

Moncure Conway: Abolitionist, Reformer

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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May 1972

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Accepted by the faculty of the School of Social Sciences, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

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"Indeed, though the life of the Reformer may seem rugged and arduous, it were hard to say considerately that any other were worth living at all.

...but to have lived so that one less orphan is called to choose between starvation and infamy,-one less slave feels the lash applied in mere wantonness or cruelty,... so that the few who knew him truly shall recognize him as a bright, warm, cheering prescence, which was here for a season and left the world no worse for his stay in it,- this surely is to have really lived, -and not wholly in vain."

Horace Greeley, Recollections
Of A Busy Life.

Preface

Moncure Conway's life was essentially a search for a satisfying philosophy of life. His curiosity and intellectual abilities led him from Southernism and Methodism to a life dedicated to liberating man from impediments to happiness, both secular and religious. Conway's contributions to intellectual history from 1832-1877 in the areas of general reform, literature, and religion will be studied in this work. However, emphasis will be placed upon Conway's role and activities in the field of abolitionism and the struggle for Negro rights.

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I. Up From Slavery

(1832-1852)

Moncure Daniel Conway was born March 17, 1832, in Stafford County, Virginia.¹ Conway was born in a period of reform. However, defenders of the South and slavery were increasingly identifying reforms with the northern reformer and viewed reform as a symptom of social decay and the product of abolitionist thought.² As a result, the Southern mind gradually began to close on the slavery question and liberal causes.³ The debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832 symbolized the decline of the reform spirit in the Old Dominion.⁴ Moncure Conway spent the first twenty years of his life under the influence of these developments. However, his intellectual curiosity and a variety of influences helped him break free of the repressive intellectual atmosphere, which had been created as a by-product of slavery, and begin a career of reform.

¹ Moncure Daniel Conway, Autobiography, Memories, And Experiences, Vol. I (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), p. 1.

² Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 96.

³ Clement Eaton, The Freedom Of Thought Struggle In The Old South (New York: Harper and Row, 1940), pp. 31, 88, 161.

⁴ Theodore Whitfield, Slavery Agitation In Virginia, 1829-1832 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1930), p. 133.

Moncure Conway's ancestry and heritage was fitting to a man who was to gain distinction for his liberal views and intellectual achievements. He was a mixture of prominent Virginia and Maryland families including the Conways, Daniels, Peytons, Moncures, Washingtons, and Stones.⁵ The House of Conway had been prominent in England and included nobility such as Sir Edward Conway and Sir Henry Seymour Conway, Secretary of State from 1765-1768 and Commander In Chief of English Forces in 1782.⁶ Edwin Conway of Worcester, England, was the first Conway to come to Virginia in 1640.⁷

The Moncures, French Huguenots, originally fled to Scotland from France to avoid religious persecution and later migrated to Virginia in 1733. The first of the Stone family in America, William Stone, was persuaded by Lord Baltimore in 1649 to become the Governor of Maryland and to open the colony to men of all religions. Thomas Stone, a descendant of William, was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Likewise, the Daniels, Peytons, and Washingtons were well-educated families who provided professional, religious, and political leadership in Virginia and Maryland.⁸

⁵ Edwin Walker, A Sketch And Appreciation Of Moncure Daniel Conway (New York: Edwin Walker Pub., 1908), p. 13.

⁶ The Times-Dispatch, (Richmond, Virginia), January 10, 1904.

⁷ Horace Hayden, Virginia Genealogies (Washington D. C.: Rare Book Shop, 1931), p. 225.

⁸ Walker, p. 13.

Moncure Conway also had a heritage of antislavery sentiment in his background as well as ancestors holding unorthodox religious views. For example, Conway's great-grandfather, Travers Daniel, was an "ardent emancipationist" and would have freed his slaves if Virginia law had not prevented him from such action. His grandfather, John Moncure Conway, was a rationalist who had obtained liberal religious views while he was a student at William and Mary College.⁹

Moncure Conway was the second child of Walker Peyton Conway and Margaret Eleanor Daniel. Conway's father was a slaveholder, the presiding justice of Stafford County, and the owner of a cotton factory and a large farm near Falmouth, Virginia. Young Conway was cared for by a Negro nurse and he and his older brother, Peyton, were instructed by a relative, Elizabeth Gaskins. The Conway farmhouse burned and although Walker Conway kept the farm, he moved his family to Falmouth where they lived in the largest residence in town.¹⁰ The Conway boys traveled two miles to a log schoolhouse. They were accompanied by a young mulatto named Charles, who was to protect the boys from mocassin snakes in the fields. Charles was like a hero to the Conway boys

⁹ Conway, pp. 6-8.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 10, 11, 57.

in that he was intelligent and full of stories and songs. However, the monotony of his tasks and a stifled desire for knowledge led Charles into mischief. At age nineteen, he set fire to an outhouse in order to see a fire engine in action. As a result, Conway witnessed one of the cruelties of slavery as Charles was sold to the deep South.¹¹

Life in Falmouth was full of inconsistencies which young Conway had not grasped. Fourth of July orators spoke on the right of each man to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," while millions of slaves were held in bondage. Of the one thousand inhabitants of this town, Conway claimed that most were "poor whites" while his family was one of the five or six very rich households. While these poor whites lived as they could, the Conway's owned more than fifty slaves.¹² The institution of slavery had created these conditions and although he had heard his parents comment that the care of slaves had made them prematurely old, Conway never questioned the peculiar institution. Young Conway was not conscious of the social conditions that existed in

¹¹ Moncure Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery (London: Chapman and Hall, 1863), pp. 4-6.

¹² Eaton points out that the majority of so-called "poor whites" in the South were actually yeoman farmers. Conway probably did not make a distinction between the two classes. Eaton, pp. 40, 63; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 29-30; Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 1-3; Conway's father was of the elite as only approximately 1 of 200,000 Southerners owned between 10 and 100 slaves. William Hesselstine, The South In American History (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1943), p. 267.

Falmouth. Instead, he was a child of the leisure class living under the influence of Southern romanticism where the tournament and the ball was an annual event.¹³

Moncure Conway and his brother, Peyton, were on "affectionate" terms with the slaves and the bondsmen helped the boys in their projects such as raising poultry and pigeons. With the exception of Charles, Conway claimed that his family never treated slaves cruelly. His parents considered the Negro an "immortal soul" and thus he was not to be treated harshly. Servants were flogged, but Conway claimed that they were whipped no more frequently or severely than the white children. Conway's mother taught lessons to the white and black children on the Bible and catechism every Sunday until it was reported that she was teaching slaves to read. Conway, ignorant of laws prohibiting the teaching of slaves to read, taught one slave to read in exchange for a necktie.¹⁴ Although Conway associated with the servants, he was unaware of the disaffection of the bondsmen and their true condition. He had never heard slavery referred to as an institution and had only heard Negroes called servants, not slaves.¹⁵

¹³ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 34.

¹⁴ Conway justified his father's selling of Charles. He claimed that his father was forced to sell Charles due to public opinion. Ibid., pp. 21, 28, 30.

¹⁵ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, p. 27.

Religion became a dominant force in Moncure Conway's life. His father had been converted at a camp-meeting and thus his family became the first family of good social position in the Falmouth area to become Methodist, much to the chagrin of relatives who were Episcopalians. Conway lived under strict Methodism. The Sabbath was closely observed, two sermons were attended on Sunday, as well as Sunday school, and prayer meetings twice a week. Since the Conways were the first in their region to follow evangelicalism, their home became the center of the movement. Conway's mother, also dedicated to Methodism, taught her children to follow conscience without fear or favor.¹⁶

Moncure Conway enjoyed the Methodist camp-meeting. The camp-meeting was the big event of the year and included a "grand barbaric picnic" which often lasted for over a week. He was also impressed by the religious outpourings of the Negroes at these gatherings. By age ten, Conway noticed the contrast between Methodism and his social standing. While his cousins and playmates attended fine churches, Moncure Conway went to the meetinghouse with a congregation composed mainly of the poor and ignorant. His envy of the worldliness of his friends and their jokes about Methodism

¹⁶ Mary Elizabeth Burtis, Moncure Conway (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1952), pp. 5-6.

led Conway to become unhappy with this "double life."¹⁷

At age ten, Conway was sent to the Fredericksburg Classical and Mathematical Academy. George Washington had attended this school, which was considered the principal educational institution in Northern Virginia.¹⁸ Fredericksburg was typical of the Southern academies in that practical training was given in subjects such as mathematics and Greek and Latin were taught to prepare students for college.¹⁹ Methodist prejudices against the reading of novels were wavered and after reading the works of Charles Dickens, Conway considered him to be "the greatest man in the world." In addition to formal schooling, Conway received an education in other ways. Trips to Richmond introduced young Conway to the realm of politics in that he attended bonfires and mass meetings in support of his parent's choices for office. According to Conway, his most lasting education was obtained in the law courts and in listening to cases being discussed in his home. Walker Conway's position as presiding magistrate of the county brought many lawyers to the Conway home. Two of Moncure Conway's uncles were lawyers. His mother's uncle was a justice on the United States Supreme Court, and her brother had been the Chief Justice

¹⁷ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 25, 27, 44.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁹ Hesselstine, p. 294.

of Virginia.²⁰

When fifteen years old, Conway left Virginia for Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He was rather young to enroll in college but was sent because his older brother wanted Moncure with him at Dickinson. Conway entered the sophomore class as he turned fifteen. Four months later he advanced to the junior class and graduated at age seventeen.²¹ Conway was to come under new influences during his stay at this Methodist college that were to not only further his education but also stimulate his interest in writing and affect his views on slavery and religion.

At Dickinson Conway met his first Unitarian, was introduced to science, and received training in oratory. He joined the temperance society, became a member of the Union Philosophical Society, was converted at the mourner's bench, and joined the Methodist church.²² Conway, like most Southerners, was not nationalized by educational institutions in the North.²³ Indeed, when one of the professors at Carlisle was rumored to have led a riot to interfere with the return of a fugitive slave, Moncure Conway, his brother, and other Southerners packed their trunks to leave school. They

²⁰ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 33-38.

²¹ Ibid., p. 47; Walker, p. 16.

²² Ibid., pp. 47, 53-56.

²³ Arthur Cole, The Irrepressible Conflict, 1850-1865 (New York: MacMillan Co., 1934), p. 52.

decided to remain at Dickinson only after the professor explained his actions to the satisfaction of the Southern students. More important for Conway was the fact that he discovered that the institution of slavery did not exist everywhere and he began to study it.²⁴

This was Moncure Conway's first contact with an environment that did not include slavery. However, he was under the spell of Southern thought in 1847. On vacations in Virginia, Conway came under the influence of his cousin, John Moncure Daniel, the co-editor and later editor of the Richmond Examiner. He has been referred to as the "earliest apostle of the secessionists in Virginia,"²⁵ and through him Conway was introduced to very strong pro-slavery sentiments.²⁶

For his graduation oration at Dickinson, Conway chose the theme, "Old Age." In this oration Conway reviewed an address by George Alexander Coffey given at the Union Philosophical Society. Coffey's concept of social democracy had impressed Conway as well as the assertion that social change could take place without war and that society should become fraternal enough to find work and bread for all.²⁷ With

²⁴ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 27-28.

²⁵ Hayden, p. 315.

²⁶ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, p. 28.

²⁷ MS-Fragment of Conway's graduation oration, 1849 (Conway Collection, Columbia University; hereafter cited as CU).

graduation, Conway began to prepare for the vocation to which many young Southerners aspired, political life. Instead of politics, Conway found that his only enthusiasm was directed toward literature. He had composed several articles for the Richmond Examiner, the Fredericksburg Democratic Recorder, and the Southern Literary Messenger. However, he discovered that there was little support in the South for non-political or non-theological literature.²⁸ In addition, the South had only 24 of the 345 publishing houses in the country and the products of their presses were rarely of high literary quality.²⁹

A few months after graduation Conway was invited to a meeting to form a Southern Rights Association. Extreme pro-Southern resolutions were passed and Conway was elected secretary of the association. Walker Conway warned his son not to be fooled by these men and told him that slavery was a doomed institution. Conway had not met any active opposition to slavery in Virginia and since the peculiar institution was so firmly entrenched in his environment, he took little notice of his father's admonition.³⁰

²⁸ At age sixteen, Conway wrote a romantic novel entitled "The Flute Player." At Dickinson, Conway persuaded the students to begin a monthly periodical, The Collegian, which he edited and contributed several articles. MS-Moncure Conway to Mildred Sawyer, April 16, 1897, Conway Collection (CU); Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 61-71.

²⁹ Hesseltine, p. 298.

³⁰ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 72, 74.

Walker Conway had earlier hoped that his son would enter the ministry. Now, in 1850, Conway's father tried to persuade him to go into law. Conway was given the job of deputy clerk of Fauquier County,³¹ and in exchange for his services the county clerk, Colonel William Phillips, supervised Conway's law studies. Through Colonel Phillips Conway met Robert Eden Scott, who was defeated by the Southern fire-eaters in 1848 due to his stand on the Wilmot Proviso.³² Scott ran again for the Virginia Legislature in 1850 and Conway reported his speech at Warrenton in the Richmond Examiner. Scott maintained that a Southern Confederacy could not survive and he treated the fugitive slave problem lightly. Conway's Southern sentiments caused him to disagree with Scott's speech and he evaluated the speech in his article as "cloggy."³³ Another expression of Conway's Southern sentiments was expressed in several articles written during a visit in Washington when the Omnibus Bill was before the Senate. He heard speeches from Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, Henry Foote, and Pierre Soule of Louisiana. Conway was especially pleased with Soule's debate with Clay. Soule had taken a pro-slavery stand and

³¹ MS-Moncure Conway to Abraham Lincoln, May 7, 1861 (Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; hereafter cited DCL).

³² Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 76.

³³ Richmond Examiner, April 2, 1850.

Conway favorably reported this incident to the Richmond Examiner.³⁴

In Virginia Conway again fell under the influence of his cousin and from his library Conway came into contact with new ideas and philosophies from the writings of Georg Hegel, Voltaire, Theodore Parker, Charles Fourier, and others.³⁵ In addition, John Moncure Daniel gave Conway a list of books to read including the works of the man who was to have a profound influence on Conway, Ralph Waldo Emerson.³⁶ Conway's subsequent study of Emerson, Horace Greeley, and Horace Mann created an awareness in Conway of other men's efforts to improve mankind. Horace Mann's Massachusetts Report On Free Schools helped open Conway's eyes as to the true condition of "poor whites" in Virginia.³⁷ Conway still did not see the institution of slavery as the problem. Instead, he felt that a new code of laws including free schools and compulsory education would help improve the condition of "poor whites" in Virginia.

In 1850, a convention was to convene to revise the Virginia Constitution. Conway was convinced that Virginia

³⁴ Richmond Examiner, May 28, 1850.

³⁵ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, p. 28.

³⁶ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 79-80.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 83-84.

was falling behind in education, in which she had once been a leader. He had devoted nearly a year to his study of the problem which included statistics on the amount of ignorance in Virginia and school systems in the North.³⁸

The result was Conway's first separate publication, Free Schools In Virginia. Conway's plea was for the state of Virginia and humanity. The task of educating the other members of the community was viewed as a moral obligation in this pamphlet. He not only pointed out the material gains of a public free school system, but he emphasized the project as an answer to those Northerners who claimed that Virginia could not operate such a system due to the institution of slavery. Conway believed that free schools could coexist with slavery. He utilized Jeffersonian principles in his plea, and declared that conservatism and religion must be ignored in this matter.³⁹

Conway's composition was not unique. There had been an almost revival-type campaign for free education in Virginia since 1839.⁴⁰ However, this pamphlet demonstrated his interest in reform even though his plan excluded the

³⁸ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 31, 33, 119.

³⁹ Moncure Conway, Free Schools In Virginia (Fredericksburg, Virginia: Recorder Print, 1850), pp. 5, 9, 26, 27, 40, 43, 48; Moncure Conway, Addresses And Reprints (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1909).

⁴⁰ William Maddox, The Free School Idea In Virginia Before The Civil War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1918), p. 127.

Negro and was to be an answer to Northerners who criticized slavery as an obstruction to a public free school system. Above all, this work demonstrated Conway's love for Virginia which he called "the most wonderful 61,000 square miles...on earth."⁴¹

Conway's uncle, Greenhow Daniel, editor and owner of the Fredericksburg Democratic Recorder, printed approximately five hundred copies of the pamphlet at a minimal cost. Conway sent copies of his pamphlet to every important figure in Virginia whose address he could discover. The author was pleased with the personal response to his pamphlet, but his plan was ignored.⁴² Soon after publication, Conway attended a dinner in honor of Virginia's Senators for their role in the Compromise of 1850. Conway conversed with the Senators during the course of the evening. He disgusted Senator Stevens Mason with his interest in agricultural reform by supporting the Homestead Act, which was to provide homesteads for families in the territories. Conway also discovered that they regarded his free school idea with "horror," saying that the education of the masses would result in the introduction of Northern

⁴¹ Conway, Free Schools In Virginia, p. 41.

⁴² Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 85.

"isms."⁴³ Conway was frustrated. He could not resolve his Jeffersonianism and the fact that the Negro was an obstruction to his humanitarian endeavors.

In July, 1850, Conway read an article on races by Louis Agassiz in The Christian Examiner. In this article Agassiz stated that the races of mankind were not from a single pair.⁴⁴ Conway, under the influence of Southern apologism, concluded that the Negro was not a man under the meaning of the Declaration of Independence. Eager to assert his views, the eighteen year-old Conway gave an address on his theory at the Franklin Lyceum in Warrenton, of which he was secretary. The thesis of his essay was that the Negro race was inferior to the Caucasian. Conway's lecture was not well-received and the "infidelity" of his thesis created a religious tempest in Warrenton. Conway suffered through a period of intense stress following this lecture and he struggled with questions concerning the status of Negroes and the practical problem of missions for "heathens." His reaction was a sense of personal inferiority and he decided to devote his life to the elevation and welfare of his fellow human-beings, both white and

⁴³ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁴ Louis Agassiz, "The Diversity Of Origin Of The Human Races," The Christian Examiner. Vol. 14 (July, 1850), pp. 118-119.

black.⁴⁵ This experience had a profound effect upon Conway's intellectual development. Conway's new decision marked his turn away from Southern thought and the beginning of his search for a more satisfying philosophy, which increasingly turned toward humanitarianism.

In August, 1850, Conway attended a large Methodist camp-meeting in Loudoun County. He was impressed by the effect of Methodism in Virginia and the effect of sermons on large assemblies. John Moncure Daniel had urged his cousin to go into journalism, not the "wretched profession" of the ministry. Daniel told Conway that religion was dependent upon absurd dogmas, that the trinity was a theological invention, and that the concept of hell was "simply ridiculous." However, Conway felt that he had a message for the masses of people. Since Methodism was the only active society for charity and humanitarian effort in that region, he began to consider the ministry against his cousin's advice.⁴⁶

Emerson had provided the spark that led Conway toward his new aim, to save souls.⁴⁷ The end result was that Conway

⁴⁵ William Stanton, The Leopard Spots (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 109-112; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 85-90.

⁴⁶ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 25, 79, 85, 86, 101.

