the ordinary situation.³⁶ Actually Miss Glasgow gives only glimpses of the sharecroppers and the poor whites such as Sol Peterkin and his daughter in The Deliverance.

In further considering McIlwaine's term "social truth" and in appraising Miss Glasgow's contribution to social truth, one may pose several questions. Can social truth be found in the collapse of the Sutpen and Compson families in Faulkner's work? Do the depths of moral and physical

³⁴Rouse, p. 37.

³⁵Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 60.

³⁶Glasgow, The Voice of the People, pp. 86, 212, 213.

degradation to which the poor-white Lesters sink in Tobacco Road reveal social truth? Perhaps each of these authors presents some social truth, but surely Miss Glasgow's portrayal of the Virginia middle class is social truth too. Unless one accepts the reality and the importance of the middle class, he is faced with a modern version of the Abolitionists' view — a society of fallen aristocrats, debased whites, and Negroes, who are no longer slaves.

CHAPTER III

THE NEGRO

Certainly every Southern writer who has attempted to portray his homeland realistically has had to consider the Negro and the relationship of the Negroes and the whites in the community. Ellen Glasgow does not write of the Negro in the South, but of the Negro in Virginia. In her novels is outlined the black man's development from a state of slavery at the time of the Civil War to a place of responsible citizenship in the 1920's and 1930's. It will be the purpose of this chapter to show that, while a few of Miss Glasgow's Negro characters have characteristics which members of their race in the Deep South share, many reveal self-reliance and aspirations for a better life, qualities that would rarely be seen among Negroes in the Deep South. It will also be noted that the Negroes in Miss Glasgow's novels, for the most part, live in an atmosphere that is quite different from that of the Deep South. Although Louis Auchincloss's statement that Ellen Glasgow "will be remembered for her women, not her men"¹

¹Auchincloss, p. 43.

may be generally true, I believe that the men are stronger among her Negro characters and that Parry Clay in In This Our Life is the most memorable. Therefore, I shall discuss first the women as portrayed in Barren Ground and then the Negro men in the novels, The Battle-Ground, Barren Ground, and In This Our Life.

Before one can properly evaluate Miss Glasgow's treatment of the Negro, he needs to know the attitude toward this race that was a part of Miss Glasgow's Virginia heritage, and he needs to examine the difference in attitude toward the Negro in Virginia and in the Deep South. Apparently Virginians were never strong believers in slavery. Even in Colonial days, Virginia petitioned the Crown to stop the importation of slaves. Manumission was encouraged in Virginia, and, with the strong support of Virginia leaders, Congress authorized the formation of the American Colonization Society in 1816. It is estimated that in the period from 1820 to 1860 Virginians liberated approximately 80,000 slaves.² Many prominent Virginians believed that slavery was morally wrong as well as financially impractical.

Most Southern historians say that slavery was a dying institution when the invention of the cotton gin revived it by causing a tremendous need for labor. Ironically it was

²Hemphill, Schlegel, and Engelberg, p. 223.

at this time that attacks from Northern Abolitionists caused all Southerners to rally to the defense of slavery. Even Virginians who under ordinary circumstances might have been somewhat critical of slavery believed that they should support the Southern view. Francis Simkins says that the Cotton Kingdom not only caused the revitalization of slavery but also spread the influence of the plantation system to an unthought of extent. Simkins also notes that the discipline of the slave was much harsher in the Deep South. Of the master who demanded this stern discipline, Simkins says:

Only a few of the planters of 1850 inherited their positions from the eighteenth-century aristocracy of coastal Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas. The mass were self-made men, like Gerald O'Hara in Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind, who carved fortunes for themselves from a new country."³

Perhaps the frontier background of the master was but one reason; the size and operation of the large plantations may have been another, but the Negroes' place in the Cotton Kingdom was not what it was in Virginia. Certainly some Negroes in Virginia were treated cruelly and unjustly, but, on the whole, in the Deep South they were driven harder and were more closely restricted.

In spite of the difference in attitude, Blair Rouse believes that Ellen Glasgow and William Faulkner have a great deal in common in their literary treatment of the

³Simkins, p. 134.

Negro:

Like William Faulkner, Ellen Glasgow recognized the worth of the Southern Negro. She never used her Negro characters for low comedy or sentimental effects. She saw them and understood them as persons of significance in their own right. William Faulkner's Dilsey of The Sound and the Fury would have found a sister in Aunt Mehitable of Barren Ground in wisdom and enduring character.⁴

While Faulkner and Ellen Glasgow treat their Negro characters with the same sincerity, Faulkner writes of the Negro in Mississippi, and Miss Glasgow writes of the Negro in Virginia; therefore, it is difficult to consider Aunt Mehitable and Dilsey sisters in anything except "wisdom and enduring character." Perhaps the Negro women from Mississippi and Virginia that seem to resemble each other the most are those that play a part in the decline and decay of the Sutpen family in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! and the Greylock family in Miss Glasgow's Barren Ground. However, it must be noted that neither author does more than briefly sketch the women characters but does emphasize the results of the illicit relationship between the white men and the Negro women. Yankee Shreve McCannon's comments at the end of Quentin Compson's story of the Sutpens in Absalom, Absalom!, "'So it takes two niggers to get rid of one Sutpen dont it'...You've got one nigger left. One nigger

⁴Rouse, pp. 140, 141.

Sutpen left'."5 clearly indicates the role of the Negro woman in that novel. The fire that consumes the great house that Sutpen built consumes his white son, Henry, and his daughter, Clytie, born of a Negro slave. The idiot Jim Bond, great-grandson of Sutpen, survives, a tragic symbol perhaps of the evil of the white man's lust and the Negro woman's servility. Old Dr. Greylock in Barren Ground too is survived only by his mulatto children, whom Miss Glasgow does not name as she does not name the mulatto mistress. His son Jason, a young doctor, comes home, but Jason does not have the determination to manage his own life. He cannot change his father's craving for drink, nor does he send away the mulatto mistress. Even the farm Five Oaks and the house itself appear to deteriorate with old Dr. Greylock as he lives out his last days, ignored by his white neighbors and even avoided by the reliable Negroes, who do not wish to encounter the Negro mistress.⁶

If Faulkner and Miss Glasgow had written only of the Negro woman as the victim of the white man, they would have indeed given an erroneous portrayal of the Negro woman in the South. Certainly Dilsey of The Sound and the Fury is more representative of Mississippi than is Sutpen's mistress.

⁵Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 378.

⁶Glasgow, Barren Ground, pp. 6, 7, 78.

Certainly Dilsey too has the wisdom and the enduring character which Rouse ascribes to her. She has the wisdom to see the Compsons as they are when she says, "Ise seed de first en de last."⁷ However, she has the enduring character to stay with her white family, to put up with Mrs. Compson's constant complaining and senseless demands and Jason's temper. Her strength and love apparently give the poor idiot Benjy the only comfort that he ever knows.

