

SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE

A Study of its Sources and Thematic Significance
in the Novels of
Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot

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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the sources of the theme of spiritual pilgrimage and its significance in the novels of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot. Central to the Victorian imagination, the archetypal quest-motif is a literary expression of a living faith that the journey of life is invested with challenge and purpose. Although the three novelists under discussion present in their work unique variations on the theme, they share the conviction that the ultimate goal of pilgrimage is a reconciliation of the sacred and secular. Spiritual crisis often becomes in their novels the point of encounter between the human and the divine and the means of effecting the new creation, in which the dichotomies of human experience are resolved.

The Introduction places the theme of spiritual pilgrimage within the Victorian context by demonstrating its importance in the thought of major prophetic writers of the age. The main body of the thesis is divided into two sections: Part I, Sources, and Part II, The Novel. Since one of the most vital clues to the interpretation of the Victorian novel is found in its use of biblical metaphor and allusion, the first chapter of the thesis focusses upon the Bible, from which Victorian writers and readers derived their understanding of the

essential nature of pilgrimage. All quotations are from the King James Version, and, after the first footnote, all biblical references are included in the text.

The second most familiar source of the pilgrimage theme for the Victorians was The Pilgrim's Progress, which presents in a linear narrative the stages of the journey from the present world to that which is to come. As in the chapter on the Bible, I have included references to The Pilgrim's Progress, following the first full footnote, in the text. The hymns which were sung in the churches and homes of the Victorian era gave voice to the theme of pilgrimage, which was already firmly instilled in the national and cultural consciousness. In their selections from the canon of Christian hymnody and in their own writing of hymns the Victorians reflected their attitudes towards the pilgrimage of life and its ultimate destination, and I have, therefore, given a full chapter to this topic.

Three other strongly influential works were The Divine Comedy, The Imitation of Christ, and Paradise Lost. These inspirational sources, also based upon the pilgrimage motif, were drawn upon particularly by Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot, and are cited in the relevant chapters on the novel rather than treated separately in the first part of the thesis.

For the sake of consistency I have used as far as possible the Penguin English Library series of novels by Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot. In all cases I have given complete bibliographical details in first footnote references, including the author's name even if already cited in the text, but have omitted the names of publishers throughout.

PART I

SOURCES

INTRODUCTION

SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE

AND

PROPHETIC VOICES OF THE VICTORIAN ERA

The theme of spiritual pilgrimage is as ancient and as modern as the questing nature of humanity. It is the story of Everyman and Everywoman engaged in the search for the ultimate meaning of life and in the eternal dialogue between the sacred and the secular. During the Victorian period the pilgrimage motif, deeply ingrained in the religious consciousness of writer and reader alike, assumed central significance in all forms of literary expression. Intellectual, spiritual, and social concerns were frequently discussed in terms of a journey, an appropriate metaphor for an age characterized by a general sense of being uprooted and lost in a wilderness of overwhelming change. Victorian authors who envisioned life as a pilgrimage and their contemporaries as a pilgrim people discerned the crisis of their times and exhorted the exiled to look beyond the present stage of their journey to its destination.

In an essay of 1831 John Stuart Mill captured the dominant mood of expectation that marked the early years of the nineteenth century:

The conviction is already not far from being universal, that the times are pregnant with change; and that the nineteenth century will be known to posterity as the era of one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved the remembrance, in the human mind, and in the whole constitution of human society. Even the religious world teems with new interpretations of the Prophecies, foreboding mighty changes near at hand. It is felt that men are henceforth to be held together by new ties, and separated by new barriers; for the ancient bonds will now no longer unite, nor the ancient boundaries confine.¹

The Industrial Revolution, which set England on its course of scientific and technological advancement, inaugurated an epoch of unprecedented social change, which had far-reaching implications for the history of ideas. The railway, the main symbol of progress for the Victorians, brought mobility to a larger segment of the population and had a considerable impact upon the creative minds of the day. Tennyson, wistfully contemplating 'summer isles of Eden', where he believes he would find 'enjoyment more than in this march of mind, / In the steamship, in the railway, in the thoughts that shake mankind', recognizes that the past can never be recovered, but that, as 'the heir of all the ages, in the foremost files of time', he faces the challenge of the future:

Forward, forward let us range,
Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves
of change.²

As it appears in both Victorian poetry and fiction, the image of the

¹John Stuart Mill, The Spirit of the Age (Chicago, 1942), pp.2-3.

²Alfred Tennyson, 'Locksley Hall', The Poems of Tennyson, edited by Christopher Ricks, Longmans' Annotated English Poets (London, 1969), pp. 698-99.

railway usually points to the conflict between the human will, with its freedom of choice, and the deterministic forces of history.

Urbanization, the most direct result of industrialization, was considered a cause for pride by Robert Vaughan, whose statement 'Our age is pre-eminently the age of great cities' typifies the correlation made by the early Victorians between the city and the idea of progress.³ The nation gloried in its material prosperity, gained through a sudden transformation of a predominantly rural economy into 'the work-shop of the world', a phrase used by Lord Stanley in a speech on the abolition of the Corn Laws on 15 March 1836.⁴ The real power behind the system of production, however, was the sweated labour of the masses, whose crowded slum-dwellings and degrading conditions of work in the factories aroused the social conscience of novelists such as Gaskell, Dickens, and Kingsley. The realistic orientation of much Victorian fiction, with its focus on the evils inherent in the new creeds of utilitarianism and materialism, which gave precedence to the machine over human relationships, contributed to a growing awareness that the material dimension of life was tragically severed from the spiritual, as was the private domain from the public. Although the cities ostensibly drew people together for a common purpose, they in fact created more social divisions than had

³Robert Vaughan, The Age of Great Cities: Or, Modern Society Viewed in its Relation to Intelligence, Morals, and Religion (London, 1843), p. 1.

⁴Samuel Arthur Bent, Short Sayings of Great Men with Historical and Explanatory Notes (Boston, 1882), p. 186.

been known in pre-industrial times. Disraeli, in his novel Sybil or The Two Nations, first published in 1845, indicates the extent to which the rich and the poor, 'as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets', were alienated from each other in the urban setting:

In great cities men are brought together by the desire of gain. They are not in a state of co-operation, but of isolation, as to the making of fortunes; and for all the rest they are careless of neighbours. Christianity teaches us to love our neighbour as ourself; modern society acknowledges no neighbour.⁵

This discrepancy between profession and practice was associated with the ambiguity in the minds of many Victorians towards the two cities of which they considered themselves citizens. In neither the earthly city, which they regarded as their temporal domicile, nor the heavenly city, their eternal home, did they feel completely at ease. The prevailing religious temperament encouraged the faithful pilgrim to flee from the tribulation of the present world to the bliss of that which is to come, and resulted in a piety that was unrelated to everyday life. The vision of the Celestial City, to use Bunyan's image, too often obscured the realities of suffering and injustice in the secular city. Although the main preoccupation of the average Victorian was other-worldly, those who had the capacity to stand against their times and predict the shape of things to come placed

⁵ Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil or The Two Nations, in The Works of Benjamin Disraeli, 20 vols (London, 1904), I, 93, 92.

their trust in the human rather than the divine and deemed this world to be the only sphere of worthwhile endeavour. The reaction against the overly-spiritual emphasis of the age was, therefore, a concentration on historical existence and the possibility of actualizing the new creation on earth.

The nineteenth century witnessed a series of challenges to religious faith, which determined the nature of the pilgrimage undertaken by the major writers of the period. Aware that they were participating in an intellectual and spiritual exodus from an inherited tradition, they wandered through the wilderness of despair and groped for a pathway out of the morass of shattered beliefs. Whereas the biblical metaphor of pilgrimage to the promised land remains in their works, all vestiges of dogmatic religion disappear. The general theological ferment culminated in Darwin's evolutionary theory, which challenged the concept that stability was at the heart of the universe and which initiated the debate over natural versus supernatural revelation. Many Victorians, however, who habitually read the Bible through from Genesis to Revelation once a year, were undisturbed by problems of historicity and hermeneutics which cast Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, George Eliot, James Anthony Froude, and William Hale White, among other intellectuals, into personal crises of faith. By applying scientific methodology to the study of scripture those engaged in Higher Criticism discovered that revelation was progressive and that literal interpretation of the text was no longer acceptable. As a result, belief which rested upon form rather than process, and which denied the believer freedom of the intellect, was often rejected, but the moral imperative of such a system was usually retained. Hence the importance of conduct became

a central theme in literature of the nineteenth century.

Confronted by perpetual change in all realms of their experience, the Victorians were particularly conscious of the spirit of the times and of their unique historical destiny. As a people living in an age of transition, they were intensely concerned about the relationship between the past and the present and also about the direction in which the nation was bound. The material condition of England prompted enquiry into its spiritual condition by literary figures who brought the perspective of the eternal to bear upon the present moment and who understood that a crisis contains the seeds of both hope and despair and that the risk of reversal is always greatest when success seems most certain. Froude employed the pilgrimage motif in his warning against the danger of over-confidence in the endless possibilities of achievement untempered by a realistic appraisal of human nature:

The road of true progress. . . . is no primrose path -- with exhibition flourishes, elasticity of revenue, and shining lists of exports and imports. The upward climb has been ever a steep and thorny one, involving, first of all, the forgetfulness of self, the worship of which, in the creed of the economist, is the mainspring of advance.⁶

For the most part, the historical process continued to be thought of eschatologically, as illustrated by Tennyson's 'In Memoriam', based upon the Hebraic-Christian assumption that the human race, by tending 'upward, working out the beast', would inevitably

⁶James Anthony Froude, Short Studies on Great Subjects, second series (London, 1871), p. 282.

reach its ultimate fulfilment in 'one far-off divine event, / To which the whole creation moves'.⁷ In a later work, however, Tennyson offers a cyclical rather than a linear view of progress, suggesting that moral improvement is not a necessary concomitant of material advancement:

Forward then, but still remember how the course of
Time will swerve,
Crook and turn upon itself in many a backward
streaming curve.⁸

Arnold, too, was preoccupied with the drama unfolding upon the stage of history. Referring to man as a wanderer, 'born in a ship / On the breast of the river of Time', he acknowledges that, although 'the spirit of man has found new roads' which depart from 'the old faiths', 'the fire within' must still be carefully preserved.⁹ The Victorian emphasis upon personal salvation, notwithstanding its negative implications, encouraged the individual to take responsibility for discovering new meaning in a world of perplexing turmoil. According to J. S. Mill, 'the source of all improvement is the exercise of private judgment . . . the last and only resource of humanity':

The men of the past, are those who
continue to insist upon our still adhering
to the blind guide. The men of the present,
are those who bid each man look about for
himself, with or without the promise of
spectacles to assist him.¹⁰

⁷The Poems of Tennyson, pp. 970, 988.

⁸'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After', The Poems of Tennyson, p. 1368.

⁹Matthew Arnold, 'The Future', The Poems of Matthew Arnold, edited by Kenneth Allott, Longmans Annotated English Poets (London, 1965), p. 263; 'Progress', The Poems of Matthew Arnold, p. 262.

¹⁰The Spirit of the Age, pp. 18-19.

During the course of the century, as the concept of progress became increasingly detached from that of culmination, the ultimate goal of the human pilgrimage became less clearly defined. The greatest intellects of the era, however, could never entirely divest themselves of their concern for the stages of the journey and its destination, which they envisioned as having to do with the total transformation, not of the self alone, but of society. They perceived that the fundamental Victorian dilemma was one of dualism, which gave rise to fragmentation on both conceptual and relational levels of experience. Tennyson, for instance, reflecting upon the tendency to 'break into "Thens" and "Whens" the Eternal Now: / This double seeming of the single world', laments dichotomy within the metaphysical realm but, ironically, validates rigid distinctions within the area of human relationships:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
 Man for the sword and for the needle she:
 Man with the head and woman with the heart:
 Man to command and woman to obey;
 All else confusion.¹¹

This Miltonic view of the proper spheres of men and women was, however, challenged in the fiction of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot, many of whose heroines seek freedom from traditional domestic roles but are caught within the same frustration that beset the novelists themselves, who discerned new horizons for the pilgrimage but lost sight of a positive and practical pathway

¹¹'The Ancient Sage', The Poems of Tennyson, pp. 1352-53; 'The Princess', The Poems of Tennyson, pp. 814-15.

towards their goal. Arnold, likewise disillusioned by 'this strange disease of modern life, / With its sick hurry, its divided aims', yearned for the gift possessed by Sophocles, 'who saw life steadily, and saw it whole'.¹² The writers discussed in this chapter represented a broad spectrum of philosophical and theological thought but shared a common quest for a unifying principle which would liberate their age from its bondage to an irrelevant religiosity on the one hand and to a humanism devoid of spirituality on the other. Regarded by the Victorians as sages, they spoke out in prophetic tones on issues related to the quality of life, which, they believed, was being seriously diminished by the separation of sacred from secular, or of vision from reality.

Thomas Carlyle was, in the opinion of David Daiches, 'one of the great Victorian prophets who saw into the heart of the nineteenth century dilemma'.¹³ In his biography of 'the Prophet of Cheyne Row', Froude states that Carlyle, 'a Bedouin, as he said of himself, a rough child of the desert', stood with Tennyson as 'a prophet and teacher', whose 'words were like the morning reveille'.¹⁴ In times

¹²'The Scholar-Gipsy', The Poems of Matthew Arnold, p. 342; 'To a Friend', The Poems of Matthew Arnold, p. 105.

¹³David Daiches, 'Carlyle and the Victorian Dilemma', Thomas Green Lectures, 4 (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 17.

¹⁴James Anthony Froude, Thomas Carlyle: A History of his Life in London, 1834-1881, 2 vols (London, 1884), I, 295, 288, 291.

when, as Froude expresses it, 'the intellectual lightships had broken from their moorings' and there was 'nothing left to steer by except the stars', he had a revitalizing and steadying influence upon those of his generation who had lost their faith in a living God:

Carlyle was the first to make us see His actual and active presence now in this working world, not in rhetoric and fine sentiments, not in problematic miracles at Lourdes or La Salette, but in clear letters of fire which all might read, written over the entire surface of human experience. To him God's existence was . . . an awful reality to which the fates of nations, the fate of each individual man, bore perpetual witness.¹⁵

Religion is defined by Carlyle as 'the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest'.¹⁶ Resistant to the materialism of the age, which he regarded as the new religion of profit and loss, he asserts that the essential human problem is a lack of spiritual vision: 'The truth is, men have lost their belief in the Invisible, and believe, and hope, and work only in the Visible; or, to speak it in other words: This is not a Religious age. . . . Our true Deity is Mechanism'.¹⁷

¹⁵Thomas Carlyle: A History of his Life in London, 1834-1881, I, 291, 293.

¹⁶Thomas Carlyle, On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, in The Works of Thomas Carlyle, Centenary edition, 30 vols (London, 1896-99), V, 2-3.

¹⁷Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, in The Works of Thomas Carlyle, XXVII, 74.

In his spiritual autobiography, Sartor Resartus, Carlyle expounds upon this dichotomy between the transcendent and the mundane through the persona of Professor Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, whose name means 'born of God' and 'devil's dung'. According to Herr Teufelsdröckh's Philosophy of Clothes, undue importance has been given to matter, which is merely the extrinsic manifestation of the intrinsically spiritual nature of life. Clothes, symbolizing outward forms and social divisions, tend to blind humanity to the fact that underneath its 'adventitious wrappings' it is naked and that it shares a common destiny as an 'unutterable Mystery of Mysteries' dwelling in the midst of 'Immensities' and 'Eternities'.¹⁸ Church-Clothes, the outer-garments of religion, have outworn their usefulness so that they are now 'sorrowfully out-at-elbows: nay, far worse, many of them have become mere hollow Shapes, or Masks, under which no living Figure or Spirit any longer dwells'.¹⁹

The philosopher-hero of Sartor Resartus is described as 'a Pilgrim, and a Traveller from a far Country' and refers to himself as 'the Wanderer'.²⁰ From his rooms on the pinnacle of Weissnichtwo Professor Teufelsdröckh looks down upon the urban microcosm, which with its air of purposive activity evokes for him the existential question of the origin and destination of the human race: 'That

¹⁸Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh, in The Works of Thomas Carlyle, I, 45, 52.

¹⁹Sartor Resartus, p. 172.

²⁰Sartor Resartus, pp. 60-61.

living flood, pouring through these streets, of all qualities and ages, knowest thou whence it is coming, whither it is going? . . . From Eternity, onwards to Eternity!'.²¹ The city, 'a living link in that Tissue of History, which inweaves all Being', exemplifies the organic nature of society, poisoned in nineteenth-century England by spiritual and moral disease:

Only Vice and Misery, to prowl or to moan like nightbirds, are abroad: that hum, I say, like the stertorous, unquiet slumber of sick Life, is heard in Heaven! Oh, under that hideous coverlet of vapours, and putrefactions, and unimaginable gases, what a Fermenting-vat lies simmering and hid!²²

Having encountered the 'Crash of Doom' in the form of an unfulfilled love-affair, Teufelsdröckh is suddenly hurled from the Garden of Eden 'through the ruins as of a shivered Universe . . . towards the Abyss'; taking up his 'Pilgrim-staff', he departs from the darkened Weissnichtwo and commences his 'world-pilgrimage'.²³

Compelled by 'a nameless Unrest' to go forward in the confidence that 'there was and must be somewhere a healing Fountain', he discovers that he can never escape from himself but that his best solace is to be found in action.²⁴ He enters the 'grim Desert' of unbelief and despondency, in which 'no Pillar of Cloud by day, and no Pillar of Fire by night, any longer guides the Pilgrim':

²¹Sartor Resartus, p. 16.

²²Sartor Resartus, p. 16.

²³Sartor Resartus, pp. 118-19, 124.

²⁴Sartor Resartus, pp. 125-26.

To me the Universe was all void of Life,
of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it
was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine,
rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind
me limb from limb. O, the vast, gloomy,
solitary Golgotha, and Mill of Death!²⁵

At the height of his misery, however, he asserts his defiant independence and records his 'Protest, the most important transaction in Life', against the 'Everlasting No': 'It is from this hour that I incline to date my Spiritual New-birth, or Baphometric Fire-baptism; perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a Man'.²⁶ Teufelsdröckh is indeed Job-like in his self-assertion and conviction that, despite all appearances to the contrary, a pattern of meaning will eventually emerge out of chaos.²⁷ During the next stage of his journey, set within the 'CENTRE OF INDIFFERENCE', he awakens from a healing sleep to 'a new Heaven and a new Earth', and realizes that the 'first preliminary moral Act, Annihilation of Self', leads to an enlargement of vision and freedom of action.²⁸ Renunciation is a recurring theme in the Victorian novel, and, as treated by Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot, it is closely related to the quest for identity and vocation. Teufelsdröckh's conversion in the 'Sanctuary of Sorrow', which fills him with 'an infinite Love, an infinite Pity' for 'poor, wandering,

²⁵Sartor Resartus, pp. 130, 133.

²⁶Sartor Resartus, p. 135.

²⁷On 29 March 1819 Carlyle wrote to his mother: 'I was reading upon my favourite Job'. James Anthony Froude, Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life, 1795-1835, new edition, 2 vols (London, 1891), I, 62.

²⁸Sartor Resartus, p. 149.

wayward man', is the prototype of the baphometric suffering and extension of sympathy experienced by most of George Eliot's characters.²⁹ The destination of the pilgrimage delineated in Sartor Resartus is affirmation of the 'EVERLASTING YEA, wherein all contradiction is solved'.³⁰ Since he believed that a divine presence informs the material realm, Carlyle, according to Eloise M. Behnken, 'in large measure, erased the traditional separation between the sacred and the secular'.³¹

At the heart of Carlyle's philosophy is the conception of life as combat. The gifted one whose task it is to work towards the redemption of the world is described as an indefatigable pilgrim:

Not a May-game is this man's life; but a battle and a march, a warfare with principalities and powers. No idle promenade through fragrant orange-groves and green flowery spaces, waited on by the choral Muses and the rosy Hours: it is a stern pilgrimage through burning sandy solitudes, through regions of thick-ribbed ice.³²

Progress, in Carlyle's view, depended upon the creative possibilities inherent in the 'boundless grinding collision of the New with the Old'.³³

²⁹Sartor Resartus, pp. 151, 150.

³⁰Sartor Resartus, pp. 153-54.

³¹Eloise M. Behnken, Thomas Carlyle: 'Calvinist Without the Theology', University of Missouri Studies, LXVI (Columbia, Missouri, 1978), p. 36.

³²Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present, in The Works of Thomas Carlyle, X, 291.

³³'Signs of the Times', p. 82.

Engaged in resolute struggle, humanity assumes the vitality of 'the ever-living, ever-working Universe': 'On the whole, as this wondrous planet, Earth, is journeying with its fellows through infinite Space, so are the wondrous destinies embarked on it journeying through infinite Time, under a higher guidance than ours'.³⁴ Possessed of 'faith in the imperishable dignity of man; in the high vocation to which, throughout this his earthly history, he has been appointed', Carlyle foresaw the evolution of 'a new and brighter spiritual era'.³⁵ The test of the ideal was, to his mind, always found in the actual: 'Conviction, were it never so excellent, is worthless till it convert itself into Conduct'.³⁶ This emphasis upon deeds and duty, also prevalent in the Victorian novel, is closely linked with his concept of heroism. Although he recognizes 'a sacredness' in 'the true Literary Man', who is 'the light of the world; the world's Priest; -- guiding it, like a Sacred Pillar of Fire, in its dark pilgrimage through the waste of Time', he makes the point that every person must bear the responsibility of relating the sacred to the secular and of contributing to the collective wisdom of the human race:

Every man . . . is not only a learner but a doer: he learns with the mind given him what has been; but with the same mind he discovers further, he invents and devises somewhat of his own. Absolutely without originality there is no man.³⁷

³⁴Sartor Resartus, p. 31; 'Signs of the Times', p. 82.

³⁵'Signs of the Times', pp. 80-81.

³⁶Sartor Resartus, p. 156.

³⁷On Heroes, pp. 157, 118.

For Carlyle, therefore, the goal of the contemporary pilgrimage was the creation of 'a whole World of Heroes' and the new heroic ideal, one of faith manifested in works.³⁸

Past and Present, which closes with a grand vision of the garden of Eden restored by human endeavour, has as its final word 'onward'.³⁹ Through positive action the hero of the present seeks to provide a way out of the darkness of the past into a new world of wholeness and harmony. The first stage of such an immense task of reformation is, Carlyle asserts, the change which takes place within the individual. The human role in history is thus given greater significance than that of the divine. In the opinion of Basil Willey, Carlyle is 'the most remarkable example of a phenomenon . . . typical of the nineteenth century, that of the religious temperament severed from "religion"'.⁴⁰ Humanist though he was, Carlyle seemed loath to relinquish religious faith and language. In his prophetic stance and concreteness of expression, he employs throughout his work a style reminiscent of the Old Testament. Unfettered by the dogma and tradition of the Church, he stresses the importance of the personal search for truth. In contrast to Froude's estimate of Carlyle's impact upon his contemporaries is the comment made in 1848 by Arthur Hugh Clough to Emerson: 'Carlyle has led us all out into the desert, and he has

³⁸ On Heroes, p. 127.

³⁹ Past and Present, p. 298.

⁴⁰ Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold (London, 1949), p. 105.

left us there'.⁴¹ Frederick Denison Maurice echoes this view of the foremost prophet of the century:

I cannot find that Carlyle leads us directly to a centre; but I do find that he makes us despair for want of one, and that he expresses the indistinct wailings of men in search of it better than all the other writers of our day.⁴²

Carlyle's vision of a society in which sacred and secular are reconciled was shared by Thomas Arnold, for whom the goal of the pilgrimage was the Christianization of national life. The Christian principles upheld at Rugby would, he hoped, eventually permeate all areas of human activity. In a sermon preached in Rugby Chapel he referred to the expulsion from Eden, a dominant motif in the literature of the period, and one which reveals a yearning to recover a spiritual home:

In the account given of the fall of man, the sentence of death and of being cast out of Eden go together; and if any one compares the description of the second Eden in the Revelation, and recollects how especially it is there said, that God dwells in the midst of it, and is its light by day and night, he will see that the banishment from the first Eden means a banishment from the presence of God.⁴³

⁴¹Edward Everett Hale, James Russell Lowell and his Friends (Boston, 1899), p. 136.

⁴²Letter of 31 August 1843 to Mr Daniel Macmillan, The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice Chiefly Told in his Own Letters, edited by his son Frederick Maurice, 2 vols (London, 1884), I, 348.

⁴³Thomas Arnold, Christian Life, its Course, its Hindrances, and its Helps: Sermons, Preached Mostly in the Chapel of Rugby School, fifth edition (London, 1849), p. 201.

Like Carlyle, he deplored his era's unbelief and tendency to 'live, as it were, out of God's atmosphere; we do not keep that continual consciousness of His reality which I conceive we ought to have, and which should make Him more manifest to our souls, than the Shechinah was to the eyes of the Israelites'.⁴⁴ In his opinion the essential nature of Christianity was social and practical rather than doctrinal and sacramental:

The true and grand idea of a Church, that is, a society for the purpose of making men like Christ, -- earth like heaven, -- the kingdoms of the world the kingdom of Christ, -- is all lost; and men look upon it as 'an institution for religious instruction and religious worship,' thus robbing it of its life and universality, making it an affair of clergy, not of people -- of preaching and ceremonies, not of living -- of Sundays and synagogues, instead of one of all days and all places, houses, streets, towns, and country.⁴⁵

Denouncing his 'old enemy, the priestcraft', which proclaims the Church to be the mediator between God and the individual, Arnold maintained that 'all who go straight to Christ, without thinking of the Church, do manifestly and visibly receive grace, and have the seal of His Spirit, and therefore are certainly heirs of salvation'; he was thus entirely out of sympathy with the Oxford Movement's insistence upon apostolic succession as the channel of salvation: 'there is something so monstrously profane in making our heavenly inheritance like an earthly estate, to which our pedigree is our

⁴⁴Letter of 24 February 1834 to W. W. Hull, quoted in The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, sixth edition (London, 1846), p. 298.