⁴⁷ Moncure Conway, Emerson At Home And Abroad (London: Trubner and Company, 1883), p. 3.

abandoned possible careers in law, politics, or writing and informed his father in December, 1850, that he was going to apply to the Baltimore Methodist Conference as a minister. On his nineteenth birthday Conway was appointed to the Rockville Circuit in Maryland. The Rockville Circuit was an agricultural area in which vices were rare, slavery was "mild," and there were few paupers or issues to excite Conway's spirit of reform. As an itinerant minister with twelve congregations, he traveled by horseback carrying the Bible and Emerson in his saddlebags. His sermons were prepared according to the methods he had learned in the law courts. He would emphasize a main point and then plead the issue as if he were before judge and jury. This method of trying to prove creeds only created doubts in the young Methodist minister who soon concluded that he could never belong to any church except a creedless one.⁴⁸

In June, 1851, Conway preached to a large congregation in Fredericksburg in what turned out to be a step in the direction of unorthodoxy for Conway. Conway opposed the "cruelties" of Calvinism and his sermon reflected this attitude in that he ignored the concepts of heaven and hell and treated religion as the guide and consecration of life on earth.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 91, 93, 98, 100; Burtis, p. 29; During this time Conway wrote to the anti-slavery Senator, Charles Sumner, concerning the issue of international copyright. This was the first communication between these men, who later worked together in the struggle for Negro rights and emancipation.

⁴⁹ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 102-103.

While traveling on his circuit, Conway made several visits to a settlement of Hicksite Quakers at Sandy Spring, Maryland. Here he found "happy Negroes" and prosperous farms that had not been touched by slave labor. Conway also met Roger Brooke, the first abolitionist he had ever encountered. Conway began to perceive that there was a great wrong in the land, and soon he discovered that the wrong was slavery.⁵⁰ The Quakers never tried to convert Conway, yet his observations of their religious life led him to evaluate his beliefs. Although not concerned with the concept of the trinity, Conway was disturbed by the "morally repulsive dogmas and atrocities ascribed to the deity in the Bible." Not knowing where to turn, Conway wrote a letter to the man whom he most admired, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Conway asked Emerson where he could purchase the Dial and added that after closely reading his works, he felt that he had been led to "a second Fall from which there is no redemption by any atonement."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Quaker emphasis on peace no doubt influenced Conway. Later, in 1852, he emphasized this new reform interest in a sermon delivered at Frederick, Maryland. In the sermon Conway urged peace, to the extent of non-resistance. Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 115; Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 36-38; Conway was not unique in opposing slavery and remaining a minister in the Southern wing of Methodism. After the 1844 division, Methodists in the South continued to discuss various aspects of slavery, pro and con. Conrad Engelder, "The Churches And Slavery" (University of Michigan: Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, 1964), p. 149.

⁵¹ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 103-109.

George Burnap. The next day Burnap and Orville Dewey, a Washington Unitarian minister, advised Conway to enter the Harvard Divinity School. The notion of attending Harvard weighed upon the mind of Conway while he preached his last sermon on the circuit on December 4, 1852. Then he started home to Falmouth.⁵³

Conway's parents were willing to allow their son to come home, but he was instructed not to tamper with the slaves in any way. His stay at home was not a happy one. Walker Conway was embarrassed over his son's new views on slavery and disappointed at his decision to leave the Methodist ministry and enter Harvard Divinity School. Conway was informed by his father that although he was welcome at home, he would not be supported at Cambridge. His parents kept his abolitionist leanings a secret from the rest of the family since his father hoped to persuade him from such a course of action. During his stay, Conway realized even more that the social system of the South was undermined. Although his slavery views were supposed to be secret and he had not actively opposed slavery, Negroes in Falmouth and those belonging to his father sought secret interviews with him.⁵⁴

⁵³ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 108, 117-123; Conway was probably never a minister in full connection. The minutes of the 1852 Baltimore Conference listed Conway as remaining on trial. Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1852 (New York: 1852), p. 3.

⁵⁴ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 40-41.

Emerson's writings and encouragement helped motivate Conway to break with Southern politics and orthodoxy. Emerson's final words to Conway in a November 13, 1851, letter characterized the intellectual journey from Methodism and Southernism that Conway was soon to embark upon in that he ended with best wishes "in that contest which every soul must go alone."⁵²

In February, 1852, Moncure Conway was given the Frederick Circuit. Conway struggled with the question of dogma and his faith on his new circuit. Finally, he decided not to continue his ministry beyond the next Baltimore Conference in early 1853. Conway considered joining the Quakers, but Roger Brooke advised him against such a decision. He pointed out Quaker prejudice against music, which Conway appreciated, and suggested that it would not be good for him to be committed to an organized society while he was still growing mentally. Before returning home, Conway visited Baltimore to see relatives and alleviate his mental distress. At this time the Unitarians were holding their annual meeting in Baltimore. Conway was impressed by the speakers at the Unitarian Conference and he received a dinner invitation from a Baltimore Unitarian minister,

⁵² MS-Ralph Waldo Emerson to Moncure Conway, November 13, 1851; Conway, Emerson At Home And Abroad, pp. 5-6.

Up until his twentieth birthday, Conway considered himself a "strong pro-slavery man, and intensely hostile to the Yankees...."⁵⁵ Yet in a short time, Conway had reversed his stand on slavery and developed a sincere interest in reform. His growing unorthodoxy and break with Methodism were occurrences which were to be the basis for the later claim that he was perhaps "the boldest thinker that the Southern church produced in ante-bellum days...."⁵⁶ Although by no means a victim of slavery, Conway revolted against the repressive intellectual atmosphere in the South which had been created as a by-product of the peculiar institution. By 1852, Moncure Conway had truly come "up from slavery" and was about to begin on the first step taken by reformers such as Emerson, Parker, and William Ellery Channing as he prepared to enter Harvard.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Boston Evening Journal, January 19, 1863.

⁵⁶ Eaton, p. 293.

⁵⁷ Henry Steele Commager, The Era Of Reform, 1830-1860 (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1960), p. 32.

II. Cambridge and Washington

(1853-1856)

Moncure Conway was one of the few Southerners, in terms of that section's total population, to reject Southern thought and adopt instead the ideas and "isms" associated with the North. Between 1853 and 1856 Conway continued his intellectual growth and moved closer to reform. He first entered the ranks of Unitarianism while at Harvard Divinity School and then as a minister in Washington he became involved in the abolitionist struggle. Throughout this period Conway seemed to be frustrated due to the fact that his feelings against slavery had to be compromised with his affection for the South. Finally, Conway was able to break with the South sufficiently to seriously pursue the cause of abolitionism.

Conway's growing interest in the antislavery cause came after the "critical period" of the freedom of the abolitionist press and after the martyrdom of the earlier abolitionists was almost over.¹ The young Virginian's late entry onto the antislavery scene partially explains his relative anonymity in this area. Conway was caught up in

¹ Russell Nye, Fettered Freedom (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University, 1963), p. 172; Moncure Conway, Addresses And Reprints, p. viii.

this struggle at a time when events since 1850 had returned abolitionism to a moral crusade.² While many Whigs and Democrats believed that the Compromise of 1850 would bring "a final settlement to the slavery issue," the Fugitive Slave Act aroused Northern opposition.³ Harriet Beecher Stowe's publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin and especially the emerging Kansas problem were factors bringing the abolitionist struggle to a moral basis and a surge of activity.⁴

Conway's move to Unitarianism began on February 14, 1853. He painfully left his Virginia home and departed for Harvard Divinity School with clothes, one hundred and forty books, and about one hundred dollars. Arriving at Cambridge, Conway discovered that he could not peacefully slip into the ranks of Unitarianism. By 1852, Unitarians were divided over the issue of the Bible as the immediate and final revelation of God.⁵ This controversy was evident at Harvard Divinity School because Conway discovered that the majority of professors were trying to steer a middle course between

² Hazel Wolf, On Freedom's Altar, The Martyr Complex in the Abolitionist Movement (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952), p. 108.

³ Russell Nye, William Lloyd Garrison and the Humanitarian Reformers (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), p. 156.

⁴ Wolf, pp. 108-109.

⁵ Burtis, pp. 34-35; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 128-129.

Unitarian orthodoxy and German rationalism.⁶ Conway associated himself with the liberal position on this issue. He joined a group of like-minded young men who held weekly discussions in the chapel on ethical problems as well as on reform issues including peace, women's rights, and other matters related to "human life and society." One debate centered around the question of not using the products of slave labor as a means to further the antislavery cause. Conway contended that a mere economic or military victory would be of little value to the slave. What was needed, according to Conway, was an attitude change among slave-owners so that they would free the slaves.⁷ The necessity to avoid military conflict with the South was a recurrent theme in Conway's thinking at this stage.

The young student from Virginia made friends easily at Harvard and associated with some of the leading intellectual figures in New England. On arriving at Cambridge he met Jared Sparks, President of Harvard College, and was accepted as one of the Spark's family. Conway admired his poetry professor, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and received a

⁶ Loyd Easton, Hegel's First American Followers (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966), p. 128; German rationalism refers to the critical interpretation of the Bible which viewed miracles as myths or results of natural causes, inspired by David F. Strauss.; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 164-166.

⁷ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 165-166, 169.

standing invitation from the Longfellows to spend his Sunday evenings at their home. One professor, who had a significant effect upon Conway, was Louis Agassiz. Agassiz interested Conway in science and repeatedly referred to the hypothesis of the continuous development of species in his classes, which was to become a familiar concept after Charles Darwin's publication of the Origin of Species.⁸

On May 3, 1853, Moncure Conway recorded that he experienced "the most memorable day" of his life. On that day he traveled to Concord to visit his prophet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, a meeting which marked the beginning of a long and friendly relationship between these two men. During his summer vacation in 1853, Conway obtained a room near Concord and visited Emerson several times each week. Emerson became a strong influence in directing Conway's intellectual development. He suggested readings to Conway and interested him in the works of the East such as the Bhagavad Gita, the Gulistan, and the Desatir.⁹ Emerson introduced the young Virginian to his friends as well. Soon Conway became acquainted with most of the

⁸ Sparks resigned in 1853. Conway first learned from him that Thomas Paine was a man to be respected. Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 149, 151, 153-157.

⁹ Walker, p. 18; Conway, Emerson At Home And Abroad, pp. 6, 102, 286, 293; Walter Harding, The Days of Henry Thoreau (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1965), p. 316; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 134.

Unitarian, abolitionist, and literary leaders of the "Golden Age of New England Culture," including Henry David Thoreau and James Russell Lowell.¹⁰

Emerson and Theodore Parker, a religious radical and abolitionist, became major influences on Conway and the "radical-minded" students at Harvard. Conway's respect for Emerson was likewise held for Parker, whom he considered the "standard bearer of religious liberty." When graduation approached, Conway and several of his classmates invited Parker to address their commencement in 1854. Parker advised them that the faculty was already embarrassed by the "radicalness" of their class and that they should "get some one less notorious."¹¹ Near graduation, Conway was also involved in an incident concerning academic freedom. One of Conway's classmates, a spiritualist, submitted his graduation address which repudiated the miracles described in the Bible. The essay was rejected. Conway, although not in sympathy with spiritualism, combined with several other students and refused to deliver their addresses in protest of this violation of "liberty." While this incident was not

¹⁰ Frank Sanborn, The Life of Henry David Thoreau (New York: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1917), p. 482; Ferris Greenslet, James Russell Lowell (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1905), p. 107; Walker, p. 18; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 140-141, 158-159.

¹¹ Easton, pp. 128-129; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 162-163, 167-168.

one of major proportions, it illustrated Conway's readiness to oppose a restriction on "liberty."¹²

In addition to these men, Conway came under the influence of transcendentalism at Harvard. Although he reported that none in his class were converted, transcendentalism was instrumental in shaping Conway's later religious thought. Through the "spiritual individualism" preached by transcendentalism, Conway discovered a "quickening sense of social obligation" that increasingly led him toward reform.¹³

On May 24, 1854, one of the most sensational fugitive slave cases in ante-bellum history commenced and as a result focused Conway's attention on the slavery question. A fugitive slave named Anthony Burns was arrested in Boston by a United States Deputy Marshall, and the city was thrown into an uproar as a result of this incident. The Kansas-Nebraska Act had been passed on May 22, and Colonel Charles Suttle of Alexandria, Virginia, chose this moment to seize his fugitive property. The Pierce administration seemed

¹² Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 182.

¹³ Conway has been credited to be the "only" Southerner of his generation to be "swept along" by the transcendentalist movement. Influenced by transcendentalists such as Emerson and Parker, Conway believed that the intellectual was obligated to reshape society and preach millennial reform. George Frederickson, The Inner Civil War (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 14-16; Stow Persons, Free Religion, An American Faith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1947), p. 22; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 165-169.

determined to break Boston's resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law and the President sent over two thousand troops into Boston to suppress any rescue attempt. This event excited the antislavery-minded people and the New York Times reported that one thousand pistols were sold on May 27 to the Bostonians.¹⁴

Conway knew Colonel Suttle and the fugitive, Anthony Burns, who was born in Falmouth, Virginia. An attempt to rescue Burns seemed imminent. The Southerners at Cambridge decided to sympathize with the slave-hunters and offer their assistance if required. However, Conway refused his help, stating that his sympathies were on the side of the fugitive.¹⁵ In Boston, Conway attended an antislavery meeting at Tremont Temple. Again, he refused to become actively involved and rejected an appeal by several men after the meeting to aid in a plot against the slaveholders.¹⁶ Despite an assault on the courthouse led by Thomas Wentworth Higginson and aided by Parker, Wendell Phillips, and approximately two thousand others, Burns was returned to slavery

¹⁴ Lawrence Lader, The Bold Brahmins (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1961), pp. 203-209; New York Times, May 26, May 28, 1854.

¹⁵ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 43-44.

¹⁶ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 176.

in Virginia.¹⁷ Conway's non-involvement was the result of conflicting attitudes. He opposed any plot against his fellow Virginians, yet he could not be part of any action that would return the fugitive to slavery.

Colonel Suttle returned to Virginia with the story that the "only fellow-townsmen" he knew in Boston had opposed him. While later knowledge of Suttle's report grieved Conway, he found consolation in the discovery that his mother had for many years held a "fervent hatred of slavery."¹⁸ The Burn's incident was also significant since Conway claimed that any slavery enthusiasm he may have held was "burned out" during this fugitive slave case.¹⁹

On July 4, 1854, a meeting of approximately five or six hundred abolitionists convened at Framingham, Massachusetts, to protest the Burn's incident. At this meeting speeches were delivered by Thoreau, Phillips, Sojourner Truth, and other antislavery leaders. William Lloyd Garrison provided the highlight of the gathering. He read

¹⁷ Later the abolitionists raised money to pay for Burns and he returned North to freedom. One result of the case was the passage of a strengthened Personal Liberty Law which made it almost impossible to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act in Massachusetts. Lader, pp. 208-209, 214-216; James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States, Vol. I (New York: MacMillan Company, 1928), pp. 500-506.

¹⁸ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, p. 44.

¹⁹ Boston Evening Journal, January 19, 1863.

and burned several documents including copies of the Fugitive Slave Law and the decision against Anthony Burns rendered by Judge Edward Loring. Finally, Garrison held up a copy of the Constitution, denounced it as "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell," and then ignited it.²⁰

Conway attended the gathering and made a short speech calling for the peaceful separation of the North and South. On that day Conway moved closer to abolitionism. He recognized that the antislavery cause was a crusade and that Garrison was its torch bearer and the "real savior of men." According to Conway: "Every breath of New England air was the holy Spirit. Every copy of the Liberator was gospel and epistle."²¹ However, as a Southerner, Conway knew "good" people on both sides of the controversy and his affection for Virginia was a factor influencing his reform activities. As a result, he decided not to join the Antislavery Society and his peace principles led him to conclude that the peaceful separation of the North and South would hopefully provide a solution to the sectional problem.²²

When Moncure Conway returned to Boston he found a

²⁰ Filler, pp. 215-216; New York Times, July 6, 1854.

²¹ MS-Moncure Conway, "William Lloyd Garrison," pp. 57-58, Conway Collection (CU).

²² Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 184-186.

letter from the Unitarian Church in Washington. The church was without a permanent minister and Conway accepted an invitation to fill the pulpit for the month of September.²³ Slavery existed in Washington and the new Unitarian minister realized that his views on this matter would probably affect the length of his stay. As a result, he decided to be candid on this subject from the beginning.²⁴

Conway's initial sermon in Washington was delivered on September 10, 1854. In this sermon he informed the congregation of his antislavery thoughts. He noted that the "advancing day" was marred by slavery, which enslaved the brothers of Christ. The next Sunday, September 17, Conway again introduced the subject of slavery in the pulpit using as his text the theme, "Am I my brother's keeper?" On October 29, the church met to select a permanent minister. Conway delivered an address on that day which pointed out his feelings concerning the role of the church on non-theological questions. Conway informed his listeners that:

The church must thus hold itself ready to pass free judgment on all customs, fashions, ideas, facts; on trade and politics-and, in this country, more especially hold itself ready to give free utterance in relation to our special national sin-the greatest of all sins-human slavery.

²³ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 186.

²⁴ MS-Moncure Conway, Sermon fragment, Isaiah XXX,10 Conway Collection (CU).

Fifteen minutes after this sermon, Conway was elected to the post of permanent minister with but two opposing votes.²⁵

Such sermons indicate that Conway now believed that abolitionism was a religious cause, and he followed the path of those reformers who identified slavery as the national sin. This emphasis on the sinfulness of slavery and its inhumanity helped stimulate the zealous abolitionist efforts which eventually overshadowed all other phases of nineteenth century reform.²⁶

Since Conway was near his Virginia home, he planned to visit his parents in Falmouth. However, he received a letter from his father stating that it would be better if he did not visit until his views on slavery had changed. The Burn's incident had created a stir in Falmouth and Conway's father did not want to expose his family to any hazards that might occur as a result of his son's views on slavery.²⁷ In November, his parents changed their minds. Reports of Moncure Conway's sermons in the National Intelligencer and the fact that several eminent Virginians belonged to the Unitarian Church produced a favorable impression upon Conway's relatives. Soon his parents wrote and asked him to come home and visit. On January 21, 1855, Conway delivered

25 Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 187, 189.

26 Wolf, p. ix.

27 MS-Walker Conway to Moncure Conway, September 18, 1854, in Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 188.

two addresses at the Universalist Church in Richmond and after this engagement, he eagerly returned home.²⁸

While Conway's parents received him with great affection, his homecoming was marred due to the fact that many of his former friends treated him like a "leper." On the second day of his stay, he was instructed to leave Falmouth by a group of townspeople who claimed that they could not trust him around the slaves. The next day, Conway left dejected.²⁹ Conway had considered leaving Washington to settle in Richmond, but that incident at Falmouth destroyed any plans he may have had. He now knew that any intentions to advocate abolitionism in Virginia would be counter-productive. As a result of this painful experience, Conway realized that he too was a victim of slavery and he became more deeply involved in the antislavery crusade.³⁰

In early March, 1855, Conway was officially installed as minister of the First Unitarian Church in Washington. Conway invited several eminent clergymen from the left wing of Unitarianism to assist in what were reported to be "impressive services."³¹ Conway's pulpit topics touched upon

²⁸ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 189.

²⁹ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, p. 45.

³⁰ Ibid.; Hayden, p. 285; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 191-194.

³¹ National Intelligencer, March 6, 1855; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 194.

varied subjects. His sermons included a history of the Unitarian Church in Washington, a discourse in praise of a former member and Chief Justice in Washington, and a series of sermons which deplored the divorce of theology from human life.³² Conway received praise for his sermons. Although a Virginian, the young Unitarian minister was reported not to be a sectional man, but a believer in the "nationality of freedom."³³

The new minister had taken a rationalistic position with his congregation. However, Conway tried to follow Unitarian doctrine so that he would not have to again suffer the pangs experienced when he left Methodism.³⁴ Although he tried to avoid controversy with the orthodox churches of the community, an incident occurred which caused the young minister to deviate from orthodoxy. In the summer of 1855 a plague of yellow fever broke out in Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia.³⁵ Other Washington pulpits set aside September 26 as a day of fasting and prayer at their churches to avert the "terrible calamity." Conway refused to open his church for this purpose and instead delivered a discourse

³² Moncure Conway, The Old And The New, A Discourse (Washington: Buell and Blanchard, 1854); Moncure Conway, Discourse On The Life And Character Of The Honorable William Cranch (Washington: Franck Taylor, 1855); National Intelligencer, April 17; May 8; July 3, 1855.