Miss Glasgow's Aunt Mehitable also has wisdom and enduring character, but it is difficult to imagine that she would have long submitted to the demands made on Dilsey: the long hours of work, the complete care of Benjy, and the lack of any real appreciation from the family she serves. Aunt Mehitable has pride and self-reliance too, and these qualities assume special significance when one remembers that Aunt Mehitable is an ex-slave. Having worked hard and having raised her sons to become capable farmers, Aunt Mehitable enjoys a place of respect among both the colored and the white in her community.⁸ Although Aunt Mehitable is important in the novel, Barren Ground, she is Dorinda's friend, never her servant. Young Fluvanna, who is Dorinda's servant, has

⁷William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (The Modern Library; New York: Random House, 1946), p. 316.

⁸Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 76, 77.

a unique place in her mistress's life and shares that life perhaps more than any other person. Of course, Fluvanna and her mistress are never represented as equals, but these women of different races do respect and admire each other, and both, in their own way, have a sense of pride in the improvements that come to Old Farm.⁹ Blair Rouse's comment shows perhaps most clearly the portrayal that Miss Glasgow gives: "In these two, Ellen Glasgow embodied in strong-willed, superstitious, and shrewd Aunt Mehitable the excellences of the old-time Negro, and in Fluvanna the capable, energetic, and faithful 'new' Negro of the turn of the century."¹⁰

When Miss Glasgow was writing her novels, the typical Negro woman would probably, like Fluvanna, be employed in a white household. To establish the role of the Negro man, however, would be a more difficult task. If one can picture the loyal and reliable older Negro man, he can probably picture also the Negro youth with his loud clothes and flamboyant manner, for both portraits have become a part of Southern literature.

Thomas Nelson Page's "Marse Chan" certainly establishes the loyal ex-slave. Sam, the Negro slave, goes to war with his master and does not return until he brings his master's

⁹Ibid., pp. 348, 349.

¹⁰Rouse, p. 89.

body home. Now an old man, he has only memories of Marse Chan and the white family he served so faithfully. In Ellen Glasgow's The Battle-Ground, Big Abel proves his loyalty just as Sam does. He goes with his young master, Dan Montjoy, and stays with him throughout the war. Never voicing a complaint, he endures every hardship that the battles and the final defeat bring in order to be with young Dan.¹¹ Those who have never known the loyalty of the Negro servant might consider Miss Glasgow's treatment of Big Abel as sentimental and romantic, but such devotion did exist. The loyalty and devotion of many of the ex-slaves and of their heirs, I believe, accounts for the concept of the faithful and reliable Negro.

However, to imply that the South had known only such Negro men as Big Abel would leave out the carefree Negro youth, who likes to strut on Saturday night. Caldwell's Candy-Man Beechum is such a character. He has got a "yellow gal" waiting and tells those other "niggers" to step aside. Caldwell's emphasis on the violence that awaits the Negro at the hands of a white man is clear enough, but the reader can almost see Candy-Man's high-spirited swagger. Even the actual "Fode" from Percy's Lanterns on the Levee has some of that love of show, and he is certainly far from reliable.

¹¹Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, pp. 232, 487.

Of course "Fode" doesn't mind getting roaring drunk, but Percy gives the reader an insight into "Fode's" life when he shows the Negro's drunken grief over his inability to change his life.¹²

Actually Ellen Glasgow departs from the accepted view of the carefree Negro and pictures in Barren Ground and In This Our Life the reliable Negro who is working seriously at changing and bettering his life. This emphasis is evident in Barren Ground, when Miss Glasgow lets her readers know that Aunt Mehitable's sons are not only thrifty and hard-working but have also bought small farms which they operate successfully. In this same novel, young Jason Greylock notices when he first returns to Pedlar's Mill that the Negroes who own their own small farms are much better managers and much better farmers than are the poor whites. Miss Glasgow too suggests an awareness among the whites of the respect that is due these Negroes. Dorinda disapproves of her husband's use of the term "nigger" and says that it is a scornful term used only by poor whites.¹³

Although the Negro is considered so definitely a part of the South, Mrs. Santas has surprisingly little comment on

¹²William Alexander Percy, Lanterns on the Levee; Recollections of a Planter's Son (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), p. 297.

¹³Glasgow, Barren Ground, pp. 78, 31, 274.

Miss Glasgow's treatment of the Negro. Actually her most important remarks on this subject come as a result of her discussion of the political reality in the novel, The Builders. In considering whether Miss Glasgow is evasive or not, Mrs. Santas contrasts Ellen Glasgow's position with that of other Southerners as follows:

For the entrenched Southerner of this evasive stamp, the Negro race as an entity has already been assimilated, has been given a place in the community or beneath the community in which it is expected to stay indefinitely without pain or disturbance to anyone. But for Miss Glasgow, the Negro is not an unassimilated entity since he is already viewed by the evasive idealists as having a definite if inferior place in the community; he is, if you like, only too well assimilated, only too much an entity and not a person. The problem is then to view him, as she views Parry Clay of In This Our Life, as an individual possessing his full share of emotions, capabilities, and aspirations, an individual who is entitled to fulfill himself not as a Negro with a designated sphere of activities in the community, but as a person who deserves full membership rights in any human community.¹⁴

While Mrs. Santas contends that this position is one that Miss Glasgow reached in her mature years, nevertheless she finds it not only an admirable position for a Southerner but also the only one that meets "ultimate goals or dreams."¹⁵

Certainly Ellen Glasgow's sensitive, yet penetrating treatment of Parry in In This Our Life presents an understanding and an awareness of the intelligent and ambitious Negro youth

¹⁴Santas, p. 114.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 114.

that one would scarcely expect to find in Southern literature in the 1930's. Yet this maiden lady who lived a rather secluded and aristocratic life in Richmond almost lays bare the soul of a young Negro who has dreams of accomplishment and of his own worth. Parry, the son of Minerva and Abel Clay, hard-working and respectable Negroes, aspires to a college education and to the profession of law. He does not expect his goal to be reached easily, nor is he unduly disappointed when he finds so little sympathy. He is glad to make some money for his college expenses by driving William Fitzroy's car and the car that William has given his pleasure-seeking niece Stanley. Stanley's weakness and complete selfishness cause her to blame a fatal accident on Parry. Although Parry is released after one night in jail and completely cleared of any wrongdoing, this experience, with its stark reality of the night in jail, has dashed his dream to pieces and broken his will. This one episode has so convinced him of the unjust treatment of his race and the limitations enforced upon it that he has no desire to pursue his dream. Education and ambition have failed him in this crisis in his life. Parry's experience also brings a real sense of grief to Stanley's father, Asa Timberlake, who has sympathized with Parry's ambitions and even wished to help him. Asa knows now that good will is not enough.¹⁶

¹⁶Glasgow, In This Our Life, pp. 320, 385, 401, 402, 407.