⁴⁵Letter of 18 November 1835 to Justice Coleridge, quoted in The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, pp. 358-59.

title'.⁴⁶ Convinced that 'one object of the Christian Church was to enable us to aid in bearing one another's burthens', he heralded George Eliot's Religion of Humanity, in which the human takes precedence over the clerical.⁴⁷ Since he believed that the social and cultural ethos of nineteenth-century England was comparable to that of Judea in the days of the prophets, he recognized the need for prophetic voices of his own day to challenge the values of society and restore to religion its transforming power. Reflecting the major concern of his age over the nature of advancement, he agreed with Carlyle that the immediate task was to move beyond the spiritual legacies of past tradition to forge a better future for humanity:

There is nothing so revolutionary, because there is nothing so unnatural and so convulsive to society as the strain to keep things fixed, when all the world is by the very law of its creation in eternal progress; and the cause of all the evils of the world may be traced to that natural but most deadly error of human indolence and corruption, that our business is to preserve and not to improve.⁴⁸

Matthew Arnold, reflecting upon the life and work of his father, considered him to be one of those 'helpers and friends of mankind' who appear to their 'fainting, dispirited race' as 'beacons of hope', which encourage others to continue the march 'on, to the bound of the

⁴⁶ Letter of 14 December 1836 to Thomas S. Pasley, quoted in The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, p. 402.

⁴⁷ Letter of 24 February 1834 to W. W. Hull, quoted in The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, p. 297.

⁴⁸ Letter of 1 November 1830 to J. T. Coleridge, quoted in The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, p. 224.

waste, / On, to the City of God'.⁴⁹ Whereas Thomas Arnold firmly believed that moral improvement was an attainable goal, Matthew Arnold, caught in the turmoil of a transitional age, marked by the 'melancholy, long, withdrawing roar' of the 'Sea of Faith', viewed the world as 'a darkling plain', echoing 'confused alarms of struggle and flight'.⁵⁰ In his attempt to create wholeness out of disorder and alienation, Arnold retained the compelling desire of most Victorians for perfection, which he regarded as the common goal of religion, 'that voice of the deepest human experience', and of culture, which seeks to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere'.⁵¹ The sharp dichotomy between the spiritual and the material dimensions of life was, according to Arnold, caused by the lack of balance between the forces of Hebraism, which emphasizes 'strictness of conscience', and Hellenism, which has as its principle 'spontaneity of consciousness'; the Victorian proclivity for Puritanism, which placed action above knowledge, was exemplified by the Philistinism of the middle classes, whom he castigated for their inability 'to see things as they really are'.⁵²

⁴⁹'Rugby Chapel', The Poems of Matthew Arnold, pp. 450-52.

⁵⁰'Dover Beach', The Poems of Matthew Arnold, pp. 242-43.

⁵¹Matthew Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism', Culture and Anarchy, in The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, edited by R. H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1960-77), V, 93, 113.

⁵²'Culture and Anarchy', p. 165.

For Arnold the two obvious facts about Christianity were that 'men cannot do without it' and that 'they cannot do with it as it is'.⁵³ Abandoning the customary distinction between religion and ethics, he renames God 'the enduring power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness', and claims that conduct is 'in a special manner the object of Bible-religion'.⁵⁴ The Bible, he states, cannot be rightly understood apart from an appreciation of culture; a sense of 'the life of humanity' and 'some flexibility of spirit' are required by one who would 'watch the God of the Bible, and the salvation of the Bible, gradually and on an immense scale discovering themselves and becoming'.⁵⁵ Aware of the Protestant tendency of his era to make the Bible a fixed authority, subject only to literal interpretation, he advocated a critical approach which recognizes that all parts of scripture are not of equal value. A 'mechanical and materializing theology' gives rise, in Arnold's opinion, to the perverted notion that the Bible, along with any interpreter of it, possesses 'talismatic virtues'; only the 'infallible Church Catholic is, really, the prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come'; the whole human race, in its onward progress, discovering truth more complete than the parcel of truth any momentary individual can seize'.⁵⁶ The universal quest for meaning is, in Arnold's

⁵³ Matthew Arnold, 'God and the Bible: A Sequel to "Literature and Dogma"', God and the Bible, in The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, VII, 378.

⁵⁴ Matthew Arnold, 'Literature and Dogma: An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible', Dissent and Dogma, in The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, VI, 200, 175.

⁵⁵ 'Literature and Dogma', p. 152.

⁵⁶ 'Literature and Dogma', pp. 152, 161.

philosophy, indissolubly linked with the liberating power of culture.

Francis William Newman, like Carlyle and the Arnolds, believed that 'the law of God's moral universe, as known to us, is that of Progress'; he was convinced, however, that 'nowhere from any body of priests, clergy, or ministers, as an Order, is religious progress to be anticipated, until intellectual creeds are destroyed', and that it is the responsibility of the laity to give practical expression to the Christian faith.⁵⁷ Through application of historical and textual criticism to the canon of scripture, he perceived that the essence of Christianity is not the Bible or any doctrine about it, but rather the person of Christ: 'I am sensible how heavy a clog on the exercise of my judgment has been taken off from me, since I unlearned that Bibliolatry, which I am disposed to call the greatest religious evil of England'.⁵⁸ His intellectual and spiritual progress from a childhood faith founded upon an unconditional acceptance of the Bible is traced in Phases of Faith.⁵⁹ Throughout this work his own pilgrimage is associated with the progress of the age, which he discerned to be 'ripe for something better; -- for a religion which shall combine the tenderness, humility, and disinterestedness, that are the glory of the purest Christianity, with that activity of intellect, untiring pursuit of truth, and strict adherence to

⁵⁷ Francis William Newman, Phases of Faith, Victorian Library (New York, 1970), reprint of Phases of Faith: or, Passages From The History of My Creed, sixth edition (London, 1860), pp. 169, 168.

⁵⁸ Phases of Faith, p. 137.

⁵⁹ Phases of Faith, pp. 174-75.

impartial principle, which the schools of modern science embody'; employing the metaphor of the journey, he describes the Church of the future as having 'movement, namely, a steady onward one', away from dogma and towards proclamation of the message of universal peace and love.⁶⁰ George Eliot, in a letter of 27 March 1874 to Sara Sophia Hennell, admitted to the interest she once felt in Phases of Faith and said of Newman: 'How much work he has done in the world, which has left no deep, conspicuous mark, but has probably entered beneficently into many lives!'.⁶¹

Whereas Francis Newman's outlook was essentially secular and ethical, that of his brother John Henry Newman was mystical and dogmatic. Francis encouraged a spirit of enquiry, but John Henry resisted it in the belief that it was destructive of faith. In complete accord with the doctrinal and apologetic emphasis of the Oxford Movement, Cardinal Newman extolled a spirituality based upon withdrawal from the world rather than upon action within it. His intense concentration upon the heavenly realm is evident in 'The Dream of Gerontius', which explores the crisis of the soul at the moment of death as it discovers freedom and peace in the eternal kingdom. Communion with the living God was, in Newman's view, the ultimate goal of humanity, 'strange composite of heaven and earth! / Majesty dwarf'd to baseness'.⁶² This quest of the human for the

⁶⁰Phases of Faith, p. 175.

⁶¹The George Eliot Letters, edited by Gordon S. Haight, Yale edition, 9 vols (New Haven, Connecticut, 1954-78), VI, 34.

⁶²John Henry Cardinal Newman, 'The Dream of Gerontius', Verses on Various Occasions, new impression (London, 1910), p. 337.

divine was, he declared, the fundamental cause of the spiritual turmoil of Victorian England:

Look round, I say, and answer, why it is that there is so much change, so much strife, so many parties and sects, so many creeds? because men are unsatisfied and restless; and why restless, with every one his psalm, his doctrine, his tongue, his revelation, his interpretation? they are restless because they have not found. Alas! so it is, in this country called Christian, vast numbers have gained little from religion, beyond a thirst after what they have not, a thirst for their true peace, and the fever and restlessness of thirst. It has not yet brought them into the Presence of Christ, in which 'is fulness of joy' and 'pleasure for evermore'.⁶³

Apologia pro Vita Sua, the autobiography of a restless seeker after intellectual and spiritual truth, was read with 'absorbing interest' by George Eliot, who described it as a 'revelation of a life -- how different in form from one's own, yet with how close a fellowship in its needs and burthens'.⁶⁴ Newman opens his religious history with the statement that he was 'brought up from a child to take great delight in reading the Bible'.⁶⁵ In danger of preferring intellectual to moral excellence and of drifting towards liberalism, he was suddenly awakened to his spiritual position by illness and bereavement. The driving force of his pilgrimage was the search for a centre of authority, which, he concluded, could only be found in

⁶³ John Henry Newman, Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day, new impression (London, 1909), p. 316.

⁶⁴ Letter of 13 July 1864 to Sara Sophia Hennell, The George Eliot Letters, IV, 158-59.

⁶⁵ John Henry Cardinal Newman, Apologia pro Vita Sua: Being a History of his Religious Opinions, new impression (London, 1918), p. 1.

the sacraments of the Church. Believing antiquity to be 'the true exponent of the doctrines of Christianity and the basis of the Church of England', he came eventually to accept the Church of Rome as that which is genuinely Catholic and Apostolic.⁶⁶ Unlike many of his contemporaries for whom the pilgrimage meant great anguish of spirit and radical reordering of ideas, Newman experienced perfect peace and contentment':

I never have had one doubt. I was not conscious to myself, on my conversion of any change, intellectual or moral, wrought in my mind. I was not conscious of firmer faith in the fundamental truths of Revelation, or of more self-command; I had not more fervour; but it was like coming into port after a rough sea.⁶⁷

This sense of serenity and utter fulfilment is also known by the hero of his novel Loss and Gain, Charles Reding, who, upon being admitted into the Roman Catholic Church, believes that he is 'already in heaven, with the throne of God before him, and angels around'; like Newman, he finds himself in harbour 'after much tossing at sea', but at the same time feels 'as if he were really beginning life again'.⁶⁸

Willey rightly claims that 'Newman's view of history was apocalyptic, and not -- like that of most of his contemporaries -- progressive; he did not view it as a linear forward movement towards light and truth'.⁶⁹ Newman's vision focussed upon the redemptive mission of the Church, which he believed to be in perpetual warfare

⁶⁶Apologia, p. 26.

⁶⁷Apologia, p. 238.

⁶⁸John Henry Cardinal Newman, Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert, tenth edition (London, 1891), p. 430.

⁶⁹Nineteenth Century Studies, p. 86.

with the world for dominion over the human race, 'implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity. It is out of joint with the purposes of its Creator'.⁷⁰ As the channel of divine grace, the Church recognizes in human nature 'real moral excellence though degraded, but she cannot set it free from earth except by exalting it towards heaven'.⁷¹ Newman could not dissociate his personal pilgrimage from that of the Church itself:

The Church has lasted, but as a pilgrim upon earth, having a secure dwelling-place in no country; first identified with one nation, then with another; losing children and gaining them; sure of a sojourn nowhere, yet sure of it somewhere; Israel being but the first of many nations in which she had been lodged, and from which she takes her name in prophecy.⁷²

One of those attracted for a time to Newman and the Oxford Movement was James Anthony Froude, who admitted that he was, however, 'saved by Carlyle's writings from Positivism, or Romanism, or Atheism'.⁷³ Like Newman, Froude related the story of pilgrimage through the form of spiritual autobiography as well as through that of fiction. In The Nemesis of Faith he traces his struggle to find deliverance from a moribund religious tradition. His persona, Markham Sutherland, is at the commencement of his career warned by his father that he will never develop character by reading and

⁷⁰Apologia, p. 242.

⁷¹Apologia, p. 248.

⁷²Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day, p. 195.

⁷³Thomas Carlyle: A History of his Life in London, 1834-1881, I, 295.

dreaming, but that he must 'hammer and forge' one by going out into life itself.⁷⁴ Tested on the anvil of intellectual and spiritual suffering, he does not emerge triumphant from the wilderness, as does the protagonist of Newman's novel. His tragedy, which is also the tragedy of the era, lies in his failure, despite many efforts, to relate faith to life. Unable to accept the creeds of the Church, which, he believes, circumscribe the greatness of God and impede the search for truth, he decides to abandon his ministerial vocation. He would, however, gladly preach 'the religion of Christ -- the poor man's gospel; the message of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of love', as revealed in the Bible, which is to him 'not the most divine but the most human' of scriptures.⁷⁵

Reflecting Froude's concern over the compromise between profession and practice, Markham expresses his admiration for those whose vision of the Christian life issues in concrete action:

Men who do indeed spend their lives among the poor and the suffering, who go down and are content to make a home in those rivers of wretchedness that run below the surface of this modern society, asking nothing but to shed their lives, to pour one drop of sweetness into that bitter stream of injustice: oh, Arthur, what men they are! what a duty that might be!⁷⁶

⁷⁴James Anthony Froude, The Nemesis of Faith (Chicago, 1879), p. 8.

⁷⁵The Nemesis of Faith, pp. 23, 28-29.

⁷⁶The Nemesis of Faith, pp. 11-12.

He deplores the dichotomy between sacred and secular, which results in the view of the next world as the only real one and of the present world as 'but a thorny road to it, to be trod with bleeding feet, and broken spirits'; he recognizes, too, that 'to attempt to separate morality from religion is madness'.⁷⁷ Wandering in 'the wilderness of speculation', he discovers that 'the beacon lights of life had gone out, or sunk below the horizon', and becomes aware of 'the abysses which environed him'.⁷⁸ Unsupported in his doubt and remorse by his 'new faith fabric', which places feeling above form, he sinks down 'amidst the wasted ruins of his life . . . into the barren waste'.⁷⁹

Carlyle's influence is evident in Froude's perception that the greatest need of his age was for a prophetic consciousness which would link the material and the spiritual and motivate a perplexed generation to move forward confidently into the future. Markham's words 'Life is change, to cease to change is to cease to live' illustrate Froude's concept of the spiritual pilgrimage.⁸⁰ Although he experienced the Victorian crisis of faith, Froude never entirely lost hope in the ultimate redemption of the world:

We suspect that there may be mysteries in God's nature and methods which we cannot fully explain. The outlines of 'the scheme of salvation' are growing

⁷⁷The Nemesis of Faith, pp. 167, 198.

⁷⁸The Nemesis of Faith, p. 223.

⁷⁹The Nemesis of Faith, p. 247.

⁸⁰The Nemesis of Faith, p. 40.

indistinct; and we see it through a gathering mist. Yet the essence of it will remain true, whether we recognise it or not.⁸¹

Whereas Froude struggled to discover signs of spiritual regeneration in life about him, Frederick Denison Maurice discerned that the divine was everywhere interfused with the human. Maurice, whose powerful impact upon 'the more thoughtful portion of the English people' was noted by Elizabeth Gaskell, is regarded by J. Scott Lidgett as 'by far the most important and significant personality -- the most potent and pervasive influence -- in the religious life and thought of England during the past century'.⁸² Immanentist in his theology, Maurice did not envisage the pilgrimage in the same way as the other prophetic minds of the period. From his viewpoint there was no need to journey far in search of the God who is always present. He maintained that 'time and eternity co-exist here' and that society and humanity are 'divine realities, as they stand, not as they may become'.⁸³ Convinced that the kingdom of heaven is within the heart, he saw no distinction between the sacred and the secular. Always suspicious of systems of any kind, Maurice placed great emphasis upon process. He shared with Froude, as indeed with Carlyle, Thomas and

⁸¹James Anthony Froude, Bunyan, English Men of Letters (New York, 1902), p. 50.

⁸²Letter of 3 December 1853 to F. J. Furnivall, The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, edited by J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester, 1966), p. 257; J. Scott Lidgett, The Victorian Transformation of Theology (London, 1934), p. 13.

⁸³Letter of 2 December 1853 to Rev. D. J. Vaughan, quoted in The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, II, 219; Letter of 24 September 1852 to Mr J. M. Ludlow, quoted in The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, II, 138.

Matthew Arnold, and Francis Newman, belief in progressive revelation, and found in the Bible the promise of that progress which 'consists in the advancing further into light and the scattering of mists which had obstructed it'.⁸⁴ When the Bible is used merely to support fixed theological positions rather than approached openly for what it has to say about the human condition, 'Christianity becomes a notion or doctrine, instead of a kingdom'.⁸⁵

In contrast to Newman, who considered that involvement in the world's affairs diminished the possibility of communion with God, Maurice argued that knowledge of the divine was attainable only through sympathetic response to the human. Thus, deeply concerned about the social implications of the Gospel, he applied his theological reflections to the needs of his own time and place. Tirelessly engaged in political, economic, and educational reform, he deemed the realm of mundane existence, fraught though it is with suffering and evil, to be holy: 'We cannot reverence heaven or know what it is, if we do not reverence the earth on which Christ walked and which He redeemed. We cannot attain Christ's likeness, if we do not learn to care for England as He cared for Palestine, when it was in its lowest condition'.⁸⁶ Maurice's ideas were popularized as 'Muscular Christianity' in the novels of Charles Kingsley, an active member of

⁸⁴ Frederick Denison Maurice, Theological Essays, third edition (London, 1871), p. 354.

⁸⁵ Letter of 14 February 1838 to Mr Woollcombe, quoted in The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, I, 248.

⁸⁶ F. D. Maurice, The Ground and Object of Hope for Mankind: Four Sermons (London, 1868), p. 49.

the Christian Socialist Movement.⁸⁷ Through the founding in 1854 of the Working Men's College, to which George Eliot subscribed her financial support, Maurice gave practical expression to his belief that the entire creation was, through the Incarnation, already redeemed and that the labouring classes must, therefore, be given their rightful place in the social order.⁸⁸

A typical nineteenth-century figure in his search for a centre of unity, Maurice held that, when Christ's sacrificial love becomes the model for social relationships, humanity will be gathered into a universal harmony. With prophetic insight he affirmed his belief, in a letter of 1868 to a son, that the spiritual crisis of Victorian England will be resolved according to the divine purpose and that the goal of the pilgrimage, the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth, will ultimately be reached:

God is guiding this age and the persons in it by ways that I know not. I believe and hope that those who are following us will be far more deep and earnest believers in Him than we have been, will be far more under the dominion of His Spirit of Truth. When they fancy they are throwing off a yoke, I think they are sometimes putting on a new yoke; but I don't the less believe

⁸⁷The term appears in the Edinburgh Review of January 1858: 'It is a school of which Mr Kingsley is the ablest doctor; and its doctrine has been described fairly and cleverly as "muscular Christianity"'. Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, Centenary edition, revised by Ivor H. Evans (New York, 1970), p. 739.

⁸⁸Letter of 3 February 1880 to Mrs Frank Rodbard Malleson, The George Eliot Letters, VII, 246-47.

that they are on their way to deliverance;
 that they will receive . . . what we have
 lost as well as come into a land of promise
 that we can only see afar off.⁸⁹

The central preoccupation of Victorian writers with the theme of pilgrimage reflects the powerful influence of biblical metaphor upon their literary imagination. Although new critical approaches to biblical literature initiated much of the religious doubt of the period, the Bible continued to be read by most Victorians, including those who had rejected it on historical and theological grounds, as an analogue of the spiritual life. This archetypal pattern of pilgrimage, with its images of exile, deliverance, and entry into the promised land, was taken up by the novelists, who dramatized the universal quest for meaning and self-realization. The spiritual pilgrimage as presented in fiction is the process of becoming fully human and of integrating within the consciousness both the sacred and the secular dimensions of experience.

The emphasis during the nineteenth century upon individual endeavour, the redemptive nature of suffering, and the destination of the life-journey contributed to the popularity of the spiritual autobiography and the Bildungsroman as literary forms. The Victorian novel, for the most part characterized by a highly-personalized experiential quality, adopted elements of the autobiographical and confessional narrative in its treatment of the pilgrimage motif. Whereas the Bildungsroman explores the process of initiation, growth, and achievement of self-awareness, the novel of spiritual pilgrimage has to do with the search, which frequently takes the form of intense

⁸⁹ Quoted in The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, II, 574.

struggle, for reconciliation between the sacred and the secular on both personal and social levels. The city, which is in much Victorian fiction the setting and activating force for character development, symbolizes the dichotomy which the novelists sought to resolve between the realities of this world and the vision of the world to come. The progress of the pilgrim is determined to a large extent by the capacity to live as a citizen of both the earthly city and the heavenly city and to discern amidst the brokenness of the human condition a divine power working for the restoration of wholeness.

Foremost among the novelists concerned with the spiritual pilgrimage are Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot, whose inspiration for their own journeys as for those of their protagonists was derived from their familiarity with the Bible, The Pilgrim's Progress, and the hymns of the Christian Church. From these religious sources came the fundamental concept of pilgrimage, with its paradoxical patterns of advance and retreat, loss and gain, estrangement and reconciliation. The Bible provided a rich heritage of images which served to keep the imagination alive in a time when it was in danger of becoming atrophied by the stress on the rational and literal. In The Pilgrim's Progress, the classic unfolding of the pilgrimage motif in English literature, Victorian readers found parallels to their own experience of the spiritual journey. And through the hymns which were sung in church and home they were alerted to various forms of human response to the divine, which initiates spiritual progress. Continuing the story of pilgrimage in their own day by linking faith with life and past with present, Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot entered new frontiers of literary expression and became in their own right prophets of a new age.

CHAPTER 1

THE BIBLE .

I. Old Testament

The Bible, perceived as a drama of the human and the divine in quest of each other, remained the single most important influence upon Victorian life and literature. As the markedly allusive quality of the Victorian novel illustrates, archetypal patterns and images of the Old and New Testaments were integral to the literary imagination of the era. Read by the Victorians as the story of redemption, which is firmly rooted in history and yet encompasses eternity, the Bible was the primary source of their understanding of human experience as a goal-oriented pilgrimage. Although its primary concern is with the corporate rather than the personal, scripture became individualized in nineteenth-century interpretation. Strands of the biblical drama which seemed most relevant to the spiritual progress of the individual were selected for particular emphasis and woven into fiction as a means of highlighting the nature and stages of the pilgrimage.

From Genesis were derived many of the themes developed in the novel. The opening words of the Prologue, 'In the beginning God

created the heaven and the earth', establish the cosmic setting of the drama and express its central concern with the relationship between the sacred and the secular.¹ The process of creation, which commences with the transition from primal chaos and darkness to order and light, culminates with the appearance of humanity. Day and night, heaven and earth, sun and moon, and male and female receive the blessing of the Creator: 'And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good' (Genesis 1. 31). Although the material world is, according to Genesis, sanctified by the Spirit which infuses all life, it was generally regarded as being inherently evil by the Victorians, in whose minds the differentiation which is essential to the created order was distorted as dualism. Created in the image of God, humanity possesses an affinity for the divine, its motivation and inspiration for the spiritual journey.

Genesis 2. 7 acknowledges that human nature is at once material and spiritual: 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul'. Not only are man's physical needs amply provided for in the garden of Eden, which in Hebrew means 'delight' or 'pleasure', but his spiritual need of companionship is also satisfied by the creation of 'an help meet for him' (Genesis 2. 18). The fashioning of the woman out of Adam's rib was interpreted by most Victorians as validation of the subordinate role of women in society. Since the female was created after the male and was taken

¹Genesis 1. 1. Biblical quotations throughout the thesis are from the King James Version. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

from the male, she must accordingly be ordained by God to a position of secondary importance. This view of woman as weaker vessel rather than as equal partner was, however, challenged by novelists who recognized that the spiritual quest of the Victorian woman was severely circumscribed by social codes based upon a literal understanding of the biblical text.

Adam and Eve are commanded not to eat the fruit of 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil', but they succumb to the temptation to 'be as gods, knowing good and evil' (Genesis 2. 17; 3. 5). With this act of disobedience comes disintegration of the intended harmony and trust between the divine and the human and between man and woman. The attempt of Adam and Eve to hide themselves from God illustrates the paradoxical character of the spiritual pilgrimage: the longing for communion with God often begins in alienation and flight, and is, moreover, initiated by the prevenient grace of God. Adam becomes defensive towards God and also towards Eve, whom he earlier described as 'bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh' (Genesis 2. 23), but whom he now blames for their predicament. As the expulsion from Eden makes clear, humanity is granted freedom of action but is held responsible for the consequences of its action. The motif of temptation, Fall, and expulsion, which recurs throughout Victorian fiction, often marks the initial stage of pilgrimage. Cast out of the garden, in which they knew plenitude and security, Adam and Eve enter upon a pathway infested with thorns and thistles (Genesis 3. 18) and are thereby initiated into the suffering of life. They are not, however, utterly abandoned. The 'coats of skins' (Genesis 3. 21) with which God clothes them symbolize the providential care of the Creator for the created.

In the story of Cain and Abel the theme of estrangement is continued. Abel, as 'a keeper of sheep', is the prototype of the wanderer or nomad, and Cain, as 'a tiller of the ground' (Genesis 4. 2), represents the desire for a permanent dwelling-place on earth. God's question to Adam, 'Where art thou?', and that to Cain, 'Where is Abel thy brother?' (Genesis 3. 9; 4. 9), direct attention to the divine and human dimensions of relationship. Cain, having murdered Abel, cries out in self-justification: 'Am I my brother's keeper?' (Genesis 4. 9). Like Adam, he engenders enmity where there was once accord and is condemned to live as 'a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth', but, again like Adam, he is never completely bereft of God's protective presence: 'And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him' (Genesis 4. 14-15). Driven out into the land of Nod, east of Eden, Cain builds a city, the precursor of civilization and material progress.