³³ Paper clipping from Toledo Blade (no date), inside cover of The Old And The New; Conway, "Volume of Sermons," No. 5, 1850-1855 (CU).

³⁴ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 194.

³⁵ Burtis, p. 51.

in which he stated that the plague was not God's revenge on the people of these towns, but was due to ignorance and unsanitary conditions. The cause of the plague in Portsmouth was cited by Conway to have stemmed from "unwise laws" that herded free Negroes together. As an afterthought, Conway noted in this discourse that men were often labeled "infidels" if they tried to "limit" God's influence.³⁶ This statement proved to be accurate in this case in that Conway's actions resulted in criticism from other pulpits. When the day for the public fast arrived, Conway delivered a discourse which opposed fasting as an attempt to "pacify" God.³⁷ Conway was pleased when his congregation approved of his attack on "vulgar superstition,"³⁸ and the success of his efforts probably reinforced his ideas on freeing people from "superstitions." Throughout Conway's life, the eradication of superstition and evil became one of his primary objectives.

When Conway had moved to Washington he found Senator Charles Sumner and the antislavery congressmen united in a little Massachusetts of their own, since Washington society ignored them.³⁹ However, Conway was not restricted socially.

³⁶ Moncure Conway, The True And The False In Prevalent Theories Of Divine Dispensation (Washington: Taylor and Maury, 1855), pp. 8, 10, 13, 15, 17, cover page.

³⁷ Moncure Conway, Pharisaism And Fasting, A Discourse (Washington: Buell and Blanchard, 1855), pp. 11, 18.

³⁸ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 198.

³⁹ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, p. 46.

He ministered to some of the leading citizens in Washington and moved easily into Washington's social circle. He mixed with men such as Sumner, Winfield Scott, William Seward, and occasionally attended receptions held by President Franklin Pierce.⁴⁰ Most Unitarian ministers at this time favored the containment of slavery within its boundaries and relied on the molding of public opinion to support the eventual extinction of slavery.⁴¹ Most of the Unitarian ministers as a result associated themselves with the free-soil movement. Conway supported this position and also met frequently with the free-soil congressmen who were working to exclude the peculiar institution from the Federal domain.⁴²

In 1855, Conway made an abortive attempt to petition the Virginia Legislature concerning slavery. In this project he united with Samuel Janney, a Quaker minister from Virginia, who had been indicted in 1850 for inciting a slave rebellion and had praised Conway for his pamphlet on Free Schools In Virginia. This petition did not demand emancipation, but asked for the repeal of the law which forbade the teaching of slaves to read and requested a law be passed to prevent arbitrary separation of slave families.

⁴⁰ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 199, 200, 203, 208-210, 220.

⁴¹ Conrad Wright, The Liberal Christians (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 64.

⁴² Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 233.

The petition was sent to the Virginia Legislature, but was never read before that body.⁴³ Conway probably realized the futility of petitioning for the emancipation of slaves. As a result, the objective of this petition seemed to be to merely alleviate some of the evils of slavery, without clouding some improvement with the heated issue of emancipation.

As the sectional problem intensified in early 1856, Conway sensed that war was approaching. Since the young minister hated war more than slavery, Conway again emphasized the position he expressed at Framingham in 1854; a position that many Garrisonians had accepted, favoring the peaceful separation of the North and South.⁴⁴ Conway vocalized this sentiment in a discourse delivered on January 26, 1856. A large number of congressmen were present to hear the announced topic, The One Path; or, the Duties of the North and South. Here Conway stated that slavery was "exclusively" a moral question and thus was a proper topic for the pulpit. He claimed that he belonged to no party, but defended the right of the North to oppose the spread of slavery or to separate peacefully. Separation was not

⁴³ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 49-50; Samuel Janney, The Memoirs of Samuel Janney (Philadelphia: Friends Book Association, 1881), p. 93; Eaton, p. 135; Janney was supposedly the only Virginian to campaign for emancipation without colonization. Patricia Hickin, "Antislavery In Virginia, 1831-1861" (University of Virginia: Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, 1968), p. 443.

⁴⁴ Carleton Mabee, Black Freedom, The Nonviolent Abolitionists From 1830 Through The Civil War (New York: MacMillan Company, 1970), p. 364; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 231.

emphasized, but was introduced as an alternative unless the North could not disengage from policies which promoted the continuation of slavery. Although Conway pointed out his detestation of slavery, he seemed primarily concerned with whites. He claimed that the "interests of the three or four millions of Negroes are not so near to us as the interests of the whites who hold them."⁴⁵ Again, Conway seemed to be mixing abolitionism with his concern for the South. This paradox probably frustrated Conway. He certainly did not want the South ravaged by war. For the present Conway was satisfied to emphasize peace and only the ending of the spread of slavery.

Conway's discourse was published and "widely circulated." The Liberator and The National Era reprinted it on the front page and praised the young minister for his boldness, independence, and originality.⁴⁶ Horace Greeley had attended Conway's sermon and reported the discourse in the New York Daily Tribune as "fearless," adding that the young minister expected to lose his pastorship as a result of this address.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Moncure Conway, The One Path; or, the Duties of the North and South, A Discourse (Washington: Buell and Blanchard, 1856), pp. 1-6.

⁴⁶ The Liberator, February 22, 1856; The National Era, February 7, 1856.

⁴⁷ New York Daily Tribune, January 29, 1856; This final statement was only inferred by Greeley, yet Conway's congregation did deplore his use of the pulpit on such an "angrily contested political question." Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 235.

Despite the fact that the topic of slavery created discord within his church, Conway delivered another address touching upon slavery the next week. On February 17, 1856, Conway delivered a discourse entitled, Spiritual Liberty, in which he declared that speaking out on moral questions was the Christian duty of his congregation. In this address, Conway posed a question that asked why injustices to Indians were freely discussed in the pulpit, while reference to the African was silenced. He answered that the African was being exploited and that "profitable" evils do not seem so horrible. He condemned the motto, "Our country, right or wrong," and asserted that the mission of the congregation should be to "free men from all the evils of mind and doctrine and practice...."⁴⁸

Evidently Conway and his congregation were not of a single mind and purpose on this question. On April 15, he received a notice from the church committee that many were dissatisfied with his latest course of action and noted that it might be better for him to leave than to split the church. Ironically, the southern wall of the church split at this time. Since the divided congregation could not raise enough money to repair the wall, Conway decided to raise the money

⁴⁸ Moncure Conway, Spiritual Liberty, A Discourse (Washington: 1856), pp. 3, 6-7.

from the Northern churches.⁴⁹

Traveling northward, Conway attended the annual meeting of the Progressive Friends at Longwood, Pennsylvania, on May 22. This meeting discussed a wide variety of reform issues and Conway contributed a speech on slavery. The New York Daily Tribune reported Conway's speech as, "Manifesting all possible charity toward the slaveholder, he nevertheless denounced the system, and pledged his endeavor against it in bold and refreshing terms."⁵⁰ On this same day, Charles Sumner was assaulted by Preston Brooks of South Carolina.⁵¹ While the Richmond Whig called the assault on the "notorious and foul-mouthed abolitionist from Massachusetts" a "Good Deed," Conway was appalled.⁵²

On May 28, Conway attended the New England Antislavery Convention in Boston where he was one of the many speakers who expressed shock over the attack on Sumner.⁵³ In his speech, Conway asserted that few Virginians realized the sinfulness of slavery. He then added that the Southerners could hardly be expected to react to the problem of slavery

⁴⁹ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 236.

⁵⁰ New York Daily Tribune, May 29, 1856.

⁵¹ Rhodes, p. 139.

⁵² National Era, May 29, 1856, article reprinted from Richmond Whig.

⁵³ New York Daily Tribune, May 30, 1856.

when the North continued in a Union with them, without significant protest.⁵⁴

After the convention, Conway visited Concord and stayed with Emerson. While in Concord and in surrounding towns, Conway raised a substantial sum of money for his "Church of Freedom" in Washington.⁵⁵ He attended one of the Unitarian anniversary meetings in Boston where he created a controversy by speaking candidly concerning the problems of his Washington church. In reference to the slavery question, Conway claimed that it was time to take a practical stand and ignore theology for the present. He wanted the Unitarians to resolve that there was an inseparable connection between Unitarianism and antislavery. This proposal was rejected by Henry Bellows of New York. Bellows stated that the subject of slavery had paralyzed several meetings in the past and that the chief goal of Unitarianism was to promote Unitarianism.⁵⁶ Thus, Conway's anti-slavery leanings had brought him not only in conflict with the laymen, but with some of the Unitarian clergy as well.

Conway returned to Washington and on July 6, after

⁵⁴ The Liberator, June 8, 1856.

⁵⁵ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 247; MS-Emerson to Conway, October 16, 1856, in Conway, Ibid., p. 243.

⁵⁶ National Anti-Slavery Standard, July 26, 1856.

repairs to the church had been made, he delivered the sermon that proved fatal to his Washington ministry.⁵⁷ This discourse, "War, and its present Threatenings," condemned war and denied that anything positive resulted from hostilities. Conway feared that war would develop out of the Kansas situation and he warned the people that the nation was moving toward "the darkest, deadliest, and most awful (war) which ever cursed this planet." He objected to the atrocities occurring in Kansas and referred to slavery as "that poisoned fang of hell," which had whipped servility even into the Unitarian church. This sermon demonstrated the frustration that Conway probably experienced and the contradiction that resulted by trying to compromise abolition with his peace principles. Although Conway emphasized peace, he claimed that it would be better for this country to "sink beneath an ocean of blood, than one of the rights of Humanity be surrendered...."⁵⁸ Typical of most Unitarian moralists who distrusted collective action, Conway implored his congregation to act individually as workmen for God in this issue.⁵⁹ These speeches on slavery in Washington

57 Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 239.

58 Conway's foremost concern at this stage was a peaceful settlement. Boston Daily Evening Traveler, July 10, 1856; National Anti-Slavery Standard, August 2, 1856.

59 David Howe, The Unitarian Conscience (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 272; Ibid..

gained widespread publicity for Conway and helped establish his reputation as an opponent of slavery.⁶⁰

The next week following this sermon, the congregation assembled to vote on whether or not to keep Moncure Conway as their minister. On that day Conway addressed his church, but not as an antagonist. He merely informed the people that he was not penitent for his actions and he hoped he would be strong enough to continue in his work.⁶¹ The meeting of the brethren had been arranged because their pastor was "turning the pulpit into a political forum, and upholding one side of a sectional controversy on the Sabbath." However, religious services and the vote on whether or not to keep Conway were suspended by the congregation until October. Washington was in an uproar during this interim due to sectional problems. Under this influence a resolution was passed in October, by a majority of five, to dissolve Conway's connection with the First Unitarian Church.⁶²

Conway delivered one final sermon in Washington in which he concluded: "It is not so much whether the real voice of our church here be vocal or silent-I know that the standard, where I leave it, is for Truth, Justice, Humanity, Freedom,

⁶⁰ National Anti-Slavery Standard, August 30, 1856.

⁶¹ MS-Moncure Conway, Sermon fragment, "Isaiah XXX,10" Conway Collection (CU).

⁶² Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 242, 244.

and Endless Seeking."⁶³ In early October, Conway received an invitation in behalf of a committee representing the First Unitarian Church in Cincinnati, to fill their pulpit for six weeks.⁶⁴ Several of Conway's followers requested that he begin a new congregation in Washington, but he decided to leave.⁶⁵

Conway matured and grew intellectually between 1853 and 1856. Influences and incidents at Harvard and Washington led him on a path toward increasing religious unorthodoxy and a growing dedication to reform, especially in the field of abolitionism. By 1856, Conway rejected Southern thought, suffered martyrdom due to his views, and became associated with the intellectual vanguard of New England. The groundwork had been laid. Moncure Conway was now prepared to launch upon a program of reform at his next ministry, in Cincinnati.

⁶³ Moncure Conway, Mignon, A Discourse, in Moncure Conway, Tracts For Today (Cincinnati: Truman and Spofford, 1858), p. 175.

⁶⁴ MS-John Kebler to Moncure Conway, October 13, 1856, Conway Collection (CU).

⁶⁵ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 244, 248.

III. Ante-Bellum Cincinnati

(1856-1861)

The summer of 1856 had not only been a time of strife for Moncure Conway, but for the nation as well. In June, 1856, the Republican party drew up a platform opposed to extending slavery into the territories and called for the admittance of Kansas as a free state. Most of the abolitionists supported the Republican candidate, John C. Fremont, in the coming election. But others such as Franklin Sanborn, Thomas W. Higginson, Theodore Parker, and Samuel Howe took more direct action in reference to the free-state cause in Kansas. As members of the Kansas Committee of Massachusetts, they collected money to equip the free-staters with Sharp's rifles, using John Brown as their agent to receive the equipment in Kansas.¹ The approaching election found Conway without a pulpit in which to express his views.

However, Conway accepted an invitation from the First Unitarian Church at Fourth and Race Streets in Cincinnati, and temporarily filled this pulpit in November, 1856. Determined to express his sincere views, Conway delivered his first discourse on November 9, while the excitement

¹ Wolf, p. 115.

from the election, in which the issues of slavery and freedom had confronted each other, still existed.² The title of this initial sermon was Virtue vs. Defeat.³ Conway began his sermon by denouncing those who would suppress the discussion of slavery, especially in the pulpit, and others who merely gave lip service to the end of an evil while they condemned those who attempted to eliminate the problem. He castigated those who could not see the inhumanity of slavery as "moral idiots" and tagged those who were apathetic as lacking in virtue or "simple manliness."⁴ Although Conway was dismayed by the fact that James Buchanan had won the election, denoting a triumph for slavery, he believed that the people were still right at heart and that more education would bring them to the side of the abolitionists. Thus, although Conway increasingly identified with the "immediate" emancipation wing of Garrison, in this discourse he advocated a "gradualistic" approach using education as the primary vehicle to change the hearts of people. He concluded by entreating this congregation to join together and "strike forth" against

² Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 251.

³ Moncure Conway, Virtue vs. Defeat, A Discourse (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Gazette Company, 1856).

⁴ Ibid., pp. 8, 9, 12.

the greatest of evils, slavery.⁵

Conway had clearly confronted this new congregation with his abolitionist principles. Only a few days prior to his sermon, the Cincinnati Daily Enquirer had printed an article rebuking "political preachers" and reprimanding ministers for leaving the theme of religion to delve into politics.⁶ Yet Conway was well received. The congregation requested that his discourse be printed and the Cincinnati Daily Gazette referred to the "glowing thoughts" and "eloquence" of the new minister.⁷ As a result, the church voted unanimously on November 18 to extend the invitation of permanent pastor to this "distinguished preacher."⁸ Moncure Conway was in New York when he replied to the invitation to accept the ministry of this large and wealthy church. A November 30 meeting in Washington ended Conway's responsibility to that church and he replied to Cincinnati that he would accept what he felt was to be an "unshackled ministry" and would begin at once.⁹

Conway's first sermon upon returning outlined almost

⁵ Conway, Virtue vs. Defeat, pp. 16, 20; Previously Conway sought moral suasion as a means to peaceful abolition. But from this point he increasingly stressed "immediacy" in reference to emancipation due to his increasingly militant position in reference to the slavery question. Cincinnati Times Star, November 18, 1907.

⁶ Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, November 7, 1856.

⁷ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, November 15, 1856.

⁸ Ibid., November 20, 1856.

⁹ MS-Moncure Conway to Robert Hosea, December 10, 1856. William Greene Papers, Cincinnati Historical Society (Hereafter cited as CHS).

the breadth of his reform interests. He compared the returned fugitive slave to Christ on the cross, he attacked superstition, and stated that he favored human happiness over Protestant asceticism. He demanded more rights for women, he called for the establishment of hospitals for inebriates, a foundling hospital, a home for the socially outcast, and dealt with the problem of prostitution. Nothing could have seemed brighter for Conway as his church stood by him in his ideas, making him feel that he had truly entered an "unshackled ministry." He immediately made some influential friends including Judge George Hoadly, later Governor of Ohio; Alphonzo Taft, later United States Attorney General; and Stanley Matthews, later a United States Supreme Court Justice.¹⁰

The reform and antislavery activities of Moncure Conway were only a part of the role he played in ante-bellum Cincinnati. His religious views and literary endeavors became an important asset to the intellectual life of the Midwest. Conway joined several clubs and wrote anonymous criticisms of plays, concerts, operas, and exhibitions for the local papers. Such broad interests led him into controversy. He attended the ballets and dramatic presen-

¹⁰ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 252-256, 269-270.

tations in Cincinnati, which he loved.¹¹ However, a dancing and theater-going preacher was unheard of in Cincinnati and this culminated in critical remarks directed against Conway. This criticism was most outspoken in the "Democratic" Enquirer, whose views on slavery were also opposed to those held by Conway. This newspaper openly condemned Conway's use of politics in the pulpit and continued to call him the apostle of "Unitarianism, Niggerism, and Theatres."¹² The Enquirer also denounced what it called an alliance between pulpit and press, which was directed to the Gazette for printing a favorable review of Conway's theater discourse. This incident only increased the new minister's interest in antislavery since the Enquirer announced that the theater question had more bearing on the morals of the people than did slavery in the Queen City.¹³

The 1857 Western Unitarian Conference was held at Alton, Illinois, in May. The issue of slavery was felt strongly at this meeting which resulted in a split in the conference. Resolutions were introduced which favored "immediacy" in reference to the slave question.¹⁴ These resolutions were

11 Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 257.

12 Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, June 10, 1857.

13 Ibid.

14 The Alton Weekly Courier, May 18, 1857.

drawn up by Moncure Conway and were supported by a majority of the members. Conway wrote to a member of his congregation that although matters at the conference remained in "status quo," he felt that their side was gaining support.¹⁵ Finally, a resolution was introduced which claimed that the United State's Constitution was a failure and that the Supreme Court decision in the Dred Scott case was "humbug" and of "no binding force." The Reverend Samuel Eliot of St. Louis opposed this resolution and finally he and others, primarily the St. Louis and Louisville delegations, dissolved their connection with the conference and returned home.¹⁶ The Enquirer termed Conway an "ambitious agitator" for his role in the incident.¹⁷ However, the Gazette stated that it was necessary for both the press and pulpit "to probe at the moral cancers of this nation," without fear of crossing one's profession.¹⁸ Conway was glad that a resolution had been passed declaring slavery a moral and religious cause, proper for the pulpit, and overriding the "timid" resolution of three years before.¹⁹

¹⁵ MS-Moncure Conway to William Greene, May 19, 1857
Greene Papers, (CHS).

¹⁶ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, May 20, 1857.

¹⁷ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 274.

¹⁸ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, May 23, 1857.

¹⁹ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 274; When Conway's mother received news of the conference, she wrote to her son: "It seems that you are doomed to be in an excitement on the peculiar institution." MS-Margaret Conway to Moncure Conway, June 2, 1857, Conway Collection (CU).

Conway continued to receive notoriety in Cincinnati for his religious unorthodoxy as well as for his political views. Some applauded him as reaching the thinking people of the community, but several ministers declared him nothing but a heretic. But criticism seemed to have little effect upon his activities. He lectured to the German Turners, Jewish societies, actors, and preached in two different Methodist churches. Conway was invited to speak at the Presbyterian Lane Seminary in Cincinnati by Henry Smith, President of the institution. Conway reciprocated by inviting Smith to occupy his pulpit and explain his religious creed to the Unitarian congregation.²⁰

The increasingly liberal Conway also defended the Jews in Cincinnati when prejudice became apparent against an organization known as the Zouave Guard. Conway's defense in the newspapers won him many new friends, especially Rabbi Isaac Wise. As a result, Conway was invited to speak to their societies, he was entertained by them, and he was impressed with their concern for modern science and their limited belief in supernaturalism.²¹

20 Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 272-273.