It is true that Ellen Glasgow gives no answer for the salvation of Parry, for Parry is lost. But, in narrating his destruction, she questions, as her Virginia forefathers had done in the past, the place of the Negro in Virginia society. Miss Glasgow treats each Negro as an individual, and she treats each with sincerity. Her novels clearly show that there are Negroes who reach out for new opportunities and for a better way of life. Through Parry's dilemma, she makes it evident that society must provide for and accept growth and change in the Negro. Surely, she seems to say that the Negro, just as any other man, must have the chance to fulfill his dreams and reach his goals and that human value and human potential must not be destroyed.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGION

One would have little hesitancy in agreeing that the land, the structure of the social classes, and the presence of the Negro were factors in determining the character of the South. Probably religion would seem to have been a more significant factor in the North, especially since the Puritan influence was so strong during the colonization of that area. Southern historians, however, point to the impact of religion on Southern thought. Simkins says, "The revivalists, together with orthodox theologians, created a religiously solid South long before a politically solid South existed."¹ Simkins describes this religion as "'the old-time religion,' to which the thinking of the rationalists, the facts of science, and the allurements of earthly progress were either subordinate or irrelevant."² In this chapter, I shall attempt to show that Miss Glasgow's characters are not a part of this "religiously solid South."

¹Simkins, p. 159.

²Ibid., p. 159.

They cannot be simply classified as revivalists of the South, nor can they be considered among those who seemingly are satisfied with only the ritual and the outward signs of religion. While Miss Glasgow indicates that her characters may be the heirs of this religion, she clearly shows that it sustains and strengthens only the old while the young find it inadequate for their needs and at times almost a burden carried over from their youth. Neither strengthened by the stern God of the Presbyterians nor inspired by the more relaxed and socially oriented religion of the Episcopalians, they search for deeper meaning and greater spiritual resources than they find in the practice of religion as they know it.

Although Simkins speaks of a "religiously solid South," Virginia, a part of this bulwark of Protestant Christianity, reached a low ebb in the formal observance of Christianity in the period following the Revolution.³ It was during this time that the religious revival, the Second Awakening, which had its beginning in Kentucky, began to spread into Virginia and the Carolinas. This emotional religious upheaval was in fertile ground if Cash judged the Southern mind and the Southern requirements of religion correctly. In explaining these requirements, Cash makes the following statement:

³Hemphill, Schlegel, and Engelberg, p. 238.

What our Southerner required, on the other hand, was a faith as simple and emotional as himself. A faith to draw men together in hordes, to terrify them with Apocalyptic rhetoric, to cast them into the pit, rescue them, and at last to bring them shouting into the fold of Grace. A faith, not of liturgy and prayer book, but of primitive frenzy and the blood sacrifice — often of fits and jerks and barks....

What was demanded here, in other words, was the God and the faith of the Methodists and the Baptists, and the Presbyterians.⁴

Simkins would probably have agreed with most of Cash's statement but would have questioned his union of Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. Simkins contends that, while Scotch-Irish Presbyterian ministers played a prominent part in the Second Awakening, their church did not become popular in the back country. He explains this fact by saying, "Their creed was too rigid and too exclusive in form and doctrine to appeal to the common people: their educational standards were too high to attract many ministerial candidates."⁵

Nevertheless the term "Southern Bible Belt" as well as the literature of the South testify to the truth of Cash's remarks. Certainly Johnson Jones Hooper's story of Simon Suggs at the Alabama camp meeting gives a vivid account of this faith that drew men in hordes. Hooper notes the crowds, the excitement, the mourners' bench and even those with the jerks who are pitching about. Simon, who is told that he is

⁴Cash, p. 58.

⁵Simkins, p. 157-158.

ripe for the devil, is eager to show his sorrow for his misdeeds. Of course, Simon manages to fake his conversion in order to escape with the collection money, but the reader certainly believes that Simon's newly found "brothers and sisters" are quite sincere as they pray and shout in their effort to rid themselves of their burden of sin.

With their stern creed, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians would not tolerate the display of emotionalism that Hooper describes, and it is these rural folk of the Calvinist faith that Miss Glasgow writes of in her novels, Barren Ground and Vein of Iron. Although Barren Ground is not primarily concerned with religion and will be discussed only briefly in this chapter, it is in this novel that Miss Glasgow's protagonist, who has been raised in the Presbyterian church and whose great-grandfather was a Presbyterian minister, turns from the church. Dorinda's statement that there is no help in reading the Bible and that she will never come to prayers is not made to annoy her pious mother, nor is it merely an idle threat.⁶ At the time when she needs the comfort of religion, it fails her. Dorinda knows that her parents possess a faith that she does not have. She believes that she has inherited "the religious habit of mind without the religious heart; for the instinct of piety had worn too thin

⁶Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 171.

to cover the generations...."⁷ It seems strange indeed that Dorinda Oakley in Barren Ground and Ada Fincastle in Vein of Iron, which I shall discuss next, both inherit from a religion, that they cannot accept, the "vein of iron" that enables them to survive. However, Miss Glasgow herself comments in A Certain Measure that fortitude was the chief element in the Presbyterian spirit and the Presbyterian theology.⁸

Although Mrs. Santas does not discuss the role of religion in the South nor the part it plays in Miss Glasgow's American dream, she does make several interesting comments on the beliefs of the characters in Vein of Iron. Mrs. Santas definitely sets John Fincastle and his daughter, Ada, apart from the others when she says, "Truth, for John Fincastle and Ada, is always to be discovered; for their forebears truth had been revealed."⁹ By this remark, Mrs. Santas suggests that all of the other characters accept the Presbyterian faith as it has been handed down to them except John and his daughter. It is certainly true that Grandmother Fincastle accepts completely and without question the strict doctrine of Calvinism, and Mrs. Santas's observation

⁷Ibid., p. 422.

⁸Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 169.

⁹Santas, p. 200.

that the daughter, Meggie, is "but an extension of Grandmother Fincastle into the next generation"¹⁰ is equally true. While Ada never accepts completely the Presbyterian faith, she does, through her grandmother, see its strength and goodness.

However, the Fincastles are not the only Presbyterian family in Vein of Iron. In Ralph McBride's mother, Ada sees all of Calvinism that is evil and ugly. John says that Mrs.

McBride's religion has curdled, for she worships a God of Wrath. Mrs. McBride believes that one's will has to be broken if he is to be saved, and the author indicates that Mrs. McBride, in saving her son, destroys him. In spite of Ralph's charm and his ability and Ada's great love for him, he is never able to overcome the bitterness and frustration that mark his youth.¹¹

Since Ada's Grandmother Fincastle and Aunt Meggie and even Mrs. McBride appear to accept the particular form of the Presbyterian creed that has been a part of their life, it does seem that they are guided by what they consider to be revealed truth. Before showing how John and his daughter differ from these others, I should like to point out that Ada shares not only with her husband, Ralph McBride, but even with Dorinda Oakley of Barren Ground a sense of guilt that is

¹⁰Ibid., p. 204.