The birth of Seth, Adam's third son, suggests that there is hope for the human race, despite its dismal beginnings. Through Seth, whose name means 'appointed', descent is traced to Noah, who 'walked with God' (Genesis 6. 9), and on whose account the destruction of the world is averted. God's command to Noah to separate himself and his household from the corruption of the world by entering the ark introduces the concept of election of a remnant for the purpose of redemption. In this tale, and indeed throughout the Bible, water is symbolic of divine judgment and also of restoration of life. The assuaging of the waters and the setting of the rainbow in the cloud are tokens of a covenant between heaven and earth. Victorian novelists frequently employed the image of the Flood, to illustrate that human perversity is answered by the mercy of God, who destroys in order to

begin anew.

The city is frequently presented in the Old Testament as a place of danger and destruction. For example, when the peoples of the earth, united in language and ambition, decide to build 'a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven' (Genesis 11. 4), they are confounded and scattered abroad. This image of the city founded upon human pride had particular meaning for those Victorians who, having witnessed the rise of the industrial city, expressed their misgivings over the kind of progress it represented. The story of the tower of Babel, ending in alienation and dispersal, and indicating that there is to come a long journey towards recovery of Eden-like harmony, is a fitting conclusion for the Prologue to the biblical drama.

The patriarchal narratives, with which the first act of the drama begins, reinforce the pilgrimage motif of the Bible. The challenge to go forth from the known into the unknown is expressed in God's call to Abram: 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation . . . and thou shalt be a blessing' (Genesis 12. 1-2). In obedience Abram sets out as a stranger and sojourner (Genesis 17. 8; 23. 4), knowing neither the precise direction of his journey nor its destination, but, in the manner of Noah, trusting only in the divine promise. Upon entering into a covenant relationship with the God who has called him forth, Abram is renamed Abraham, and Sarai, his wife, becomes known as Sarah. Throughout the Bible a new sense of identity and purpose is marked by a change of name. As Abraham and Sarah discover through the birth of Isaac, God's plan does not always concur with human expectations.

Hagar, cast out by Abraham into the wilderness of Beersheba, is led to a fountain of water, symbolic of the restorative power of Providence. Her son, Ishmael, whose name means 'God hears', dwells 'in the wilderness' (Genesis 21. 20), but survives his exile to become, like Isaac, the progenitor of a nation. This is the first reference in the Bible to the wilderness, which becomes a recurring image in the delineation of the pilgrimage, with its pattern of promise and fulfilment. The greatest test of Abraham's faith comes with the commandment to take Isaac into the land of Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice. In his willingness to journey into new territory, to dispossess himself of what is most precious to him, and to trust in the eventual realization of God's purposes Abraham is the prototype of the pilgrim of faith. The interlude about Sodom and Gomorrah reinforces the emphasis upon obedience in the story of Abraham. Lot, warned to escape lest he 'be consumed in the iniquity of the city' (Genesis 19. 15), represents the remnant preserved to fulfil the divine promise. Lot's wife, on the other hand, disobeys the injunction not to look back and is turned into a pillar of salt. In its biblical context the pathway of pilgrimage demands a degree of risk and steady progress towards the goal, however distant.

Whether journeying or sojourning, the patriarchs are assured of divine blessing and companionship: 'And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land' (Genesis 28. 15). The God who accompanies them also leads them into spiritual combat. The account of Jacob's wrestling with the angel at Peniel until the break of day introduces into the Genesis narrative the metaphor of life as a battle. Jacob, also described as 'a stranger', is determined to struggle until he

receives a blessing and is rewarded by seeing God 'face to face' (Genesis 28. 4; 32. 30). As the inheritor of the land promised to Abraham and Isaac, he is given the new name of Israel. This identification of the patriarch with the people is most evident in the events surrounding Joseph, who is thrown into a pit in the wilderness and sold into slavery in Egypt, but who, nevertheless, emerges from his suffering as a redemptive figure. As he comes to realize, what appears in human eyes to thwart the divine plan can in fact further it: 'And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance' (Genesis 45. 7). The members of Joseph's family, afflicted by famine in Canaan, are guided to Egypt, but are promised that they will eventually return to their own land. The stories of the early Hebrew heroes thus close on a note of expectation securely rooted in past experience, reflected in the words of the aged Israel before Pharaoh: 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage' (Genesis 47. 9).

The exodus from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the promised land serves as the rising action of the drama and is another central metaphor in Victorian fiction. Israel is led through the next stage of its history by Moses, an instrument of deliverance. Beginning his life as an exile cast upon the waters of the Nile, the infant Moses, whose name means 'drawn out of the water' (Exodus 2. 10), is rescued from the ark of bulrushes and prepared for his role as rescuer of his people. While engaged in the mundane task of shepherding in the wilderness, Moses experiences the call of God.

Turning aside to behold the burning bush which is not consumed, he is warned by God not to draw nearer: 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground' (Exodus 3. 5). This encounter with God gives Moses a sense of the sacred in the midst of the secular and also awakens him to his own identity and vocation. Chosen to play a decisive part in redemptive history, he is called to a life of pilgrimage. He must depart from Midian, where, although 'a stranger in a strange land', he is 'content to dwell', and journey towards 'a land flowing with milk and honey' (Exodus 2. 22, 21; 3. 8). Lacking confidence in his own ability to plead eloquently with Pharaoh for the freedom of his people, he illustrates human weakness through which divine strength is manifested.

As they make their way towards 'the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers', the Israelites are led by God 'in a pillar of a cloud' by day and 'in a pillar of fire' by night (Exodus 6. 4; 13. 21). They soon, however, weary of the precarious nature of their new freedom and insist that servitude in Egypt is preferable to death in the wilderness. Exhorted to 'go forward', the children of Israel acknowledge in the hymn of thanksgiving sung after their crossing of the Red Sea that God does battle on their behalf: 'I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation The Lord is a man of war' (Exodus 14. 15; 15. 1-3). Provision for the journey through the wilderness is made in the form of manna, which supplies the daily needs of the people but cannot be stored. Even though their destination is not readily discernible, the Hebrews know that they will be given sustenance for each stage

of the journey. Since they have a penchant for turning 'aside quickly out of the way' (Exodus 32. 8) and losing sight of their goal, they must frequently be redirected. Through their worship of the golden calf the 'stiffnecked people' (Exodus 32. 9) provoke the wrath of God, who threatens to destroy them for giving the creature priority over the Creator. They are thus constantly reminded that their God not only protects but also chastens. Their desert sojourn, marked by discontent and rebellion, helps to forge the Israelites into a community with a particular vocation. By pledging themselves to the keeping of the Ten Commandments, which reveal the close association between faith and ethics in the Hebrew consciousness, they enter anew into the covenant made with Noah and the patriarchs. Allegiance to the law revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai was generally regarded as the essence of religion during the Victorian era, when morality to a great extent became severed from its spiritual foundations. As many nineteenth-century novels demonstrate, strict adherence to codes which uphold the letter rather than the spirit of the law merely deepens the gulf between sacred and secular and arrests spiritual growth.

Held to their course by the ark of the covenant, which goes ahead 'to search out a resting place for them' (Numbers 10. 33), the Israelites are constantly reminded that God initiates and directs their progress. The portable tabernacle is an appropriate image of the exodus, as it indicates the dynamic nature of pilgrimage and links the past with the future. Remembrance of their experience in the wilderness, which they discovered to be a place of testing and of grace, keeps the faith of the Hebrews firmly rooted in history: 'And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these

forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no' (Deuteronomy 8. 2). Israel's ancient confession of faith, found in Deuteronomy 26. 5-9, is at once a recital of its origin and preservation and a source of inspiration for its ongoing pilgrimage:

A Syrian ready to perish was my father,
and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned
there with a few, and became there a nation,
great, mighty, and populous: And the Egyptians
evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and
laid upon us hard bondage: And when we
cried unto the Lord God of our fathers,
the Lord heard our voice, and looked on
our affliction, and our labour, and our
oppression: And the Lord brought us forth
out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and
with an outstretched arm, and with great
terribleness, and with signs, and with
wonders: And he hath brought us into this
place, and hath given us this land, even
a land that floweth with milk and honey.

Moses, however, who vowed not to depart from 'the king's high way' by turning 'to the right hand nor to the left' (Numbers 20. 17), and who guided his recalcitrant people through the wilderness, is permitted only a distant view of the promised land prior to his death on Mount Nebo. As he assigns the role of leadership to Joshua he assures him out of the depth of his own experience that he does not journey alone: 'Be strong and of a good courage And the Lord . . . will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed' (Deuteronomy 31. 7-8).

Summoning all the tribes of Israel to the sanctuary at Shechem, Joshua invites them to choose whom they will serve, but he asserts unequivocally: 'as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' (Joshua 24. 15). Each generation must either accept or reject the

covenant with the living God. The importance of such a decision to affirm or deny life in all its potential was recognized by Victorian novelists, who dramatized it as the moment of spiritual crisis. From the Bible they also derived their knowledge that faithfulness and sincerity are essential concomitants of the quest: 'But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul' (Deuteronomy 4. 29). As Elijah discovers on Mount Horeb, God's presence is revealed to an earnest seeker not only through miracles but also through the receptiveness of the heart:

And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains . . . but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (I Kings 19. 11-12)

These great elemental images of wind, earthquake, and fire, set against a landscape of deserts, mountains, and springs of water, were appropriated by Victorian writers to mark the stages of the inner journeys of their protagonists.

The alternating pattern of exile and return, which characterizes their history, gives the Israelites a consciousness of being strangers in a strange land and also a sense of responsibility towards the aliens in their midst. The tale of Ruth, the Moabitess, who journeys to a distant land, exemplified for the Victorians the risks and the rewards of pilgrimage. Addressing her mother-in-law, Naomi, Ruth reveals the constancy that is demanded of the pilgrim: 'Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God' (Ruth 1. 16).

Although she is 'a stranger' (Ruth 2. 10) in her adopted land, she is honoured by Boaz and inherits the promises of God to Israel. As one who willingly breaks with her own past, she becomes an instrument of blessing for the future.

The Book of Esther, whose main characters are alluded to by Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot, illustrates the intervention of Providence by means of human plans and actions. Its heroine, Esther, who replaces the disobedient and banished Queen Vashti, helps to preserve the Hebrew identity in time of persecution. Through her own ingenuity and the estimable conduct of her uncle, Mordecai, a people few in number and weak in influence are granted power and prestige. The theme of retributive justice, which dominates this book, is also central in Victorian fiction, in which characters seldom escape the consequences of their actions and in which good generally triumphs over evil. During the restoration following the Babylonian exile the Hebrews are again confronted with a crisis of identity. In gratitude for their deliverance they rebuild the walls of Jerusalem but are in danger of alienating themselves behind impenetrable religious and racial barriers. Having 'separated themselves from all strangers' (Nehemiah 9. 2), they forget that they, too, were once strangers and sojourners.

The problem of suffering addressed in the Book of Job arose directly out of Israel's experience as a pilgrim people and was also a central concern of most Victorian novelists, who perceived that the moment of extreme desolation is often the turning-point of the spiritual pilgrimage. Job, dispossessed of his sons, daughters, and livestock, and afflicted with physical pain, curses the day of his birth and in his utter anguish questions the meaning of life itself:

'Let the day perish wherein I was born Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?' (Job 3. 3, 23). Representing the orthodox view that adversity is a punishment for sin, whether acknowledged or not, and that material prosperity is a reward for virtue, Job's friends advise him to examine his relationship with God. According to Eliphaz, tribulation is part of the divine plan for the restoration of humanity: 'man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. . . . happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole' (Job 5. 7, 17-18). Job, 'perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil' (Job 1. 1), refuses to repent, since he does not know what sin he has committed. He remains puzzled about the cause of unmerited affliction and can find in the explanations offered by his well-intentioned but unhelpful companions no real solution to the dilemma. In desperation he continues to inveigh against God: 'Therefore I will not refrain my mouth . . . I will complain in the bitterness of my soul' (Job 7. 11). Job's cries of protest from his spiritual wilderness are reminiscent of the complaints of the Israelites during the exodus.

Throughout his discourse Job uses imagery associated with the chase and battle:

Know now that God hath overthrown me, and
hath compassed me with his net. . . . He
hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass,
and he hath set darkness in my paths. . . .
His troops come together, and raise up their
way against me, and encamp round about my
tabernacle. (Job 19. 6, 8, 12)

The God who appears to be his adversary and assailant Job knows intuitively to be his advocate and deliverer: 'Though he slay me,

yet will I trust in him'; 'for I know that my redeemer liveth' (Job 13. 15; 19. 25). Persistent in his interrogation of God, he is answered by the voice speaking 'out of the whirlwind': 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?'; 'shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it' (Job 38. 1, 4; 40. 2). In recognition of his own presumptuousness in attempting to judge the ways of God, Job repents, not on account of the specific sins which his friends thought to be the cause of his suffering, but on account of the universal sin of pride. Although he is not given the reason why the righteous and innocent suffer, he emerges from his spiritual conflict with renewed faith. As one who dares to vent his anger and resentment against God, Job assumed the stature of a hero in the minds of those Victorians who resisted the popular religious belief that resignation to the 'divine will is the only proper response to suffering.

Like the Book of Job, Ecclesiastes makes the point that the complexities of life cannot be easily explained on a purely moralistic basis. Probably the most secular of all the books of the Bible, Ecclesiastes offers a sceptical view of the world, in which 'there is no new thing under the sun' and in which 'all is vanity and vexation of spirit' (Ecclesiastes 1. 9, 14). In direct contrast to other Old Testament writers, who for the most part affirm that there is a divine purpose in human suffering, the Preacher contends that it is essentially futile to attempt to comprehend mortal existence, which is merely 'a shadow' (Ecclesiastes 6. 12). In his opinion it is sufficient to undertake the task immediately at hand and to live each moment fully, in an attitude of acceptance rather than of expectation. Time, in Ecclesiastes, is thought to be cyclical and

not linear:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away. (Ecclesiastes 3. 1-6)

The appeal of this work for the Victorians lay in its emphasis upon the travail of life, the importance of work, the duty of obedience, and the final judgment of God. According to Ecclesiastes, however, the pilgrimage concludes not in light but in darkness.

The Victorian literary imagination was nurtured in the Psalms, lyrical poems arising out of personal and national experience and of reflection upon the human in relation to the divine. Carlyle, for instance, regarded the Psalms, which were in his day attributed in their entirety to David, as a compendium of the stages of the spiritual journey:

David's life and history, as written for us in those Psalms of his, I consider to be the truest emblem ever given of a man's moral progress and warfare here below. All earnest souls will ever discern in it the faithful struggle of an earnest human soul towards what is good and best. Struggle often baffled, sore baffled, down as into entire wreck; yet a struggle never ended; ever, with tears, repentance, true unconquerable purpose, begun anew.²

²On Heroes, p. 47.

The Victorian preoccupation with the struggle for perfection was largely inspired by the positive stance taken in scripture towards human nature. Humanity, created in the image of God, and made 'a little lower than the angels', possesses a questing spirit which finds its ultimate goal in communion with the Eternal: 'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is' (Psalm 8. 5; 63. 1). As the psalmist recognizes, the pilgrimage begins and ends in the presence of God:

O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. . . . Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. . . . Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139. 1, 3, 5-10)

The heights and depths of human experience are expressed with great intensity in the Book of Psalms, which contains songs of praise for the grandeur of creation, hymns of thanksgiving for protection and strength in the past, prayers for forgiveness, and petitions for punishment of the enemy, all of which reveal the advances and retreats made by Israel as a pilgrim people. The motif of exodus and exile is implicit in psalms which give utterance to the desolation of the spirit in times of crisis: 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. . . . How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' (Psalm 137. 1, 4). Even when overwhelmed by the 'heavy burden' of sin or by a sense of abandonment by God, the

wanderer in the wilderness is never bereft of divine grace: 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me'; 'for thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me' (Psalm 38. 4; 23. 4; 31. 3). David's longing for 'wings like a dove' to enable him to 'wander far off, and remain in the wilderness' (Psalm 55. 6-7) illustrates the temptation to make a stage of the journey a final resting-place. The psalms most often alluded to in Victorian literature, however, are those which offer hope for the continuation of the pilgrimage:

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
 from whence cometh my help. . . . The Lord
 is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon
 thy right hand. . . . The Lord shall preserve
 thy going out and thy coming in from this
 time forth, and even for evermore. (Psalm 121. 1, 5, 8)

The Book of Psalms, unlike Ecclesiastes, concludes on a note of victory and joy, as those who have entered Zion, 'city of God', are exhorted to praise God 'with the sound of the trumpet' (Psalm 87. 3; 150. 3).

The Old Testament prophets, whose influence upon Victorian literature was both thematic and stylistic, bring the first act of the biblical drama to a close with their vision of a new day of peace and justice inaugurated by the renewal of the covenant. Interpreting the signs of their times in accordance with the divine will, the prophets pronounce judgment upon the nation and call it to repentance in order that the promise of the new creation may be fulfilled. Their emphatic tones and vivid images were frequently adopted by nineteenth-century novelists, who found the prophetic tradition congenial to the temper of their own times.



Isaiah, who describes himself as 'a man of unclean lips', dwelling 'in the midst of a people of unclean lips' (Isaiah 6. 5), is symbolically purged of his iniquity and set apart as a prophet through a vision in which a seraphim places upon his mouth a live coal taken from the altar in the temple. Although the Book of Isaiah represents many types of prophecy from diverse periods in Israel's history and also reflects a variety of literary styles, its underlying motif is that of pilgrimage motivated by the hope that a time will come when 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' (Isaiah 11. 9). Isaiah's message focusses upon the restoration of Jerusalem, which, he says, shall become the 'city of righteousness, the faithful city' (Isaiah 1. 26). His vision of the gathering of nations on Zion, 'the mountain of the Lord', where they will hear and obey 'the word of the Lord' and 'walk in his paths' (Isaiah 2. 3), illustrates the prophetic insistence upon the interrelation of word and deed. In Isaiah's view the renewal of the bond between the Creator and the created will result in harmony among the peoples of the earth, so that 'they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more' (Isaiah 2. 4).

The Book of Isaiah presents the concept of a righteous remnant which will be preserved to ensure the continuity of the chosen people and the fulfilment of their redemptive role. As a voice 'that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God' (Isaiah 40. 3), Isaiah proclaims that the deliverance from Babylonian exile is the first stage in the establishment of God's reign. Regarding the return as a second

exodus, he assures 'the cities of Judah' that the 'Lord God will come with strong hand' to lead them to their goal: 'they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint' (Isaiah 40. 9-10, 31).

The figure of the suffering servant as deliverer introduces into the prophetic tradition the theological insight, paradoxical as it may be, that the way of victory leads through the wilderness of suffering and humiliation:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions . . . and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53. 3-5)

From the chapter-headings in the King James Version of the Bible the Victorians would have understood this passage to refer to Christ, and would thus have been aware of its significance in the total drama of redemption. Various interpretations, the concept of the suffering servant represents a major step forward in Israel's understanding of vocation. Refined 'in the furnace of affliction', the covenant people are called to be 'a light of the Gentiles'; whereas they once 'walked in darkness' and sought only their own salvation, they 'have seen a great light' (Isaiah 48. 10; 42. 6; 9. 2), which extends their vision beyond their own borders. As in the wilderness, when faced with the temptation to halt, Israel is again exhorted to look ahead rather than behind: 'Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert'

(Isaiah 43. 18-19).

The importance of conduct in the prophetic writings is evident in Isaiah's statement that God honours justice and compassion more than religious ritual:

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the hands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? (Isaiah 58. 6-7)

By so doing, Israel shall become known as 'The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in', and shall be 'like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not' (Isaiah 58. 12, 11). In a passage often alluded to in the Victorian novel Isaiah employs the metaphor of matrimonial love to express the close union between God and the covenant people: 'Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married' (Isaiah 62. 4). Like the Book of Psalms, Isaiah closes in the expectation that the divine promise of restoration will be realized in the new Jerusalem: 'For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy' (Isaiah 65. 17-18).

The commissioning of Jeremiah as 'a prophet unto the nations' is reminiscent of God's call to Moses:

Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. (Jeremiah 1. 5-8)

After an intense struggle to overcome his doubts and lack of courage, Jeremiah enters the arena of public affairs as the spokesman for God. Set 'over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant' (Jeremiah 1. 10), he denounces in order to restore. Jeremiah, suffering ignominy on account of his prophetic office, complains that he was born 'a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth' (Jeremiah 15. 10). Constantly plagued with the threat of death, he is put in the stocks, whipped, imprisoned, and cast into a dungeon, thus experiencing tribulation which tests his faith and resolution. The most humanly-drawn of the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah, although at times resentful of his high calling, is the incarnation of the prophetic message that humiliation precedes exaltation and that suffering is an integral element of God's plan of purgation and regeneration.

As an outcast himself, Jeremiah expostulates with the nation on behalf of God, whose grace in former times has been forgotten: 'For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water' (Jeremiah 2. 13). Because it has 'loved to wander' and has 'gone backward', Israel has become alienated from its Redeemer who appears to them now 'as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night' (Jeremiah 14. 10; 15. 6; 14. 8). Mindful of the everlasting love of God, Jeremiah anticipates the time when the people, scattered like 'lost sheep', will return to 'their restingplace' in Zion, where 'a perpetual covenant' (Jeremiah 50. 6, 5) will be established.

Ezekiel, who, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, is concerned with the

relationship between word and action, symbolically makes God's words his own by eating the scroll on which they are written. The burden of Ezekiel's message is that God's purposes will not be defeated by the rebellious ways of Israel, which is in need of 'a new spirit' (Ezekiel 11. 19). In a highly pictorial style the prophet imparts the divine promise of restoration:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you,
and ye shall be clean and I will
take away the stony heart out of your flesh,
and I will give you an heart of flesh. . . .
This land that was desolate is become like
the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate
and ruined cities are become fenced, and are
inhabited. (Ezekiel 36. 25-26, 35)

In the new Jerusalem 'there shall be no more a pricking brier . . . nor any grieving thorn' (Ezekiel 28. 24), suggestive of the expulsion from Eden. As the vision of the valley of dry bones dramatically illustrates, from brokenness and estrangement can come wholeness and reconciliation. Ezekiel, who is both priest and prophet, realizes the need for repentance in bringing about renewal in personal and national life. Placing considerable importance upon religious observance as a means of atoning for the sins of the past, he envisages the temple as the source of healing waters, symbolic of God's presence. When the sanctuary is set in the midst of the people, the city of Jerusalem will, the prophet affirms, receive a new name, 'The Lord is there' (Ezekiel 48. 35).

The Book of Daniel, representative of apocalyptic literature, was written for the purpose of strengthening the covenant people during a time of suffering and persecution. Through the use of allegory, complex symbolism, and interpretation of dreams, this work introduces into the biblical drama the expectation of a sudden and

cataclysmic intervention of God in human affairs, heralding an era of long-awaited peace and righteousness. Based upon the assumption that evil and injustice will prevail until the final judgment by 'the Ancient of days' (Daniel 7. 22), the Book of Daniel lifts redemptive history out of the realm of the present and gives it a mystical and other-worldly dimension quite unknown in the rest of the Old Testament. Daniel, whose trust in 'the living God', who 'delivereth and rescueth, and . . . worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth' (Daniel 6. 26-27), is vindicated by his preservation in the den of lions, is portrayed as a heroic figure who dares defy danger for the sake of his convictions. In his vision of the cosmic conflict involving angels and beasts he is warned that a time of trial lies ahead, but he is also assured that the Israelites will eventually be delivered from exile. Encouraged to persevere until the end, he learns that the pilgrimage often demands a difficult period of waiting before victory is won.

This hope of deliverance from the wilderness of suffering is also found in the prophecy of Hosea, whose portrait of the God who disciplines and yet restores arises out of his own experience. Focussing his attention upon the present rather than the distant future as the time for reconciliation, Hosea insists, along with Ezekiel, that repentance must precede pardon but gives more emphasis to the merciful nature of God's judgment. Through the form of an autobiographical parable Hosea illustrates the infinite love which is the basis of the divine-human relationship. Deserted by his wife, Gomer, who 'played the harlot' (Hosea 2. 5), the prophet denounces infidelity, which he perceives to be the cause of Israel's estrangement from God:

She is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight . . . Lest I strip her naked . . . and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. . . . Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. (Hosea 2. 2-3, 6)

However, when he views his own tragedy from the perspective of the promised covenant, through which Israel will be betrothed to God 'in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies' (Hosea 2. 19), he forgives his unfaithful wife and redeems her from servitude. By this action Hosea exemplifies the compassion of God, who repeatedly draws the children of Israel back to himself with 'bands of love' (Hosea 11. 4).

The analogy which he draws between marriage and the covenant indicates the high regard in which marital love was held in Hebrew thought, and also suggests that obedience to the divine will is the foundation of all enduring human relationships. The 'virtuous woman' is one who 'feareth the Lord' and does her husband 'good and not evil all the days of her life' (Proverbs 31. 10, 30, 12). The Song of Solomon, an anthology of candidly erotic love poetry, which affirms sexual attraction to be a divine gift, is usually interpreted allegorically and invested with a religious significance not intended by the author. Chapter-headings in the King James Version of the Bible, for example, identify the lovers as Christ and the Church. This spiritualizing tendency was carried over by many Victorian readers into everyday life, so that the sacred and secular became divorced from each other.