21 Ibid., p. 275; Conway continued his defense of the Jews in a sermon entitled the "Merchant of Venice" delivered in 1860, and in an 1887 publication, The Wandering Jew. Conway praised the Jewish people for their liberality in political and social matters and for their anti-sabbatarianism. Cincinnati Daily Gazette, May 31, 1860; Moncure Conway, The Wandering Jew (London: Chatto and Windus, 1887), pp. 274-276.

During 1858 Conway began to devote more time to literary interests. He took more interest in the Cincinnati Literary Club, of which he became a member.²² This led to the publication of his discourses collected over the past several years entitled, Tracts For Today.²³ These sermons demonstrated Conway's enlightened religious opinions. Here Conway revealed that there was no such thing as absolute truth in any church and that the paths to God were as numerous as individuals. Conway did not explain in these lectures what God was, but he stated that he was not "trifling, wrathful, or capricious."²⁴ Like Emerson, Conway devoted one discourse to Nature, in which he claimed that social progress came through harmony with nature and that one developed this harmony through "unswerving self-reliance." An example of millennialism was exhibited in another discourse, in which Conway pointed to a day when all crimes against man would cease. This was to come about through the eradication of dogmatism and superstition even in so-called "liberal Christians" to whom the doubting of a miracle was more anathema than the enslavement of human beings.²⁵

The newspapers were once again split over the worth of

²² Robert Jones, "Notes on Authors of the Early Literary Club, 1849-1861," in Papers Read Before The Literary Club (Cincinnati: December 25, 1922), p. 21.

²³ Conway, Tracts For Today (Cincinnati: Truman and Spofford, 1858).

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 60, 62, 229.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 278, 283, 285, 287, 300.

Conway's latest activity. The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, which felt that ministers should preach "good, old-fashioned Bible doctrine," was critical of Conway's work, especially when he made reference to his skepticism of Biblical authenticity. This paper's reviewer classed Tracts For Today as typical not of a Christian minister, but of an infidel.²⁶ The Gazette's review of Conway's book was more complimentary. The work was characterized as "bold" and the review focused its attention on the sensational aspects of the work. For example, Conway declared that Christ was not omniscient by not knowing about Judas, that it was heathen to worship God for health or material goods, and his observation that it was a miracle all men were not "scoundrels" in view of the unjust and cruel God in the Old Testament. In conclusion, the review mildly reproved Conway for a lack of respect for other people's opinions and for respecting no one's viewpoints but his own.²⁷

In March, 1858, a reprinted article from the Liberator appeared in the Gazette on why abolitionism generally had been declining in the North over the past several years. This article attributed the loss of fervor as due to mixing anti-slavery with politics and because it disturbed the peace of

26 Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, February 28, 1858.

27 Cincinnati Daily Gazette, February 16, 1858.

the church.²⁸ Conway's antislavery attack over the past few years was also not too noticeable. However, this was not due so much to the charges of the Liberator, but the result of the fact that his congregation was already anti-slavery in attitude.²⁹

Other activities were occupying Conway's time. On June 1, 1858, he married Ellen Davis Dana against his mother's earlier letter of precaution. Soon, misfortune occurred as Conway lost his savings when the Life and Trust Company of Cincinnati failed. However, Conway recorded that 1858 was a beautiful year. Journals sought his articles, societies wanted addresses, and there were many opportunities to engage in "ethical discussion."³⁰ A large portion of Conway's time was taken up by speaking engagements. His ministrations and lectures took him to cities such as Newbury, Massachusetts,³¹ Louisville, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and later to Theodore Parker's congregation in Boston. In Ohio, Conway toured Chillicothe, Xenia, Yellow Springs, Columbus, Athens, and other towns.³²

²⁸ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, March 16, 1858.

²⁹ Burtis, p. 61.

³⁰ MS-Margaret Conway to Moncure Conway, July 10, 1857
Conway Collection (CU); Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 288-289.

³¹ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, August 15, 1857.

³² MS-Moncure Conway to A. W. Whelpley (postcards),
Whelpley Autography Collection (CHS); Gazette, September 17,
1860.

Cincinnati's population at this time was composed by almost one-third of Germans, many of whom had been leaders in the 1848 revolutions in Europe.³³ This caused several Ohioans to become interested in the works of German philosophers, especially the writings of Georg Hegel. The Cincinnati group devoted to the study of Hegel consisted of Conway, J. B. Stallo, Peter Kaufman, and August Willich.³⁴ Conway had earlier associated with German reformers and was a personal friend of Stallo, who was active in the literary club with Conway and Rutherford Hayes. Conway was also intimate with Willich.³⁵ These men often met at Wielert's tavern for afternoon beer and conversation. Conway largely based his religious, moral, and political views and writings on two themes that were greatly influenced by Hegel and David Frederick Strauss. One theme-religious naturalism-held that the Deity was to be found within nature and history, not in some other-worldly realm. The second theme, evolution, reinforced his ideas of brotherhood to all men, and to use tolerance and rational evidence in religious matters.³⁶

³³ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 253, 268; Many of these immigrants were radical reformers who wanted to make the world over, and they especially attacked slavery. Carl Wittke, We Who Built America (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1939), pp. 189, 193.

³⁴ Easton, p. 1.

³⁵ Loyd Easton, "German Philosophy in Nineteenth Century Cincinnati-Stallo, Conway, Nast, and Willich," Bulletin of Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio (Cincinnati: Vol. 20, 1962), pp. 15-24.

³⁶ Easton, Hegel's First American Followers, pp. 52, 123-124.

Conway's connection and contact with the Germans subsequently brought him in touch with a group of "infidels."

In the years preceding the Civil War, Conway often attended the Sunday afternoon meetings of a small society of freethinkers.³⁷ He was impressed with their non-belief in God or immortality and the respect held for their "standard bearer and apostle of religious freedom," Thomas Paine. In his earlier life, Conway had associated Paine's name with ill-repute, but Conway, being a student of legends, began to research the large mythology that had seemed to grow about Paine.³⁸ His views on Paine were made apparent in a discourse given on Paine's birthday, January 29, 1860, entitled Thomas Paine: A Celebration.³⁹ Conway concluded that Paine had often been maligned in the past, that he was not anti-Christ, and he reminded his congregation that it had been Paine who had brought forth the theory and goal of American independence. Conway added that these too "are the times that try men's souls," and he beseeched his church to follow the path of truth and reason and be unselfish for humanity, as was Thomas Paine.⁴⁰

Conway feared that a discourse on this controversial

³⁷ Walker, p. 26.

³⁸ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 304.

³⁹ Moncure Conway, Thomas Paine: A Celebration, A Discourse (Cincinnati: Published at the office of the Dial, 1860).

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 7-9, 14-15.

man might create problems in his church. However, the day after the discourse was delivered, his congregation exhibited their approval by asking him to publish the sermon. Many of the freethinkers felt Conway was justifying their cause. As a result, many thereafter frequented his church and arranged for Conway to have discussions with them one night a week.⁴¹ Conway continued to study Paine throughout his life.⁴² In 1892, he published a thorough two-volume study, The Life of Thomas Paine, in which he rejected all previous studies on this man and defended Paine against the prejudice and attacks made upon him.⁴³

In December, 1858, and January, 1859, Conway began a series of Sunday evening lectures on social issues. For example, one discourse called for the creation of asylums for alcoholics, work houses for the "idle and dissolute," and for more sanitary conditions and "fairer relations" between capital and labor. Conway struck a note of gradualism in his social reform as he referred to education as the

⁴¹ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 305.

⁴² MS-Moncure Conway to Robert Smith, September 29; October 7; November 13, 1895, Miscellaneous manuscripts (DLC); Moncure Conway, "Thomas Paine's First Essay," The Nation, Vol. 52 (February 26, 1891); Moncure Conway, The Writings of Thomas Paine, 4 Vol. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896). Conway wrote numerous other articles and letters on Thomas Paine.

⁴³ Moncure Conway, The Life of Thomas Paine, Vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1892), pp. vii, xiv.

"great cure" and that it was not to be achieved overnight. On January 3, 1859, Conway again emphasized the labor problem in a discourse entitled "The Relation of Capital and Labor." In this speech, he defended the side of labor and referred to the workers as "noble and dignified."⁴⁴

In a later talk on prostitution he attributed the origin of this problem to destitution on the part of the woman due to limited jobs. Although opposed to licensing, he felt these women should be treated with kindness.⁴⁵ Conway said that he did not agree with all that was called "Women's Rights," but he did not ridicule the cause either. Earlier, in 1858, his concern led him to make a survey of the local business establishments and he discovered that women were paid better in the East than in the Midwest. Conway concluded that the only "fair" profession for a woman to enter was the theater, yet he demanded the right of women to enter every profession and all occupations.⁴⁶ Conway's lectures on social questions were but an elaboration of the themes mentioned in his initial sermon upon officially entering the ministry in Cincinnati. Conway discussed the possibility of creating hospitals for alcoholics, foundlings, and outcasts in Cincinnati, but he

⁴⁴ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, December 27, 1858; January 3, 1859.

⁴⁵ Ibid., January 17; January 25, 1859.

⁴⁶ Ibid., January 14, 1858.

recorded that the project was interrupted by the Civil War.⁴⁷

The early Unitarians had believed in miracles, but then Theodore Parker and the transcendentalists began to question this position.⁴⁸ These individuals had a profound influence upon the thinking of Conway and led him away from orthodoxy. As Conway's religious views became more unorthodox, they eventually created a disturbance within his own church. Conway had rejected supernaturalism and approximately one-third of his church was upset by the fact that this was the first time that simple theism had been incorporated into the western pulpit. More disturbing to some was a discourse on "God" in which Conway maintained that the creation and governing of the world by an omniscient and omnipotent God negated the idea of free will, so he replaced this concept with a God of reason.⁴⁹ Conway's view of Christ had also changed over the past several years. He now stated that Christ never died on the cross, but only "swooned," later to be revived and escape to the countryside.⁵⁰ He urged

⁴⁷ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 289-290.

⁴⁸ George Willis Cooke, Unitarianism In America (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902), p. 156.

⁴⁹ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 270-272, 305.

⁵⁰ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, April 30, 1859.

his church to view Christ not as the Son of God but only as an "ideal man."⁵¹

In late February, 1859, Conway delivered a discourse on "Miracles," in which he referred to the walking of Jesus on the water as "trash." The primary purpose of this discourse was to show that all Biblical miracles were fables. The Gazette, usually sympathetic with Conway's views, described his assertions as absurd and surprising for a man professing to be a minister of the gospel.⁵² This discourse created a division in Conway's church and shortly a meeting was arranged to discuss the problem. Conway wrote a letter to his church in which he stated that he would resign and was not bitter, but he said that they could not dismiss him for expressing his honest views without destroying the foundations on which the Unitarian church was built. At the meeting a trustee, Robert Hosea, although disapproving of Conway's attendance to theaters and parties, praised him for his moral and intellectual excellence and asserted that if Conway was dismissed it would be a severe blow to liberal Christianity in America. The Gazette reported the meeting to be stormy, but felt that both sides would harmonize.⁵³ However, the society decided to split and divide

⁵¹ Easton, Hegel's First American Followers, p. 134.

⁵² Cincinnati Daily Gazette, March 3, 1859.

⁵³ Ibid., March 29, 1859.

the property as well.⁵⁴

On April 16, 1859, a meeting was held to organize a second Unitarian Church in Cincinnati. A church constitution was created by the anti-Conway faction for the new church named The Church of the Redeemer.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, the Conway faction met and established a "free church," with open doors, free seats, and free sentiments.⁵⁶ Most of Conway's influential friends such as A. R. Spofford, Judge Hoadly, and Alphonzo Taft remained in the Conway faction as did a large number of ladies, freethinkers, and "liberal Christians."⁵⁷ On May 1, 1859, Conway preached the inaugural sermon to his new congregation entitled "East and West."⁵⁸ Conway called this service a victory over "prejudice and ignorance" and welcomed those left to a church where they would not have to compromise their feelings when they entered the door. In his desire to change the role of the church from a position of other-worldliness to a humanitarian religion, Conway stated that his concern was for "the Destiny of America, living fully in the day which is at hand...."⁵⁹ Conway had

⁵⁴ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, March 31; April 5, 1859.

⁵⁵ Ibid., April 16, 1859.

⁵⁶ Previously Conway's church rented their pews.

⁵⁷ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, April 16, 1859.

⁵⁸ Moncure Conway, East and West, A Discourse (Cincinnati: Truman and Spofford, 1859), pp. 4-5; Moncure Conway, My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1906), p. 2.

⁵⁹ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, March 3, 1859.

been moving from orthodox Unitarianism for some time, but this church split and the ensuing controversy at Harvard Divinity School was to reinforce this tendency.

In July, 1859, Moncure Conway attended the annual meeting of the Harvard Divinity School alumni. Theodore Parker usually attended these meetings, but illness prevented him from attending the assemblage. Conway was present and after consulting with James Freeman Clarke, Clarke said that he would second a resolution drawn up by Conway to extend the sympathy of the alumni to the ailing Parker. The resolution was thus stated:

Resolved, That the association had heard with deep regret of the failure, during the past year, of the health of the Rev. Theodore Parker, and we hereby extend our heartfelt sympathy, and express our earnest hope and prayer for his return, with renewed strength and heart unabated, to the post of duty which he had so long filled with ability and zeal.⁶⁰

While this seemed to be a moderate resolution, it brought out the "anti-Parkerism" of the alumni and was described as a "bombshell" thrown into the assembly.⁶¹ Conway had wisely left the speech to Clarke who stated that no matter what Parker had said in the past, he "cherished" the members of

⁶⁰ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 295-296.

⁶¹ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, July 22, 1859.

the assembly.⁶² This feeling was not mutual as Ezra Gannet declared Parker's preaching was harmful and that he had previously said "bitter" things against the association. After heated argument, some suggested the resolution be altered to leave out reference to Parker's work. Conway then claimed that he was not trying to get them to follow Parker's theology, but just to extend sympathy to a colleague.⁶³ One delegate stated that he did not want the resolution in any form. Before the meeting adjourned the discussion became so heated that an attempt was made to exclude the reporters. Conway later wrote to James Martineau about the affair, who was the greatest representative of Unitarian theology since William Ellery Channing had died. Conway was pleased with Martineau's reply which recognized Parker as one of God's "true prophets of righteousness" and added that often the noblest of men were of the excommunicate. Although this partly redeemed Conway's hero, it was not until Parker's death in June, 1860, that critics began to recognize the importance of Parker's work.⁶⁴

The sectional conflict in 1859 saw serious new overtones. On October 16, 1859, the fire-eaters were given the weapon with which they could arouse the Southern people and denounce the North. John Brown invaded Virginia at Harper's Ferry and

⁶² Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 296.

⁶³ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, July 22, 1859.

⁶⁴ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 296-298.

was soon captured by Colonel Robert E. Lee. Conway knew how the South would react to this incident and since he was anti-war and feared armed conflict, he denounced Brown's actions. In a sermon Conway described Brown's move as "worse than a crime" and declared that the abolitionists would also denounce Brown since they were "non-resistant." On this point Conway was mistaken. Franklin Sanborn, Samuel Howe, Parker, and Thomas Higginson had known about Brown's intentions and Gerrit Smith as well as Sanborn was aware of Brown's final plan.⁶⁵

After his sermon on Brown, Judge Stallo took Conway to his home in an attempt to get him to change his views. The tremendous praise for Brown from men Conway admired, such as Emerson and Garrison, brought about a change of heart for Conway. Conway had also strained some friendships due to his initial reaction to Brown's venture. One such friend, August Willich, led a torchlight parade through Cincinnati when Brown was executed in spite of many threats. Thus, on December 2, 1859, two days after Brown's execution, Conway exalted Brown "to the right hand of God" in his sermon.⁶⁶ In this compromising discourse Conway referred to Brown as an instrument of God, the "purest" general in the world, and a "friend and benefactor to humanity."⁶⁷ Now Conway was

⁶⁵ Burtis, p. 74; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 299.

⁶⁶ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 268, 300, 302.

⁶⁷ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, December 5, 1859.

again in step with the abolitionists. He had charged the United States Government with being the arch-criminal of the incident, yet he claimed that although altering his position on Brown, he had approved of the use of bloodshed only by implication.⁶⁸ Previously, Conway had hoped for a "high human victory" in regard to a peaceful settlement of the slave question, but now all were victims of Brown's act and a peaceful victory seemed improbable.⁶⁹

Conway's pulpit activities focused on the slave question as a result of the Harper's Ferry incident. His Thanksgiving Day sermon in 1859 called for a return of the "old Puritan virtue" in the people and stated that by freeing the African, America would become a pillar on which to prop the world's freedom.⁷⁰ Conway again created controversy as he remarked that no other churches were speaking out against the "national sin." This comment was attacked in the Gazette in which a reader defended the Methodist Protestant Churches for their work against slavery and among the blacks.⁷¹

This renewed abolitionist fervor was of short duration

⁶⁸ Walker, p. 20; In an 1887 novel, Pine and Palm, Conway revealed a later opinion on Brown through the character of Gideon, in which he revealed that he felt Brown's actions had been unwise. Moncure Conway, Pine and Palm (New York: Henry, Holt and Company, 1887), pp. 317-321.

⁶⁹ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 303.

⁷⁰ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, November 25, 1859.

⁷¹ Ibid., December 13, 1859.

as Conway's interests again became divided between the humanitarian, scientific, and literary in the tradition of the early Unitarian movement in New England. The sermons of the Unitarian ministers had become a literary product and Conway was no exception.⁷² His sermons often dealt with religious leaders of the past and present such as Swedenborg, Thomas Arnold, and John Henry Newman.⁷³ He spoke on Oriental religions and praised Muhammad as the first to set forth the concept of the equality of man and the nobility of women.⁷⁴

The publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species was to revitalize Conway's interest in evolution which had first been stimulated by Emerson and Agassiz in 1853.⁷⁵ When Darwin's work did appear in December, 1859, Conway hailed this scientific publication in a sermon at a time when few people could understand the work or its potential importance.⁷⁶ To Conway, Darwin had now stated that miracles were only in nature, thus reinforcing his ideas on supernaturalism. Conway was farsighted as he emphasized that all religions

⁷² Burtis, p. 62; Cooke, pp. 415-416..

⁷³ MSS-Sermons, Conway Collection (CU), from Burtis, p. 62.

⁷⁴ MS-Moncure Conway to A. W. Whelpley, October 22, no year, Whelpley Autograph Collection (CHS).

⁷⁵ Walker, p. 24.

⁷⁶ Burtis, p. 63.

not based upon natural science would have to labor under a rising storm of criticism.⁷⁷

Conway seemed to proudly record that his religious and philosophical heresies were widely reported.⁷⁸ Thus, it was natural for Conway to seek a vehicle to not only express his views more widely, but to expand and clarify them. The realization of this project came in late 1859 when Conway wrote to Emerson that the revival of the Dial had long been his dream and that he now wished to embark upon this endeavor.⁷⁹ The first number of the new magazine appeared in January, 1860, entitled, The Dial: A Monthly Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion, with Moncure Conway as editor. At the end of the preface Conway printed: "The Dial stands before you, the reader, a legitimization of the Spirit of the Age, which aspires to be free: free in thought, doubt, utterance, love and knowledge," and dedicated to "closing up of superstitions and evils...." The January Dial set the intellectual pace for this new magazine. The featured article by Octavius B. Frothingham on "The Christianity of Christ" attempted to show that many of the rituals used in Christianity were actually pagan. In a portion entitled "The Catholic Chapter," Conway included quotes from various philosophers and differing

⁷⁷ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 281-282.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 303-304, 306.