¹¹Glasgow, Vein of Iron, pp. 260, 93, 119.

a part of their religious heritage. Although each character's experience with the Presbyterian faith is somewhat different from the other, each carries a feeling of guilt and expects some type of punishment. Dorinda wears her new blue dress gaily, but her "incurably Presbyterian" conscience sees it as a "symbol of selfishness."¹² When Ada and Ralph have their few days together before he goes into World War I, Ada, as Mrs. Santas notes,¹³ cries inwardly to her Grandmother's Redeemer, "Don't punish us, God."¹⁴ Ralph expects either death or injury in the war, and his explanation for this sense of foreboding is merely, "I'm always waiting for punishment. I suppose I'm still incurably Presbyterian."¹⁵ While it is undeniably difficult to explain one's gaining fortitude from a religion which he rejects, it is equally difficult to account for his feeling of guilt when he does not believe that a sin has been committed. However, it may well be that long years in a strict and stern environment that tended to see pleasure as sin and any luxury as self-indulgence might cause an individual to intellectually deny the existence of the sin and yet somehow emotionally retain something of the

¹²Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 98.

¹³Santas, p. 206.

¹⁴Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 212.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 220.

old fear. In like manner, one might deny the form and practice of a religious sect and yet draw a certain fortitude from the inner strength and courage that it provided one's forebears.

In going back to Mrs. Santas's statement that for John and Ada, truth is to be discovered, it is important to remember that John, in going abroad to study and in seeking further education, believes that knowledge will give greater depth to his belief and will enable him to defend the doctrines of his church.¹⁶ He discovers, however, that additional knowledge only causes him to seek and question further and that "knowledge does not justify God."¹⁷ Forced to resign from his church in Queenborough and finally dismissed from the church at Ironside and tried for heresy by the church whose doctrines he hoped to defend, John never becomes bitter nor vindictive. Gentle by nature, kind and considerate, he knows that his dedication to truth has set him apart from his fellow man.¹⁸ In describing Ada, Paul Wermuth says that she rejects the Calvinism of her grandmother and the intellectual pursuits of her father and seeks happiness instead.¹⁹ While one can readily agree that Ada

¹⁶Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 48

¹⁸Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁹Paul C. Wermuth, "Valley Vein," Virginia Cavalcade VII (Winter, 1957), 15.

rejects Calvinism, it seems only fair to add to Mr. Wermuth's statement that Ada is not prepared as her father was to pursue knowledge and that Ada's search for happiness is more a spiritual search than a worldly one. Ada seeks for meaning in her life and for a way of life that allows dignity and goodness; happiness to her is not a superficial gaiety nor worldly wealth and comforts.

Mrs. Santas says that in Vein of Iron Miss Glasgow "is concerned with morality; not the morality of convention but of the iron-veined heritage, which in this novel breaks with tradition that tradition may conquer."²⁰ I am not sure of Mrs. Santas's idea of the morality of the "iron-veined heritage," but surely the morality of convention causes John to be dismissed from his church, forces Ralph into an unhappy marriage, and condemns and ostracizes Ada because of her illegitimate child.²¹ John and Ada refuse to be broken by the moral judgment of their neighbors and seek an eternal truth that views beyond the narrow codes of man. If the search for spiritual honesty and the belief in mercy and kindness are a part of what Mrs. Santas considers tradition, then through John Fincastle and his daughter tradition does prevail.

In spite of the fact that Miss Glasgow's Presbyterians

²⁰Santas, p. 208.

²¹Glasgow, Vein of Iron, pp. 45, 150, 156, 268.

do not attend camp meetings and shout their sins away, they are still more closely related to the evangelical sects than are her characters who are members of the Episcopal church. Although the Presbyterian faith is given much more importance in Miss Glasgow's novels than the Episcopal, Episcopal ministers are portrayed in two novels, The Miller of Old Church and Virginia. Through these characters and through their families, Miss Glasgow shows that this "faith of liturgy and prayer book," as Cash calls it, is largely just that, a concern that the order of service be proper and that the outward behavior be correct.

In The Miller of Old Church, Miss Glasgow allows one of her main characters, Abel Revercomb, to leave the Presbyterian church and join the Episcopal church, but she has no kind words for this older and more aristocratic church. Blair Rouse in his comments on this novel says that if Abel Revercomb's mother represents Ellen Glasgow's "bitter reaction" to her father's Calvinism "then Orlando Mullen and his Episcopal liberalism stand for her scornful rejection of a shallow, saccharine, snobbish, 'superior,' substitute."²² Orlando Mullen, the Episcopal rector to whom Miss Glasgow attributes a small and serious mind, disapproves of what he considers the "Methodistical low church atmosphere" of his

²²Rouse, p. 72.

parish.²³ He, therefore, is particularly concerned with his pulpit appearance, desiring not only to move and gesture in just the proper way but also to speak in a serious but eloquent manner. Miss Glasgow does concede that Orlando is kind-hearted, but she makes this compliment rather meaningless when she adds that "he wished well to all the world."²⁴ Miss Glasgow also assures the reader that Mr. Mullen is completely unaware of Judy's passion, and she explains that his lack of understanding is due to a "natural obliquity of vision, which kept him looking above the world as it is to a mental image of the world as he imagined it."²⁵

Miss Glasgow does not say that she considers this ability to look at the world and see only what one wishes to see as a weakness of the Episcopal Church nor does she say that this characteristic is confined to Episcopalians. She does, however, endow the characters in Virginia with this very same quality of "evasive idealism." However, in Virginia the wife and daughter, Mrs. Pendleton and Virginia, seem more influenced by their "mental image" of the world than does the minister, Gabriel Pendleton. Actually though both the

²³Glasgow, The Miller of Old Church, p. 311.

²⁴Ibid., p. 360.

²⁵Ibid., p. 360.

Reverend Pendleton and his wife live "upright lives guided by a code of manners confused with a religion which dictated that one must always seek the 'true view' and never admit the presence of evil."²⁶ Perhaps Gabriel differs from his family only in that he does face reality and confront evil once in his life while the others do not. Gabriel does fight for what he believes in when he dies in his attempt to aid a Negro youth.²⁷ Mrs. Pendleton, who rises early and does her household chores so that the neighbors will not know that she performs such menial tasks, governs her life by what she believes a minister's wife should say and do and by her desire to save Virginia from any unpleasant task. Never acknowledging anything unpleasant or cruel, Mrs. Pendleton even in her youth was able to see the slave market without ever realizing that human beings were sold there.²⁸ In writing of the daughter, Mrs. Santas agrees with Miss Glasgow's statement that Virginia is the "crowning achievement of the code of beautiful behavior and of the Episcopal Church."²⁹ But Mrs. Santas adds that Virginia's beautiful behavior and her Episcopal Church ideals are not truly hers but rather

²⁶Rouse, p. 77.

²⁷Ellen Glasgow, Virginia (The Old Dominion Edition; Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co, 1929), pp. 345, 346, 347.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 36, 50, 51, 61.

²⁹Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 83.

her parents.³⁰ It would appear then that Virginia does not even have the convictions of her parents and that she accepts the Episcopal faith because it is handed down to her, not because of any personal belief. Unlike Dorinda and Ada, who question and reject what they consider false in their religion, Mr. Mullen and the Pendletons confuse religion with the formalities of worship and correct behavior. Their faith does not inspire them to see and correct the faults in the world; it simply helps them to escape reality and to ignore evil.