The minor prophets, however, acutely conscious of the realities of this world, boldly state that genuine obedience to the covenant

demands not a ritual purity but an ethical response: 'I hate, I despise your feast days But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream'; 'what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' (Amos 5. 21, 24; Micah 6. 8). Malachi heralds the coming of the Lord, who is 'like a refiner's fire' and who will arise as 'the Sun of righteousness . . . with healing in his wings': 'Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts' (Malachi 3. 2; 4. 2; 3. 7). The Old Testament thus closes, as it begins, with reference to both heaven and earth and to the creative power of God. The long series of revelatory acts chronicled from Genesis to Malachi concludes with the promise that the way has been prepared for the new creation, in which divine and human are reconciled.

II. New Testament

The second act of the biblical drama opens with the Gospels, which convey the 'good news' that a new beginning is possible for humanity through the coming of God in Christ, the culmination of Israel's hope. The four Gospels, each with its own distinctive style and thematic emphasis, share the same kerygmatic intent. Opening in a manner reminiscent of the first chapter of Genesis, the Gospel of John proclaims that Christ is 'the true Light', the human expression of the divine energy which created order out of chaos and light out of darkness: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1. 9, 1, 14). Matthew, concerned to show that Jesus is the Messiah, and that in him the old covenant is fulfilled

in the new dispensation, opens his account with a genealogy tracing Jesus's descent from Abraham through King David, and also with an affirmation of his divinity in the words of Isaiah: 'they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us' (Matthew 1. 23). During the Victorian era biblical scholars, in their efforts to recover the essential Gospel, sought to distinguish between the figure of Jesus of Nazareth and that of the Christ of faith, who, they believed, reflected the theology of the early Church rather than the ethos of first-century Palestine. Most Victorians, however, read the Gospels through the eyes of faith and regarded the life of Jesus Christ as a paradigm of the spiritual pilgrimage.

In his baptism by John, the prophet 'crying in the wilderness' (Mark 1. 3), Jesus associates himself with humanity's need for repentance and reorientation. Made aware of his Messianic calling through a vision and a voice from heaven, he is immediately driven out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for forty days. In the same way that Israel developed a sense of identity and vocation during its forty-year sojourn in the wilderness, Christ, choosing the path of servanthood and suffering rather than that of spectacular power, prepares himself for his work of redemption. Having imparted his vision of life transformed by the power of God to his twelve disciples, remarkable in their diversity of character and occupation, Jesus summons them to take up his way of pilgrimage: 'Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. . . . Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men' (Matthew 4. 17, 19). Those who would follow are warned, however, not to expect a resting-place in this world: 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head' (Matthew 8. 20). Response to

the divine call is the first stage of the spiritual journey, but perseverance in the chosen way is necessary if the goal is to be reached: 'And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved'; 'No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God' (Mark 13. 13; Luke 9. 62).

The new creation inaugurated by Christ is characterized by newness and wholeness: 'No man . . . seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment And no man putteth new wine into old bottles'; 'as many as touched him were made whole' (Mark 2. 21-22; 6. 56). In his encounter with the woman of Samariá at Jacob's well, Jesus, described in Mrs Oliphant's account of the event as a 'Pilgrim' and 'Traveller', asks for a drink of water and offers in return 'a well of water springing up into everlasting life' (John 4. 14).³ By entering into conversation with the Samaritan woman he breaks through racial barriers, since in his day the Jews had 'no dealings with the Samaritans' (John 4. 9), and also through social conventions, since it was considered unacceptable for a rabbi to address a woman in public. In word and conduct, therefore, Jesus reveals the new law of love which restores broken relationships. Whereas the woman at the well waits for the dawning of the Messianic age, Jesus assures her that in him it has already begun.

In his parable of the Prodigal Son, frequently alluded to in the Victorian novel, Jesus illustrates the necessity of repentance in

³Mrs Oliphant, Jerusalem: Its History and Hope (London, 1891), pp. 413-14.

effecting reconciliation between God and humanity. The tale of the younger son who takes 'his journey into a far country' (Luke 15. 13), and who in his desperation is welcomed back by his forgiving father, is one of several parables in the Gospels on the theme of the lost and found. Throughout the Bible the cry of human helplessness signals the moment of turning and recovery. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10. 30-37), with its insistence upon love of neighbour which issues in practical aid, discloses the way in which the outcast or despised member of society is used by God as an instrument of healing and reconciliation. In the parables of the good seed and the tares, the net, and the separation of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 13. 37-43, 47-50; 25. 32-46) Jesus speaks plainly about the actuality of evil and the inevitability of judgment. Through images of growth, such as the seed and leaven, which abound in the parables of the kingdom, he assures his disciples that good will eventually triumph over evil.

The Victorian reader was acutely aware of the tension in the Gospels between love of the world, which 'God so loved . . . that he gave his only begotten Son', and repudiation of it as a place of 'tribulation' (John 3. 16; 16. 33). Although Jesus tells his disciples that his 'kingdom is not of this world', he also admonishes them to be worldly-wise: 'ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?' (John 18. 36; Matthew 16. 3). A recurring theme in Victorian fiction is that of self-denial, which in the eyes of the world signifies loss, but which is also a condition for spiritual gain: 'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my

sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it' (Mark 8. 34-35).

The life of Jesus is presented in John's Gospel as a journey from and towards God: 'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father' (John 16. 28). The Transfiguration serves to confirm for Jesus the next stage of his pilgrimage as the Redeemer of the world. Fully cognizant of the road of suffering that lies ahead, he informs the disciples that he 'must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day' (Matthew 16. 21). Having 'stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem', which 'killest the prophets' (Luke 9. 51; 13. 34), Jesus enters the city in triumph and in humility on a beast of burden. The element of surprise is again evident in the story of redemption. Whereas the popular image of the Messiah was that of a conquering hero who would appear in great majesty to deliver the nation from its enemies, Jesus appears in the role of the suffering servant to declare his reign over a spiritual kingdom, and to deliver all peoples from the final enemy, death itself.

By taking the way of self-sacrifice, symbolized by his shed blood and broken body, Christ initiates a new covenant between the divine and the human. In the garden of Gethsemane he wrestles with his own desire to be rid of the weighty burden of humanity's sin, but commits himself unflinchingly to the anguish that is before him: 'Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt' (Mark 14. 36). The betrayal by Judas and the denial by Peter increase Jesus's sense of abandonment on the lonely road leading to Calvary. Having endured

both an ecclesiastical and a civil trial, the condemnation of the crowd which had earlier shouted its hosannas around him, a scourging, and the mockery of the soldiers, he is bidden to carry his own cross to the site of execution. The crown of thorns placed upon his head foreshadows his ultimate victory over the sin and suffering which have beset humanity since its Fall occasioned thorns and thistles to invade the garden of Eden. Identifying himself so completely with the human condition that he experiences the depths of desolation, Jesus cries out: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark 15. 34).

The final temptation faced by Jesus is that of saving himself, but, remaining firm in his purpose, he drinks the cup of suffering to its last bitter dregs. In his forgiveness of those who crucify him Jesus reveals the grace of God that is beyond human understanding. As Hosea had testified, the most compelling power is that of love. With the words 'it is finished' (John 19. 30) Christ reaches the end of his earthly pilgrimage and completes the work of redemption. The rending of 'the veil of the temple . . . from the top to the bottom' (Mark 15. 38) indicates that the gulf separating the divine from the human has been bridged. Whereas Jesus's humanity was foremost in the minds of those who identified him as 'the carpenter's son', his divinity is apparent to the centurion who witnessed his death and proclaimed him to be 'the Son of God' (Matthew 13. 55; Mark 15. 39).

The Resurrection is the final word of the Creator to the created that life overcomes death and that love overcomes evil: 'Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here' (Mark 16. 6). Significantly, discovery of the risen Christ is made in

the setting of a garden. Humanity first knew life in the garden of Eden, but experiences eternal life in the garden of the empty sepulchre. The revolutionary power of the Resurrection is evident in the change that occurs within the disciples. Following the appearances of their risen Lord they are transformed from a state of abject despair to one of confident and vital faith, and are inspired by the commission of Christ, to whom 'all power is given . . . in heaven and in earth', to continue their pilgrimage: 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Matthew 28. 18-20).

The third act of the drama of redemption highlights the initial stages in the growth of the Christian Church. Beginning at a local level in Jerusalem, followers of the 'way' gradually increase in number and influence until they become known as those 'that have turned the world upside down' (Acts 9. 2; 17. 6). The Acts of the Apostles records the activities of this redeemed community, which, as 'one body in Christ' (Romans 12. 5), sets out to proclaim the message of reconciling love. As the Israelites were assured of God's presence by the pillars of cloud and of fire which accompanied them through the wilderness, the Church, as the new Israel, is empowered by the presence of the Spirit:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2. 1-4)

Israel's experience of exile and oppression at the hands of its

enemies is paralleled also in the early Church's persecution by the forces of orthodox religion, represented by Saul, who, 'breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord' (Acts 9. 1), journeys to Damascus in order to eradicate all traces of the new faith. Before he reaches his destination, however, he is arrested by 'a light from heaven' (Acts 9. 3) and by the voice of Christ. Physically blinded by this revelation, which alters the direction of his life, Saul is led into the city, where in his helplessness and humiliation he acquires spiritual vision and, after being baptized, is commissioned to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Under the new name of Paul, signifying his new task as 'a chosen vessel' of God, he endures affliction for the sake of the Gospel:

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I
stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck . . .
in journeyings often, in perils of waters,
in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own
countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in
perils in the city, in perils in the
wilderness. (Acts 9. 15; II Corinthians 11. 25-26)

Although he finds 'no certain dwellingplace' in this world, Paul is 'persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (I Corinthians 4. 11; Romans 8. 38-39).

In his epistles Paul speaks of the new creation, in which eternal life is possible in the present. Those in union with Christ are 'delivered from the law' and thereby enabled to 'serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter': 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage' (Romans 7. 6; Galatians 5. 1). In the

new creation, according to Paul, 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3. 28). This passage, which places all racial, social, and sexual relationships within the context of a universally restored harmony, received less attention during the Victorian period than I Timothy 2. 11-15, which places sexual roles within a limited historical context. Envisioning life as a gradual progress towards the attainment of maturity, 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ', Paul exhorts believers to 'go on unto perfection' (Ephesians 4. 13; Hebrews 6. 1). The 'good soldier of Jesus Christ', engaged in the 'good fight' of faith, is protected by 'the whole armour of God . . . against the wiles of the devil' (II Timothy 2. 3; 4. 7; Ephesians 6. 11). The metaphor of battle is closely associated in the epistles with that of the race, which emphasizes the perseverance required of 'strangers and pilgrims' who desire to reach 'the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem': 'let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God' (Hebrews 11. 13; 12. 22, 1-2). Central in Paul's theology is the concept of redemptive suffering. Those who endure tribulation for the sake of Christ will be 'joint-heirs' with him, and 'the whole creation', which 'groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now', will enter into 'the glory which shall be revealed' (Romans 8. 17, 22, 18).

Several of the Pauline epistles reveal a strain of asceticism

and other-worldliness not found in the Old Testament. Reflecting the Hellenistic rather than the Hebraic element in Paul's background, the passages of this nature held special appeal for many Victorians. The apostle, declaring that 'the carnal mind is enmity against God', urges members of the Church to set their 'affection on things above, not on things on the earth' (Romans 8. 7; Colossians 3. 2). Fully aware of the power of evil in the world, he is particularly aware of his own powerlessness to achieve even his best intentions: 'For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do' (Romans 7. 19). Afflicted by 'a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet' him, Paul is personally acquainted with the abundant grace through which 'strength is made perfect in weakness': 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men' (II Corinthians 12. 7, 9; I Corinthians 1. 25). James, in his General Epistle, warns his readers not to conform to the ways of the world, but also emphasizes, in the manner of the Old Testament prophets, the importance of works as a sign of faith: 'be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world' (James 1. 22, 27).

Unifying the epistles is the triumphant note of reconciliation, which in its cosmic dimension is the perfect culmination of the acts begun by God at the beginning of time. Although humanity has already been redeemed by grace, and signs of the kingdom are already present, life in this world is only a foretaste of that which is to come: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known' (I Corinthians

13. 12). In the final consummation of heaven and earth God's reconciling purposes will be fulfilled.

The Epilogue to the biblical drama is acted out on the boundless stage of time and space. The Revelation of St John the Divine, which, like the Book of Daniel, was written to strengthen the faith of the people of God, was for many Victorians a source of solace and of hope. The abundance of eschatological imagery of battle, judgment, heaven, hell, darkness, and light in Victorian literature attests to the influence of the Apocalypse upon an age which was preoccupied with the direction of history and with the relationship between this world and that which is to come. The work opens with the seer's vision in which the Sovereign of heaven, enthroned in majestic splendour, and Christ the Lamb receive the honour and blessing of the entire universe. The triumphant conclusion of the story of redemption is thus foreshadowed before the various stages of transition between the old creation and the new are delineated.

With the breaking of the seventh seal of the book of destiny the world is afflicted by a series of calamities which represent the forces of evil, personified in Apollyon, 'the angel of the bottomless pit' (Revelation 9. 11). In the cosmic battle of Armageddon, however, Christ overcomes Antichrist and enters into his eternal reign as 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS' (Revelation 19. 16). Following the overthrow of Satan and the last judgment, humanity will be restored to its original and perfect unity with the Creator and endowed with a radically new quality of life:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth:
for the first heaven and the first earth were
passed away And I John saw the holy
city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God
out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned

for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. (Revelation 21. 1-5)

The descent of the holy city signifies the gift of divine grace to the world in the person of Christ, whose love is expressed through the metaphor of marriage. God, who planted in the garden of Eden the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, plants in the new Jerusalem the tree of life 'for the healing of the nations' (Revelation 22. 2). Redemptive history, as traced from Genesis to Revelation, commences in a garden, symbolic of human potential, but concludes in a city, symbolic of human maturity.

The biblical drama closes with Christ's words 'Surely I come quickly', to which John replies: 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus' (Revelation 22. 20). Through the action of God, who is 'Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end', and the response of those who 'take the water of life freely' (Revelation 22. 13, 17) earth and heaven are reconciled and the goal of the spiritual pilgrimage is attained.

CHAPTER 2

THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

I. Part One

The Pilgrim's Progress was the second most important source of the theme of spiritual pilgrimage for the Victorians. According to Amy Cruse, Victorian biographies and autobiographies suggest that 'everyone seems to have read Pilgrim's Progress'.¹ Coleridge, who initiated the Romantic reappraisal of John Bunyan as a writer of genius, based his esteem for the work upon its faithfulness to the biblical drama of redemption:

I know of no book, the Bible excepted, as above all comparison, which I, according to my judgment and experience, could so safely recommend as teaching and enforcing the whole saving truth according to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, as in the Pilgrim's Progress. It is, in my conviction, incomparably the best Summa Theologiae Evangelicae ever produced by a writer not miraculously inspired.²

¹Amy Cruse, The Victorians and their Books (London, 1935), p. 291.

²Quoted in Bunyan: The Pilgrim's Progress: A Casebook, edited by Roger Sharrock (London, 1976), p. 53.

This view was shared by Thomas Arnold, who found Bunyan's allegory to be 'a complete reflection of Scripture, with none of the rubbish of the theologians mixed up with it'.³ Froude was another who gave Bunyan the highest encomium by describing him as 'a man whose writings have for two centuries affected the spiritual opinions of the English race in every part of the world more powerfully than any book or books, except the Bible'.⁴

The dramatic structure and pictorial language of The Pilgrim's Progress is derived from the Bible, which, in the Puritan tradition, was the ultimate guide for the spiritual pilgrimage. The concept of life as a journey from this world to the next is, in the words of Roger Sharrock, 'one of those archetypal images which are larger than metaphors because the idea seems to appeal to a deep and universal feeling about human life as a progressive development from birth to death; the term of comparison is felt to be, not an embroidery on the facts, but nearer to ultimate reality than the experience described'.⁵ As employed by Bunyan, the journey motif became individualized and spiritualized. The popularity of The Pilgrim's Progress, one of the main channels through which the Puritan spirit entered the mainstream of English literature, contributed largely to the dualism that prevailed during the Victorian period. In Puritanism, which emphasized personal responsibility for salvation and fulfilment in heaven rather than on earth, the present world was regarded merely as a means to an end; it-

³ Letter of 30 November 1836 to Justice Coleridge, quoted in The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, pp. 400-1.

⁴ Bunyan, p. 1.

⁵ Roger Sharrock, John Bunyan (London, 1968), p. 94.

was in effect the wilderness which had to be traversed before the promised land could be reached. Images of wayfaring and struggle, which in the Bible are for the most part earth-centred, assume in Bunyan's treatment of the pilgrimage an other-worldly and allegorical significance.

Through a predominantly linear narrative Bunyan presents the principal stages of the spiritual pilgrimage. His protagonists, who have a clear vision of the goal before them, move steadily towards it, whereas the apostate pilgrims they encounter along the way remain in a stationary position as mere abstractions because they have lost sight of their destination or deny its reality. To go on pilgrimage is, in Bunyan's mind, to be constantly engaged in spiritual warfare. The figure of the Christian soldier, clad in the full panoply of spiritual armour, is in the Puritan consciousness a favourite metaphor of the soteriological journey. As Monica Furlong points out, the Puritan, 'deeply alienated from the world and from instinctual life . . . compensates himself by an heroic and romantic vision. He sees himself as the central figure in a drama, a drama in which he, the champion of righteousness, fights the dragon of evil'.⁶ Although he recognizes the depravity and imperfection of human nature, Bunyan is also well aware of the courage and strength of will which mark the quest for truth.

Since he affirms the world as the setting for 'the good fight of faith' (I Timothy 6. 12) rather than renounces it as the domain of the devil, he is not a typical Puritan. His pilgrims earnestly strive to reach their heavenly destination but at the same time take pleasure in the journey itself. For Bunyan the path of pilgrimage does not only

⁶ Monica Furlong, Puritan's Progress (New York, 1975), p. 41.

lead beyond this life but also opens up the way of eternity in the present. He represents, therefore, a modified form of Puritanism which gives precedence to the experiential over the doctrinal nature of religion. The Pilgrim's Progress was praised by Froude for its 'genuine human beings', portrayed in all their nobility and infirmity.⁷ In its immediacy and universality Bunyan's 'epic of the soul', like the Bible itself, transforms the reader into an actor in the drama of salvation.⁸ Mark Rutherford, conscious of the polarities inherent in the Puritan vision of life, and in search of a faith which unifies the sacred and the secular, declares Bunyan's great qualities to be 'those of relationship which no one time or temperament can fully unfold':

We are now, however, beginning to see that he is not altogether the representative of Puritanism, but the historian of Mansoul, and that the qualification necessary in order to understand and properly value him is not theological learning, nor in fact any kind of learning or literary skill, but the experience of life, with its hopes and fears, bright day and black night.⁹

The Pilgrim's Progress, probably more than any other work in English literature, exemplifies the perfect union of a writer's personal experience, faith, and art.

In his Apology for The Pilgrim's Progress Bunyan relates the sacred and the secular by giving credit for his work to God, who guides

⁷Bunyan, p. 117.

⁸Vera Brittain, In the Steps of John Bunyan: An Excursion into Puritan England (London, 1950), p. 321.

⁹Mark Rutherford, John Bunyan, Literary Lives (London, 1905), pp. 1-2.

human endeavour 'for his Design' and 'makes base things usher in Divine'.¹⁰ Presented in the form of a 'Figure, or Similitude', for which, he states, he has biblical warrant, his work is a personal invitation to pilgrimage:

This Book will make a Travailer of thee,
If by its Counsel thou wilt ruled be;
It will direct thee to the Holy Land,
If thou wilt its Directions understand
Wouldest thou loose thy self, and catch no harm?
And find thy self again without a charm? . . .
O then come hither,
And lay my Book, thy Head and Heart together. (pp. 6-7)

The Pilgrim's Progress recounts a dream which is profoundly individual and yet universal. Although the 'glorious dreamer', as Robert Southey called Bunyan, invests his story with a dream-like quality, he also creates figures and episodes which are startlingly realistic.¹¹ The setting for his allegorical pilgrimage is at once an internal and an external landscape, depicted in biblical symbolism of hills, mountains, valleys, and rivers. The progress of the spirit is from city to city through a wilderness relieved by restorative springs and gardens.

The opening paragraph of the work introduces several essential elements of the spiritual pilgrimage:

¹⁰ John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to That which is to Come, edited by James Blanton Wharey, second edition, revised by Roger Sharrock (Oxford, 1960), p. 6. The use of italics is based upon that by Roger Sharrock, as explained in his Introduction: 'I have retained the spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and italicization of the first edition and of the earliest edition in which the passages added later appear' (p. cxi). Subsequent references to The Pilgrim's Progress will be cited in the text.

¹¹ Robert Southey, Cromwell and Bunyan, Select Biographies (London, 1844), p. 90.

As I walk'd through the wilderness of this world,
 I lighted on a certain place, where was a Denn;
 And I laid me down in that place to sleep: And
 as I slept I dreamed a Dream. I dreamed, and
 behold I saw a Man cloathed with Raggs, standing
 in a certain place, with his face from his own
 House, a Book in his hand, and a great burden
 upon his Back. I looked, and saw him open the
 Book, and Read therein; and as he read, he wept
 and trembled: and not being able longer to
 contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry;
 saying, what shall I do? (p.8)

This cry for direction is later taken up by the protagonists of Victorian novels, in which it usually initiates the journey through the wilderness. The person in rags whom Bunyan sees in his dream is simply called 'a Man', connoting the entire human race in the poverty of its spiritual condition. In the manner of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, and also of Christ and his followers, the man is facing in an outward direction as if ready to begin a journey. He possesses a guide in the form of the Scriptures, but, until he actually arrives in person at the Cross of Christ to which his book points, he will retain the burden which limits his progress. Although his reading makes him aware of his need for salvation, his redemption depends upon his own quest. The Pilgrim's Progress commences in a mood of existential Angst and desperation. The dread of judgment and search for deliverance cause the pilgrim to flee from the City of Destruction and to journey towards the City of God.

In his zeal to attain personal salvation the seeker in Bunyan's dream becomes alienated from his family and community. Most Victorian writers agreed with Bunyan that the way of pilgrimage is an extremely solitary one. Resisting the efforts of those who would restrain him from going on pilgrimage, he 'put his fingers in his Ears, and ran on crying, Life, Life, Eternal Life: so he looked not behind him, but

fled towards the middle of the Plain' (p. 10). Not until he has set forth on the way of pilgrimage and, having laid his 'hand to the Plow', determined to continue in the course is the man named Christian (p. 11). Henri Talon writes of the struggle which identifies a Christian:

One must fight to be worthy of a name. Hence Bunyan gave us an example of 'muscular Christianity' long before Kingsley. Before Kierkegaard he demonstrated that the man who is really alive is the man who is moving forward; he may stumble, but he gets up again; he is fervent and full of will; he is very much here and yet at the same time he is elsewhere, because his gaze is fixed on a horizon that is always receding.¹²

Christian, directed to the Wicket Gate by Evangelist, moves out of darkness into light and abandons the world for gain of heaven. His vision of a new goal and haste to reach it provoke the mockery of his neighbour Obstinate, who calls him 'a brain-sick fellow' (p. 12). The influence of the Pauline epistles is evident in Bunyan's statement that one who chooses to be wise in the ways of God is certain to be regarded as foolish in the eyes of the world. Pliable, who accompanies Christian part of the way, is overcome by the Slough of Despond and abandons his pilgrimage. Christian, left to 'possess the brave Country alone' (p. 14), is almost submerged on account of his heavy burden, but is rescued by Help, who asks why he did not look for the steps which are placed through the midst of the mire as an aid for travellers. Despite the deepest despair into which the pilgrim can fall, Bunyan affirms that there is always hope of recovery.

¹²Henri Talon, John Bunyan: The Man and his Works, translated by Barbara Wall (London, 1951), p. 142.

As Christian makes his solitary way to the Wicket Gate, he encounters Mr Worldly Wiseman, who attempts to dissuade him from following Evangelist's directions:

There is not a more dangerous and troublesome way in the world . . . that Slough is the beginning of the sorrows that do attend those that go on in that way: hear me, I am older than thou: thou art like to meet with in the way which thou goest, Wearisomness, Painfulness, Hunger, Perils, Nakedness, Sword, Lions, Dragons, Darkness; and in a word, death, and what not? (p. 18)

Conscious only of the hardships that have beset Christian pilgrims since the days of the apostle Paul, Mr Worldly Wiseman has no vision of deliverance at the end of the journey through the world's wilderness. He is reminiscent of Ecclesiastes in his disparagement of those who seek to discover meaning in life's mysteries: 'it is happened unto thee as to other weak men, who meddling with things too high for them, do suddenly fall into thy distractions; which distractions do not only unman men . . . but they run them upon desperate ventures, to obtain they know not what' (p. 18). Mr Worldly Wiseman prefers the way of Morality to that of the Cross, the way of comfort to that of suffering.

Having 'so quickly turned aside . . . out of the way' (p. 20), Christian is redirected by Evangelist, who tells him that the way of salvation lies not in good works but in faith. According to Roland Mushat Frye, 'it is not at all the choice of another goal that attracts Christian from the way, for he always maintains his central dedication to the Celestial City, but he is repeatedly deluded into believing that he can find a "better" way there than the way which God has

ordained for him'.¹³ Arriving at the Wicket Gate, Christian knocks persistently and asks for admittance in full realization that he is 'a poor burdened sinner':

May I now enter here? will he within ?
Open to sorry me, though I have bin ?
An undeserving Rebel? (p. 25)

Even as the gate is opened for him he comes under attack from Beelzebub, who shoots arrows from his castle to try to prevent pilgrims from entering upon the straight and narrow path. It is clear that entrance at the Wicket Gate establishes a commitment to the Christian way but does not ensure escape from danger and tribulation along the route. Frye claims that the Christ-Gate 'provides the only ultimate means of reconciliation. . . . Once the self is properly related to its creator, it is ready for a proper relation with other creatures and with itself as a part of creation'.¹⁴

At the House of the Interpreter Christian is shown a portrait of Christ, who is authorized by the 'Lord of the Place' for which pilgrims are bound to be their 'Guide in all difficult places': 'thou seest him stand as if he Pleaded with Men: And whereas thou seest the World as cast behind him, and that a Crown hangs over his head; that is, to shew thee, that slighting and despising the things that are present, for the love that he hath to his Masters service, he is sure in the world that comes next to have Glory for his Reward' (p. 29). For his

¹³Roland Mushat Frye, God, Man, and Satan: Patterns of Christian Thought and Life in Paradise Lost, Pilgrim's Progress, and the Great Theologians (Princeton, 1960; reprint, Port Washington, New York, 1972), p. 132.