⁷⁹ MS-Moncure Conway to Ralph W. Emerson, November 16, 1859; Ralph Rusk, The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), Vol. IV, p. 181.

religions and in the book reviews he gave a favorable report on a book concerned with the problems of female employment. Likewise, other editions of the Dial maintained a reform attitude. Articles included comments on topics such as prostitution, foundling hospitals, and abolitionism.⁸⁰

Conway was pleased at his magazine's large subscription list and he had received cheering letters from Longfellow, Charles Norton, and O. B. Frothingham.⁸¹ The press was generally favorable to Conway, especially a review by William Dean Howells in the Ohio State Journal, published at Columbus. Howells noted that until now, Boston was the only place where a person could freely express his opinions, but now the Dial had attempted to "bring out all the thinkers of the West." Although the article did not ask everyone to endorse each word of the publication, reference was made to the Dial as an "organ of profound thinkers, merciless logicians, and polished writers."⁸²

Conway wanted his magazine to be a "chip off the old block" so he requested articles from Emerson. He was disappointed when Emerson contributed little.⁸³ However, Conway's work provided an important outlet for intellectual

⁸⁰ Dial (Cincinnati, Ohio), June, 1860, pp. 338-343; November, 1860, pp. 649-660, 669-676; March, 1860, p. 152.

⁸¹ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 307.

⁸² William Howells, "The Dial," Ohio State Journal (February 15, 1860).

⁸³ MS-Moncure Conway to Ralph Emerson, in Burtis, p. 71.

endeavors and has been termed "an important episode in the history of the transcendental movement."⁸⁴

The achievements of this magazine were short-lived. The election of 1860 had produced a "black president." The thought of Lincoln in the White House was anathema to the fire-eaters and created an incendiary situation. Under this pressure, Conway joined in the struggle with "pen and words" to try to keep the unionists from surrendering freedom to the secessionists through compromise.⁸⁵ Conway hoped for the Dial, which he termed "the freest magazine in America," to continue its enlightened work at least on a quarterly basis, but the national crisis deemed that even this project was to be abandoned.⁸⁶ As a result, the December edition of the Dial opened with "A Parting Word," which began: "With this number the publication of the Dial ceases." Conway included his farewell for the present, but added that the need for a comparable organ still existed.⁸⁷

The election of 1860 was the first time Conway had voted in a presidential election. This first and only vote cast by him was given to a man he had heard speaking in the market

⁸⁴ Clarence Gohdes, The Periodicals of American Transcendentalism (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1931), p. 134.

⁸⁵ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 311.

⁸⁶ MS-Moncure Conway to the Liberator, January 9, 1861 Smith College (Garrison Collection).

⁸⁷ Dial, December, 1860, p. 311.

place of Cincinnati in September, 1859.⁸⁸ Conway was passing through the market but stopped to hear the speaker, Abraham Lincoln. His words were to remain in Conway's memory. Lincoln had stated in his speech that "Slavery is wrong," and that the spread and "perpetuity of slavery impaired the general welfare" for which the government was entrusted to ensure. Having supported Fremont, it was only natural for Conway to support a man who gave hope of ending "the national sin." But Lincoln's election had not solved the problems of the nation.⁸⁹

As the Southern states began to secede, Conway had not taken the position of an antislavery unionist or disunionist. Although he was not a fervent Southern patriot, he viewed the unionist theme as based primarily on commercial interests. Though Conway disliked Buchanan, he felt that the President had been right in not antagonizing the Southern states, mainly because his abolitionist principles were overshadowed by his hatred of violence.⁹⁰

In a sermon on "Secession," Conway described the Union as

⁸⁸ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, September 19, 1859.

⁸⁹ In fact, as Lincoln passed through Cincinnati to his inauguration, seven states had already seceded. Lincoln's inaugural address provided the first of many disappointments for Conway. The man Conway felt would end slavery had raised no significant objection to an amendment passed in Congress forbidding interference with any state institution, including slavery. Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 317-319.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 319.

"an oak planted in a jar," and preached against the holding of the Union by force.⁹¹ Conway had been receiving threatening notes as the crisis developed. When his discourse on "War" was advertized for December 3, 1860, a dozen Kentuckians armed with heavy canes took over the front pews of his church. When they discovered that Conway was not going to urge war upon the South, they filed out. This discourse was representative of Conway's peace principles. He stated that there were no good wars and that nationalities were nothing but stains on the globe. In reference to the claim that the seceding states were traitors, Conway declared that "treason is fictitious" and that one should place humanity above "cold national interest."⁹²

Conway's normal pulpit activities continued during this period of stress and he gave a series of topical lectures on Wednesday evenings. The Gazette announced Conway's proposed topics and added that whether on social or political matters, his lectures "have been replete with good thoughts."⁹³ Conway's final lecture of the series was delivered on March 31, 1861, for which the topic was appropriately entitled, "Our Nation's Present Emergency." In this discourse Conway

⁹¹ Burtis, p. 76.

⁹² Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 321.

⁹³ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, November 30; December 31, 1860; March 6, 1861.

had taken the position that the American people should preserve the Union, reversing an earlier attitude on this subject. Again, Conway illustrated conservative tendencies by calling for a "steady progress" in America to unite the states, using constitutional amendments as the primary vehicle for this purpose. Conway also made a great understatement in this sermon by predicting a long, hard struggle for the Negro to gain some rights.⁹⁴ He felt to compromise any more than the North had already done would be paramount to surrendering all liberty to the slave power.⁹⁵

Conway's plea for humanity and hope for a peaceful settlement to the crisis was to be lost when Confederate forces fired upon Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. When the news reached Cincinnati, Conway was at the home of Judge Hoadly, where men and women met weekly to study German literature. When the group received the news, all quietly got up and left, never to continue their studies.⁹⁶ Cincinnati was suddenly filled with thousands of men drilling, as the city turned into an armed camp.⁹⁷

The Sunday following the President's call for seventy-

⁹⁴ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, March 13; March 14, 1861; Conway's attitude change was probably due to the fact that he realized separation would not solve the slavery question.

⁹⁵ Ibid., March 25, 1861; By now Conway was more militant on the slavery issue. His sympathies were less for the South and he condemned any compromise with the South and slavery.

⁹⁶ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 324.

⁹⁷ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, April 13, 1861.

five thousand volunteers, Conway's church sang the Star Spangled Banner as he rose to give the sermon. The church was so overcome with emotion following the song that it was several minutes before Conway could deliver his discourse on "The Peril and Hope of the Hour." In this speech, the Unitarian minister defended Lincoln for his decision to protect Fort Sumter, which had been a test case concerning Lincoln's attitude toward secession.⁹⁸ By 1861, Conway had taken a definite position on the crisis, which was exemplified by his actions at a Unionist rally at the Catholic Institute. Conway was spotted in the crowd waving his hat in the air and making "all sorts of patriotic gesticulations." By request he came forward and declared that now there could be no neutrality in the conflict, since there was no medium "between loyalty and treachery." Conway affirmed that he would continue to do his part in the pulpit, which was attested to by the fact that his next day's sermon was entitled "Loyalty and Neutrality."⁹⁹

Although Conway was outspoken in many areas, he was not a unique radical during this time in Cincinnati. His

⁹⁸ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 324-325.

⁹⁹ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, April 27, 1861. Conway cheered the troops marching through Cincinnati, but he was to be disappointed. He believed that the soldiers were there only to protect the Northern boundary and not invade the South. Burtis, p. 77.

activities, although numerous, were comparable to James Freeman Clarke and others in scope and intensity in the fields of literature, theology, and reform.¹⁰⁰ While Conway touched upon many reforms, he neglected other reforms of interest to the Unitarians such as care for the blind and insane and for civil service reform. While Conway was concerned about the rights of Negroes, he demonstrated no interest in Indian education, another Unitarian interest, or any concern toward the Indians at all. His interest in peace, education, and women's rights had earlier been initiated by William Ellery Channing, Margaret Fuller, and others. As a group, the Unitarians promoted the scientific study of theology, free investigation, and an attitude of tolerance, thus placing Conway in step with his colleagues.¹⁰¹

Yet one cannot lightly dismiss the influence of this man. His use of religious naturalism and early utilization of the concept of evolution was notable for the Midwest at this time. His work on humanitarian religion and his challenges to orthodoxy placed him as a forerunner of the religious trend to appear in the Gilded Age. Besides entering the ranks of the "antislavery vanguard," his magazine, the Dial, was an important contribution to ante-

¹⁰⁰ Cooke, pp. 365, 418.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 325-328, 345-358, 372, 389.

IV. The Civil War

By 1860, Unitarians were practically unanimous in their condemnation of slavery and when the war commenced, Unitarian ministers as a whole played an active role as soldiers, chaplains, or in the Sanitary Commission.¹ Moncure Conway also became engrossed in the abolitionist struggle during the Civil War, but instead of entering the war directly, he chose to utilize his talents of lecturing and writing.

Although Conway had emphasized his peace principles in the past, he temporarily viewed the new war as a "time of glorious visions." Conway considered Lincoln's new army not as a weapon of destruction, but an agency that was to "heal" and "liberate." Conway was not alone in his paradoxical views since many Garrisonians, Quakers, and others with non-resistant attitudes cooperated with the Union side.² Like Gerrit Smith, who was President of the American Peace Society, Conway believed that the new conflict was a war to end war and in addition would end the source of the war, slavery.³ In a speech delivered in New York, during the early months of the war, Conway claimed that this war would become

¹ Cooke, pp. 176, 365.

² Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 328; James McPherson, The Struggle For Equality (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 52; Mabee, p. 342.

³ Merle Curti, Peace or War, The American Struggle 1636-1936 (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1936), p. 54.

"holier" than that of 1776, through an earnest desire to make "our brothers" free.⁴ However, Conway soon became disillusioned since Lincoln maintained that slavery was an incidental issue in the war while the cause of the Union was primary and vital. The President stated that the only thing he would not compromise was his opposition to the extension of slavery into the territories.⁵ Conway was dismayed since he sought a total and immediate end to slavery and he strongly opposed any compromises with the South. He referred to any further concessions to the South as "base seductions" and feared that compromises would leave the North "neither honor, virtue, or a real nation."⁶

During July and August of 1861, Conway visited Washington.⁷ There he discovered with great regret that Union generals had been warned to prevent slaves from entering Federal lines. While visiting William Henry Furness and Charles Sumner, Conway argued that if the President and Congress immediately declared every slave in America free, there would be no war. According to Conway, every Southerner would have to stay at

⁴ National Anti-Slavery Standard, May 18, 1861.

⁵ James Randell and David Donald, The Civil War and Reconstruction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 376; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 326, 328.

⁶ MS-Moncure Conway to Charles Sumner, February 19, 1861, Sumner Papers, Harvard University (Hereafter cited as HU).

⁷ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, June 15, 1861.

home and guard his slaves. After this transpired, the owners could be paid with the cost of the Union army for one month and peace would reign. Furness and Sumner accepted Conway's doctrine and Sumner urged Conway to spread his ideas throughout the North and West.⁸

Conway's desire to do everything possible to help his country "in this her solemn but ever-glorious emergency," caused him to offer his first-hand knowledge of Virginia to the War Department.⁹ Since this project never materialized, Conway decided to follow Sumner's suggestion. During the summer of 1861, Conway traveled through the East preaching and lecturing on the crisis of the Union.¹⁰ In Boston, on July 7, 1861, Conway's lecture on "Our National Emergency" was strongly applauded six times.¹¹ From Boston, Conway journeyed with Horace Greeley on his way to preach in Newport, Rhode Island. However, these two abolitionists disagreed upon the conduct of the war. While the New York Tribune cried "Forward to Richmond," Conway hoped that the Northern armies would only occupy the border states with camps to provide asylums for slaves, and thus compel the slaveowners

⁸ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 328, 330.

⁹ MS-Moncure Conway to Abraham Lincoln, May 7, 1861, Lincoln Papers (DLC).

¹⁰ Burtis, pp. 77-79.

¹¹ MS-Moncure Conway to Ellen Conway, July 8, 1861, Conway Collection (CU).

to remain home.¹²

On July 21, 1861, Conway lectured at the Unitarian church in Bedford, Massachusetts. In this lecture, Conway pictured an American millennium of liberty and ensuing peace. The Quakers who attended were pleased with Conway's emphasis on peace and his contention that not one drop of blood would be shed if the President proclaimed freedom for every slave.¹³ On this same day, Union soldiers had been routed in the battle of Bull Run. While many Northerners viewed the defeat with despair and dejection, Conway evaluated the incident with hope. He felt that the defeat would rouse the country to the realization of the great work that had to be done.¹⁴

Before returning to Cincinnati, Conway lectured in numerous towns and cities, including New York City, where he preached to the congregation of Octavius Frothingham. While in New York, Conway met with several leading men including

¹² Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 332; During the summer of 1861, Conway also visited Easton, Pennsylvania, and Eagleswood, New Jersey. At Eagleswood, he addressed the school established there by Theodore Weld in 1852. Eagleswood was a utopian educational community often visited by "unconventional idealists and visionaries." Eagleswood attracted the best and broadest minds of the day including Thoreau, Conway, Greeley, and Frothingham. Catherine Birney, Sarah and Angelina Grimke (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1885), pp. 272-273; Betty Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), pp. 284, 287.

¹³ Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 334.

¹⁴ MS-Moncure Conway to Ellen Conway, July 23, 1861, Conway Collection (CU); in McPherson, p. 71.

Henry Ward Beecher. Although all agreed with Conway's tactics of striking at slavery as the heart of the war, only Frothingham seemed to think that this plan was practical. Conway's trip to Washington and the East had been a sort of pilgrimage to the great antislavery leaders so that he might discover how to proceed in the crisis. But Conway returned to Cincinnati disheartened. The President's decision to fight the war had led several of the leading abolitionists to espouse a "suicidal war," and Conway could not support a war that would bring about an invasion of the South.¹⁵

While in Cincinnati, Conway announced his approval of General John C. Fremont's actions in the West and especially praised his proclamation to free slaves confiscated from Southerners. Conway applauded him as the leader that the nation cried for and pleaded to make this conflict "a noble war of humanity."¹⁶ Later, in an 1862 speech delivered in Boston on the anniversary of emancipation in the British West Indies, Conway criticized the "ineffable stupidity" of the present administration and nominated Fremont to be the next President.¹⁷ Again, Conway was disheartened when Lincoln left no doubt that all issues were to be subordinated to the saving of the Union. Lincoln did not want to alienate the

¹⁵ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 334-337; Conway was in a dilemma. Slavery still existed and the war could possibly end this evil. Yet, Conway could not approve of violence, especially if it meant destruction of his native Virginia.

¹⁶ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, September 2, 1861.

¹⁷ The Liberator, August 8, 1862.

border states and instead displeased abolitionists such as Conway by removing Fremont from his post of Commander in the West.¹⁸ Conway's reaction to this decision was scathing and was demonstrated in a letter to Sumner in which he stated: "I cannot convey to you the burning sense of wrong which is filling the hearts of our people here, as they gradually come to see that there is no President of the United States—only a President of Kentucky."¹⁹

Throughout late 1861 and early 1862, Conway was constantly lecturing and when he was not lecturing, he was either writing or working for emancipation. In late 1861, Conway decided to tour the state of Ohio and plead his plan of emancipation. After consulting Sumner, Conway discovered that a number of men in Washington were ready to pay him for these lectures, but Conway refused to accept payment. He felt that the lectures would be more effective if it was known that he was the son of a slaveholder, lecturing unpaid. Conway visited every important town in Ohio including Piqua, Lebanon, and Dayton. He was astonished at the lack of opposition to his argument which called for the immediate and universal emancipation of slaves as a war measure. As a result,

¹⁸ Dumas Malone and Basil Rauch, Crisis Of The Union 1841-1877 Vol. IV (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960), p. 182.

¹⁹ MS-Moncure Conway to Charles Sumner, September 17, 1861, Sumner Papers (HU).

Conway reported to Washington that a majority of Ohioans favored his plan.²⁰

Conway wrote to Charles Sumner in September, 1861, about drawing up petitions for emancipation to be distributed in the West, and mentioned a new pamphlet he had been preparing. Conway claimed that there had been a singular lack of publication on the nation's emergency and he wanted Sumner to inquire about having the pamphlet published.²¹ Conway's publication, The Rejected Stone, appeared in October, 1861. In this work, he claimed that justice must be given to the Negro. He noted his displeasure with Lincoln and the Northern generals because emancipation was not emphasized, because fugitives were not accepted in the Union lines, and because the new black minister from Haiti was not received in Washington. One major theme of the pamphlet was Conway's negation of the idea that the Southerners could justify their actions by calling themselves revolutionists. According to Conway, revolution depended upon the dignity and justice of its cause. Since the South was fighting to perpetuate an evil system, Conway claimed that the Northerners were the revolutionists while the Southern movement was a

²⁰ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 337-339; Cincinnati Daily Gazette, October 28; November 11, 1861.

²¹ MS-Moncure Conway to Charles Sumner, September 23, 1861; August 22, 1861, Sumner Papers (HU).

rebellion.²² Later, Conway amplified this concept in a "utopian" statement, in which he declared that this revolution would spread throughout the world, making the world "free."²³

Predictably, Conway defended immediate and unconditional emancipation and re-emphasized that it would force every Southerner to remain at home. To counter racist rumors concerning emancipation, Conway pointed out the harmonious and beneficent results of emancipation in various countries and declared that the Negroes have been "infamously slandered" and "absurdly misunderstood." Finally, Conway exhorted the young men and women in America to unite morally, not politically, to seek the liberation of the slaves.²⁴

Conway's one hundred and thirty-two page pamphlet was favorably reviewed by the press and the work was published in three editions. The Cincinnati Daily Gazette favorably reviewed it and emphasized the author's assertion that peace could not become a reality so long as slavery existed. The review concluded that The Rejected Stone was decidedly the "ablest pamphlet" which the war had brought out.²⁵ A group of men in Boston wished to distribute The Rejected Stone

²² Moncure Conway, The Rejected Stone; or, Insurrection vs. Resurrection In America (Boston: Walker, Wise and Company, 1861), pp. 24, 53-54, 68.

²³ The Liberator, August 8, 1862.

²⁴ Conway, The Rejected Stone, pp. 79, 86, 96, 125.

²⁵ Cincinnati Daily Gazette, November 14, 1861; The Commonwealth, December 20, 1862, reprinted from The Christian Examiner.

among the soldiers and to facilitate this action, Conway relinquished any royalties to his work.²⁶ This 1861 publication became a "wartime antislavery bible" and saved the life of one soldier in the Battle of Roanoke when a minnie ball glanced off the pamphlet which he carried over his heart. When the soldier was asked if the Bible had saved him, he replied "no-the Bible wasn't radical enough for that."²⁷

In late 1861, Conway inquired about a lecture series that was to be started in Washington with speakers from "the radical wing of the country." He felt that it would be poetic justice for him to speak in Washington again and he asked Sumner to try to get him invited.²⁸ Other antislavery leaders such as Garrison, Phillips, and Greeley had lectured in this series and finally, on January 17, 1862, Conway delivered his address at the Smithsonian Institute. In spite of opposition against permitting Conway to lecture, he delivered his oration, "The Golden Hour," to an audience that included several leading statesmen. The Golden Hour of the nation meant that now slavery could be eradicated forever

²⁶ Walker, p. 36; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 343.

²⁷ Frederickson, p. 116; MS-Moncure Conway to Ellen Conway, March 28, 1862, Conway Collection (CU).