When Mrs. Santas in the concluding chapter of her book discusses the difficulty that Miss Glasgow's characters have in passing on their values to other, she notes that Miss Glasgow provides no orthodox religious framework by which the characters can accept and defend their values.³¹ It is true, indeed, that Miss Glasgow's novels do not provide this framework; however, Miss Glasgow's novels show that she does not find in either the Presbyterian or the Episcopal Church the religious background that she desires. It may be that Miss Glasgow sought too perfect a religion, but she saw on one side the stern creed of Calvinism and on the other the spiritual ease of the Episcopalians. Just like the author

³⁰Santas, p. 86.

³¹Ibid., p. 234.

who created them, Dorinda and Ada search for a God of Love, Whose wisdom is tempered by mercy and kindness. Ellen Glasgow, who shared Dorinda and Ada's Presbyterian heritage, complained that her father offered her "not Christ, but Jehovah."³² Still in her personal life as well as in her literary work, she refused to abandon religion. Following a severe heart attack and almost at the close of her life, she said, "In my death, as in my life, I was still seeking God, known or unknown."³³

³²Glasgow, The Woman Within, p. 93.

³³Ibid., p. 290.

CHAPTER V

THE PAST

The legend of the Old South and of the past was a very real part of Miss Glasgow's Virginia heritage as well as one of the main topics of the popular literature of her youth. However, unlike John Esten Cooke, whose novels idealized antebellum days, and George Washington Cable, who wrote of the early Creole days in Louisiana, Miss Glasgow wrote not only of the past but also of the present age. Although she is perhaps best known for her efforts to avoid sentimentality in portraying the past, she also refuses to be caught up in the modern day enthusiasm for progress and material gain. In discussing her novels, Simkins says, "The New South, which she praised at least by implication in her earlier work, in her last novel was portrayed as no happier or more enlightened than the Old South she so effectively damned."¹ While there is truth in this statement, it seems fairer to say that Miss Glasgow's treatment of the past and of the present are basically the same and that, while she

¹Simkins, p. 442.

damns neither age as evil, she does indeed damn the false beliefs or the "evasive idealism" that she finds in each age. In studying Miss Glasgow's treatment of the past and also of the present, I shall use The Deliverance, Virginia, and In This Our Life. The Deliverance, published in 1904, has its setting in the period of Reconstruction, the time at which the myth of the past begins to take firm root.

Virginia, published in 1913, shows life in a small town in Virginia at the turn of the century when the first cries of the New South are being raised. In This Our Life, which was published in 1941, gives Miss Glasgow's most recent treatment of the past and the present.

The period of Reconstruction that followed the Civil War had a tremendous impact not only on Virginia but on the entire South. It is interesting to note that W. J. Cash in his The Mind of the South and Virginia Moore in her Virginia Is a State of Mind describe this period in much the same terms, and each author seems to understand the turning to the past. Cash not only states that Reconstruction turned the mind of the South to the past, but he also explains why the legend of the past was a natural and perhaps a psychologically necessary development. He contends that, by ruining the South economically and holding it ruined and by turning the entire South into a frontier, the Yankee eliminated any causes of

discord among Southern people.² The Southern mind rather than being reconstructed was strengthened and became, according to Cash, "one of the least reconstructible ever developed."³ It was this Southern mind — defeated, humiliated, punished, and oppressed — that could no longer look at the present. Comparing Southerners to other defeated nations, Cash says, "And like many another people come upon evil days, the South in its entirety was filled with an immense regret and nostalgia; yearned backward toward its past with passionate longing."⁴ The story is much the same for Mrs. Moore's Virginians. In relating their ability to hold fast to their beliefs, she explains, "You can conquer physical bodies and territory, but not a moral attitude. Escaping through the ruins, it goes a mysterious way."⁵ Mrs. Moore also understands why the Virginians began to look back toward the past during Reconstruction, for she says that conditions were so terrible that they could not look at reality and live.⁶

To write of the Reconstruction period with reality in The Deliverance, Miss Glasgow shows through her central character, Mrs. Blake, the normal tendency to venerate and

²Cash, p. 109.

³Ibid., p. 109.

⁴Ibid., p. 127.

⁵Moore, p. 234.

⁶Ibid., p. 292.

idolize the past. Mrs. Blake's blindness and her children's desire for her happiness allow her to continue to believe that the Confederacy flourishes and that she still resides in her plantation mansion surrounded by willing slaves and all the comforts of life. With her eyes closed to the present and with her children's careful schemes to preserve her delusion, Mrs. Blake never knows that the Confederacy is gone, that the overseer owns the mansion, and that her family lives in a small cottage and ekes out a living on a few acres.⁷ While her blindness does enable her to live completely in the past and relish anew the charm and gaiety of the antebellum days of her youth, Miss Glasgow does not believe that physical blindness is actually necessary for this character who she says "personified the lost illusions of the Southern heart."⁸ To explain this statement, Miss Glasgow makes the following comment:

So profound had been her former sense of security and permanence, so unreasoning her belief in a personal Providence, and her veneration for religious and social taboos, so invulnerable her pride of name and estate, that even had her eyes been suddenly opened, in all likelihood she would have looked on her fallen fortunes merely as a sort of inopportune masquerade.⁹

⁷Ellen Glasgow, The Deliverance (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1904) pp. 49, 50, 51.

⁸Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 35.

⁹Ibid., p. 36.

In considering Mrs. Blake's attachment to the past, one must remember that her life is but one aspect of the novel. Even in this story of Reconstruction days, Miss Glasgow brings the present into focus through the story of the younger daughter, Lila. Here Miss Glasgow departs from the usual romantic and beautiful story of the past and even seems to suggest that it is Lila who has a more practical and sensible approach to life than the other members of her family. Lila can accept the situation as it is and make a meaningful life for herself in her marriage to Jim Weatherley, whose parents were former tenants. Of course, Lila is young, too young perhaps to have vivid memories of the past, but she is wise enough not to live in mournful regret for things that cannot be. Miss Glasgow says of her: "She remembered none of the past grandeur, the old Blake power of rule, and the stories of gallant indiscretions and powdered beaux seemed to her as worthless as the moth-eaten rags which filled the garrett."¹⁰

It is through the elder daughter, Cynthia, however, that Miss Glasgow brings the past and present together for closer scrutiny. It is through Cynthia too that Miss Glasgow seems to ask her reader to notice not a sanctified past but the very real danger in the fanciful creation of that past. Concerned only that her mother's last days be bright and

¹⁰Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 117.

pleasant, Cynthia, at her mother's death, faces for the first time the alternatives of myth and reality. In speaking to her uncle, she describes her feelings:

'I don't know how it is, but the thing I miss most — and I miss her every minute — is the lying I had to do. It gave me something to think about, somehow. I used to stay awake at night and plan all sorts of pleasant lies that I could tell about the house and the garden, and the way the war ended, and the Presidents of the Confederacy — I made up all their names — and the fuss with which each one was inaugurated.... I've lied for almost thirty years, and I reckon I've lost my taste for the truth.'