¹⁴God, Man, and Satan, p. 100.

edification he is taken into a large parlour which is full of dust, symbolic of the frailty and corruption of humanity, and which is sprinkled with water, symbolic of divine grace. The children Passion and Patience, whom Christian meets next, are associated by Bunyan with Dives, who received good things on earth, and with Lazarus, who received his portion in heaven. Considered together, they represent the paradoxical nature of the Christian life, which is both temporal and eternal. The unquenchable fire displayed in another room signifies the constant work of grace in the heart of the believer in spite of attacks from the evil enemy. In the House of the Interpreter Christian gains insight into the trials and temptations awaiting him. For example, the man who forces his way through the armed guard into the beautiful palace teaches him the necessity of maintaining strength and determination on the pilgrimage. Also, the one enclosed in the iron cage of despair is a warning not to reject the promise of redemption by casting contempt upon Christ. His conversation with the tormented soul who relates his terrifying dream of the final judgment and the opening of the bottomless pit makes him aware of the importance of readiness for the coming of Christ. This theme of expectation and preparedness recurs in Victorian fiction, in which the protagonists are, like Christian, given appropriate warning and encouragement at crucial stages in their journeys.

When Christian reaches the Cross, where his burden falls from his shoulders, he rejoices 'with a merry heart', saying, 'He hath given me rest; by his sorrow; and life, by his death (p. 38). The figure of the pilgrim freed from the burden of despair to continue bravely to the end of the pilgrimage looms large in Victorian literature. Formalist and Hypocrisy, who enter the narrow way by climbing over the

wall rather than by knocking at the Wicket Gate, thereby seeking to avoid the Cross, end their journey in Danger and Destruction. As Bunyan makes clear, both the goal and the means by which that goal is reached are important to the pilgrim. At the foot of the Hill of Difficulty Christian drinks from the spring which increases his spiritual vitality and enables him to make the arduous ascent. Halfway up the hill, however, he pauses to rest in the pleasant arbour placed there by the 'Lord of the Hill, for the refreshing of weary Travailleurs' (p. 42). Succumbing to the temptation to linger awhile, Christian falls into a deep sleep and loses much precious time as well as the roll which he was given at the Cross and which he must present at the gate of the Celestial City. The necessity of having to return to the arbour makes him realize that there is no permanent resting-place on the pilgrim way and that he must venture forward even in the midst of weariness:

O wretched Man that I am, that I should sleep in the day time! that I should sleep in the midst of difficulty! that I should so indulge the flesh, as to use that rest for ease to my flesh, which the Lord of the Hill hath erected only for the relief of the spirits of Pilgrims! How many steps have I took in vain! (Thus it happened to Israel for their sin, they were sent back again by the way of the Red-Sea) and I am made to tread those steps with sorrow, which I might have trod with delight. (p. 44)

The Palace Beautiful, where Christian next finds refreshment and is offered instructions for the remainder of the journey, is, like the House of the Interpreter, a symbol of the Church, in which the pilgrim is accepted as an individual and also as a member of a community. The residents of the Palace Beautiful, who welcome him into their midst, are referred to as 'the Family' (p. 47). Through discourse with Piety, Prudence, and Charity Christian is forced to consider the path along

which he has already come and to face with renewed vigour that which lies ahead. Havens of rest provide a two-way vision for the wayfarer, who is made grateful for mercies received in the past and is challenged to remain faithful to his original intent. Like the people of God, Christian desires 'a better Countrey; that is, an Heavenly' (p. 49). Weary of his 'inward sickness' (p. 50), he anticipates the wholeness and peace to be found in the Celestial City. The chamber in which he sleeps at the Palace Beautiful has a window opening 'towards the Sun rising', suggestive of promise:

Where am I now? is this the love and care
Of Jesus, for the men that Pilgrims are?
Thus to provide! That I should be forgiven!
And dwell already the next door to Heaven. (p. 53)

Before setting out once again upon his journey Christian is taken to the top of the house, from where the Delectable Mountains may be seen. From there, he is told, the gate of the Celestial City is clearly visible. The progress of the pilgrim is, therefore, one of gradual revelation and advance. As Bunyan presents it, the dual role of the Church is to keep the vision of the City of God alive for pilgrims and to equip them for the journey towards that destination, in which the vision becomes reality. Christian leaves the Palace Beautiful armed 'from head to foot, with what was of proof, lest perhaps he should meet with assaults in the way' (p. 55).

In the Valley of Humiliation Christian immediately confronts evil in the form of Apollyon, the destroyer of the spirit. But through his allegiance to the 'King of Princes' (p. 57) and by standing firm in the 'Kings High-way, the way of Holiness' (p. 59), the spiritually-accoutred pilgrim joins the ranks of all those who are 'more than Conquerours, through him that loved us' (p. 60). The Valley of

Humiliation leads directly into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, a place of darkness, drought, and destruction. Here the path becomes extremely narrow, and Christian must proceed cautiously in order not to fall into the ditch on the one hand or into the mire on the other. Accosted by fiends and terrified by fearsome sounds, he is tempted to turn back, but remembers 'how he had already vanquished many a danger: and that the danger of going back might be much more, then for to go forward; so he resolved to go on' (p. 63). True to the experience of Israel, Christian's remembrance of past deliverance provides strength for present affliction. Having overcome the fear and despondency which accompanies him through the first part of the valley, he makes his way through the second and more dangerous part with ease, since the darkness is now turned to light. Knowledge that his Guide is with him turns 'the shadow of death into the morning' (p. 64).

Christian's meeting with Faithful illustrates both the solitary and the social nature of the pilgrimage. Each pilgrim has his own unique experiences but needs the fellowship and support of others going in the same direction. But as Bunyan is well aware, all who are headed for the heavenly country do not necessarily agree on the means by which their destination is to be attained. Talkative, who accompanies Christian and Faithful for a short distance, offers to discuss 'things heavenly, or things earthly; things Moral, or things Evangelical; things Sacred, or things Prophane; things past, or things to come; things forraign, or things at home; things more Essential, or things Circumstantial' (p. 77). With a delightful touch of humour Bunyan thus depicts ^a pilgrim who is more prepared to speak than to act. Failing in their attempt to convince Talkative that knowledge apart from faith and love is of no avail, and that words without deeds are

dead, Christian and Faithful depart from him, whom they consider 'a blot' (p. 85) upon their company. Although they may be accused of self-righteousness in their attitude towards Talkative, as members of 'the Fellowship of the Godly' they are intensely concerned about those who 'stumble the World, blemish Christianity, and grieve the Sincere' (p. 85). This tendency of the elect to shun those who do not share their religious and moral views was evident in the revival of the Puritan ethic during the Victorian period.

Evangelist, who joins them next, commends them for their victory in past trials and exhorts them to continue the race so that they may win the crown of life: 'set your faces like a flint, you have all power in Heaven and Earth on your side' (p. 87). His words about tribulations yet to come foreshadow Faithful's sacrificial death in Vanity Fair: 'He that shall die there, although his death will be unnatural, and his pain perhaps great, he will yet have the better of his fellow; not only because he will be arrived at the Coelestial City soonest, but because he will escape many miseries that the other will meet with in the rest of his Journey' (p. 87). Vanity Fair, with its display of worldly wares and temptations, has an alien aspect in the eyes of Christian and Faithful, who declare themselves to be 'Pilgrims and Strangers in the world', travelling 'to their own Countrey, which was the Heavenly Jerusalem' (p. 90). Victorian novelists, as familiar with Bunyan as they were with the Bible, frequently reveal in their work the same distrustful attitude towards the earthly city that is found in The Pilgrim's Progress. In the episode set in Vanity Fair, Bunyan makes his most emphatic statement about the conflict between the way of the spirit and the way of the world. Faithful, after being tried by a jury consisting of Mr Blind-man,

Mr No-good, Mr Malice, Mr Love-lust, Mr Live-loose, Mr Heady, Mr High-mind, Mr Enmity, Mr Liar, Mr Cruelty, Mr Hate-light, and Mr Implacable, and condemned to die a martyr's death, is immediately 'carried up through the Clouds, with sound of Trumpet, the nearest way to the Coelestial Gate' (p. 97). Christian continues his pilgrimage with hope in his heart and with the knowledge that his companion has entered heaven: 'Sing, Faithful, sing; and let thy name survive; / For though they kill'd thee, thou art yet alive' (p. 98). The death of Faithful brings Christian the company of Hopeful, who, inspired by the victory of good over evil at Vanity Fair, enters into 'a brotherly covenant' (p. 98) with him. Out of death, Bunyan declares, comes new life and out of faith comes hope.

Significantly, the first person encountered outside Vanity Fair is By-ends, who refuses to subscribe to a religion which has at its centre suffering and sacrifice: 'First, we never strive against Wind and Tide. Secondly, we are alwayes most zealous when Religion goes in his Silver Slippers; we love much to walk with him in the Street, if the Sun shines, and the people applaud it' (p. 99). In The Pilgrim's Progress, however, and indeed in Victorian fiction suffering is extolled as a means of spiritual awakening. By-ends meets his fate at Lucre, where, turning aside to see the silver-mine guarded by Demas, he falls into the pit. At the sight of the pillar of salt, which reminds them of Lot's wife, who looked back 'with a covetous heart, when she was going from Sodom for safety' (p. 109), Christian and Hopeful determine to keep to the narrow way and to look ahead. However, by taking By Path Meadow they soon find themselves in difficulty and are captured by Giant Despair, who casts them into a dark dungeon in Doubting Castle. Ordering them to commit suicide, the giant discovers

that they are 'sturdy Rogues, they chuse rather to bear all hardship, than to make away themselves' (p. 117). In their extremity the prisoners spend an entire night in prayer, and before dawn Christian realizes that he has all the while had in his possession a key called Promise, which releases them from the captivity of Giant Despair and his wife, Mrs Diffidence. True to the Puritan tradition, Bunyan insists that the individual bears the responsibility for making of life a heaven or a hell.

At the Delectable Mountains the two travellers confront the agony of those who commence the pilgrimage but submit to temptation and danger along the way and, therefore, fail to reach their destination. Bunyan repeatedly affirms that not all who set out as pilgrims remain faithful to their journey's end. But, to ensure that Christian and Hopeful retain a clear vision of the Celestial City, the shepherds of the Delectable Mountains invite them to use their 'Perspective Glass' (p. 122), through which 'they thought they saw something like the Gate, and also some of the Glory of the place' (p. 123). Thereby inspirited, they continue as 'footmen' (p. 131) towards their heavenly home. Bunyan undoubtedly has in mind at this point in his narrative Jeremiah's question to the people of the covenant: 'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?' (Jeremiah 12. 5). Their enthusiasm is shortly afterwards severely tested by Atheist, for whom the Celestial City is non-existent: 'I laugh to see what ignorant persons you are, to take upon you so tedious a Journey; and yet are like to have nothing but your travel for your paines' (p. 135). According to Frye, 'the radical difference between the errant Christian and the apostates of the Pilgrim's Progress' is that 'the Christian may leave the way, but

the false pilgrims repudiate the goal'.¹⁵ As the Enchanted Ground is reached, the temptation to rest by the wayside again assails the pilgrims, but discourse on their progress keeps them alert and active. Reflection upon the work of Christ as Mediator between God and humanity hastens them on towards the heavenly kingdom, where they shall dwell with their Lord.

From the land of Beulah, which is on the borders of heaven, the Celestial City can be seen. The name Beulah, mentioned in Isaiah 62. 4, means 'married', and Bunyan employs the wedding motif to signify the marriage of heaven and earth: 'the contract between the Bride and the Bridgroom was renewed: Yea here, as the Bridegroom rejoiceth over the Bride, so did their God rejoyce over them' (p. 155). Overcome by the delights and splendour of the city they are about to enter, Christian and Hopeful 'with desire fell sick . . . crying out because of their pangs, If you see my Beloved, tell him that I am sick of love' (p. 155). The Celestial City is so brilliant with the reflection of the sun upon its pure gold, pearls, and precious stones that it is beheld by approaching pilgrims through a special instrument. Whereas the view from the Delectable Mountains is a dim one, that from Beulah is dazzling, suggestive of the glory that increases with each step towards the City of God. The pilgrims now 'see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face' (I Corinthians 13. 12).

At the river over which there is no bridge Christian again becomes despondent and is almost submerged by fears that he will never safely reach the other side. But at Hopeful's reassuring words that

¹⁵God, Man, and Satan, p. 132.

he is not forsaken by God, Christian exclaims: 'Oh I see him again! and he tells me, When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the Rivers, they shall not overflow thee' (p. 158). Christian's final encounter with despair is similar to that experienced by Bunyan himself: 'Of all the Temptations that ever I met with in my life, to question the being of God, and the truth of his Gospel, is the worst, and worst to be born; when this temptation comes, it takes away my girdle from me, and removeth the foundations from under me'.¹⁶ Bunyan's pilgrims are inspired not so much by a system of belief as by a Person and a Way. The triumphal entry of Christian and Hopeful into the heavenly Jerusalem is accompanied by the jubilant strains of trumpets and the ringing of bells, but above all, by 'the warm and joyful thoughts that they had about their own dwelling there, with such company, and that for ever and ever' (p. 161). Part One of The Pilgrim's Progress ends on an exuberant note of victory. As the gates of the city close behind Christian and Hopeful, the chorus of praise from Revelation 5. 13 lingers in the celestial air: 'Blessing, Honour, Glory, and Power, be to him that sitteth upon the Throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever' (p. 162).

II. Part Two

Part Two of The Pilgrim's Progress, published in 1684, six years after Part One, also takes the form of a dream. Christiana, who earlier mocked her husband's quest of the Celestial City as pure folly,

¹⁶John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, edited by Roger Sharrock (Oxford, 1962), p. 102.

has a premonitory dream by which she is awakened to the darkness of her own spiritual position in contrast to that of Christian. Through the personal invitation of the King of Heaven to go on pilgrimage to his city and 'to dwell in his Presence with Joy, forever', she decides immediately to begin the journey in the knowledge that 'the bitter is before the sweet' (p. 180) and that the way will not be easy. As Bunyan constantly affirms, the initiative for the pilgrimage always comes from God. Christiana departs for her new country on a 'Sun-Shine Morning' (p. 183), full of promise. Sharrock claims that 'the earlier pilgrims are moving to a goal; their dynamic creed makes every part of life a preparation, a hindrance, or a test. Christiana and her family saunter towards the promised land'.¹⁷ Whereas Christian's progress is more theologically complex, that of his wife and children, however, has more human interest. ^PAlthough her neighbours deride Christiana as a 'blind and foolish Woman', who will not 'take warning by her Husband's Afflictions' (p. 184), Mercy does not hesitate to accompany her friend on pilgrimage. Like Ruth, who would not allow Naomi to travel alone, she leaves behind country and kindred for love of her neighbour and for love of her own soul. In the earlier narrative the relationship of the pilgrims to God is of primary significance, but in the latter the relationship of the pilgrims with each other is dominant. Her affection for Christiana eventually leads Mercy to love of Christ. 'The beauty of a purely human friendship is presented',

¹⁷ John Bunyan, p. 152.

writes Sharrock, 'as something capable of development into Christian fellowship'.¹⁸ Mercy's violent knocking at the Wicket Gate, as described by Christiana, reveals her eagerness to avail herself of the promise of eternal life: 'Can you not tell how you knocked? I am sure your knocks were so earnest, that the very sound of them made me start. I thought I never heard such knocking in all my Life. I thought you would a come in by violent hand, or a took the Kingdom by storm' (p. 191). In Bunyan's outlook women as well as men are to be wholeheartedly engaged in the spiritual pilgrimage. Setting out from the Wicket Gate, Christiana sings:

Our Tears to joy, our fears to Faith
Are turned, as we see: / Thus our
beginning, (as one saith,) / Shews
what our end will be. (p. 193)

Ⓟ Christiana's boys partake of the fruit overhanging the wall which bounds their narrow way but discover later that it belongs to Beelzebub's orchard and causes severe illness. Whenever pilgrims transgress the devil's territory, Bunyan insists, they are forced to halt in their onward march until the way is again clearly seen through the tears of repentance. At the House of the Interpreter Christiana is warmly welcomed because of her husband, who journeyed ahead of her. But, although the route is the same, the experiences encountered differ greatly. As the two parts of the work indicate, the crown of Life cannot be won vicariously: Christian and Christiana must go on pilgrimage individually. After viewing the same 'Significant Rooms' (p. 199) that were shown to Christian, Christiana and her company see

¹⁸Roger Sharrock, John Bunyan: The Pilgrim's Progress, Studies in English Literature, 27 (London, 1966), p. 47.

an additional figure, that of 'a man that could look no way but downwards, with a Muckrake in his hand' (p. 199). Having a task but no vision, this tragic individual, whose gaze is riveted to the earth, is most likely intended to warn Christiana and Mercy, who may be more concerned with matters of mundane and practical importance than are the men who precede them on the journey of faith. The emblems of the spiritual life presented to the women and children, such as the man who rakes the floor, the spider that chooses the best room in the King's house, the hen that calls her chickens to her, the butcher who slaughters the sheep, the flowers that beautify the garden in harmonious diversity, the field from which wheat and corn are harvested and the straw remains, the robin with a spider in its mouth, and the tree which is rotten inside, have a domestic or local significance.

Prior to their departure from the House of the Interpreter the pilgrims bathe in the garden and, like Cain, receive the mark of the seal 'that they might be known in the Places whither they were yet to go' (p. 207). They are also granted the company of Mr Greatheart, a servant of the Interpreter, who becomes their friend and defender. Despite his conviction that women and children are invited on the pilgrimage, Bunyan seems to fear that they are incapable of travelling alone and thus gives them every possible means of assistance. In Sharrock's opinion, 'it is Greatheart, not Christiana, who is the real successor to Christian in Part Two'.¹⁹ In the arbour of the Hill of Difficulty Mr Greatheart explains the precarious nature of pilgrimage:

¹⁹John Bunyan, p. 144.

Some sleep, when they should keep awake;
 and some forget, when they should remember;
 and this is the very cause, why often at
 the resting places, some Pilgrims in some
 things come off losers. Pilgrims should
 watch and remember what they have already
 received under their greatest enjoyments:
 But for want of doing so, oft times their
 rejoicing ends in Tears, and their Sun-shine
 in a Cloud. (p. 217)

^PWearied by their journey, the pilgrims find rest and further sustenance at the Palace Beautiful. As at the House of the Interpreter, where minstrels play during meals, so here the sound of music accompanies their visit: 'Wonderful! Musick in the House, Musick in the Heart, and Musick also in Heaven, for joy that we are here' (p. 222). Also, as at the House of the Interpreter, where 'one smiled, and another smiled, and they all smiled for Joy that Christiana was become a Pilgrim' (p. 199), at the Palace Beautiful the atmosphere is, in the words of Ola Elizabeth Winslow, one of 'a smiling journey'.²⁰ Mercy, dreaming of her welcome as a daughter at the Throne of Grace, laughs in her sleep. In this case the dream is a means of conveying a sense of the abundant life that awaits the faithful pilgrim: 'Our Heart oft times wakes when we sleep, and God can speak to that, either by Words, by Proverbs, by Signs, and Similitudes, as well as if one was awake' (p. 223). The short-lived courtship of Mercy by Mr Brisk, who finds her 'a pretty lass; but troubled with ill Conditions' (p. 227), provides an element of humour which is generally lacking in the first part of the work.

In contrast to Christian's encounter with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation, peaceful contemplation of spiritual truths marks

²⁰Ola Elizabeth Winslow, John Bunyan (New York, 1961), p. 184.

Christiana's passage through this area, which proves either a testing-ground or a blessing, according to the degree of humility possessed by the wayfarer. The women and children are afflicted by fear rather than by pride. Mr Honest's account of the journey of Mr Fearing, who 'was always afraid that he should come short of whither he had a desire to go' (p. 249), inspires the fearful to venture through the midst of danger. Mr Honest also tells his companions of the great diversity of temperament he has noticed in those who go on pilgrimage: 'I have seen some that have set out as if they would drive all the World afore them. Who yet have in few days, dyed as they in the Wilderness, and so never gat sight of the promised Land. I have seen some that have promised nothing at first setting out to be Pilgrims, and that one would a thought could not have lived a day, that have yet proved very good Pilgrims' (pp. 257-58).

At the inn the journeying band is further strengthened in faith by Gaius's remembrance of Christian and his ancestors, who trod the path of pilgrimage and martyrdom. As the exiled Israelites gained renewed hope of a return to their own country through their cultic memory of the patriarchs and prophets, Christiana's sons are encouraged by Gaius to 'bear up their Fathers Name, and tread in their Fathers Steps, and come to their Fathers End' (p. 260). Gaius, moreover, does not neglect the role of women as partners in the spiritual pilgrimage:

I will say again, that when the Saviour was come, Women rejoiced in him, before either Man or Angel. I read not that ever any man did give unto Christ so much as one Groat, but the Women followed him, and ministred to him of their Substance. 'Twas a Woman that washed his Feet with Tears, and a Woman that anointed his Body to the Burial. They were Women that wept when he was going to the Cross; And Women

that followed him from the Cross, and that sat by his Sepulcher when he was buried. They were Women that was first with him at his Resurrection morn, and Women that brought Tidings first to his Disciples that he was risen from the Dead. Women therefore are highly favoured, and shew by these things that they are sharers with us in the Grace of Life. (p. 261)

Monica Furlong refers to Bunyan's deep identification with his female characters: 'No trace of patronage appears in his attitude. He takes their pilgrimage with entire seriousness, yet there is a kind of gaiety, almost a frivolity, which creeps into the book'.²¹ Although his delineation of the stages of pilgrimage was ingrained in their literary consciousness, the Victorians appeared to be less influenced by Bunyan in their thinking about women than they were by Milton.

Whereas in the first part of the work the predominant emphasis is on courage and strength, in the second it is on timidity and weakness. Christiana and her companions are joined by Mr Feeblemind, 'a man of no strength at all, of Body, nor yet of Mind' (p. 267), and by Mr Ready-to-halt with his crutches. Those with infirmities are also invited on the pilgrimage and are to be supported by the more confident and vigorous. Mr Greatheart's promise to Mr Feeblemind expresses the concerned and loving attitude of the Christian community towards the physically, mentally, and spiritually impaired: 'we will wait for you, we will lend you our help, we will deny our selves of some things, both Opinionative and Practical, for your sake; we will not enter into doubtful Disputations before you, we will be made all things to you, rather than you shall be left behind' (p. 271). This

²¹Puritan's Progress, p. 117.

expression of human sympathy caused Winslow to characterize the spirit of Part Two as that of 'a gathered church'.²²

At the home of Mr Mnason this 'company of Strangers' who have 'come from afar, and are going to Mount Sion' (p. 274), finds in shared recollection and faith in one Lord encouragement for the ongoing pilgrimage. Mr Honesty summarizes for those gathered around their host's table the vicissitudes of pilgrimage:

Sometimes our way is clean, sometimes foul;
sometimes up-hill, sometimes down-hill; We
are seldom at a Certainty. The Wind is not
always on our Backs, nor is every one a
Friend that we meet with in the Way. We
have met with some notable Rubs already;
and what are yet behind we know not, but
for the most part we find it true, that
has been talked of of old, A good Man must
suffer Trouble. (p. 275)

To Mr Love-saint's censure of those who 'rather declare themselves Strangers to Pilgrimage, then Strangers and Pilgrims in the Earth', Mr Dare-not-ly replies: 'Tis true; they neither have the Pilgrims Weed, nor the Pilgrims Courage; they go not uprightly, but all awrie with their Feet, one Shoo goes inward, an other outward, and their Hosen out behind' (p. 277). In this graphic image of a pilgrim who makes little progress because his feet point in different directions Bunyan's humour is at its best.

In the meadow by the riverside close to the Delectable Mountains the pilgrims find peace and restoration, depicted in the pastoral imagery of the Bible:

There were Cotes and Folds for Sheep, an
House built for the nourishing and bringing
up of those Lambs, the Babes of those Women
that go on Pilgrimage. Also there was here

²² John Bunyan, p. 188.

one that was intrusted with them, who could have compassion, and that could gather these Lambs with his Arm, and carry them in his Bosom, and that could gently lead those that were with young. (p. 280)

The basic pattern of The Pilgrim's Progress is that a period of refreshment for the pilgrim is inevitably followed by a trial or temptation. From the tranquillity of the meadow 'where they might lie down safely' (p. 280) they come to By Path Meadow, where they confront the giant who terrorizes pilgrims. Mr Greatheart, Mr Honest, and Christiana's four sons free from Doubting Castle Mr Despondency and his daughter, Much Afraid, who join the pilgrims in a dance of celebration, like that performed by Miriam and the Hebrews following their safe crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15. 20). In the palace of the Delectable Mountains Mercy requests the shepherds to give her the mirror which would reveal one's countenance on one side, and on the other 'would shew one the very Face and Similitude of the Prince of Pilgrims himself' (p. 287). The mirror signifies that the human is fully revealed only in the light of the divine and that Christ unites in his own personality heaven and earth, the sacred and the secular.