²⁸ MS-Moncure Conway to Charles Sumner, December 12, 1861, Sumner Papers (HU).

through the constitutional war power.²⁹

Following Sumner's suggestion, Conway called upon President Lincoln along with William Ellery Channing. At the meeting, Channing suggested emancipation with compensation for the slaveholders. When Conway asked Lincoln if the abolitionists might look to him to deliver the nation from slavery, Lincoln only responded that he hoped slavery was on the downhill. Lincoln felt that abolitionists such as Conway had overestimated the number of Northerners holding similar views. The President declared that the great masses in the country cared comparatively little about the Negro and were more anxious for military success. Conway recorded that Lincoln seemed to think that they were mainly concerned for the Negro race, but this was not the paramount issue to Conway. Of chief importance to Conway was the liberation of the country from the horror of war and its causes. According to Conway, the Negroes were suffering less than the soldiers and their families. Thus, although Conway was a humanitarian fighting for the Negro, he clearly placed the welfare of the black man below that of the whites in the conflict. Conway left the White House depressed, since it was now clear to him that the President believed military force was the only means to preserve the Union.³⁰

²⁹ Edward Magdol, Owen Lovejoy: Abolitionist In Congress (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1967), pp. 317-318; MS-Moncure Conway to Ellen Conway, January 15, 1862, Conway Collection (CU); Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 343-344.

³⁰ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 345-346.

During the winter months of 1862, when it seemed that the Union General George McClellan would never begin to fight, Conway again decided to travel making speeches and preaching. He continued his work into the spring, speaking approximately six times a week in spite of occasional threats, spreading his "simplistic" doctrine that immediate emancipation was the only true panacea for the nation's difficulties.³¹ In early 1862, Conway lectured in numerous places including Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. In Boston, he lectured to the Emancipation League and was afterwards honored at a dinner in the Parker House by approximately thirty persons, including Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, and a number of Harvard professors. At the dinner Conway reviewed his interview with Lincoln and emphasized that slavery was the commissariat of the Southern army, a concept adopted by Emerson in his lecture on "American Civilization." Conway asserted that the slave's toil supplied the rations for the Southern army and thus the slave helped keep the rebel army in the field.³²

On January 30, 1862, in New York City, Conway lectured to approximately twelve hundred people at the Church of the

³¹ MS-Moncure Conway to William Greene, March 24, 1862, William Greene Papers (CHS); Cincinnati Daily Gazette, April 3, 1862.

³² Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 347-348; Conway's impression of Lincoln after the meeting was that the President was "simply incompetent and without a plan." MS-Oliver Wendell Holmes to John Motley, February 8, 1862, in John Morse, The Life and Letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Vol. II (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1896), p. 163.

Puritans. Conway had received a letter signed by numerous individuals including Horace Greeley, O. B. Frothingham, William C. Bryant, and Sydney Howard Gay to lecture in that city. They felt that Conway's knowledge of Southern society would provide a fresh and valuable lecture. The theme of Conway's presentation was a familiar one, in that he declared that emancipation was indispensable to the salvation of the country. The lecture was reviewed as convincing in that Conway was a native of Virginia and the address was referred to as "the most striking presentation of the subject thus far made in New York."³³

Conway returned to Cincinnati after this tour to finish his latest book, The Golden Hour. In this work, he declared that the President could abolish slavery under the power of martial law and that if he would not, Congress could impeach him. Conway asserted that the slaves desired freedom and he denied that emancipation would result in mass insurrection among the slaves in the South. Even if emancipation would result in servile insurrection, Conway stated that it would not be as cruel as the chronic insurrection of the Southern whites against the rights and happiness of a whole race of blacks in the South. Conway still naively maintained that the South would welcome emancipation and that peace and a permanent victory would result from emancipation. To Conway,

³³ National Anti-Slavery Standard, February 8, 1862.

if the nation was to be saved, the abolitionists would do it. Thus, he defended his comrades claiming that they were not "monsters" but merely men who desired liberty for the entire family of man.³⁴

The Golden Hour did not enjoy the popularity that The Rejected Stone had received. Conway's idealistic notion that emancipation would solve all problems was criticized in one review which stated: "These are times for the utterance of plain common sense, not fustian."³⁵ Conway had increasingly developed a hatred of the war and his new book illustrated this concern with the evils of it. Although he had originally supported the war, Conway now became disillusioned due to the impact of war upon humanitarian philosophy.³⁶ Conway wrote of his concern to Charles Sumner and predicted that a true peace could not be won by the sword.³⁷

Conway's two publications and six weeks of nightly lecturing were beginning to tire and adversely affect him. Friends advised that he should rest for a year if he hoped to work in the future. As a result, Conway unsuccessfully applied for a consulship so that he could rest.³⁸

³⁴ Moncure Conway, The Golden Hour (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862), pp. 24, 47-49, 76, 82, 137-138.

³⁵ The Liberator, August 8, 1862.

³⁶ Frederickson, p. 123; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 366.

³⁷ MS-Moncure Conway to Charles Sumner, April 22, 1862, Sumner Papers (HU).

³⁸ Ibid.

During a short rest, Conway meditated upon a course of action. He had considered serving as a chaplain in Virginia, but when an offer came for the position, he rejected it. Later, when Conway was drafted, he decided to pay the three hundred dollars to purchase a substitute. These decisions were made because Conway could not aid in a war that had become a military invasion of the South and not primarily designed to rescue the Southerners or their slaves.³⁹

In May, 1862, Conway attended the Western Unitarian Conference in Detroit. His purpose for attending was to propose the resolution: "That in this conflict the watch-words of our nation and our church and our government should be, Mercy to the South; death to slavery!" The resolution was unanimously adopted and supported with enthusiasm. Returning to Cincinnati, Conway received letters from a group of prominent Bostonians headed by George Luther Stearns requesting that he edit a new newspaper to advocate immediate emancipation. This offer led Conway to a decision and he resolved to accept and again utilize his literary talents to further the abolitionist cause. Conway did not resign from his pulpit in Cincinnati, but asked for a leave of absence. The Unitarian minister delivered his final discourse in

³⁹ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 353, 436.

Cincinnati on June 29, 1862.⁴⁰

Before moving to Boston, Conway participated in an act which demonstrated his concern for his father's slaves. The Union army under General Irwin McDowell had liberated the Conway slaves in Falmouth, but Conway's home was deserted. His father was in Fredericksburg and his two brothers were away in the Confederate army. Upon receiving news of the occurrences in Falmouth, Conway resolved to go to Falmouth and resettle the slaves in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Conway sought a permit from Secretary of War Stanton, but received little help. Conway then called upon President Lincoln, who referred him to General W. J. Wadsworth to receive the necessary permits to search for the slaves.⁴¹ Conway found his father's slaves in a shanty in Washington and from the Capitol city he transported over fifty Negroes through an angry and threatening mob in Baltimore and finally to Ohio. Plans had been made to receive the freedmen by friends of Conway in Yellow Springs, where the freedmen found work, homes, and education for their children.⁴²

After settling the freedmen, Conway moved to Concord and began work on the new newspaper, The Commonwealth,

⁴⁰ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 353-355; Frank Preston Stearns, The Life and Public Services of George Luther Stearns (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1907), p. 264.

⁴¹ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 356-357.

⁴² Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 113-114; Ibid., pp. 357-362.

which published its first edition in September, 1862. Conway co-edited the new journal with an old friend from his Harvard days, Franklin Sanborn.⁴³ The goal of the paper was to "call unceasingly for the utter extinction of slavery." The editors announced that this publication was not the organ of any party or man, but was "pledged to the welfare of the people, to Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity..."⁴⁴

Lincoln's preliminary proclamation of emancipation in September did not prompt Conway to lessen his antislavery zeal. Instead, he worked hard to make sure that the President would not retreat from his position. As a result, Conway joined the Emancipation League in Boston and began to lecture again.⁴⁵ In Conway's speeches, he called Lincoln a "tortoise" in reference to emancipation and asserted that the sixty-five thousand lives already lost in the war could have been saved if the President had proclaimed freedom for the slaves sooner. Conway had written: "A million blood-stains crimson your hands, Mr. President; damned spots, which not all the rivers and lakes in America can wash away; but in one globule of ink upon your table you may wash them away."⁴⁶ Conway's

⁴³ Easton, p. 149; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 369.

⁴⁴ The Commonwealth, March 27, 1863.

⁴⁵ Nye, William Lloyd Garrison, p. 173; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 370-371; The Liberator, November 28, 1862.

⁴⁶ National Anti-Slavery Standard, August 9, 1862; Conway, The Golden Hour, pp. 157-158.

work created controversy and he was labeled a "Preacher of Sedition" because he claimed that the removal of Lincoln was essential to success. Above all, Conway wanted the killing to end and for the United States to become a land of equal rights for the Negro in all phases of life.⁴⁷

The debate on the character of the Negro had been raging between the abolitionists and conservatives for over thirty years, but war and the possibility of emancipation brought this debate to a new intensity.⁴⁸ In late 1862 and early 1863, Moncure Conway wrote a series of articles and works which attempted to counter prejudice and claims of Negro inferiority held by the racists. In these writings, Conway praised the Negro and declared that they were not "lazy" or "shiftless" and that they desired an education. He characterized the Negro race as a "docile, graceful" one and stated that to colonize or remove the Negro element from Southern life would destroy its poetry and picturesque charm. Instead, Conway claimed that Americans "ought to prize" the African element in this country.⁴⁹ In other writings, Conway illustrated that freed slaves were assets to their countries and would be to America. In addition, he

⁴⁷ Benjamin Quarles, Lincoln and the Negro (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 86; National Anti-Slavery Standard, August 27, 1862, reprinted from the New York Observer.

⁴⁸ McPherson, p. 134.

⁴⁹ The Commonwealth, October 18, 1862.

tried to allay economic fears of the freed slave by asserting that the freedmen would not overrun the North and take the place of white laborers.⁵⁰

Conway opposed those who claimed that the Negro race was inferior, stating that every race had certain strengths and weaknesses. Although Conway claimed that blacks tended to be weak in understanding, he pointed out that their creative imagination and expression would one day produce a great deal of original art. To counter the charge that Negroes were often guilty of crimes, especially rape, Conway replied that blacks were morally superior to the whites of any country he had visited. Conway admitted that Southern slaves did steal, but he claimed that it was due to their condition. According to Conway, major crimes or purely vindictive offenses were almost unknown among Negroes.⁵¹

Conway criticized those men who pointed out differences in the Negro's features and observed that there were few pure Africans in the United States. Like modern social scientists, Conway and other abolitionists declared that it was not "racial deficiency" that caused any inferiority on the part of the Negro, but the environment.⁵² In spite of

⁵⁰ The Commonwealth, October 25; November 8, 1862; Conway, The Golden Hour, pp. 123-127; The Commonwealth, January 10, 1863.

⁵¹ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 70-75.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 59-60; McPherson, pp. 148-149.

environmental handicaps, Conway pointed out many distinguished Negroes such as Charles Remond, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, William Crafts, and other black men and women who displayed a high degree of intelligence and achievement.⁵³ Conway wrote an article that was published in The Atlantic Monthly on Benjamin Banneker, the Negro scientist. In this article he stated: "history must record that the most original scientific intellect which the South has yet produced was that of the African, Benjamin Banneker."⁵⁴

Throughout the war, Moncure Conway continued to defend the Negro. His inflexible attitude in favor of Negro rights continued to make him a controversial figure. He joined abolitionists such as Louisa May Alcott, Lydia Maria Child, and Wendell Phillips who favored miscegenation of blacks and whites.⁵⁵ Conway argued that intermarriage would strengthen the white race. Through the efforts of men such as Conway, the law prohibiting the mixing of black and white in Massachusetts was repealed.⁵⁶

Often "humanitarians" who championed the cause of Negro rights were affected by the widespread belief in white

⁵³ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁴ Moncure Conway, "Benjamin Banneker, The Negro Astronomer," The Atlantic Monthly (January, 1863), p. 15.

⁵⁵ McPherson, p. 148.

⁵⁶ Filler, p. 172; Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 71-73.

superiority. Moncure Conway and other abolitionists reflected this "modified racism," in that they believed Negroes were superior in some areas, but inferior in other respects.⁵⁷ Although Conway was guilty of this "modified racism," abolitionists such as Conway were far ahead of their contemporaries on the race question.⁵⁸ By defending the essential equality and brotherhood of man and supporting peace, Conway demonstrated a maturity that placed him ahead of his time in that his thinking transcended the national and his perspective was clearly international in nature.⁵⁹

Conway was pleased when President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, and he wrote that the "new year had dawned auspiciously on the prospects of three millions of slaves" to be freed.⁶⁰ However, enthusiasm quickly turned to concern when the military governor of North Carolina, Edward Stanley, denounced the abolitionists and supposedly repressed efforts to carry out the President's edict of freedom. This issue and similar concerns prompted the antislavery men in Boston to send a

⁵⁷ Forrest Wood, Black Scare (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 14; McPherson, p. 144.

⁵⁸ James McPherson, "A Brief for Equality: The Abolitionist's Reply to the Racist Myth," in Martin Duberman, The Antislavery Vanguard (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 168-169.

⁵⁹ Burtis, p. 80.

⁶⁰ Boston Evening Journal, January 19, 1863.

delegation to the President. Some of the delegates included Wendell Phillips, Samuel Howe, Elizur Wright, and Moncure Conway. These men submitted their complaint against Stanley and demanded agents in the South who would support emancipation. However, the delegation made little headway. Lincoln regarded their interests as a minority opinion solely interested in the Negro and he opposed the use of reformers in politics.⁶¹

Before leaving Washington, Conway preached a sermon before the United States Senate on January 25, 1863. The sermon, entitled "The Unrecognized Gift of God to America," was dubbed "The Negro, the Saviour of America," and was thus reported by the Washington Republican: "one of the most thoroughly anti-slavery men in this country...gave utterance to the strongest anti-slavery sentiments, amidst the assembled multitude."⁶² In this sermon Conway compared Christ to the Negro. He declared that all Christ wanted from the Samaritan was a cup of water and all the Negro desired was "the simplest rights."⁶³

Since the Civil War began, abolitionists had been concerned about England, fearing that she might enter the

⁶¹ Irving Bartlett, Wendell Phillips, Brahmin Radical (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 256-257; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 376-382.

⁶² Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 377; The Commonwealth, January 31, 1863, reprinted from the Washington Republican.

⁶³ The Commonwealth, February 7, 1863.

conflict. Queen Victoria of England recognized the Confederates as having belligerent rights in 1861 and after the Trent affair in December, 1861, relations with England became strained, even to the point of English war preparations in Canada. The Confederates established several agencies in England to publicize their cause and English newspapers such as The London Times, John Bull, The Morning Post, and the Index opposed the Union cause.⁶⁴ These complications led Wendell Phillips and other abolitionists to ask Moncure Conway to go to England and through his lecturing, persuade the English people to support the Union side.⁶⁵ Conway accepted this mission and planned to remain in England approximately four or five months, speaking at Union and Emancipation meetings. The Commonwealth agreed to pay the Virginian abolitionist one thousand dollars for two letters a week and interested persons raised another seven hundred dollars for his trip.⁶⁶

Conway sailed on April 11, 1863, carrying letters of introduction from Garrison and Emerson to the leading anti-

⁶⁴ Randell and Donald, pp. 356-360; Christine Bolt, The Antislavery Movement and Reconstruction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 29-30.

⁶⁵ The Commonwealth, April 17, 1863; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 388.

⁶⁶ MS-Moncure Conway to Israel Washburn, in "Abolitionism and Southern Independence," William and Mary Quarterly, XXV (July, 1916), pp. 137-138; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 389.

slavery and literary leaders in England.⁶⁷ Conway was welcomed by the Union sympathizers in London and he soon began his work of lecturing on the slavery problem. He delivered his first speech in London on May 6, at Finsbury Chapel. In this and subsequent speeches, Conway echoed what he had stated in America, that emancipation should be the foremost concern of the conflict and that the struggle was a war for humanity. In Conway's May 6 speech he also declared that defeat would benefit the South in that the North would help educate the Southern people and economically the South would "bloom."⁶⁸ Conway delivered numerous speeches, some being interrupted by "rowdyism" and fighting. Yet Conway was generally well-received, due in part because he was a "Southerner" who could inform the English people of the "true" evils of slavery.⁶⁹

Initially, Conway avoided the Confederate representative in England, John Mason, whom Conway had known in Virginia. However, the zealous abolitionist became involved in a very controversial affair with this man. Robert Browning suggested to Conway that it might be a good idea if the antislavery Americans declared that they did not want to subjugate the

⁶⁷ The Commonwealth, April 17, 1863; MS-Ralph Waldo Emerson to Matilda Biggs, April 9, 1863; MS-Emerson to Alexander Ireland, April 9, 1863; in Rusk, The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, pp. 322-323; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 389.

⁶⁸ The Commonwealth, June 5, 1863.

⁶⁹ Ibid., July 17, 1863.

South, except to liberate the slaves and the nation from oppression. After consideration, Conway decided to challenge the Confederate envoy on this point through a series of letters.⁷⁰

Claiming that he had the authority of the leading abolitionists in America who had sent him, Conway proposed that if the Confederate States of America would emancipate her Negro slaves, then the abolitionists would oppose the prosecution of the war. According to Conway, since the abolitionists held the balance of power in the Union, the war would cease and the South could maintain her independence. The Confederate envoy, Mason, requested that Conway verify his credentials to make such a proposal. Before Conway could act, Mason informed him that he was going to publicize the correspondence.⁷¹

Although Conway had acted recklessly and without proper authority, his intentions were honorable. Several antislavery men were upset over Conway's activities, especially William Lloyd Garrison, who denied Conway's authority to make such a proposal and "utterly" repudiated his actions.⁷² However,

⁷⁰ Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 412-413.

⁷¹ New York Times, July 2, 1863.

⁷² Ibid., July 7; July 25, 1863; National Anti-Slavery Standard, July 11, 1863.

reaction to Conway's affair was not totally negative. Wendell Phillips defended Conway's intentions and newspapers praised him for supposedly "unmasking" the truth, that slavery was dearer to the rebels than independence or peace.⁷³

Conway tried to justify his actions, but quickly ceased since he had little desire for controversy. Although Conway was exonerated from any suspicion of disloyalty by the President and was praised for his antislavery work, he was disappointed by the reaction of several abolitionists in America.⁷⁴ By July, 1863, Conway was thoroughly disgusted with the Civil War. As a result, he emphasized his peace principles, declaring that any war except for the holiest cause was worse than treason, "I for one wash my hands of it forever!" Although Franklin Sanborn wrote Conway that the Mason affair had blown over and had done him little harm, Conway decided to remain and work in England. This decision earned Conway the title of "a kind of one-man lost generation of the Civil War."⁷⁵

In September, 1863, Conway preached at the South Place Chapel in London. This pulpit had become famous in the past for its rationalistic spirit and became known as one of the

⁷³ The Commonwealth, July 10, 1863; National Anti-Slavery Standard, August 1, 1863; Cincinnati Daily Gazette, July 4, 1863.

⁷⁴ The Commonwealth, January 29, 1864; The Liberator, January 20, 1865; MS-Moncure Conway to Ellen Conway, July 22, 1863, Conway Collection (CU); Burtis, p. 107.

⁷⁵ MS-Franklin Sanborn to Moncure Conway, no date; MS-Moncure Conway to Ellen Conway, July 6, 1863, Conway Coll. (CU); Frederickson, p. 126.

most liberal churches in England. After deciding to remain in England, Conway was unanimously voted to fill the pulpit in February, 1864, which continued a long and rewarding ministerial career.⁷⁶

In late 1863, Conway made several speeches at the Anthropological Society, whose chief interest according to Conway was to foster contempt for the Negro. Soon, he discovered that antislavery sentiment in England was not as deep as he had supposed. To further his attack against slavery and to answer Dr. James Hunt's theory of the natural inferiority of the African, Conway published his new book in late 1863, Testimonies Concerning Slavery.⁷⁷ In this work, Conway related his experiences with slavery and pointed out the cruelties of slavery such as the whip, slave breeding, severe restrictions, and other examples. Typical of Conway's other efforts, he condemned the South and appealed to the English people to become involved morally with the Union cause.⁷⁸ Response to Conway's book was favorable. His friends were satisfied with his latest effort and this work re-established Conway's name with the antislavery men in America, after the controversy over the Mason affair.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ The Commonwealth, March 4, 1864; Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 434-435; Vol. II, p. 39; MS-South Place Committee to Moncure Conway, February 1, 1864, Conway Collection (CU).