It is not that Cynthia cannot distinguish between truth and falsehood but rather that her life has been caught up in the lie. Somehow the lie and the clinging to the past have given her life some meaning, and the truth and the present are ugly and alarming.

In her study of Cynthia, Mrs. Santas makes an interesting comparison between her and heroines of later Glasgow novels, particularly Virginia Pendleton, the heroine of the novel of the same name. Mrs. Santas's main purpose in the comparison is to make the point that Cynthia at least can distinguish between the dream of the past and the reality of the present while Virginia fails to make that distinction.¹² It is certainly true that Virginia, who lives at the turn of

¹¹Ibid., pp. 485, 486.

¹²Santas, p. 66.

the century, is just as much a product of the past and just as loyal to its code of behavior as was Cynthia of Reconstruction days.

Both Cynthia and Virginia accept the ideal of the Southern lady which is a part of their heritage and are guided by the code of behavior which this concept of Southern womanhood demands. That this lofty view of Southern womanhood had some basis in fact is evident in Francis Simkins' description of women during plantation days:

The women were the keepers of the standards of the Christian home and of the purity of the race.... Perhaps Southern ladies practiced the Victorian virtues to a greater degree than other women, certainly they seldom shamed Southern society by sexual intimacy with Negroes.¹³

Virginia, however, does not live in plantation days but at the time when the doctrine of the New South was being proclaimed by such writers as Walter Hines Page and Henry Grady. Still Simkins makes it clear that manners were important even in this New South:

To a greater degree than other Americans, Southerners practiced what may be regarded as the essence of good manners: the idea that the outward forms of inherited or imposed ideals should be maintained regardless of what went on behind the scenes. Southern ideals were more extensive and inflexible than those prevailing elsewhere in America.¹⁴

¹³Simkins, p. 146.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 387.

Certainly Virginia practices the Victorian virtues and maintains every rule of correct behavior. As a child she accepts the rigid code of manners of her parents, the Reverend and Mrs. Gabriel Pendleton. She is thoroughly trained in the matter of dress, in the things that a lady does and does not do, in the way to act and speak, but she has little formal schooling, and she is not encouraged to develop resources that will serve her when she meets the challenges and changes in her life. In her marriage to Oliver Treadwell, she believes that she has every happiness and that her life is complete. And, in a sense, it is complete, for she does not grow but sacrifices herself completely to home and family just as she has seen her mother do. Yet as she becomes older, her husband ceases to love her, appearing almost repelled by those qualities which first attracted him, and even her daughters pity her. Only her son seems to understand. It is not that Virginia is completely unaware of the present and its demands. It is simply that her long adherence to the ways of the past and her dedication to the inherited ideal of the perfect lady leave her powerless to act, unable to even acknowledge her own natural impulses.¹⁵

As Miss Glasgow often does in her novels, she presents

¹⁵Glasgow, Virginia, pp. 424, 372, 443.

another view of the same age in the character of Susan Treadwell, Virginia's friend. Although in the tragedy of Virginia's life Miss Glasgow points to the futility of relying too heavily on inherited ideals, she does not suggest that Susan's happiness results from either education or industrialization which the writers of the New South advocate.¹⁶ Susan desires a college education, but this wish is denied by her father. Her father, Cyrus Treadwell, is a very successful businessman; however, his inhumanity to his family and his greed do not make him a very attractive figure to advertise the industrialization of the South. Actually Susan is a lady too and has the same basic qualities that Virginia possesses. Not nearly so pretty as Virginia, Susan, nevertheless, has an inquiring mind, a mind that she uses not only to question and observe but to seek a satisfactory way of life.¹⁷ Susan also grows up without a code that insists that one must see only the beautiful and the good. From her father, whose only interest is money, and from her mother, whose unhappiness is clearly evident, Susan learns early that life is not always a sweet dream of love and romance. She borrows no illusions from the past and thus can

¹⁶Richard C. Beatty, Floyd C. Watkins, Thomas D. Young, eds., The Literature of the South (New York: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1952), p. 438.

¹⁷Glasgow, Virginia, pp. 148, 59, 20, 21.

live vigorously in the present. Blair Rouse says, "Virginia, living in a mist of ill-defined idealism, is suffocated by life; Susan, able to use her mind and to feel deeply but with direction, achieves a life of meaning and substantial happiness."¹⁸

Between the publishing of Virginia in 1913 and In This Our Life in 1941, the tools of the New South, education, science, and industrialization, had brought many changes to the Virginia that Miss Glasgow knew. Perhaps never before had science and education made such advances; certainly industry grew by great strides. In addition, Virginia, along with the rest of the nation, had fought through World War I, suffered a great depression, and stood on the threshold of another world war. Life's pace had quickened, old customs were going, and a new brusqueness and air of urgency tended to replace the friendly, leisurely manner of the South.

Southern writers reacted to this new age of progress in various ways, and Cash notes several groups of writers in the period of the 1920's and 1930's. Prominent among these were the Agrarians, who Cash says, "were mouthpieces of the fundamental, if sometimes only subterranean, will of the South to hold to the old way: the spiritual heirs of Thomas Nelson Page."¹⁹ Another group, according to Cash, responded to a

¹⁸Rouse, p. 77.

¹⁹Cash, p. 390.

"new extreme" and in their writings hated and denounced the South.²⁰ In this latter group he includes Wolfe, Faulkner, and Caldwell. His criticism of these writers is that "telling the truth in detail, they fail to tell it in adequate perspective. The effect is much as though a painter had set out to do a portrait by painting only the subject's wens, warts, and chicken-pox scars."²¹ In spite of these remarks, Cash does strive to be a fair critic and finds that contributions have been made by both the Agrarians, whose view is based somewhat on the ideals of the past, and by the other school of writers who seem greatly influenced by the present.

Neither fitting into the category of the Agrarians nor of the denouncers of the South, Miss Glasgow, is, to a great extent, as out of step in 1941 as she was in 1900 when her works could neither be classified as "antebellum" or "New South." However, she writes of the present as she sees it in Virginia in the late 1930's in In This Our Life. Telling the story of Asa Timberlake, his wife, and their family, Miss Glasgow gives particular attention to the daughters, Stanley and Roy, and the problems that they find in the New South. Born into an age when women were educated on an equal basis with men, when they argued about politics and voted, and when

²⁰Ibid., p. 386.

²¹Ibid., p. 388.

they competed with men for employment, these young women are not bound to the rigid code which controlled Virginia's every act.