As the end of the journey draws near, the pilgrims are heartened by the faith of Mr Valiant-for-Truth, who witnesses to the importance of resolve on the part of those who have the Celestial City as their goal:

Who would true Valour see
Let him come hither;
One here will Constant be,
Come Wind, come Weather.
There's no Discouragement,
Shall make him once Relent,
His first avow'd Intent,
 To be a Pilgrim. (p. 295)

The Enchanted Ground, with its alluring arbour, is 'placed almost at the end of the Way' (p. 298) and is overgrown with briars and thorns, representing the suffering which must be borne before the crown of glory may be attained. Vigilance, Christiana realizes, is especially necessary towards the end of the race, 'for when, thinks the Enemy, will these Fools be so desirous to sit down, as when they are weary; and when so like to be weary, as when almost at their Journys end?' (p. 298). Symbolically, Mr Standfast appears before the final difficulty, that of crossing the river, is encountered. Christiana's pilgrimage began with her response to a personal invitation, and it closes with her acceptance of the love offered her by the Heavenly King: 'The Token was, An Arrow with a Point sharpened with Love, let easily into her Heart, which by degrees wrought so effectually with her, that at the time appointed she must be gone' (pp. 304-5). Her parting words, 'I come Lord, to be with thee and bless thee', and those of Mr Standfast, 'Take me, for I come unto thee', reflect the responsive action that is integral to the spiritual pilgrimage, while Mr Ready-to-halt's 'Welcome Life' and Mr Despondency's 'Farewel Night, welcome Day' (pp. 306, 311, 307-8) reveal the joy and affirmation with which the journey ends. The progress of each pilgrim into the nearer presence of God is greeted with an exultant fanfare and the flinging wide of the gates of Eternal Life. If the music which accompanies the pilgrimage is at times in a muted minor key, it changes to a distinct major key when the midnight of spiritual dimness and incompleteness becomes the dawn of spiritual illumination and maturity.

Part Two concludes with reference to those still engaged in the pilgrimage upon earth but inspired by those who have reached the

heavenly realm, thereby linking the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. 'By the device of two juxtaposed narratives', Frye points out, 'Bunyan provides a stereoscopic view of the Christian life, fully three-dimensional and vital in its perspectives, expressing both the individual and the corporate aspects of the pilgrimage'.²³ The Pilgrim's Progress, therefore, embraces secular and sacred, dream and reality, action and response, youth and age, weakness and strength, and person and community.

²³God, Man, and Satan, p. 97.

CHAPTER 3

HYMNS

The dominance of the pilgrimage motif in hymns sung by the Victorians reflects the extent to which the Bible and The Pilgrim's Progress influenced the thought of the era. The hymn, which in its English manifestation reached its peak in production and popularity between 1750 and 1850, became an important secondary source of the pilgrimage theme for the Victorian novelist. Uniting the faith of the ages and the faith of the present, the hymn presents in poetic form the various stages and the goal of the pilgrimage.

According to John Brownlie, the nineteenth century produced 'a mighty army of hymn-writers', 194 of whom are represented in The Church Hymnary by no fewer than 406 hymns, including translations, amounting to roughly two-thirds of the book.¹ It was, however, not until the middle of the century that hymn-singing was introduced on a general scale into the Nonconformist churches of England.² This hesitation in adopting the use of hymns may be attributed mainly to Calvin's

¹John Brownlie, The Hymns and Hymn Writers of The Church Hymnary (London, 1899), pp. 187, 113.

²The Hymns and Hymn Writers of The Church Hymnary, p. 111.

insistence that songs bearing the definite authority of scripture are alone acceptable in public worship. Congregational singing was thus limited, until the beginning of the eighteenth century, to metrical versions of the Psalms, 'the oldest hymn book in existence'.³

Isaac Watts, whose Psalms and Hymns continued in use, either alone or supplemented, far into the nineteenth century, is known as 'the Father of English Hymnody'.⁴ In his Preface to Hymns and Spiritual Songs, published in 1707, he comments on the unsatisfactory state of the psalmody of his day:

I have been long convinc'd, that one great Occasion of this Evil arises from the Matter and Words to which we confine all our Songs. Some of 'em are almost opposite to the Spirit of the Gospel: Many of them foreign to the State of the New-Testament, and widely different from the present Circumstances of Christians. Hence it comes to pass that when spiritual Affections are excited within us, and our souls are raised a little above this earth in the beginning of a Psalm, we are check'd on a sudden in our Ascent toward Heaven by some Expressions that are more suited to the Days of Carnal Ordinances, and fit only to be sung in the Worldly Sanctuary.⁵

Later hymn-writers are indebted to Watts's efforts to raise the level of diction in sacred song and to create a new expression of Christian experience. His concern that a hymn's lyrics portray more accurately a worshipping community's spiritual aspirations and earthly realities marks him as a forerunner of those who have sought to make the hymn a means of linking the sacred and the secular.

³ Benjamin Brawley, History of the English Hymn (New York, 1932), p. 14.

⁴ Albert Edward Bailey, The Gospel in Hymns: Backgrounds and Interpretations (New York, 1950), p. 48.

⁵ Quoted in History of the English Hymn, pp. 69-70.

Olney Hymns, produced jointly by John Newton and William Cowper, and published in 1779, had a decided impact upon the Victorians. This collection, which became the acknowledged hymn-book of the Evangelical party within the Church of England, was still being reprinted a hundred years after publication.⁶ The titles of its three sections, 'On Select Passages of Scripture', 'On Occasional Subjects', and 'On the Rise, Progress, Changes, and Comforts of the Spiritual Life', reveal the intent of the authors to apply the timeless truths of the Bible to the times in which they lived and to present the stages of the spiritual pilgrimage through the hymn of personal experience.⁷

Like those of Newton and Cowper, the hymns of Charles Wesley are largely autobiographical. Most of the 6500 hymns written by the eminent poet of Methodism portray with great fervour and spontaneity 'the ups and downs of the pilgrim progress'.⁸ The standard hymnal of Methodist congregations was A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists, published in 1780.⁹ James Martineau, editor of the hymn-book most widely used in Unitarian circles, Hymns for the Christian Church and Home, wrote in 1869 of his admiration for the Methodist collection: 'After the Scriptures, the Wesley Hymn Book

⁶The Gospel in Hymns, p. 128.

⁷William Cowper and John Newton, Olney Hymns: in Three Books, second edition (Glasgow, 1840), pp. 57, 189, 279.

⁸Louis F. Benson, The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship (Richmond, Virginia, 1915; reprint, 1962), p. 249.

⁹History of the English Hymn, p. 93.

appears to me the grandest instrument of popular religious culture that Christendom has ever produced'.¹⁰ In contrast to the Wesleyan hymn-books, which are arranged according to the pattern of spiritual growth each Christian pilgrim is expected to follow, Hymns Ancient and Modern, published in 1861, is organized along liturgical lines and intended to be a companion volume to the Book of Common Prayer. The widespread favour in which this work was held is revealed by the results of an official enquiry made about 1895, indicating that 'in 13,639 churches no less than 10,340 used Hymns ancient and modern'.¹¹ The value to be gained from a study of the selection and compilation of hymns as a guide to understanding a particular era's theological and practical approach to the spiritual pilgrimage is recognized by G. Kitson Clark: 'Some day perhaps someone will realize how significant for the general social and intellectual history of England is the evidence that can be extracted from Hymns Ancient and Modern, and the collections which preceded it'.¹²

To the Oxford Movement credit is due for the enhancement of the literary quality of English hymnody and the establishment of the liturgical hymn in worship. The scholarship and broad cultural appreciation of the Tractarian writers brought a new dignity and catholicity to the hymn. Translations of ancient Greek and Latin sources helped to enrich the Victorian sense of history by linking

¹⁰Quoted in The English Hymn, p. 249.

¹¹The English Hymn, p. 510.

¹²G. Kitson Clark, The English Inheritance: An Historical Essay (London, 1950), pp. 11-12.

the past and the present on a spiritual basis. The Christian Year, published in 1827 by John Keble, the founder of the Oxford Movement, was 'the most widely read book of religious verse of the century', and for the fifty years following its initial publication appeared in no fewer than three editions annually.¹³ Although he did not design his poems to be hymns as such, Keble stands in the very first rank of hymn-writers and must be acclaimed for his work which unites the theological and the literary. In the words of John Julian, 'what the Prayer Book is in prose, The Christian Year is in poetry'.¹⁴ The most notable characteristics of English hymnody of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are the renewed vision of the Church universal, evident in the liturgical hymn, and the vitality and authenticity of personal faith, evident in the evangelical hymn.

The outstanding English hymns are those which inspire the Church, engaged in a corporate pilgrimage, as well as the Church's members, engaged in individual pilgrimages. Hymns, described by Erik Routley as 'the folk-song of the church militant', are intended to impart vigour and solidarity to faithful soldiers of Christ, who are encouraged on their way by the witness of the Church triumphant.¹⁵ Past, present, and future are linked in Christian experience and the material realm assumes a spiritual significance, as indicated by the

¹³History of the English Hymn, p. 141.

¹⁴A Dictionary of Hymnology: Setting Forth the Origin and History of Christian Hymns of All Ages and Nations, edited by John Julian (London, 1892), pp. 611-12.

¹⁵Erik Routley, Hymns and Human Life, first edition (London, 1952), p. 3.

following anonymous hymn:

Far down the ages now,
 Much of her journey done,
 The pilgrim Church pursues her way
 Until her crown be won:
 The story of the past
 Comes up before her view;
 How well it seems to suit her still, --
 Old, and yet ever new!

'Tis the repeated tale
 Of sin and weariness,
 Of grace and love yet flowing down
 To pardon and to bless:
 No wider is the gate,
 No broader is the way,
 No smoother is the ancient path
 That leads to light and day.¹⁶

The biblical drama of redemption and its allegorical presentation by Bunyan offer rich scope for poetic development. If the Bible is regarded as the theological source of the way of Christian pilgrimage, The Pilgrim's Progress must surely be regarded as the literary source of the figure of the Christian pilgrim. The route of pilgrimage with its manifold challenges to the spirit has boundless appeal in the hymn-writer's creative imagination. The road along which the journey or search is enacted serves as the metaphorical framework for variation in individual experience and expression. A concern for continual advance on the path of pilgrimage and for evidence of increasing spiritual maturity as each new stage is reached is noted by Brownlie to be an intrinsic element of the nineteenth-century hymn:

'The spirit of the age is felt in its hymnody as in the departments of

¹⁶The Additional Hymn-Book, selected and arranged by Rev. J. C. Ryle, third edition (London, 1876), Hymn 250, p. 213.

science and literature in general--a spirit of progress and enterprise'.¹⁷ A sense of movement is indeed the outstanding feature of the hymns which most clearly reflect the era's preoccupation with progress; the pilgrim, whether the Church or the individual, is never portrayed at a standstill.

The pilgrim depicted in hymnody as one who strides through the wilderness of the world in quest of a better land appears to be modelled after Bunyan's Christian. With a burden on his back, a staff in his hand, and a song on his lips, the traveller pursues his arduous way, which is likened to a march, a race, and a test of endurance:

A scrip on my back, and a staff in my hand,
I march on in haste through an enemy's land;
The road may be rough, but it cannot be long,
And I smooth it with hope, and I cheer it with song.

Through the night of doubt and sorrow,
Onward goes the pilgrim band,
Singing songs of expectation,
Marching to the promised land.¹⁸

Despite his singing, the pilgrim is relieved when each stage of 'the weary homeward journey' is past and he is closer to his heavenly destination: 'No more these clouds and shadows shall darken all our sky; / No more these snares and stumbling-blocks across our path shall lie'.¹⁹ The way of pilgrimage is beset with thorn and thistle, trial and danger:

¹⁷The Hymns and Hymn Writers of The Church Hymnary, p. 187.

¹⁸Henry Francis Lyte, The Hymnal Companion to The Book of Common Prayer, edited by Edward Henry Bickersteth (London, 1880), Hymn 464; Ingemann, translated by Sabine Baring-Gould, Hymns for the Church and Home, selected and edited by Rev. W. Fleming Stevenson (London, 1873), Hymn 273, p. 153.

¹⁹The Additional Hymn-Book, Hymn 291, p. 249.

I thought that the course of the pilgrim to heaven
 Would be bright as the summer, and glad as the morn;
 Thou show'dst me the path--it was dark and uneven, --
 All rugged with rock, and all tangled with thorn.

I'm a pilgrim and a stranger,
 Rough and thorny is the road,
 Often in the midst of danger; --
 But it leads to God.
 Clouds and darkness oft distress me;
 Great and many are my foes;
 Anxious cares and thoughts oppress me; --
 But my Father knows.²⁰

In hymns of the Victorian period the Old Testament is drawn upon more substantially than the New. Imagery associated with the Exodus and the wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness is applied by many hymn-writers to the Christian pilgrimage:

The tedious pilgrimage is past,
 The forty years have reach'd a close,
 And happy Isra'l now at last
 Is destin'd to enjoy repose.

O God of Bethel, by whose hand
 Thy people still are fed;
 Who through this weary pilgrimage
 Hast all our fathers led

O spread Thy covering wings around
 Till all our wanderings cease,
 And at our Father's loved abode
 Our souls arrive in peace.²¹

Freed from bondage in Egypt, 'where death and darkness reign', the pilgrims 'haste with songs of joy' to 'Canaan's sacred bound', where

²⁰Pilgrim Lays (London, 1862), Hymn 14; The Additional Hymn-Book, Hymn 60, p. 49.

²¹Thomas Kelly, Hymns on Various Passages of Scripture (London, n.d.), Hymn CCCLIX, p. 359; Doddridge and Logan, Hymns for the Church and Home, Hymn 190, p. 105.

'peace and liberty are found'.²² Their vision of the promised land makes them 'partners in distress' and 'comrades through the wilderness'.²³ In the midst of the desert, however, God's guiding and restoring presence is made known:

This land, through which his pilgrims go,
Is desolate and dry;
But streams of grace from him o'erflow,
Their thirst to satisfy.

When troubles, like a burning sun,
Beat heavy on their head,
To this almighty Rock they run,
And find a pleasing shade.²⁴

Perhaps the most enduring hymn of pilgrimage which relates the Exodus to the universal experience of the human spirit is that written originally in Welsh by William Williams:

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven,
Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong Deliverer,
Be Thou still my strength and shield.²⁵

The recurring biblical metaphor of a rock as refuge often refers in

²²Thomas Kelly, The Church of England Hymnal, edited by Rev. Charles D. Bell and Rev. H. E. Fox (London, 1894), Hymn 413, pp. 308-9.

²³Charles Wesley, The Methodist Hymn-Book (London, 1904), Hymn 471, p. 398.

²⁴Newton, Olney Hymns, Hymn 59, pp. 111-12.

²⁵William Williams, translated by Peter Williams, The Church of England Hymnal, Hymn 401, p. 300.

hymnody to the Name and Cross of Christ:

Dear name! the rock on which I build,
 My shield and hiding-place;
 My never-failing treas'ry, fill'd
 With boundless stores of grace.

Beneath the cross of Jesus
 I fain would take my stand,---
 The shadow of a mighty rock
 Within a weary land;
 A home within a wilderness,
 A rest upon the way,
 From the burning of the noontide heat
 And the burden of the day.²⁶

A major emphasis of hymns either written or popularized during the nineteenth century is that upon the world as a mere place of sojourn: 'We're pilgrims in the desert, / Our dwelling is a camp'.²⁷ The concept of the Christian as a stranger and a pilgrim with no abiding city on earth, but rather seeking one that is to come, dominates hymns of pilgrimage: 'Strangers and pilgrims here below, / This earth, we know, is not our place'; 'Pilgrims fix not here their Home; / Strangers tarry but a Night'.²⁸ The world is also frequently described as 'a vale of tears, / By many a cloud o'ercast', where the darkness of sin and sorrow accompanies the pilgrim as he makes his way

²⁶Newton, Olney Hymns, Hymn 57, p. 110; Elizabeth Cecilia Clephane, Hymns Ancient and Modern for Use in the Services of the Church (London, 1889; reprint, 1906), Hymn 667, p. 549.

²⁷The Additional Hymn-Book, Hymn 169, p. 147.

²⁸Wesley, The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 610, p. 506; Robert Seagrave, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, for Christian Worship (London, 1860), Hymn VII, p. 8.

'with hope unchill'd, / By faith and not by sight':

I do not ask, O Lord, that life may be
 A pleasant road;
 I do not ask that thou wouldst take from me
 Aught of its load

I do not ask my cross to understand,
 My way to see;
 Better in darkness just to feel thy hand,
 And follow thee.²⁹

To be a pilgrim is to know the tribulations of human life but also to know that they can be overcome by divine assistance and transformed into means of spiritual fulfilment. The burden of guilt and frustration is removed by the grace of God:

Pilgrim, burdened with thy sin,
 Come the way to Zion's gate;
 Wait--till heavenly grace appears.

Oppressed with sin and woe,
 A burdened heart I bear,
 Opposed by many a mighty foe;
 But I will not despair.³⁰

The pilgrim is, therefore, at once burdened and free; he cannot escape the suffering that is part of humanity's earthly lot and yet he views that suffering from a heavenly perspective. It is his profound conviction that sorrow will somehow lead to joy and that these two

²⁹ Wesley, Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church, revised edition (New York, 1849), Hymn 747, p. 446; Adelaide Anne Procter, Christian Hymns, edited and arranged by Rev. Stopford A. Brooke (London, 1891), Hymn 153, pp. 140-41.

³⁰ George Crabbe, The Additional Hymn-Book, Hymn 39, p. 33; Anne Brontë, 'Confidence', The Complete Poems of Anne Brontë, edited by Clement Shorter (London, 1920), p. 70. This poem, written in 1845, appears in an adapted form in the Congregational Hymnary and Dr Hunter's Glasgow Hymnal.

threads are inextricably and, in human terms, inexplicably interwoven in the fabric of life. Affliction is thus welcomed as a form of spiritual discipline which leads to communion with the divine:

let each keen pain
And hour of woe be heavenly gain,
Each stroke of Thy chastising rod
Bring back the wanderer nearer God.³¹

In 'Last Lines', written in 1849, Anne Brontë expresses her bereavement after the death of her sister Emily and her agony of disappointment at the trial of illness she herself must undergo, but at the same time pleads for the insight and courage which will enable her to be 'more wise, more strengthened for the strife' and to 'gather fortitude from pain, / And hope and holiness from woe':

I hoped, that with the brave and strong,
My portioned task might lie;
To toil amid the busy throng,
With purpose pure and high. . . .

A dreadful darkness closes in
On my bewildered mind;
Oh, let me suffer and not sin,
Be tortured, yet resigned.

Shall I with joy thy blessings share
And not endure their loss?
Or hope the martyr's crown to wear
And cast away the cross?³²

Suffering as an integral element of the spiritual pilgrimage was taken for granted by the Victorians, in whose works the theme of mortality is central. Hymns which focus upon the transience of life and the mutability of earthly interests are to be found in abundance in hymn-books of the nineteenth century, and had a definite impact upon

³¹William Walsham How, The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 952, p. 794.

³²The Complete Poems of Anne Brontë, pp. 148-50. An abridged version of this poem is found in The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 816, pp. 675-76.

novelists and poets of the period. It is this particular emphasis upon the world as a place of sorrowful sojourn which created in Victorian thought the tension between appreciation of the secular and aspiration for the sacred. The prevalent view was that security, although fleeting on earth, is permanent in heaven:

Since sin has fill'd the earth with woe,
And creatures fade and die,
Lord, wean our hearts from things below,
And fix our hopes on high.

O be a nobler portion mine!
My God, I bow before Thy throne:
Earth's fleeting treasures I resign,
And fix my hope on Thee alone.³³

Reference is frequently made in hymns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to Christ as 'a pilgrim through this lonely world' and as 'a mourner all his life'.³⁴ God in the person of Christ shares in the human condition and suffers alongside mortals:

In every pang that rends the heart
The Man of sorrows had a part.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
All our weakness Thou dost know;
Thou didst tread this earth before us,
Thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Lone and dreary,
Faint and weary,
Through the desert Thou didst go.³⁵

By taking upon himself the sin of the world alienated from its Creator, Jesus is 'through suffering perfect made'.³⁶ Fully human and

³³Newton, Olney Hymns, Hymn 54, pp. 107-8; The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 818, p. 677.

³⁴The Evangelical Hymn-Book, compiled by John H. Rutherford (London, 1860), Hymn 570, p. 308.

³⁵Hymns Ancient and Modern for Use in the Services of the Church, compiled and arranged by William Henry Monk (London, 1861), Hymn 151; The Church of England Hymnal, Hymn 402, p. 301.

³⁶How, The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 952, p. 794.

fully divine, he is well acquainted with both the bitterness and the joy of life and has power to deliver pilgrims from all that would hinder them from completing their journey. Because he has travelled the route of pilgrimage and promises to accompany those who follow in his way, he may be trusted as 'Leader of faithful souls, and Guide / Of all that travel to the sky':

Thus every where we find our suffering God,
 And where He trod
 May set our steps.³⁷

Christ is at once the way and the destination, the Alpha and the Omega, of pilgrimage: 'How canst thou want if he provide, / Or lose thy way with such a guide?'; 'As my Guide, my Guard, my Friend, / Lead me to my journey's end'.³⁸ Through his victory Christian pilgrims are enabled to engage in the warfare of the spirit and to know ultimate triumph.

Wesley presents the divine-human encounter in the guise of a wrestling match, based upon Jacob's experience at the ford Jabbok (Genesis 32. 22-30):

Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,
 Whom still I hold, but cannot see;
 My company before is gone,
 And I am left alone with Thee;
 With Thee all night I mean to stay,
 And wrestle till the break of day. . . .

³⁷ Wesley, The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 610, p. 506; John Keble, The Christian Year: Thoughts in Verse for the Sundays and Holydays Throughout the Year (Oxford, 1873), p. 98.

³⁸ Newton, Olney Hymns, Hymn 40, p. 316; Hymn 31, p. 86.

In vain Thou strugglest to get free,
 I never will unloose my hold;
 Art Thou the Man that died for me?
 The secret of Thy love unfold;
 Westling, I will not let Thee go
 Till I Thy name, Thy nature know. . . .

What though my shrinking flesh complain,
 And murmur to contend so long,
 I rise superior to my pain;
 When I am weak then I am strong;
 And, when my all of strength shall fail,
 I shall with the God-Man prevail.³⁹

In his spiritual battle the pilgrim must first come face to face with God and with himself. Only then is he prepared to withstand any attack or overcome any impediment to his progress. Bunyan's portrayal of the Valley of the Shadow of Death and the enemy Apollyon is obviously the inspiration behind Cowper's hymn of spiritual conflict:

My soul is sad and much dismay'd;
 See, Lord, what legions of my foes,
 With fierce Apollyon at their head,
 My heavenly pilgrimage oppose!⁴⁰

The dichotomy between earth, where 'we wrestle with the foe', and heaven, where 'our conflicts cease', is stressed in many hymns which have as their theme the constancy of the battle and the endurance required for victory:

A soldier's march, from battles won
 To new-commencing strife,
 A pilgrim's, restless as the sun:
 Such is the Christian life. . . .

³⁹ Wesley, The Hymns and Hymn Writers of The Church Hymnary, pp. 136-37.

⁴⁰ Olney Hymns, Hymn 20, p. 298.

O let us seek the heavenly home,
 Revealed in sacred lore, --
 The land whence pilgrims never roam,
 Where soldiers fight no more.⁴¹

A recurring image in the hymnody familiar to the Victorians is that of the soldier 'girt with heavenly armour' and fighting valiantly until the day when he will exchange his 'sword for a harp, the cross for a crown', and will be greeted with 'the glad "Well done"'.⁴² Paul's exhortation to equip oneself with the whole panoply of God (Ephesians 6. 11-17) is the basis for a large number of hymns which serve as marching-songs for Christian pilgrims:

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
 And put your armour on,
 Strong in the strength which God supplies,
 Through His eternal Son.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
 Ye soldiers of the cross;
 Lift high His royal banner,
 It must not suffer loss. . . .

Put on the Gospel armour,
 Each piece put on with prayer;
 Where duty calls, or danger,
 Be never wanting there.⁴³

The imagery of warfare assumes both a mystical and a practical quality in William Blake's vision of the struggle which will fashion England,

⁴¹Kelly, Hymns on Various Passages of Scripture, Hymn CCLXVIII, p. 268; The Additional Hymn-Book, Hymn 41, p. 35.

⁴²John Brownlie, Pilgrim Songs, third series (London, 1892), p. 49; The Additional Hymn-Book, Hymn 29, p. 24; John Brownlie, Zionward: Hymns of the Pilgrim Life (London, 1890), p. 63.

⁴³Hymns for the Church and Home, Hymn 234, p. 130; Hymn 120, p. 372.

spiritually and socially, into the promised land:

And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic Mills? . . .

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green & pleasant Land.⁴⁴

It is ironic that the Victorians, who sang so heartily of the heavenly city, turned their earthly cities into a living hell for those who laboured in the factories.

Notwithstanding the intensity of affliction or the duration of conflict, Christians are encouraged to go onward, to affirm the challenge and the risk of pilgrimage:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on

So long thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on.⁴⁵

Many hymns are imbued with a sense of expanding spiritual consciousness and progressive movement:

⁴⁴William Blake, 'Milton', Blake: Complete Writings, edited by Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1966), p. 481. Although the poem was not popularized as a hymn until 1916, when it was set to the tune 'Jerusalem' by Sir Hubert Parry, and was not included in hymn-books before 1923, when it appeared in A Students' Hymnal, the final stanza was used by Stewart Headlam in the 1880s as a motto for the monthly paper of the Guild of St Matthew and was thereby widely known among Christian Socialists. Companion to Congregational Praise, edited by K. L. Parry (London, 1953), p. 312.