⁷⁷ Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁸ Conway, Testimonies Concerning Slavery, pp. 3, 9-11, 50, 96, 139.

⁷⁹ National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 8, 1864; The Commonwealth, September 30, 1864, Conway, Autobiography, II, p. 2.

Conway received a letter from Horace Greeley in April, 1864, in which Greeley reproached him for not returning to America to join in the presidential campaign. Although the letter troubled Conway, he refused to return because he felt that a revival of the Mason affair would only create problems for their side. Conway's decision to remain was also due to the fact that Phillips and others had assured him that he was "doing good service" in England. Conway was lecturing, writing articles for English and American newspapers, and his wife was collecting contributions to aid the freedmen. These considerations added to Conway's hatred of war, further estranged him from America and the hostilities.⁸⁰

Yet Conway continued to have an interest in the coming election, which divided the antislavery leaders. Garrison favored Lincoln's re-election while Phillips and the Parker Pillsbury faction strenuously opposed it. The resulting schism over this issue and the freedmen's future became more evident in 1865 and was comparable to the abolitionist division which occurred in 1840.⁸¹ Conway's critical view of Lincoln and support for Fremont placed him in sympathy with the Phillip's faction. When Lincoln was nominated,

⁸⁰ Don Seitz, Horace Greeley (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1926), pp. 270-271; Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 44-45; The Commonwealth, March 4, 1864.

⁸¹ MS-Franklin Sanborn to Moncure Conway, May 31, 1864, Conway Collection (CU); Nye, William Lloyd Garrison, p. 182.

Conway wrote: "I am filled with pain and sorrow...when a united abolition phalanx might have gained at Baltimore the best radical republic in America."⁸²

Throughout 1864, Conway continued to express his views on the American situation and he vowed to pursue his fight against slavery until no vestige of enslavement remained. Conway criticized the actions of General Nathaniel Banks in Louisiana, who had returned the Negroes to a state of serfdom by forcing them to work under their former masters. He criticized Lincoln because he supported Banks and claimed the President was responsible for the creation and continuation of the Copperhead Party, since according to Conway, the party was kept alive by the lingering belief that slavery would survive in the United States.⁸³ In a letter to the editor of the National Anti-Slavery Standard, Conway criticized Garrison for not speaking out against the crimes in Louisiana. In addition, he opposed pay discrimination against Negroes in the Army as well as segregated black units composed of former slaves fighting their masters, because he maintained this would create race hatred that would last beyond the war. Conway's position in 1864 was exemplified in one statement

⁸² MS-Moncure Conway to The Liberator, February 3, 1865, Boston Public Library; The Commonwealth, April 22, 1864; McPherson, The Struggle For Equality, pp. 287, 306.

⁸³ The Commonwealth, March 12; June 3; June 10; July 1; August 12; 1864; McPherson, The Struggle For Equality, p. 289.

in which he affirmed that if "any Copperhead stands by my side for the abolition of slavery, the equality of the negro before the law, and the decapitation of an embecile President, I will embrace that kind of Copperhead with my whole heart...."⁸⁴

Although Conway's reform interests had emphasized the slavery question, he did not lose sight of his broad commitment to humanity. Conway emphasized various reforms throughout the war including the demand for co-education and women's rights. He reproved factories that would not hire women and stated that society would never do more than "white-wash and decorate the walls" which imprisoned women.⁸⁵ Conway opposed capital punishment and he termed flogging in public schools as "a sad, incompetent, abortive method of controlling a child and therefore a sin." To Conway, flogging in schools as well as in the armed forces was "brutal." His position on punishment was consistnet with his peace principles in that he opposed any brutality. Instead of methods such as flogging, Conway suggested that schools should use an old abolitionist method, "moral suasion."⁸⁶

While Garrison believed that the abolition crusade was

⁸⁴ National Anti-Slavery Standard, August 27, 1864; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 436.

⁸⁵ Moncure Conway, "The New Antioch," The English Woman's Journal (November 2, 1863), pp. 147, 150; Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 76-77; Moncure Conway, "The Transcendentalists of Concord," Fraser's Magazine (August, 1864), p. 249.

⁸⁶ The Commonwealth, July 7, 1863; May 27; May 6; April 1, 1864; December 6, 1862.

finished after Lincoln was re-elected and the Thirteenth Amendment had been adopted by Congress, men such as Phillips and Conway continued the fight. Conway declared that the work of the abolitionists was not over, but now they were to seek social equality for the Negro.⁸⁷

Once again, Conway's principles had caused him grief. His steadfast concern for emancipation, which was highlighted by the Mason affair, resulted in Conway becoming an exile and observing the conclusion of the war from England. His emphasis on peace and ultimate condemnation of war also brought him into conflict with many of his fellow abolitionists. Although Conway's ideas and words may have occasionally been naive and contradictory, he played an important role in the antislavery struggle and was in the vanguard of those men who championed Negro rights. Conway was possibly too utopian to have gained great fame, since he wanted one of the "bloodiest" wars in American history to be fought on a high level of principle and humanity. The war had brought out Conway's greatest effort in reform and his work was rewarded when emancipation became a reality when the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified in December, 1865.

⁸⁷ Nye, William Lloyd Garrison, p. 184; The Commonwealth, August 26, 1864.

V. England

(1865-1877)

Abraham Lincoln had guided the Union to victory in the War Between the States. The Union had been preserved and slavery had ended. The ending of the war was hailed by many Northerners and "praise" was given to Abraham Lincoln. However, Conway remained critical of Lincoln and the war. Conway believed that the war had been a great catastrophe and he claimed that no President in America had been so detested by his electors.¹

The assassination of President Lincoln on April 14, 1865, brought sympathy and dismay from many Englishmen and Americans alike.² Yet this tragedy did not effect a change of heart for Conway, who was living in London. Franklin Sanborn asked him to wait before publishing something on the fallen President since a recent article by Conway had been very critical and had created controversy.³ The Liberator had labeled Conway's January article on Lincoln "abusive and discreditable" and Sanborn hoped that Conway would not

¹ Moncure Conway, "President Lincoln," Fraser's Magazine, (January, 1865), p. 18; Conway was critical of Lincoln because he did not proclaim emancipation after his election in 1860, and had seemingly opposed the efforts of the abolitionists.

² London Times, April 27, 1865.

³ MS-Franklin Sanborn to Moncure Conway, April 20, 1865, Conway Collection (CU).

repeat his action.⁴ After consideration, Conway announced that he was sorry that he had been so critical of Lincoln in light of his assassination, but he also claimed that he could not participate in the canonization of the President.⁵ Conway believed that in the consecration of Lincoln lurked the consecration of the sword and Conway's peace principles placed him in opposition to any such deed.⁶

With the death of Lincoln, Conway looked hopefully toward Andrew Johnson to carry out a "proper" policy of Reconstruction. Conway believed that Johnson would do more in terms of emancipating the Negro than Lincoln. According to Conway, the horror of slavery in an "emancipated slaveholder" was second only to an emancipated slave. Thus, he concluded that Johnson would make a strong commitment toward emancipating the Negro in all respects. Like the Republicans, Conway supported Johnson. He called for the American people to "gather around" the new President and like Moses, he would lead the people "from bondage to liberty."⁷

Initially, Conway favored a lenient policy of Reconstruction imposed on the South. He naively maintained that the South

⁴ The Liberator, March 31, 1865.

⁵ Moncure Conway, "The Assassination of President Lincoln," Fraser's Magazine (June, 1865), p. 793; The Commonwealth, May 27, 1865.

⁶ Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 94-96.

⁷ Conway, "The Assassination of President Lincoln," p. 801; The Commonwealth, May 20; June 17, 1865; Now that the war was over and the lives of whites were no longer sacrificed, Conway emphasized improving the plight of the Negro,

would keep promises to give the Negro equality, since the code of honor in that section would never permit shame on the South's integrity due to broken promises.⁸ In addition, he called for no vengeance or punishment of Southern leaders.⁹ Of major importance to Conway was the assurance of the total eradication of slavery and the dispensation of equal rights to the freedmen. One issue he emphasized was the suffrage question. Conway believed that Negro equality was to be the corner-stone of Reconstruction, and to achieve this he repeatedly demanded the unconditional enfranchisement of Negroes.¹⁰ He wrote to Charles Sumner of his hopes that Johnson would begin his administration correctly by supporting Negro suffrage. However, other abolitionists, such as Wendell Phillips feared that Johnson was going to "drag" on this issue, and soon Conway disappointedly realized that Johnson was not an active supporter of Negro enfranchisement.¹¹

By 1866, Conway's optimistic view of this "great time of growth" for the nation and his view of Johnson soured. Now, instead of referring to Johnson as a Moses, Conway tagged the President "an ignorant slaveholder," a "tipsy tailor from

⁸ The Commonwealth, February 15, 1865.

⁹ Conway, "The Assassination of President Lincoln," p. 805.

¹⁰ MS-Moncure Conway to Charles Sumner, June 7, 1865, Sumner Papers (HU); Moncure Conway, "The New Rebellion In America," Fraser's Magazine (November, 1867), p. 637; The Commonwealth, March 23, 1867.

¹¹ MS-Ibid.; MS-Franklin Sanborn to Moncure Conway, May 26, 1865, Conway Collection (CU).

Tennessee," and "that Presidential Beast."¹² Conway was equally disillusioned with the progress of Reconstruction in terms of securing Negro equality. In early 1866, Johnson vetoed the Freedmen's Bureau Bill. This act was to indefinitely extend the Freedmen's Bureau, an agency that was organized to protect and serve the freedmen.¹³ Conway joined with Wendell Phillips and the Radical Republicans and objected to Johnson's actions.¹⁴ According to Conway, no peace or progress could exist in the South until all "negro-agitation" was eradicated.¹⁵

Conditions in the South also prompted Conway to condemn the progress of Reconstruction. Under Johnson's program, Southern legislatures had adopted "black codes" to regulate the Negro population.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, Conway condemned the codes and the atrocities that were being committed against the freedmen in the South.¹⁷ To Conway, it was obvious that the Negro had not been improved and he believed that instead

¹² Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 65, 95; The Commonwealth, October 13, 1866.

¹³ Randall and Donald, p. 580.

¹⁴ MS-Wendell Phillips to Moncure Conway, April 20, 1866, Jenkins Autograph Collection (Swarthmore College).

¹⁵ Moncure Conway, "The President's Defense," The Fortnightly Review, Vol. V (May, 1866), p. 98.

¹⁶ Randall and Donald, p. 571.

¹⁷ Conway, "The President's Defense," p. 103; The Commonwealth, March 31, 1866.

of advancing, America was "crouching under ex-slavemasters" who sought to enthrone slavery in Washington.¹⁸ While Conway had earlier favored leniency toward the South, he now called for a sterner approach to be used against Southern leaders and claimed that the North had demonstrated too much moderation in reconstructing the South. Conway's latest approach included a plea for continued military occupation of the South to insure the rights of Negroes and the demand for the exclusion of Southerners from Congress so that they could not "unravel all prior legislation" concerning the equality of the races.¹⁹

Since Johnson's plan of Reconstruction had not provided equality of the races in the South, Conway gave full support to the Radical Republicans and he called for the impeachment of the President. Conway claimed that the impeachment of Johnson was a "solemn duty in obedience to the conscience and conviction of the American people...."²⁰ When the House of Representatives moved to investigate accusations made against the President in January, 1867, Conway supported their actions and maintained that any scandal revealed in the

¹⁸ Moncure Conway, "A Whitsuntide Wreath," The Radical, Vol. I (July, 1866), p. 427.

¹⁹ Moncure Conway, "The Purpose and the President of the United States," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. LXXV (February, 1867), pp. 249-250.

²⁰ The Commonwealth, April 7, 1866; Conway, "The Purpose and the President of the United States," p. 257.

trial would not be as bad as leaving Johnson in office.²¹ Years later, in evaluating Johnson's administration, Conway noted that instead of extending freedom and equality to the Negro, the President had founded a reign of terror over the Negro race, which had suffered more physically since the war began than in the previous century of slavery.²²

In 1868, Conway received a letter from Walt Whitman who informed him that politics in America were in an "unusually effervescent condition" and that Ulysses S. Grant would probably be elected President.²³ After Grant's election, the nation's attention turned from the South to matters of national life. Reconstruction was on the decline as an important issue and there existed a widespread feeling that Reconstruction had failed.²⁴ Likewise, Conway ceased to be outspoken on the issue of Reconstruction in America, and he had exhibited little interest in the 1868 election. He did criticize the scandals in the Grant administration, but his

²¹ The Commonwealth, February 9, 1867.

²² Conway, Autobiography, II, p. 94; Indeed this was Conway's final evaluation of Reconstruction. Although he optimistically reported in 1877 that it was almost unanimously believed that the "war" was really over, he later recorded that equal rights in America did not become a reality and that blood had been shed in the Civil War only to lynch the Negro. Cincinnati Daily Commercial, January 30, 1877; Conway, Autobiography, I, p. 222.

²³ MS-Walt Whitman to Moncure Conway, February 17, 1868, Conway Collection (CU).

²⁴ Avery Craven, Reconstruction: The Ending Of The Civil War (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 274; Waldo Hilary Dunn, James Anthony Froude, Vol. I (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1896), p. 344.

observations and reports upon the state of affairs in America became infrequent.²⁵

Conway's disaffection with American politics and the evils of the Grant administration were expressed in an 1872 work, Republican Superstitions. He wrote the book in an attempt to dissuade the members of the French Convention from patterning their constitution after the American model, which he felt had many outstanding flaws. In this work, Conway condemned the electoral college system because he felt this system elected the chief executive by a minority of the nation. Even if elected by a majority of the people, Conway maintained that the product would often be a mediocrity. Instead, he believed the President should be elected by Congress and thus he would supposedly be the "ablest man" of his party. Conway also opposed the appointment of Supreme Court judges by the President because these appointments created partisan control. One section of the book pointed out the graft, scandal, and abusive use of the patronage system in the Grant administration, and was labeled a "ferocious onslaught" against General Grant. The Vice-Presidency also came under fire. Conway referred to this office as "vicious" since many Vice-Presidents represented only a minority of the people, and with the death of the chief

²⁵ Moncure Conway, Republican Superstitions (London: Henry King and Company, 1872), pp. 79-80.

executive they ascended to office and promoted a reverse policy.²⁶

In addition to assailing the Presidency, Conway opposed the bicameral legislative system. Since there was more prestige associated with the Senate, Conway stated that the House of Representatives could not attract the most qualified men and thus they could not command the confidence of the United States or the world. With two houses of legislature, Conway maintained that continual rivalry between the two would prevail and that a second chamber only added the chance for lobbyism, corruption, and dead-locks. Conway opposed the spirit of political competition in America and this work served as a vehicle to widely circulate his views. Underlying Conway's motive was not anti-American sentiment, but a sincere concern for political reform in his homeland and for better government.²⁷

With the exception of Republican Superstitions, Conway rarely mentioned the American political situation after 1868. Conway's time was being devoted to divergent interests. In addition, he was frustrated over the progress of Reconstruction and the achievement of Negro equality. These factors, plus his physical separation from the United States, probably

²⁶ Conway, Republican Superstitions, pp. 15-16, 76, 84, 91, 103-104, 110, 118; "Our Library Table," The Athenaeum (December 28, 1872), p. 866.

²⁷ Conway, Republican Superstitions, pp. 54, 68, 72.

explains his reticence on questions relating to America.

Although distance deprived Conway of a close relationship with American affairs, he was leading an eventful life in England. One writer has stated that perhaps "no American had a wider circle of friends in two continents, men famous in letters, science, and politics, than Moncure Daniel Conway."²⁸ Conway's home became a familiar visiting place for Americans visiting Britain, such as William Lloyd Garrison, Julia Ward Howe, and Samuel Clemens. During this period, Conway associated and established friendships with men such as John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle, James Anthony Froude, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Herbert Spencer, Thomas Huxley, Charles Darwin, and other English intellectual leaders.²⁹

Another sidelight for Conway in this era was his frequent travels throughout Europe. For example, in the summer of 1869, Conway toured Sweden, Germany, and spent six weeks in Russia. Conway was pleased with what he found in Russia. Instead of finding an oppressed people, he recorded that the Russian peasants were a "happy" people with no

²⁸ Jones, p. 21.

²⁹ Warren Smith, The London Heretics (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1968), pp. 110-112; Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 16, 35, 137, 151, 187, 283, 285; MS-Moncure Conway to Moses Coit Tyler, July 4, 1866, Tyler Papers (Cornell University); MS-Samuel Clemens to Moncure Conway, no date, Conway Collection (CU); MS-John Stuart Mill to Moncure Conway, March 13, no year, Mill Papers (HU); A. Howell Smith, "Dr. Moncure D. Conway," The Ethical Societies Chronicle, Vol. XV (May, 1937), p. 3.

sabbatarian laws, no restriction on speech, and no politics to divide or excite them. Conway praised Czar Alexander II and stated: "And this man, who liberated more people than Lincoln, without shedding a drop of blood, and secured to each emancipated family a piece of land, and was slain like Lincoln, finds no place in the Anglo-Saxon halls of fame!" This attitude was consistent with Conway's afterthoughts on the Civil War. To Conway, the emancipated peasants were not suffering as much as the freedmen in America.³⁰

In addition to his other activities, Conway acquired a reputation as a correspondent and writer. Conway contributed numerous articles to journals such as Harper's Monthly, The Atlantic Monthly, Fraser's Magazine, The Fortnightly Review, The Radical, and The Nation. Newspapers that Conway occasionally wrote for included the London Daily News, the Pall Mall Gazette, London Daily Morning Star, and the Cincinnati Daily Commercial.³¹ Charles Dana, editor of the New York Sun, termed

³⁰ National Anti-Slavery Standard, August 28, 1869; MS-Moncure Conway to Ellen Conway, July 1; July 11; July 16, 1869, Conway Collection (CU); MS-Moncure Conway to Moses Coit Tyler, September 5, 1869, Tyler Papers (Cornell University); Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 180, 184-185.

³¹ MS-Henry Mills Alden to Moncure Conway, April 4, 1871, Conway Collection (CU); Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 149, 177, 200; Moncure Conway, "Working With Froude On Fraser's Magazine," The Nation, Vol. LIX (November, 1894), p. 379; MS-Moncure Conway to Moses Coit Tyler, June 24, no year; October 6, no year, Tyler Papers (Cornell University); Conway wrote for Fraser's for ten years. This magazine was considered to have the most brilliant staff of the century and has been termed the most important organ of progressive thought and open revolt in the Victorian Age. Miriam Thrall, Rebellious Fraser's (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), pp. 5-9.