Stanley, shallow and selfish, is one of the breed of happiness hunters. Governed only by her own desires, Stanley walks out on her fiance, Craig Fleming, just before their marriage is to take place and goes off with her sister's husband, the young doctor Peter Kingsmill. Peter's tragic suicide at a later date does not upset Stanley unduly, for she seeks only pleasure, not responsibility. While her manner might have been different in a different age, the reader perhaps senses that Stanley in any period would have been mainly a self-seeking and irresponsible person.²²

Roy, however, is a young woman of conviction, and she accepts the present and the things that it demands from her. She is an honest person, and she realizes that pretense and sham are very much a part of the twentieth century that she knows. She sees that her mother's "illness" is merely a device to escape the demands of life, that Uncle William's money commands power and respect, and that Stanley's outward air of innocence merely helps her to get what she wants. Although Peter's desertion causes her the same pain and anguish that the Virginias of earlier years suffered, she stands by her

²²Glasgow, In This Our Life, pp. 168, 297.

modern belief in the freedom within marriage and insists that Peter is certainly free to leave if he wishes to do so.²³ Her mother accuses her of harshness, but she replies quite honestly,

But I like hardness, Mother. I like almost anything better than sloppiness. Most of our trouble in the South comes from sloppiness. Sloppy thinking, sloppy feeling, and sloppy workmanship.²⁴

Roy holds on to this hardness even when she sees Craig, who has said he loves her, turn again to Stanley. Roy's brief encounter with a British youth seems to make her pause and take stock of her life. She cries out for something good to hold on to, something more than the hardness and the freedom that the present has offered.²⁵

Of this change in Roy, Mrs. Santas says that Roy returns to what Miss Glasgow would consider the "right pattern" of life, the pattern of her father.²⁶ Mrs. Santas does not say that this is a pattern of the past but certainly implies that it is. Mrs. Santas also states that the young men in the novel, Craig and Peter, are defeated "by being caught between two worlds,"²⁷ but then she adds that they do not "find emotional resources in their new society that

²³Ibid., pp. 21, 148, 149.

²⁴Ibid., p. 167.

²⁵Ibid., p. 466.

²⁶Santas, p. 220.

²⁷Ibid., p. 218.

might sustain them."²⁸ I believe that Miss Glasgow is saying that Peter, Craig, and Roy all face the same dilemma. So eager are they to slough off the ways and ideals of the past, so earnest in their desire to be attuned to the present, that it is difficult for them to believe that the present does not contain all the answers to life. The difference seems to be that Roy finally acknowledges the need for emotional resources that she cannot find in the present while Peter and Craig do not. Their failure is due then not to the complete lack of emotional resources, but to their decision to search for them in the limited sphere of the present only.

Perhaps each generation to a certain degree faces the same dilemma that confronted the characters of In This Our Life, and each generation must decide what old standards to cling to and what new banners to adopt. In a clever description of Miss Glasgow's "Dinwiddie Eden," Mrs. Santas gives Miss Glasgow's beliefs about the old and the new, the past and the present. Although Mrs. Santas made these comments in her study of Virginia, I believe her paragraph has something important to say about Miss Glasgow's treatment of time. It is necessary, I believe, to quote a large portion of this paragraph:

²⁸Ibid., p. 218, 219.

Perceptive enough to realize that the Dinwiddie Edens of the South are decaying, snake-infested gardens, Ellen Glasgow maintains only that they have been attempts to perpetuate orderly and flourishing beauty. In her view these Southern Shangri-las are withering partly because time and change are proving many of their remedies for snake bite ineffective, but most of all because they too often tried to outwit the snakes by pretending that they were not there. Still the gardens were created by a society that felt the necessity for an Eden. The new order seems to produce only violent irreconcilable disorder: a helpless tangle of rare new flowers of truth, the same plentiful weeds, and worst of all, the same multitude of snakes, too often disguised as flowers. If we cannot go back to the Edens of Southern yesterday, and Ellen Glasgow emphasizes this impossibility, we dare not reject standards of conduct that perpetuate the possibility of cultivated gardens.... Moreover, Miss Glasgow doubtless would continue snappishly, prune and pluck those standards though we may and should, only the vulgar will dissent about the meaning of responsibility, discipline, and good, about the greenery to be nurtured. And that's that. Move on to plant new flowers alongside the old, but be orderly about it; there is no other way. Otherwise all will be barren, eroded, lost.²⁹

To continue Mrs. Santas's analogy, I do not find that Miss Glasgow herself expected a Southern Eden, but certainly there is ample evidence that she wished an orderly garden. The flower of the Confederacy had been cut off at the root; it seemed foolish to nourish and tend a dying plant. Codes of manners may be pretty in bloom, but they must be pruned and cut back lest they choke out other flowers that lend color and excitement to the garden. New flowers are interesting and certainly should be included, but new varieties must be tried and tested. How foolish to dig up every lovely flower just

²⁹Ibid., p. 96, 97.

because it is old.

No, Ellen Glasgow does not damn the past nor the present just as she does not find either age worthy of complete praise. She says, I believe, that one must live in his own time and face the particular problems of that time. He cannot return to the past, but there is no reason that he cannot use the worthwhile principles of the past to secure a better present.

SUMMARY

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to show that Ellen Glasgow's novels embody the peculiarities of the Virginia and not the generalities of the Southern dream. To substantiate my contention that Miss Glasgow's dream cannot be simply classified as Southern or as a Southern version of the American dream, as Mrs. Santas suggests, I have examined five Southern themes and have pointed out that Miss Glasgow's concept of each theme is based on her Virginia heritage and is different from the concept of the heritage of the Deep South. As I have mentioned in the introduction of my paper, Mrs. Santas notes that Miss Glasgow's Virginia was a "unique area of the 'great South,'" but Mrs. Santas still classifies Miss Glasgow's dream as both Southern and American. Since Mrs. Santas uses the term Southern and fails to distinguish between areas of the South and the difference of thinking in these areas, she apparently either minimizes the importance in Miss Glasgow's writing of this "unique area" of the South, or considers the Virginia dream and the Southern dream as one. Nevertheless, in the conclusion of Ellen Glasgow's American Dream, Mrs. Santas again uses the word

Southern to describe Ellen Glasgow's dream:

Her fictional foes, like her heroes, were chosen as representatives of those she knew and loved best in life, and her ambitions for both foes and heroes were identical: she wanted them to conserve and to realize the Southern dream.¹

There is no reason to question Mrs. Santas's comment that Miss Glasgow wrote of those she knew and loved best. However, Miss Glasgow's treatment of typically Southern themes does not justify the conclusion that it was her intention "to conserve and to realize the Southern dream."

Let us briefly review Miss Glasgow's treatment of these Southern themes. In much of Southern literature the land is viewed in one of two ways. In antebellum days it was often considered an economic commodity, a material asset to be bought or won. With good seasons and adequate slave labor, this land was to become part of large plantations. However, with the advent of the New South and the emphasis on industrialization, another view of the land was provided by the Agrarians, who wrote about the importance of the land and who even suggested a return to the old way of living from the soil. Miss Glasgow's concept of the land differs from both of these views. Frederick McDowell speaks of her "symbolic use"² of the land, but I believe of greater importance

¹Santas, p. 231.

²Frederick P. W. McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 147.

in her novels is the psychological value of the land to her characters. Sometimes there are many acres, sometimes the farm is small, and sometimes there is only the memory of a boyhood spent in the country, but the cherished bit of land gives Ellen Glasgow's Virginians a sense of security and well-being. Mrs. Santas, in her discussion of the land, distinguishes between soil and surrounding but notes that in the South the surroundings are most often rural. While she considers the surroundings important as props that "particularize any heaven or hell,"³ Mrs. Santas's search is for Miss Glasgow's dream, and she believes that the things to be shared are more important than is the place in which they are shared.