⁴⁵John Henry Newman, Christian Hymns, Hymn 129, p. 120.

Rise my Soul, and stretch thy Wings,
 Thy better Portion trace;
 Rise from transitory Things,
 Tow'rds Heav'n thy native Place. . . .

Rivers to the Ocean run,
 Nor stay in all their Course;
 Fire ascending seeks the Sun,
 Both speed them to their Source.
 So my Soul deriv'd from God,
 Pants to view his glorious Face;
 Forward tends to his Abode,
 To rest in his Embrace.⁴⁶

George Eliot appropriately has Adam Bede, at the outset of his spiritual awakening, sing 'Awake, my soul, and with the sun / Thy daily stage of duty run'.⁴⁷ The motto of pilgrims is 'Ever onward, ever upward: / Heaven is nearer than of old'.⁴⁸ Entrance to the celestial city is the 'fond desire' which bids the spirit wake and 'from the bondage of the world, / Its drowsy pinions shake'.⁴⁹ The example and the presence of Christ give assurance that the 'onward, upward, homeward' journey will be completed:

Forward! be our watchword,
 Steps and voices joined;
 Seek the things before us,
 Not a look behind;
 Burns the fiery pillar
 At our army's head;
 Who shall dream of shrinking,
 By our Captain led

⁴⁶ Seagrave, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Hymn VII, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Thomas Ken, The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 900, p. 749.

⁴⁸ Pilgrim Songs, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Pilgrim Songs, p. 13.

Thither, onward thither,
 In the Spirit's might;
 Pilgrims to your country,
 Forward into light.⁵⁰

Anne Brontë, in 'The Three Guides', written in 1847, selects the Spirit of Faith to lead her on her 'upward road':

Deserts beyond lie bleak and bare,
 And keen winds round us blow;
 But if thy hand conducts me there,
 The way is right, I know.
 I have no wish to turn away;
 My spirit does not quail, --
 How can it while I hear thee say,
 'Press forward and prevail!' . . .

Spirit of Faith, I'll go with thee!
 Thou, if I hold thee fast,
 Wilt guide, defend, and strengthen me,
 And bear me home at last.⁵¹

The Christian concept of spiritual pilgrimage is fundamentally paradoxical. What constitutes progress from a human perspective does not necessarily do so from a divine perspective. Among the greatest hymns are those which reflect upon the central paradox of the Christian faith, the humility which is majesty and the loss which is gain, most effectively expressed through the rhetorical figure of oxymoron:

Ride on, ride on in majesty;
 In lowly pomp ride on to die:
 Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain;
 Then take, O God, Thy power, and reign.

⁵⁰A. Midlane, Hymns for the Church and Home, Hymn 111, p. 366; Henry Alford, The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 619, pp. 513-14.

⁵¹The Complete Poems of Anne Brontë, pp. 126-27. The section of this poem commencing 'Spirit of Faith! be thou my guide' was abridged by James Martineau and Dr Hunter to form a hymn.

When I survey the wondrous cross,
 On which the Prince of glory died,
 My richest gain, I count but loss,
 And pour contempt on all my pride.⁵²

Many hymns reflect the biblical paradox that in seeming weakness God's strength is manifest and that the divine power is inseparable from sacrificial love. On the Cross the 'measureless Might' and 'ineffable Love' of God Incarnate are revealed, and the sacred and the secular are irrevocably united: 'Love divine, all love excelling, / Joy of heaven, to earth come down'.⁵³

Hymnists constantly assert that the love of God is a love which seeks out the lost. Humanity discovers in its alienation, as does the prodigal son of Jesus's parable (Luke 15. 17), that it has long since been embraced by a love that attracts but which will never compel:

O wandering souls in night oppressed!
 The Son of God hath found you;
 He heard your cry when sore distressed,
 And threw His love around you.

'Tis love that sought the wandering soul,
 'Tis love, 'tis love unbounded;
 'Tis higher than the clouds that roll,
 And deep as floods unsounded.

⁵²Henry Hart Milman, The Primitive Methodist Hymnal, edited by George Booth (London, 1889), Hymn 92, p. 68; Isaac Watts, The Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, of the Rev. Isaac Watts: To Which are Added, Select Hymns, From Other Authors; and Directions for Musical Expression, edited by Samuel Worcester, new edition, revised by Samuel M. Worcester (Boston, 1858), Hymn 7, p. 478.

⁵³Robert Grant, The Primitive Methodist Hymnal, Hymn 13, p. 8; Wesley, Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Hymn 498, p. 300.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed;
 But yet in love He sought me,
 And on His shoulder gently laid,
 And home rejoicing brought me.⁵⁴

Such 'amazing grace' restores to the 'poor, wretched, blind; / Sight, riches, healing of the mind'; God, who welcomes and redeems, offers the lost the 'breadth, length, depth, and height' of his 'free love'.⁵⁵ Only by responding to the prevenient God does the pilgrim make genuine spiritual progress. In human surrender to the divine will and to divine love is to be found the richest gain and deepest wisdom:

I once was lost, but now am found, --
 Was blind, but now I see.

O Love that wilt not let me go,
 I rest my weary soul in Thee:
 I give Thee back the life I owe,
 That in Thine ocean depths its flow
 May richer, fuller be.⁵⁶

To be a pilgrim in the footsteps of Jesus demands self-denial, which, in terms of the Christian journey, leads to self-fulfilment:

Jesus, I my cross have taken,
 All to leave and follow Thee;
 Destitute, despised, forsaken,
 Thou from hence my all shalt be:

⁵⁴Pilgrim Songs, pp. 33-34; Henry Williams Baker, The Church Hymnary, Hymn 219, p. 222.

⁵⁵Charlotte Elliott, Hymns for the Church and Home, Hymn 140, p. 78.

⁵⁶Newton, Olney Hymns, Hymn 41, p. 95; George Matheson, The Church Hymnary, Hymn 207, p. 211.

Perish every fond ambition,
 All I've sought, or hoped, or known;
 Yet how rich is my condition;
 God and heaven are still my own.⁵⁷

Total response to divine grace, says the hymn-writer, involves the whole personality and the whole of life; there is no portion of human existence which cannot be infused with the Spirit of God:

Bend, and mould, and fashion,
 Will and heart and mind; --
 Be Thy love, O Saviour,
 With our life entwined.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
 That were a present far too small;
 Love, so amazing, so divine,
 Demands my soul, my life, my all.⁵⁸

Hymns of consecration reflect the human desire for complete communion with the divine. This homesickness of the soul finds expression in Cowper's plea for 'a closer walk with God' and in Wesley's confession that he is 'weary of wandering' from his 'Friend before the throne of love'.⁵⁹ H. F. Lyte longs for the wings of a dove with which to soar unto the 'sheltering breast' of his Saviour: 'I flutter, I struggle, and long to get free; / I feel me a captive while banish'd from Thee'.⁶⁰ Fellowship between God and humanity is at once a present reality and a future hope. The pilgrim, therefore,

⁵⁷ Lyte, The Church of England Hymnal, Hymn 421, p. 314.

⁵⁸ Zionward, p. 64; Watts, Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, Hymn 7, p. 478.

⁵⁹ Olney Hymns, Hymn 3, p. 59; The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 338, p. 280.

⁶⁰ Pilgrim Lays, Hymn 75.

lives in a state of tension between the present and the future, between temporary strife and eternal peace. Although the Christian is already on the road of spiritual discovery in the presence of God, his journey does not end until he enters the nearer presence of the Infinite in the new Jerusalem.

This dual sense of glory which is appropriated in the daily life of the pilgrim and anticipated in the life to come gave rise to innumerable hymns extolling the splendours of Zion, 'that celestial hill', 'the mount of God':

Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God!
He, whose word cannot be broken,
Form'd thee for his own abode

Saviour, if of Zion's city
I through grace a member am,
Let the world deride or pity --
I will glory in thy name:
Fading is the worldling's pleasure, --
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.

Our heavenly habitation
Attracts our longing eyes;
In sweet anticipation
We view the glorious prize:
That glimpse our souls inflaming
With more intense desire,
All earthly hopes disclaiming,
They now to heaven aspire.⁶¹

⁶¹Wesley, The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 471, pp. 398-99; Newton, Olney Hymns, Hymn 60, pp. 112-13; John Burton, 'The Pilgrims' Song', The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle, new series (London, 1829), VII, 309-10.

For the Victorian singer of Christian hymns the heavenly mansion was the sure destination of pilgrimage and the reward for faithful endeavour on earth. References to the restorative powers of the City of God with its pleasures of light and sound are reminiscent of passages in Revelation and The Pilgrim's Progress:

See! the streams of living waters
 Springing from eternal love,
 Well supply thy sons and daughters,
 And all fear of want remove:
 Who can faint while such a river
 Ever flows their thirst t' assuage?
 Grace, which, like the Lord, the giver,
 Never fails from age to age.

No chilling winds, or pois'nous breath,
 Can reach that healthful shore;
 Sickness and sorrow, pain and death,
 Are felt and fear'd no more.

Though the mist hang o'er the river,
 And its billows loudly roar,
 Yet we hear the song of angels
 Wafted on the other shore.

Of the bright celestial city,
 We have caught such radiant gleams
 Of its towers, like dazzling sunlight,
 With its sweet and peaceful streams.⁶²

'Jerusalem the golden', written by Bernard of Cluny in about 1145 and translated by John Mason Neale in 1851, represents most clearly the type of hymn which appealed to the Victorians:

They stand, those halls of Zion,
 Conjubilant with song,
 And bright with many an angel,
 And all the martyr throng;

⁶²Newton, Olney Hymns, Hymn 60, p. 112; Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Hymn 931, p. 555; Hymns of Progress: A Compilation from the Best Authors (London, 1884), Hymn 162, p. 83.

The Prince is ever in them;
 The daylight is serene;
 The pastures of the blessed
 Are decked in glorious sheen.⁶³

In this 'land of pure delight' the pilgrim-saints, 'lost in wonder, love, and praise', receive their crowns from 'Christ, Whose glory fills the skies, / Christ, the true, the only Light'.⁶⁴ Zion is portrayed as the ideal city and the ideal home, where 'Jesus the Forerunner waits / To welcome travellers'.⁶⁵ Here are found security and peace, never fully realized upon the 'desert drear':

Heaven is my fatherland,
 Heaven is my home.

Nor heaven have I, nor place to lay my head,
 Nor home, but Thee.⁶⁶

Here also the pilgrim knows his Lord even as he himself is known. The joy of full recognition at the last has been expressed in hymns written ever since the dawn of the Christian era, when Augustine described the human pilgrimage as a restlessness to behold the face of God:

My thirsty spirit pants for thee,
 To reach this promised rest;
 O when shall I thy glory see,
 And be for ever blest. . . .

⁶³The Church Hymnary, Hymn 334, p. 345.

⁶⁴Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Hymn 930, p. 554; Hymn 498, p. 300; Wesley, Hymns Ancient and Modern, 1861 edition, Hymn 5.

⁶⁵Watts, Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, Hymn 53, p. 406.

⁶⁶T. R. Taylor, The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 632, p. 524; Christina Rossetti, The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 520, p. 439.

There I shall ever see thy face;
 Supremely happy be;
 Shall sing the wonders of thy grace,
 Through all eternity.⁶⁷

Wesley speaks of meeting his 'Captain in the skies', and Tennyson is confident that he will see his 'Pilot face to face'.⁶⁸

This hope of communion with God, the culmination of all human journeying, results in a marked emphasis in hymns upon the significance of time. Contemplation of the temporal and the eternal has inspired one of the hymns most frequently sung by the Victorians:

Our God, our help in ages past,
 Our hope for years to come;
 Our shelter from the stormy blast,
 And our eternal home. . . .

A thousand ages, in thy sight,
 Are like an evening gone;
 Short as the watch that ends the night,
 Before the rising sun. . . .

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
 Bears all its sons away;
 They fly, forgotten, as a dream
 Dies at the opening day.⁶⁹

Watts's version of Psalm 90 offers the assurance that God's overarching love and wisdom link the past, present, and future. Embracing all of history and affirming divine guidance in human affairs, this hymn has been called 'the second national anthem of England'.⁷⁰ Popularized

⁶⁷Sacred Songs for Christian Pilgrims, Hymn 174, pp. 236-37.

⁶⁸The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 610, p. 507; Hymn 819, p. 677.

⁶⁹Watts, Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, Psalm 90, p. 186.

⁷⁰The Gospel in Hymns, p. 56.

by means of its inclusion in Hymns Ancient and Modern, it served as an appropriate tribute to the faith of the Victorians when sung at the funeral of their Queen on 2 February 1901.⁷¹

Hymns contributed to the Victorian awareness of the brevity of life and the vital importance of each moment:

O Time, how few thy value weigh!
How few will estimate a day

For nobler cares, for joys sublime,
He fashioned all the sons of time;
Pilgrims on earth; but soon to be --
The heirs of immortality.⁷²

The urgency for decision which pervades the Bible and The Pilgrim's Progress is also conveyed by the Victorian hymn. Christians are constantly reminded that 'now is th' accepted time, / Now is the day of grace':

This is that moment, -- who can tell
Whether it leads to heaven or hell?
This is that moment, -- as we choose
The immortal soul we save or lose.

Time past and time to come are not;
Time present is our only lot;
O God! henceforth our hearts incline
To seek no other love than thine.⁷³

⁷¹Hymns and Human Life, pp. 268, 278.

⁷²Scott, Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, Hymn 216, pp. 640-41.

⁷³Dobell, Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, Hymn 302, p. 685; James Montgomery, Original Hymns, for Public, Private, and Social Devotion (London, 1853), Hymn CCXXIV, pp. 223-24.

Time, the hymnist declares, is to be measured in terms of quality rather than of quantity. Life is experienced most abundantly and most intensely when lived in the knowledge of the divine presence. Only in this union of the secular and the sacred does the soul in all its restless searching find peace:

My times are in Thy hand:
 My God, I wish them there;
 My life, my friends, my soul I leave
 Entirely to Thy care. . . .

My times are in Thy hand:
 I'll always trust in Thee;
 And, after death, at Thy right hand
 I shall for ever be.⁷⁴

In the fulness of time, declare the hymnists, will arise a new heaven and a new earth, the final goal of the spiritual pilgrimage:

Heaven and earth must pass away,
 Songs of praise shall crown that day;
 God will make new heavens, new earth,
 Songs of praise shall hail their birth.

But even while the world came forth
 In all the beauty of its birth,
 In Thy deep thought Thou didst behold
 Another world of nobler mould.

For Thou didst will that Christ should frame
 A new creation by His Name.⁷⁵

The new kingdom inaugurated by Christ is embodied in the Church, which is entrusted with the gift of the Holy Spirit and also with the task of perfecting the new creation. The Christian community, while in itself a mere reflection of what God intends it to be, is the means

⁷⁴William Freeman Lloyd, The Church Hymnary, Hymn 288, p. 294.

⁷⁵Hymns for the Church and Home, Hymn 237, p. 131; Hymns Ancient and Modern, 1861 edition, Hymn 69.

whereby Creator and created may be reunited:

The Church's one foundation
 Is Jesus Christ her Lord:
 She is His new creation
 By water and the word;
 From heaven He came and sought her
 To be His holy bride;
 With His own blood He bought her,
 And for her life He died.⁷⁶

The metaphor of marriage, which recurs throughout Victorian hymnody, indicates the new covenant of love, ordained by Christ and expressed through the Church. In the world, and yet not of the world, the Body of Christ, as the bearer of divine love, participates in the sanctification of the secular, and yet, as God's partner in bringing to maturity the new creation, can never be concerned purely with the spiritual as opposed to the material. According to Routley, Wesley's phrase 'changed from glory into glory' refers to the Church's revelation of its Lord to the world which he so loved: 'there is no progress but this, there is no making of history but through this process'.⁷⁷ Most Victorian hymns, however, reflect the Church's other-worldly vision rather than its sense of caring for this world. In contrast to this general tendency are two hymns notable for their emphasis upon the secular world as the realm of God's active concern, 'Behold us, Lord, a little space', written for a weekday service in a London church, and 'From Thee all skill and science flow', written for

⁷⁶S. J. Stone, The Church Hymnary, Hymn 454, pp. 460-61.

⁷⁷Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Hymn 498, p. 300; Erik Routley, Hymns and the Faith (London, 1955), p. 140.

the founding of a workingmen's hospital:

Around us rolls the ceaseless tide
Of business, toil, and care;
And scarcely can we turn aside
For one brief hour of prayer. . . .

Thine is the loom, the forge, the mart,
The wealth of land and sea;
The worlds of science and of art,
Reveal'd and ruled by Thee. . . .

Work shall be prayer, if all be wrought
As Thou wouldst have it done;
And prayer, by Thee inspired and taught,
Itself with work be one.

And hasten, Lord, that perfect day
When pain and death shall cease,
And Thy just rule shall fill the earth
With health and light and peace;

When ever blue the sky shall gleam,
And ever green the sod,
And man's rude work deface no more
The Paradise of God.⁷⁸

Although the process of restoration has begun, the Victorians were conscious that humanity is in the making still, and that the world, fragmented and anguished, is yet to be made whole. The new creation, the consummation of history, is, however, glimpsed, albeit darkly, in signs of present renewal which serve as a foretaste of the new life to come:

New every morning is the love
Our wakening and uprising prove

New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of Heaven. . . .

⁷⁸The Gospel in Hymns, pp. 427, 435; Ellerton, Hymns Ancient and Modern, 1889 edition, Hymn 475, p. 374; Charles Kingsley, The Church Hymnary, Hymn 424, p. 431.

The trivial round, the common task,
 Would furnish all we ought to ask;
 Room to deny ourselves; a road
 To bring us, daily, nearer God.⁷⁹

The world is thus viewed as the gateway of heaven and also as the habitation of God. At once transcendent and immanent, God suffers with his creation, which will ultimately be redeemed in its entirety:

Finish then thy new creation;
 Pure and spotless let us be;
 Let us see thy great salvation,
 Perfectly restored in thee.⁸⁰

The triumphant fulfilment of the plan of salvation is heralded in many hymns which affirm God as the fount of all wisdom and power:

God moves in a mysterious way
 His wonders to perform;
 He plants his footsteps in the sea,
 And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
 Of never-failing skill,
 He treasures up his bright designs,
 And works his sovereign will. . . .

His purposes will ripen fast,
 Unfolding every hour;
 The bud may have a bitter taste,
 But sweet will be the flower.

Be Thou our great Deliverer still,
 Thou Lord of life and death;
 Restore and quicken, soothe and bless,
 With Thine almighty breath.⁸¹

⁷⁹The Christian Year, pp. 2-3.

⁸⁰Wesley, Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Hymn 498, p. 300.

⁸¹Cowper, Olney Hymns, Hymn 15, p. 294; E. H. Plumptre, The Church Hymnary, Hymn 43, p. 42.

Let every creature rise -- and bring
 Peculiar honours to their King:
 Angels descend with songs again,
 And earth repeat the long AMEN.⁸⁴

Hymnody of the nineteenth century written expressly for children treats for the most part the same themes as that written for adults. Through hymn-singing the Victorian child gained religious impressions that lasted well into adulthood. In four of the most popular hymnbooks for children, John Curwen's The Child's Own Hymn Book, published in 1846, Mrs Alexander's Hymns for Little Children, 1848, Ann and Jane Taylor's Hymns for Infant Minds, of which the fiftieth edition was published in 1876, and The Children's Hymn Book of 1877, the motif of pilgrimage is central.

From the earliest age the child is encouraged to think of himself as a pilgrim on the path of life:

I'm a little pilgrim
 And a stranger here,
 Though this world is pleasant,
Sin is always near.

Mine's a better country,
 Where there is no sin

Holy Spirit, guide me
On my heavenly way.⁸⁵

Warning is given that the narrow course to the gate of heaven is beset with manifold dangers and temptations:

How shall an infant pilgrim dare
 This dangerous path to tread?
 For on the way is many a snare
 For youthful travellers spread.

⁸⁴Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, p. 160.

⁸⁵The Child's Own Hymn Book, edited by John Curwen (London, 1862), Hymn 71, pp. 41-42.

He knows the point, the very spot,
 Where each of us shall fall,
 And whose shall be the earliest lot,
 And whose the last of all.

There's a wicked spirit
 Watching round you still,
 And he tries to tempt you
 To all harm and ill.⁸⁶

Life is described as a path 'that leads / From time and earth away', as a brittle flower which soon dies in blight or winter storm, as a sparkling stream which suddenly disappears 'before it gains the sea', as a slender thread which 'the slightest breath may stir', and as a race, with 'Heaven the distant prize'.⁸⁷

Like so many hymns for adults, those for children frequently point out the need for the virtues of a faithful soldier in the spiritual warfare of life. Probably the best-known of such hymns is that written in 1865 for a school procession:

Onward, Christian soldiers,
 Marching as to war,
 Looking unto Jesus,
 Who is gone before.
 Christ, the Royal Master,
 Leads against the foe,
 Forward into battle,
 See, His banners go.⁸⁸

In sharp contrast to the spirit of adventure encouraged by this summons to battle is the atmosphere of morbidity which dominates hymns on the frailty and transience of mortal life. Instead of inspiring the young

⁸⁶ Ann and Jane Taylor, Hymns for Infant Minds (London, 1876), Hymn LI, pp. 72-73; Hymn XXXVIII, p. 53; Mrs Alexander, Hymns Ancient and Modern, 1889 edition, Hymn 569, p. 444.

⁸⁷ Hymns for Infant Minds, Hymn LVIII, pp. 81-82.

⁸⁸ Baring-Gould, The Church Missionary Hymn Book, Hymn 140, p. 130.

with thoughts of the wonder and potential that lie before them,
hymn-writers seem preoccupied with forcing them to think about death:

Where should I be, if God should say
I must not live another day,
And send to take away my breath? --
What is Eternity? -- and Death?

My body is of little worth;
'Twould soon be mingled with the earth;
For we were made of clay, and must
Again at death return to dust.⁸⁹

Mrs Alexander's hymn on the irrevocable nature of death reflects what
was for the Victorians a harsh reality: the earthly pilgrimage of
children was often exceedingly brief:

Within the churchyard, side by side,
Are many long low graves;
And some have stones set over them,
On some the green grass waves.

Full many a little Christian child,
Woman, and man, lies there;
And we pass near them every time
When we go in to prayer. . . .

They do not hear when the great bell
Is ringing overhead;
They cannot rise and come to Church
With us, for they are dead.⁹⁰

Haunted as they were by thoughts of mortality, the imaginations
of children also dwelt upon a heavenly kingdom, which they were taught
to consider their 'home and fatherland':

Onward, upward, homeward:
Hastily I flee
From this world of sorrow,
With my Lord to be.

⁸⁹Hymns for Infant Minds, Hymn LXXXIII, p. 117.

⁹⁰Hymns Ancient and Modern, 1889 edition, Hymn 575, p. 449.

This is not my place of resting,
 Mine's a city yet to come;
 Onward to it I am hasting,
 On to my eternal home.⁹¹

Earth, depicted as a dreary desert, is in many hymns diametrically opposed to heaven, the country of transcendent joy:

Come, let us now forget our mirth,
 And think that we must die:
 What are our best delights on earth,
 Compared with those on high?

A sad and sinful world is this,
 Although it seems so fair;
 But Heaven is perfect joy and bliss,
 For GOD Himself is there. . . .

Here sins and sorrows we deplore,
 With many cares distressed;
 But there the mourners weep no more,
 And there the weary rest.⁹²

Some hymn-writers, however, counteract this unfortunate dichotomizing of the sacred and the secular in their conviction that the earthly is infused with light from the heavenly realm:

How beautiful is earth!
 Its woods and fields, how fair!
 Its sunny hills and smiling vales,
 Bright streams and balmy air.
 What then is Heaven?
 Brighter than eye e'er saw,
 Nought can on earth compare
 With that glad land, all bathed in light,
 All glorious, passing fair.

How happy is our home,
 How sweet the loving care
 Which compasseth each one around;
 All in home's gladness share.

⁹¹The Child's Own Hymn Book, Hymn 145, p. 80; Hymn 137, p. 384.

⁹²Hymns for Infant Minds, Hymn CII, pp. 146-47.

What then is Heaven?
 Each heart with joy o'erflows;
 Filled with the FATHER'S love;
 The brightest home faint image gives
 Of that dear home above,
 Our home in Heaven.⁹³

Praise of nature's beauty as a form of divine revelation is assuredly a far healthier and more uplifting means of guiding children on their 'pilgrim way' to 'the endless day' than that of deflecting their gaze from the world about them:

Summer suns are glowing
 Over land and sea,
 Happy light is flowing
 Bountiful and free.
 Everything rejoices
 In earth's mellow rays;
 All earth's thousand voices
 Swell the psalm of praise.

God's free mercy streameth
 Over all the world,
 And His banner gleameth,
 Everywhere unfurled.
 Broad and deep and glorious
 As the Heaven above,
 Shines in might victorious
 His eternal Love.⁹⁴

In her most popular hymn, with the exception of the third verse, which states that the social, as well as the natural, order receives the sanction of God, Mrs Alexander succeeds in evoking appreciation for the divinely-appointed order of creation:

All things bright and beautiful,
 All creatures great and small,
 All things wise and wonderful,
 The LORD GOD made them all.

⁹³The Children's Hymn Book for Use in Children's Services, Sunday Schools and Families, edited by W. Walsham How, Ashton Oxenden, and John Ellerton (London, 1877), Hymn 198, p. 161.

⁹⁴The Children's Hymn Book, Hymn 61, pp. 46-47.

Each little flower that opens,
 Each little bird that sings,
 He made their glowing colours,
 He made their tiny wings.