Conway's correspondence with the Commercial to be "one of the most important features of American journalism." Conway received praise from other Americans and established a name for himself in English letters as well. One description termed his correspondence "quaint, fresh, original, and racy,.... possibly sometimes wayward, but...Whether you agree with him or not, you can't help but love and enjoy him."³² Conway's topics were as numerous as the issues and interests of the day. For example, he covered events like the pilgrimage to Canterbury for Harper's and served as a war correspondent on the French side of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 for the New York World.³³

Although Conway had lessened his appeal for Negro equality in America, he did not lose his interest in reform. He continued his association with English reformers from the Civil War days and subsequently became involved with contemporary reform issues. Instead of mellowing with age, Conway declared, "I am getting radical and radicaler every day,..."³⁴ Every man was a "brother" to Conway and he worked for a humanized world

³² MS-Moncure Conway to Ellen Conway, October 1, 1875, Conway Collection (CU); MS-Murat Halstead to Moncure Conway, November 3, 1872, Conway Collection (CU); New York Daily Tribune, March 1, 1875; Count Goblet d'Alviella, The Contemporary Evolution of Religious Thought In England, America, and India (London: Williams and Norgate, 1885), p. 119.

³³ Burtis, p. 127; Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 218, 244; Moncure Conway, "Gravelotte Revisited," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. VII (October, 1873), p. 432.

³⁴ MS-Moncure Conway to Moses Coit Tyler, May 1, no year, Tyler Papers (Cornell University).

to be realized in "happy homes, clean and sweet tenements, universal education, beautiful health, and above all, in securing to every human being the freedom to carve his or her own being into the character for which each life exists,...."³⁵

One issue he became involved with was the Sabbatarian controversy. Conway believed that museums, galleries, libraries, and exhibitions should not be closed to the public on the Sabbath, especially to those people who did not attend church. To Conway, the Sabbatarian laws were unreasonable and he published an article in which he stated that he was against an "arbitrary and absolute Being who finds more pleasure even in human ignorance, gin-drinking, and unhappiness, than in human joy and happiness...." To further the cause, Conway not only utilized pen and words, but he circulated a petition door to door and presented it to Parliament.³⁶

Conway maintained an interest throughout this period in the cause of women's rights. Although the Victorian Age was a period of the "submissive wife," some women were revolting

³⁵ Moncure Conway, The Earthward Pilgrimage (London: J. C. Hotten and Company, 1870), in Addresses and Reprints, p. 248; Although Conway was a follower of Darwin, he remained a humanitarian. He rejected the Social Darwinism expressed by William Graham Sumner, that opposed attempts to improve society except through evolution.

³⁶ The Commonwealth, December 16, 1865; Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 76, 323; Moncure Conway, "The Sunday Conflict In London," The Radical, Vol. V (January, 1869), pp. 465-466, 470.

against their legal and social bondage.³⁷ While some reformers only favored legal protection for women, Conway demanded full rights and actively campaigned to achieve this goal. He emphasized the need for radical reform of girl's schools, which he termed "superficial establishments," in order to upgrade female education and better prepare them for university study. Conway favored the enfranchisement of women and pushed for the equality of women in the field of labor, especially on the issues of equal wages and total hours permitted to work.³⁸ In addition, Conway supported the reform of marriage laws in order to change the status of women as "chattel." Easy divorce was also advocated by Conway as an aid for the woman. He believed that this would eliminate some cases of murder and suicide, diminish the population, and increase human happiness. Conway had great faith in the ability of women to participate equally with men in public affairs. Thus, attempts by governments to treat women as "non-existent" were considered by Conway to be "the great refuge of all barbarism of society."³⁹

Occasionally, Conway demonstrated an interest in other

³⁷ Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 348.

³⁸ Many factories refused to permit women to work full time in England. The Commonwealth, April 29, 1865; Moncure Conway, "The Education of Girls in England," The Radical, Vol. VII (April, 1870), pp. 301, 303, 305; Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 76-77.

³⁹ Moncure Conway, On Marriage, A Debate (London: Eastern Post Printing Works, 1871), p. 3; Moncure Conway, "Marriage," The Radical, Vol. IX (December, 1871), pp. 342, 348-352; The Commonwealth, January 20, 1865.

reforms. He devoted some of his time to the Irish question. After visiting Ireland, Conway complained that the administration of the poor laws was a curse to the poor. He compared the brutal treatment of Fenians to the conditions that existed in Andersonville, the Confederacy's notorious prisoner camp, and he castigated Parliament for a lack of humanitarianism.⁴⁰ In addition, Conway addressed himself to the question of prohibition, favored an end to capital punishment, and continued his sincere interest in peace.⁴¹ One contradiction in Conway's reform interests was apparent in his work with the poor. He professed great interest in this question, yet his achievements in this area were few and his attitude toward the working man bordered on the patriarchal. While Conway supposedly lectured to the working class at London's Athenaeum and Cleveland Hall, his audience was really composed of the middle class.⁴² One author claimed that a touch of class consciousness from the Old South persisted

⁴⁰ London Times, January 30, 1871; The Commonwealth, May 18, 1867.

⁴¹ MS-Francis Bierds to Moncure Conway, April 24, 1869, Conway Collection (CU); The Commonwealth, September 16, 1865; MS-Moncure Conway to Moses Coit Tyler, May 1, no year, Tyler Papers (Cornell University); Although Conway could not attend the World's Congress of Women in behalf of International Peace held in New York in December, 1870, he forwarded a letter to the Congress. His letter created controversy. Although Conway supported the movement, he objected to the movement being announced as "Christian." However, his proposal was overruled. Laura Richards and Maud Elliott, Julia Ward Howe, 1819-1910 (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1915), pp. 161-162.

⁴² Few of the workers knew that the lectures were for their benefit or really cared. Burtis, p. 123.

in Conway. While he sought to improve the condition of the worker, he objected to trusting government to the "proletariat."⁴³ Although Conway was seriously interested in the cause of reform after the war, his efforts were too divergent and sporadic to be effective or to establish him as a great reform leader in any single area.⁴⁴

Throughout the period known as Reconstruction, Conway's religious views evolved, leading him further from Unitarianism.⁴⁵ Under Conway, South Place Chapel evolved from Unitarianism to theism and a non-scriptural rationalism.⁴⁶ However, his theism brought him unrest. He was repulsed by the providential interpretation of the Civil War and he could not worship a deity that would permit such catastrophes. Finally, toward the end of this period, Conway's religious views evolved into agnosticism and the Religion of Humanity.⁴⁷

Conway's religious viewpoints were expressed in his

⁴³ Smith, pp. 114-115.

⁴⁴ It was not until after his later life that peace consumed Conway's time and energy as a reform interest that could be compared to his antislavery work. Walker, p. 10; Conway, Autobiography, II, p. 454; Moncure Conway, "International Peace and Arbitration," (1900), in Addresses and Reprints; MS-Moncure Conway to Andrew Carnegie, April 15, 1907, Carnegie Papers (DLC).

⁴⁵ Despite Conway's radicalism, the Unitarians remained friendly to him and he preached in several Unitarian churches. Persons, pp. 81-82; Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 190, 296.

⁴⁶ John Robertson, A Short History Of Freethought, Vol. II (London: Watts and Company, 1915), p. 413.

⁴⁷ Moncure Conway, My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1906), p. 7; Conway, Autobiography, II, p. 51; Frederickson, p. 219; Moncure Conway, "The Theist's Problem and Task," The Radical, Vol. I (June, 1872), pp. 421, 423, 431.

numerous books and articles. In 1870, he published The Earthward Pilgrimage, a semi-autobiographical work that traced his evolution from Wesleyan Methodism, through Unitarianism, and to a theism that soon passed into agnosticism. The work satirized the Christian religion and expressed Conway's opinions on divergent topics. For example, he condemned the reading of scriptures of a particular religion in schools, because he believed it was an "oppression" to disbelievers.⁴⁸ The Earthward Pilgrimage was widely circulated, but Conway permitted the book to go out of print because many of the statements in the work failed to satisfy his ever-changing beliefs.⁴⁹

Moncure Conway believed that more understanding between religions could be created through a greater realization of the similarities between religions. To achieve this end, he published another work, The Sacred Anthology, which included Christian, Hebrew, Hindu, Buddhist, Arabic, and other writings on various topics. Conway devoted a great deal of time to this project and he employed Hindus and Persians to search books that had not been translated. The work received praise and this collection of Ethnical Scriptures was used in several Unitarian pulpits in England, Scotland, and America.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Robertson, Vol. II, p. 402; "Theology and Philosophy," Westminster Review, Vol. XCV (January-April, 1871), p. 218; Moncure Conway, The Earthward Pilgrimage, pp. 369-372.

⁴⁹ Conway, My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Moncure Conway, The Sacred Anthology (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1874), p. i; Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 328, 330; Max Muller, "Review of Sacred Anthology," The Academy (October, 1874), p. 476.

In some ways Conway's work paralleled that of the great American orator and freethinker, Robert G. Ingersoll, in that he worked to liberate people from religious ignorance and superstition.⁵¹ In Conway's writings and lectures he denounced Christianity as binding people "hand and foot, mind and body...." Conway referred to the God of the vast majority of the Protestant churches as a "violent, vindictive, jealous Being, creating millions for the purpose of torturing them...."⁵² He repeatedly rejected superstitions and any dogma, even atheism, because he maintained that to "claim final truth is suicidal." Yet Conway defended the atheists. He felt that they were doing an "immense and important work" and a service to humanity in helping destroy false and inadequate images created by superstition. Like Ingersoll, Conway was attacked for allegedly preaching a gospel of "negation" and trying to destroy the faith of others without offering a substitute. The New York Daily Tribune reported that Conway seemed to be most comfortable in his discourse "when he is making his audience most uncomfortable in their accustomed, not to say revered beliefs."⁵³ Although Conway rejected Christianity,

⁵¹ Paul Boller, American Thought In Transition: The Impact of Evolutionary Naturalism 1865-1900 (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1969), pp. 44-45.

⁵² Moncure Conway, Christianity, A Discourse (London: Trubner and Company, 1876), p. 7; MS-Moncure Conway, "Our God," January 10, 1868, Conway Collection (CU).

⁵³ Moncure Conway, Intellectual Suicide, A Discourse (London: Waterlow and Sons, 1875), pp. 9-10; MS-Conway, "Our God," New York Daily Tribune, August 19; January 3, 1876.

the concept of hell, and any description of Christ except that of a radical religious reformer, he replaced these concepts with an emphasis on science, rationalism, and humanity.⁵⁴

The majority of Conway's time and effort in England was spent in his chapel. Conway's connection with South Place has been termed "a rare encounter between man and institution," and his chapel was described as "the most pleasantly invigorating stopping place in metropolitan Infidelity for nearly two decades."⁵⁵ Conway made several changes in the service at South Place that had been commonplace under the former minister, William J. Fox. The new minister kept the sacramental relics as mementos, he used the communion table for flowers, and replaced prayer with "meditations" because he felt these elevated the soul without directly appealing to the Deity. In describing Conway's church, one writer observed: "The Bible figures there side by side with the Koran..., and Confucius is hand and hand with St. Paul."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ New York Daily Tribune, August 19; January 3, 1876; John Hobson, Rationalism and Humanism (London: Watts and Company, 1933), pp. 6, 13-14; Moncure Conway, Our Cause And Its Accusers, A Discourse (London: Waterlow and Sons, 1876), pp. 3, 18; Moncure Conway, "Huxley on Berkeley," The Radical, Vol. IX (October, 1871), p. 180; Moncure Conway, Revivalism, A Discourse (London: Waterlow and Sons, 1875), p. 15.

⁵⁵ Until 1875, Conway also devoted time to a second congregation at Camden Town. Smith, p. 104.

⁵⁶ Conway, Autobiography, II, p. 39; d'Alviella, p. 121.

Conway's congregation was composed primarily of scientists, professional men, and a few wealthy families. The "minister" of South Place was hospitable to all varieties of unorthodox gatherings and he often turned his pulpit over to Positivists, foreigners, and professors.⁵⁷ However, South Place became noted for its social activity as well as Sunday services. One evening a week the chapel was converted into a debating hall to discuss moral and political questions. Conway hosted a National Sunday League, designed for non-churchgoers who could hear an "improving" lecture and some serious music. Likewise, Conway organized "Soirees" which provided music, conversation, and picnics for the people so that the chapel would serve not only as a religious home, but also as a center to cultivate "social relations" among its members.⁵⁸ Again, Conway's interests were too divergent in this area for him to achieve fame or greatness. Also, unlike many of his contemporaries, Conway never sought or achieved martyrdom over his religious views.⁵⁹

Conway's religious viewpoints in this period were

⁵⁷ MS-Moncure Conway to Moses Coit Tyler, October 28, 1869, Tyler Papers (Cornell University); Smith, pp. 50, 114; d'Alviella, pp. 120, 122; In 1878, Conway organized a Congress of Liberal Thinkers to be held at South Place. Different religious viewpoints from countries such as America, England, and India were represented. The goals of the Congress were to create fellowship among liberal thinkers of all races and to emancipate mankind from the spirit of superstition. Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 387-388.

⁵⁸ d'Alviella, p. 112; Smith, p. 114.

⁵⁹ Smith, p. 112; Conway, Autobiography, II, p. 394.

connected with his ideas of political and social reform. A student of Georg Hegel and David Strauss, Conway believed that superstition in the form of Christian supernaturalism had mentally paralyzed the people. As long as men accepted religious control not based on reason, they would accept political control not based on reason. Thus, Conway's religious beliefs were a factor in his socio-political outlook since he believed, as Hegel had, that the "progress of freedom can never be aided by a revolution which has not been preceded by a religious reformation."⁶⁰

For several years, Moses Coit Tyler had encouraged Conway to return to the United States on a lecture tour. Tyler told Conway that since he had a national reputation in the United States, he could earn up to eight thousand dollars in a single season.⁶¹ Finally, in 1875, Conway decided to go to America to lecture and visit old friends across the country such as Samuel Clemens and O. B. Frothingham.⁶²

In late 1875 and early 1876, he lectured throughout the Eastern and Midwestern sections of the United States. Conway was especially pleased with his visits to Virginia and Ohio.

⁶⁰ Moncure Conway, "David Frederick Strauss," A Discourse, February, 1874, in Easton, pp. 309-310.

⁶¹ MS-Moses Coit Tyler to Moncure Conway, November 19, 1869, Tyler Collection (University of Michigan).

⁶² New York Daily Tribune, March 1, 1875; MS-Moncure Conway to Ellen Conway, October 3, 1875, Conway Collection (CU); MS-Moncure Conway to Moses Coit Tyler, October 20, 1875, Tyler Papers (Cornell University).

In Ohio, he visited the Negroes colonized from his father's farm to Yellow Springs, and in Cincinnati, Conway helped reunite the two churches that had split in 1859 over his disbelief in miracles.⁶³ Although Conway enjoyed his brief stay in America, he returned to England. His return to England was warmly greeted, especially after reports that he had declined the ministry at the Parker Society in Boston to remain at South Place. One reporter evaluated Conway's trip as a "pledge of international good-will between liberal thought on both sides of the Atlantic," and an aid to the advancement of freethought in America.⁶⁴

Conway's role in intellectual history between the years 1865-1877 was felt in many areas. During the early years of Reconstruction, he clamored for Negro rights. He achieved acclaim in England and America for his publications, and he has been credited with playing an important role in the "New Reformation" in England, which witnessed a rise in religious unorthodoxy, science, and reform.⁶⁵ Conway's non-

⁶³ MS-Moses Coit Tyler to Moncure Conway, January 25, 1876, Tyler Collection (University of Michigan); MS-Moses Coit Tyler to Moncure Conway, January 21, 1876, Tyler Papers (Cornell University); Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 299-306; MS-Moncure Conway to Ellen Conway, October 1, 1875, Conway Collection (CU).

⁶⁴ Conway has been considered one of the leading promoters of Free Religion in England; d'Alviella, p. 146; New York Daily Tribune, April 18, 1876; Cincinnati Daily Commercial, April 1, 1876.

⁶⁵ Conway, Addresses and Reprints, p. xiii.

compliance with conventional politics and theology kept him in slender means and brought criticism, yet Moncure Conway maintained his humanitarian and radical views. His goal was to work for "absolute liberty" for individuals, within the bounds of justice to others, by liberating them from impediments to happiness, both secular and religious.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Conway, Addresses and Reprints, p. xii; MS-Moncure Conway to Margaret Conway, August 26, 1869, Conway Collection (CU); Jones, p. 24.

VI. Later Life

(1878-1907)

Conway continued his ministry at South Place Chapel until 1884. At that time he gave up his ministry to devote time to lecturing, writing, travel, and researching for historical works. He continued to contribute articles to the leading magazines of the day and published numerous literary and historical works. In addition, he maintained a broad commitment to humanity and championed various causes, especially peace and religious freedom. Conway continued an active career until his wife died in 1897. Following her death, he retired and lived in various places including New York, London, and Paris. Finally, in November, 1907, Conway died in Paris. A quote from one of Conway's articles written in 1907 probably best explains his vigorous quest for human freedom and happiness: "The ardent reformer is passionate because there is striving in him the religious sentiment of a Promised Land, of the Millenium."¹

¹ Conway returned to South Place from 1892 to 1897; Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 438, 453; Conway, My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East, pp. 40-65, 91, 129, 248, 351; Moncure Conway, "William Penn," in Addresses and Reprints, p. 412; Burtis, pp. 186, 196-197, 225.

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Moncure Conway: Abolitionist, Reformer

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V. B. Howard

Moncure Conway was born in Virginia in 1832 and grew up amidst slavery and in an intellectually repressed atmosphere that was created as a by-product of the peculiar institution. At age nineteen, Conway entered the Methodist ministry. On his circuit, he became acquainted with a settlement of Quakers. The beliefs of the Quakers prompted Conway to evaluate his beliefs on religion and opened his eyes to the evils of slavery. After consideration, Conway decided to leave Methodism and go to Harvard Divinity School.

At Harvard Divinity School, Conway entered the ranks of Unitarianism and met many of the intellectual and abolitionist leaders of New England, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Lloyd Garrison. In 1854, the Anthony Burns Fugitive Slave Case occurred in Boston. The effect of this incident on Conway was that he realized the antislavery cause was a crusade and from this point he decided to devote his energy to the abolitionist struggle.

In 1854, Conway accepted the ministry at the First Unitarian Church in Washington. There he condemned slavery in

his discourses and eventually lost his post due to his abolitionist principles. In November, 1856, he continued his ministrations at another Unitarian Church in Cincinnati. Conway's new congregation was already antislavery in attitude. Thus, he devoted time to literary projects, liberal causes, and numerous reforms.

Conway's abolitionist views were often contradictory. Although he sought an end to slavery, he loved his native Virginia. Thus, when the Civil War began, he opposed military action against the South. His fervid peace principles caused him to criticize the war and brought him in conflict with antislavery men who supported the war. Throughout the Civil War, Conway was critical of Lincoln. In the early years of the conflict, Conway maintained that immediate emancipation would end the war. Since Lincoln did not emphasize this position, Conway wrote several works and lectured extensively in an attempt to secure emancipation and Negro rights.

In 1863, Conway went to England to gain that country's support for the Union cause. While in England, Conway overstepped his authority by informing the Confederate representative that if the South would free her slaves, the abolitionists would see that the South could maintain her independence. This act brought criticism against Conway. As a result, he became disgusted with the American conflict and decided to remain in England.

With Lincoln's death, Conway looked hopefully toward Andrew Johnson to carry out a proper policy of Reconstruction. However, Johnson did not champion the cause of Negro rights as Conway had hoped. Conway's frustration with the progress of Negro equality in America, plus an active life in England caused him to lose interest in American affairs.

In England, Conway's attention turned toward divergent interests. He devoted most of his time to his ministry at South Place Chapel in London. There, his religious views led him out of Unitarianism to agnosticism and the Religion of Humanity. He gained a reputation as a correspondent and writer, and maintained a broad commitment to humanity. Moncure Conway devoted his efforts toward increasing human happiness, both secular and religious. However, his efforts in the fields of reform, literature, and religion were too divergent and sporadic for him to have gained great fame in any single area.

Major sources for the study included Conway's autobiography, his numerous writings and speeches, and a collection of his manuscripts at Columbia University.

Accepted by:

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