While the land itself is important in the South, the land has also been a factor in the development of certain ideas about class society. Owners of large plantations in the Deep South believed that their land holdings placed them in a position of aristocracy, and the idea grew that the white inhabitants of the South were either aristocrats or poor whites. Miss Glasgow, however, presents the middle class, the largest social group, but the one that has received so little notice. She takes as her theme the rise of the middle class, the good people rather than the good families. At the same time, however, Miss Glasgow's novels do portray

³Santas, p. 148.

the aristocrats realistically, giving both their virtues and their faults. In spite of her inadequacies in presenting the entire social scene in Virginia (one must remember that she writes of those she knows and loves best), it is, nevertheless, evident that she does not use her novels to extol the glories of the aristocracy nor to paint a pathetic picture of the poor whites. Mrs. Santas recognizes the class society in the South and sees it as a "barrier" on the Southern pathway to heaven.⁴ However, she does not indicate whether Miss Glasgow's treatment of this "barrier" was typical of the South or not.

The class society of the South, however, does not embrace the entire population, for the Negro is in a class by himself. Set apart socially, he is often considered to lack the industry and the ambition of the white man. But from Miss Glasgow, the Negro receives the same sincerity as do the other characters. It is true that Miss Glasgow's novels do not give a complete picture of every phase of Negro life in Virginia, but her recognition of the Negro as an individual and her awareness of his accomplishments and his dreams hardly seem compatible with the Southern view that would picture him as either carefree and irresponsible or docile and subservient. Many Southerners accept the fact

⁴Ibid., p. 45, 46.

that the Negro has his place; Miss Glasgow suggests that the Negro, along with other Virginians, is seeking his place. Although Mrs. Santas has very little to say about the Negro, she does indicate that the ordinary belief is that the black man has his place, and she emphasizes that Miss Glasgow's treatment of Parry Clay is quite unusual for the South.

In matters of religion, Miss Glasgow's novels also stray from the accepted views of the South as a whole but conform very well with those of Virginia. Since her characters are neither revivalists nor orthodox in their views, they do not fit comfortably into Simkins' "religiously solid South," nor do they require the "primitive frenzy" that Cash describes. Perhaps Miss Glasgow's Presbyterians are closest to the South when they fear the God of Wrath. Surely her characters are far from orthodox views when they reject a faith that can be cruel and unreasonable as well as a faith of beautiful behavior and proper religious services. Although Mrs. Santas cites the inability of Miss Glasgow's characters to accept and defend their values in "terms of an orthodox religious framework,"⁵ she does not specify what this religious framework would or should be.

At one time the theme of the past or the Old South

⁵Ibid., p. 234.

held a special place in the mind of Southerners since they took pride in reflecting on the way of life that had once been theirs. The industrialization of the South, however, brought the theme of the New South. Thus the South is confronted with the conflicting doctrines of the old and the new. Miss Glasgow's novels show a sympathetic understanding of the tendency to look backward toward the past, but they also reveal the danger of avoiding reality for a dream world that no longer exists. McDowell says:

The really distinctive feature of the novels after 1925 was a comprehensiveness of view, in large part intuitive, which could see the best in both the old and the new....⁶

Thus Miss Glasgow refuses to substitute the past for the present, but she also refuses to accept a present that denies the heritage of the past. Mrs. Santas also notes Miss Glasgow's attitude toward traditions of the past. She believes that the novels Virginia, Life and Gabriella, and The Builders indicate a "consuming desire to discriminate between what the South must preserve and what reject."⁷ Mrs. Santas suggests that this process of selecting from the old and the new is for the purpose of achieving the American dream, but she does not say how it fits into the Southern dream.

⁶McDowell, p. 39.

⁷Santas, p. 117.

One of the obstacles in determining the validity of Mrs. Santas's contention that Ellen Glasgow's dream is Southern is her broad use of the word Southern and her failure to define for the reader her conception of the Southern dream. The reader has the same difficulty in determining the exact nature of the American dream. In the beginning of her book, Mrs. Santas refers to the Northern, the Western, and the Southern versions of this dream and discusses the faults of the Northern and Western versions. However, she does not clearly define the American dream, and her versions of this dream do not seem to add up to the American dream that she suggests Ellen Glasgow attempts to bring into reality by upholding "the old standards of honor, responsibility, and initiative."⁸ Mrs. Santas seems to come closest to stating what she believes Ellen Glasgow's dream or ideal is when she answers this question in her study of In This Our Life, "Victory for what, by what, through what?" Her answer gives the important ideal that must be victorious as well as the means by which the victory is secured, "Presumably victory for tradition, sometimes called plain 'civilization' in Miss Glasgow's later writings, by character, through fortitude."⁹

⁸Ibid., p. 231.

⁹Ibid., p. 212.

Mrs. Santas's evaluation of Miss Glasgow's dream and Miss Glasgow's own version of the American dream appear quite different. According to the following passage from A Certain Measure, Ellen Glasgow apparently accepts the Western version as the typical American dream:

In other and broader spheres than the province of letters, 'not to look on the bright side' of things was regarded as irreligious in principle; and, in the nineteenth century, it was better to have received infant damnation than to be irreligious in principle. During the latter years of our era, and indeed until American idealism had been safely buried in Flanders fields, a belief in the happy end was imperative in philosophy as it was essential in fiction. The universe, as well as the love story, must lead to romantic fulfilment. But only the older novelist, who has suffered under the artificial glow of the past American idealism, can appreciate the blessing of the liberty not to believe, and of the even more hardly won liberty not to be glad.¹⁰

Miss Glasgow's inability to believe in "the happy end" and her reference to the "artificial glow of the past American idealism" hardly qualify her as one who is the maker of dreams. On the contrary, her statement seems to indicate that she rejoices in her freedom to turn from this popular version of the American dream.

But if Miss Glasgow's novels are not representative of the American dream, then what ideal or what values do they proclaim? In trying to determine the basis of Miss Glasgow's vision for a better world, one should, I believe,

¹⁰Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 118.

consider those values that are particularly dear to Virginians. Mrs. Moore says of her state:

Virginia has developed a mighty partiality for values, and especially ethical values. She loves beauty, but most of all she loves the beauty of conduct — and what is that but character.

It is this love of character which makes Virginia history so significant, this which, above all, strives for expression in her literature,¹¹

While Mrs. Santas has suggested that Ellen Glasgow uses character to secure victory for tradition, Mrs. Moore indicates that in Virginia the love of character is more important than tradition. Ellen Glasgow, who saw that "the beginning, not the end, of defeat" came with the disintegration of character,¹² shares the belief voiced by Mrs. Moore. In her novels, Ellen Glasgow has sought to give expression to Virginia's love of character.

Character — old-fashioned, new-fashioned, beyond fashion.

It is the one hope.¹³

¹¹Moore, p. 311.

¹²Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 252

¹³Moore, p. 312.

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