The rich man in his castle,
 The poor man at his gate,
 GOD made them, high or lowly,
 And order'd their estate.⁹⁵

These lines would appear to deny the essence of pilgrimage with its implicit call for progressive change in the social as well as the spiritual sphere. The sovereignty of the Almighty expressed in terms of love is more likely to engage the mind and heart of the young pilgrim:

There's not a place on earth's vast round,
 In ocean's deep, or air,
 Where skill and wisdom are not found,
 For God is everywhere.

Around, beneath, below, above,
 Wherever space extends,
 There God displays his boundless love,
 And power with mercy blends.⁹⁶

Total consecration to the God of pilgrimage is the desired end of all hymns for children as of those for adults:

Saviour! while my heart is tender,
 I would yield that heart to thee;
 All my powers to thee surrender,
 Thine and only thine to be . . .

Send me, Lord, where thou wilt send me,
 Only do thou guide my way;
 May thy grace through life attend me,
 Gladly then shall I obey.⁹⁷

⁹⁵Hymns Ancient and Modern, 1889 edition, Hymn 573, p. 447.

⁹⁶The Child's Own Hymn Book, Hymn 144, p. 80.

⁹⁷The Child's Own Hymn Book, Hymn 74, p. 43.

Hymns sung by the Victorians served to reinforce and articulate the pilgrimage motif with which they were so familiar from their reading of the Bible and The Pilgrim's Progress. All hymnody is a response of the human to the divine and as such is concerned with the relationship between the secular and the sacred. The enduring hymns of all ages are those which recognize that the most significant journey is that leading to God. Inspired by life, they offer inspiration for life; based upon past experience, they provide perspective for new experience.

One of the main characteristics of the hymns which had a powerful impact upon the Victorians is a tendency to overshadow the present life by focussing attention upon that to come. In a substantial number of hymns the stress is on finding God in flight from the world rather than within it. The biblical affirmation of the material realm and hope for redemption of the entire created order are ostensibly disregarded. Many hymnists seem to be in danger of severing humanity's earthly link and taking the compensatory measure of strengthening that of the heavenly. They forget that, although the Christian pilgrim has his eyes on heaven, he also has his feet firmly on the earth. Moreover, those who believe that the pilgrimage must be pursued with such intensity that it precludes appreciation of the marvels encountered along the route, are in effect denying the biblical promise that joy is to be found in the journey itself as well as in the destination, and that God is present during the pilgrimage as well as at its end: 'Where'er they seek thee, thou art found, / And every place is hallow'd ground'.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Cowper, Olney Hymns, Hymn 44, p. 227.

If hymnody at its most negative is unrealistic, complacent, and effete, at its most positive it is empirical, forward-looking, and vigorous. In the words of Routley, 'the shame and the glory are in the intention'.⁹⁹ Autobiographical and confessional hymns, which appealed directly to the Victorians, possess the qualities of spontaneity and simplicity and may be said to be authentic in their intention. In contrast to the popular introspective hymns are those which are more sacramental and socially-oriented in nature and which increase the pilgrim's sense of solidarity with others on the same journey and deepen awareness of the world. The best-loved hymns of the Victorian era were those that 'deal with themes which never grow old; the majesty and love of God, the mysteries of the Incarnation and redemption, the need of pardon and of grace, the warfare and ultimate triumph of those who follow Christ'.¹⁰⁰ As expressions of the questing spirit, they point towards 'an undiscovered land', where the perfect union of God and humanity will be realized and the pilgrimage will end with songs of praise.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Hymns and Human Life, p. 307. .

¹⁰⁰ Frederick John Gillman, The Evolution of the English Hymn: An Historical Survey of the Origins and Development of the Hymns of the Christian Church (London, 1927), pp. 302-3.

¹⁰¹ The Methodist Hymn-Book, Hymn 617, p. 511.

PART II

THE NOVEL

CHAPTER 4

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

I. The Way of Pilgrimage

'My Master,' he says, 'has forewarned me. Daily He announces more distinctly, "Surely I come quickly!" and hourly I more eagerly respond, "Amen; even so, come, Lord Jesus!"'¹

These words of St John Rivers at the close of Jane Eyre (1847) have been described as 'an uneasy coda in a key which distracts but does not resolve', but, far from being this, they actually provide the key to Charlotte Brontë's understanding of spiritual pilgrimage, which is the underlying theme of all her fiction.² Echoing the closing words of the Revelation of St John the Divine, they emphasize Charlotte Brontë's absolute conviction that human nature and the meaning of relationship are most fully disclosed in the Bible and that the divine descent initiates and consummates every human ascent to a higher consciousness of the sacred and the secular.

¹Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, edited by Q. D. Leavis, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 477.

²Ruth Hook, 'The Father of the Family', Brontë Society Transactions, 17, no. 2 (1977), p. 102.

Significantly, each of Charlotte Brontë's novels concludes on a note of welcome or expectation. The Professor (1857) ends with Victor's imperative, 'Papa, come!'; the refrain 'he is coming' serves as a hymn-like affirmation of reunion at the conclusion of Villette (1853); and readers of Shirley (1849) are wished Godspeed as they don the spectacles of insight and begin their quest for meaning.³ The novels offer an invitation to pilgrimage and suggest that in the goal of the journey is to be found the way or the direction. Spiritual pilgrimage commences as it concludes, in a meeting of the human and the divine.

For Charlotte Brontë the pilgrimage always begins in the heart of the individual who seeks self-knowledge in relationship to both God and humanity. The importance she attached to reconciliation with God as the basis of all other forms of reconciliation is evident in a letter to Ellen Nussey, to whom she confided her longing for assurance that she was truly on the path of Christian pilgrimage: 'I am in that state of horrid, gloomy uncertainty that, at this moment, I would submit to be old, grey-haired, to have passed all my youthful days of enjoyment, and to be settling on the verge of the grave, if I could only thereby ensure the prospect of reconciliation to God, and redemption through his Son's merits'.⁴ Belief in the transcendence

³Charlotte Brontë, The Professor, and Emma: A Fragment, Everyman's Library (London, 1969), p. 237; Charlotte Brontë, Villette, edited by Mark Lilly, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1979), p. 595; Charlotte Brontë, Shirley, edited by Andrew and Judith Hook, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 599.

⁴Quoted in Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, edited by Alan Shelston, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp. 162-63.

and immanence of the Deity is the unquestioned premise of her fiction, as illustrated in Jane Eyre's meditation:

We know that God is everywhere; but certainly we feel His presence most when His works are on the grandest scale spread before us; and it is in the unclouded night-sky, where His worlds wheel their silent course, that we read clearest His infinitude, His omnipotence, His omnipresence. . . . Sure was I of His efficiency to save what He had made: convinced I grew that neither earth should perish, nor one of the souls it treasured. I turned my prayer to thanksgiving: the Source of Life was also the Saviour of spirits.⁵

From her reading of the Bible, which was seen through Victorian eyes to possess a dramatic unity, Charlotte Brontë would discern that the story of creation in Genesis reaches its fulfilment in the new creation in Revelation, and that both the Creator and the created play active roles throughout the drama of redemption. Such a concept of pilgrimage encompasses the totality of life from the beginning to the end of time. Its scope includes the realm of the sacred and of the secular, the eternal background and the temporal foreground of human existence. By its very nature it is at once existential and experiential, and has to do with the overarching vision of faith related to the fragility and fragmentation of life. This awareness that the earthly journey has spiritual significance is revealed in Caroline Helstone's struggle to connect 'an enchanted region to the real world': 'What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?'.⁶

⁵Jane Eyre, pp. 350-51.

⁶Shirley, p. 190.

As in the case of John Bunyan, Charlotte Brontë's life, belief, and art are inseparably linked. The pilgrimage motif which informs her fiction is never merely theoretical or intellectual but is rather her own story, based upon direct experience of life; it is not superimposed upon the persons and events in her novels but is embodied in them. She could hardly have avoided being deeply concerned about the relationship of the sacred to the secular. At the summit of the steep and narrow main road of Haworth stands the parish church, a symbol of the faith which envisages a divine pattern in the human mosaic of vicissitude and strife. Congregational worship in her day would certainly have included the singing of hymns, many of them Wesleyan, on the individual and communal nature of Christian pilgrimage. Moreover, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the role of the clergy was much broader and more secular than is often realized.⁷ Patrick Brontë, as well as officiating at christenings, marriages, and burials, marking the stages in his parishioners' journeys through life, was intimately involved in the life of the village, and from an early age Charlotte herself would have been intensely aware of the harsh realities of the world, where for many the 'walk in life lay rather on the shady side of the hill'.⁸ The parsonage, which was her home from 1820 until her death in 1855, is situated on the edge of a bleak and overcrowded graveyard, which between 1838 and 1849 claimed over forty per cent of Haworth's children under the age of six.⁹ Hymns on the

⁷Brian Wilks, The Brontës (London, 1975), p. 14.

⁸Villette, p. 368.

⁹Tom Winnifrith, The Brontës and their Background: Romance and Reality (London, 1973; reprint, 1977), p. 32.

swiftness with which the infant pilgrim may be carried away from the wilderness of this world to the glory of the next must have been especially poignant for Charlotte, who was no stranger to sorrow. Mr Brocklehurst, in questioning Jane on how she intends to escape falling into the 'pit full of fire', refers to a child whose pilgrimage has come to an abrupt end:

How can you keep in good health? Children younger than you die daily. I buried a little child of five years old only a day or two since -- a good little child, whose soul is now in heaven. It is to be feared the same could not be said of you, were you to be called thence.¹⁰

If one prospect from the parsonage served as a constant reminder that the world is only a place of sojourn and that, as Caroline muses, 'every path trod by human feet terminates in one bourne -- the grave', another served as a reminder that out of death comes life.¹¹ 'Those high, wild, desolate moors, up above the whole world, and the very realms of silence', to quote Gaskell, were for Charlotte a source of inspiration and trust in the Eternal.¹² With the sky as her companion in solitude she gained the cosmic vision with which her art is imbued and which regards the secular from the perspective of the sacred. Although her own experience led her past 'some black milestones in the journey of life', she conveys in her fiction the indomitable spirit of faith that 'God is over all'.¹³

¹⁰Jane Eyre, p. 64.

¹¹Shirley, p. 191.

¹²The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p. 506.

¹³Quoted in The Life of Charlotte Brontë, pp. 386, 362.

While the moors provided Charlotte Brontë with a profound sense of the natural manifestations of God, the symbolic landscapes of her novels came largely from the Bible, which, even as a child, she is reputed to have called 'the best book in the world', The Pilgrim's Progress, and Paradise Lost.¹⁴ From these three works she derived her concept of the essential nature of spiritual pilgrimage, which she adapted to fiction and made relevant to life in Victorian England. For her the universal human quest has as its setting the world without and the world within; the drama of redemption is acted out against the backdrop of life's mountains, valleys, and rivers, suggestive of humanity's grandeur and Fall, hopes and fears. The tension between the material and the spiritual is reflected again and again in her novels. The ultimate question she poses concerns the individual's real dwelling-place. How can the necessity of living in the earthly country be integrated with the aspiration for the heavenly country? In other words, is the realm of the secular diametrically opposed to that of the sacred, or is reconciliation between the two possible in this life?

¹⁴Quoted in The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p. 94. F. B. Pinion cites examples of Charlotte Brontë's quotation from and reference to the Bible, The Pilgrim's Progress, and Paradise Lost in A Brontë Companion: Literary Assessment, Background, and Reference (London, 1975), pp. 377-80. In the library of the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, are the following books which bear the signature of Charlotte Brontë: Le Nouveau Testament. Edinbourg: G. Cowie & Co., 1829. Date on flyleaf: 14 December 1831. A prize from Miss Wooler. Das neue Testament unsers Herrn und Heilandes Jesu Christi. London, 1835. Date on flyleaf: May 1843. A gift from Professor Heger. Milton, John. Paradise Lost: a poem in twelve books. Edinburgh: printed for J. Robinson & J. Gillies, Glasgow, 1797. Marked passages in the handwriting of Charlotte Brontë, chiefly corrections to the text. It is difficult to ascertain which edition of The Pilgrim's Progress Charlotte actually read, as the title-page of the copy in the museum is missing. The book was printed by Nuttall, Fisher, and Dixon, Liverpool.

The archetypal journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, from paradise lost to paradise regained, is the metaphorical thread linking theme, character, and action. Winifred Gérin points out the special place which cities held in Charlotte's imagination. Her first reading of The Pilgrim's Progress induced her at the age of six to set out in search of the Celestial City.¹⁵ John Martin's paintings depicting the destruction of such ancient cities as Babylon, Nineveh, Sodom, and Gomorrah also reinforced in her mind the visual intensity of biblical scenes and helped to develop a vast perspective of the world.¹⁶ For many of Charlotte Brontë's characters the city symbolizes escape, experience, and fulfilment. In a letter of 10 December 1841 Charlotte wrote to Ellen Nussey: 'Brussels is still my promised land, but there is still the wilderness of time and space to cross before I reach it'.¹⁷ Her attitude is echoed in Lucy Snowe's reverie as she crosses the English Channel on her voyage towards self-discovery: 'methought I saw the continent of Europe, like a wide dream-land, far away. Sunshine lay on it, making the long coast one line of gold For background, spread a sky, solemn and

¹⁵ Winifred Gérin, Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius (Oxford, 1967), p. 46. The source of this account is T. Wemyss Reid, Charlotte Brontë: A Monograph (London, 1877), pp. 25-26: 'The only place which seemed to her to answer Bunyan's description of the celestial town was one which she had heard the servants discussing with enthusiasm in the kitchen, and its name was Bradford! So to Bradford little Charlotte Brontë, escaping from that Haworth Parsonage which she believed to be a doomed spot, set off one day in 1822. . . . When her tender feet had carried her a mile along the road, she came to a spot where overhanging trees made the highway dark and gloomy; she imagined that she had come to the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and, fearing to go forward, was presently discovered by her nurse cowering by the roadside'.

¹⁶ Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius, p. 43.

¹⁷ Quoted in Clement Shorter, The Brontës: Life and Letters, 2 vols (London, 1908), I, 225.

dark-blue, and -- grand with imperial promise, soft with tints of enchantment -- strode from north to south a God-bent bow, an arch of hope'; Frances Henri, on the other hand, looks towards England as 'her Promised Land': 'She said "England" as you might suppose an Israelite of Moses' days would have said Canaan'.¹⁸ The journey from one city or country to another, the movement from bondage to freedom, which is the conceptual basis of the Bible, The Pilgrim's Progress, and Paradise Lost, is also the basis of Charlotte Brontë's creative art.

One of the characteristics of Victorian fiction is the paramount importance placed upon the spiritual progress of the individual, reflecting the combined influence of Puritanism, which stressed personal responsibility for salvation, and Romanticism, with its emphasis upon subjective expression. Charlotte Brontë's consciousness of being a pilgrim herself is revealed in the autobiographical nature of all of her works except Shirley, which, although presented in the third person, is largely autobiographical in tone. She regards the pilgrim in terms of the lowest common denominator, as an independent seeker devoid of earthly treasure. Her determination 'to make her heroine plain, small, and unattractive, in defiance of the accepted canon' is directly related to the theme of pilgrimage.¹⁹ True to the biblical tradition that God uses for the purposes of redemption that which is seemingly weak and insignificant, illustrated in the portrayal of the suffering servant as one who 'hath no form nor comeliness; and

¹⁸Villette, p. 117; The Professor, pp. 220, 125.

¹⁹The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p. 308.

when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him' (Isaiah 53. 2), Charlotte Brontë creates heroines and heroes whose appearance and behaviour are unconventional. William Crimsworth, seeing his own reflection in a mirror, compares himself with his brother, Edward, and recognizes his own physical inferiority. Rochester, who, it is clearly stated, is not 'a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman', offers Jane what is surely one of the most unflattering proposals of marriage in English literature: 'You -- poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are -- I entreat to accept me as a husband'.²⁰

The protagonists of the novels begin their pilgrimages in a state of alienation and extreme loneliness. William, whose hand is 'so utterly a stranger to the grasp of a kindred hand', looks 'weary, solitary, kept down like some desolate tutor or governess', and the 'penniless and parentless' Frances is described as a 'lost sheep straying amongst graves'; Robert Moore is 'very foreign of aspect', 'a perfect outcast', 'a stranger into the district: he came here poor and friendless, with nothing but his own energies to back him; nothing but his honour, his talent, and his industry to make his way for him'.²¹

In the opening scene of Jane Eyre pathetic fallacy effectively highlights the isolation and grief of the orphaned Jane: 'At intervals, while turning over the leaves in my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain

²⁰Jane Eyre, pp. 145, 283.

²¹The Professor, pp. 5, 17, 149; Shirley, pp. 59, 154, 356.

sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast'.²² At Gateshead, the entrance onto the pathway of pilgrimage, Jane is 'a discord', 'an uncongenial alien', and 'a little roving, solitary thing'; at Lowood, the second stage of her pilgrimage, she is branded by Mr Brocklehurst as 'a little castaway -- not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien'.²³ On the way to Thornfield she finds herself 'quite alone in the world, cut adrift from every connexion'; 'a wanderer on the face of the earth', she is invited to stay her 'weary little wandering feet at a friend's threshold'.²⁴ Once again an 'outcast' in 'drear flight and homeless wandering' from Thornfield, Jane crosses the 'wilderness' of the heath to be received by the Rivers family as a 'poor, emaciated, pallid wanderer'.²⁵ Rochester, who broke away from his relations, also lives the unsettled life of the wanderer in exile. Lucy, yet another who is 'anomalous; desolate, almost blank of hope', is befriended by Paul Emanuel: 'You are solitary and a stranger, and have your way to make and your bread to earn; it may be well that you should become known'.²⁶

Terry Eagleton argues that 'at the centre of all Charlotte's novels . . . is a figure who either lacks or deliberately cuts the bonds of kinship. This leaves the self a free, blank, "pre-social" atom: free to be injured and exploited, but free also to progress,

²²Jane Eyre, pp. 39-40.

²³Jane Eyre, pp. 47-48, 71, 98.

²⁴Jane Eyre, pp. 125, 256, 273.

²⁵Jane Eyre, pp. 350, 348, 351, 365.

²⁶Villette, pp. 107, 227.

move through the class-structure, choose and forge relationships, strenuously utilise its talents in scorn of autocracy or paternalism'.²⁷ Although the major characters do indeed make social and economic progress, the impetus for their development is more spiritual than sociological. The primary concern is always the homesickness of the soul, an intimation that all are 'strangers and pilgrims on the earth' and that 'they desire a better country' (Hebrews 11. 13, 16). Like the prodigal son, who 'arose, and came to his father' (Luke 15. 20), and like Bunyan's Christian and Hopeful, who fall sick with longing for their true home, her figures seek 'a Home, a Friend, a Refuge in Eternity' and find their deepest satisfaction in relationships which have spiritual dimensions.²⁸

However solitary the way of pilgrimage, it is cheered somewhat by the presence of fellow-travellers. Throughout the Bible the pilgrim people are constantly aware that their God journeys with them; in Paradise Lost Adam and Eve take 'thir solitarie way' out of Eden 'hand in hand with wandring steps and slow'; and in The Pilgrim's Progress Christian has the company of Faithful and Hopeful, while Christiana has that of Mercy, Greatheart, and her children.²⁹ Mindful that the pilgrim is a member of a larger body, Charlotte Brontë never sets her characters in complete isolation. Caroline finds both instructor and friend in Mrs Pryor, who loses her burden of loneliness in the presence of her youthful companion. A human friend who serves

²⁷Terry Eagleton, Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës (London, 1975), p. 26.

²⁸Shirley, p. 196.

²⁹John Milton, Paradise Lost, in The Poetical Works of John Milton, edited by Helen Darbishire, 2 vols (Oxford, 1952-55), I, XII. 648-49.

as an instrument of the Divine Friend, Mrs Pryor, whose voice is for Caroline 'almost divine', sings at her request Watts's hymn which places the secular in the light of the sacred:

Our God, our help in ages past, --
 Our hope for years to come;
 Our shelter from the stormy blast;
 Our refuge, haven, home!³⁰

At each stage of her pilgrimage Jane Eyre is given the comfort of at least one loving friend as a guide and a sign that the light of love is never completely extinguished despite the surrounding darkness. Bessie Lee, whose surname signifies shelter and protection, helps to mitigate the icy and cruel treatment Jane receives from Mrs Reed, John, Eliza, and Georgiana. She, too, sings a song which reminds the young pilgrim that she has a Divine Guide:

My feet they are sore, and my limbs they are weary;
 Long is the way, and the mountains are wild;
 Soon will the twilight close moonless and dreary
 Over the path of the poor orphan child. . . .

There is a thought that for strength should avail me;
 Though both of shelter and kindred despoiled;
 Heaven is a home, and a rest will not fail me;
 God is a friend to the poor orphan child.³¹

It is Bessie who accompanies Jane to the gate for her coach-journey to school and who later visits her the day before she leaves Lowood to begin a new life as a governess. Bessie's married name, Leaven, is symbolic of growth and transformation, features of the kingdom of

³⁰ Shirley, p. 407.

³¹ Jane Eyre, p. 54.

heaven (Matthew 13. 33). Jane's sense of desolation upon arrival at Lowood is conveyed through reference to walls and the opening and locking of doors, which mark her mental and spiritual progress: 'Rain, wind, and darkness filled the air; nevertheless, I dimly discerned a wall before me and a door open in it; through this door I passed with my new guide: she shut and locked it behind her'.³² Even behind the barriers of institutional life she is guided and enlightened by Miss Temple, who acts as her mother, governess, and companion, and by Helen Burns, who, in the manner of a martyr, hero, or angel, imparts strength and inspires wonder.³³ In her relationship with Rochester, too, she is convinced that events work together for good: 'God directed me to a correct choice: I thank His Providence for the guidance!'.³⁴

Lucy Snowe is also conscious of the guardianship of Providence. Upon arrival in Villette she trustingly follows John Bretton, even though she cannot see him in the darkness, and her faith is rewarded when he proves as helpful to her as a well to a weary wayfarer. The priest to whom she confesses in her intense loneliness and affliction offers her the counsel of the Roman Catholic Church, which as an avowed Protestant she refuses, but for the pilgrim passing through the Slough of Despond he provides stepping-stones of solace: 'the mere relief of communication in an ear which was human and sentient, yet

³²Jane Eyre, p. 75.

³³Jane Eyre, pp. 116, 99.

³⁴Jane Eyre, p. 386.

consecrated -- the mere pouring out of some portion of long accumulating, long pent-up pain into a vessel whence it could not be again diffused -- had done me good'.³⁵ The apparent coincidence that both Jane and Lucy are received into the homes of relations is, from the perspective of pilgrimage, a sign of the providential purpose of God, who goes ahead to prepare the way and to furnish surprises for the faithful. At Moor House Jane wins 'wealth to the heart! -- a mine of pure, genial affections', and at La Terrasse Lucy is refreshed by the 'welcome waters' of friendship.³⁶ Although she gains inspiration from Paul's friendship, Lucy asserts that her ultimate guide and teacher is no other than the Bible, the cardinal exposition of, and invitation to, spiritual pilgrimage.

Charlotte Brontë's main characters develop the capacity to take a 'sentinel-survey of life'.³⁷ Seeing with the outer and inner eye, they connect rather than separate the sacred and the secular. Frances Henri's 'right to a double power of patriotism' and 'interest in two noble, free, and fortunate countries' represent the dual citizenship of the pilgrim in heaven and earth.³⁸ In their intense introspection the protagonists seek a synthesis of the ambiguous and fortuitous events of their external experience and the incontrovertible knowledge

³⁵Villette, p. 234.

³⁶Jane Eyre, p. 411; Villette, p. 251.

³⁷Shirley, p. 273.

³⁸The Professor, p. 212.

of the heart. Jane's sensitivity to the spiritual world is evident from the time she is locked in the red room at Gateshead and anticipates 'a herald of some coming vision from another world' until she is united with Rochester and ponders in her heart 'the mysterious summons' which brings them together in spirit.³⁹ She has 'the look of another world' and her drawings are conceived 'with the spiritual eye'.⁴⁰ Her vivid premonitory dreams also reveal the intuitive depths of her personality.

Bird imagery is used of both Jane and Rochester to indicate the aspirational nature of the soul. Jane, described by Rochester as a skylark, 'a vivid, restless, resolute captive' which, set free from 'the close-set bars of a cage', would 'soar cloud-high', and as 'a wild frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation', declares her essential autonomy of will and conscience: 'I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you'.⁴¹ Rochester, whose power and vision are transformed by experience, is likened to a 'caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished': 'the water stood in my eyes to hear this avowal of his dependence; just as if a royal eagle, chained to a perch, should be forced to entreat a sparrow to become its purveyor'.⁴² Jane, who has 'a keen, a daring, and a glowing eye', possesses the double vision of the pilgrim; within she

³⁹ Jane Eyre, pp. 49, 472.

⁴⁰ Jane Eyre, pp. 153, 156.

⁴¹ Jane Eyre, pp. 464, 170, 282.

⁴² Jane Eyre, pp. 456, 464.

sees 'a rosy sky and a green flowery Eden' but without she faces 'a rough tract to travel' and 'black tempests to encounter'.⁴³ Her name in itself suggests that she is firmly rooted in the plain realities of life but is, nonetheless, also a buoyant spirit who can rise above them.

This particular combination of qualities is crucial for the pilgrim, who is essentially engaged in action, in event, in adventure. Charlotte Brontë's novels, like The Pilgrim's Progress, are episodic and full of movement. The theme of passage from estrangement through the wilderness of the unknown into a new land of promise is central in her work. For William Crimsworth the pilgrimage commences in a state of self-dissatisfaction and a desire for perfection. In the same way that the Hebrews are expelled by Pharaoh (Exodus 10. 28-29), he is dismissed from the counting-house of his brother's mill, where he has been labouring at a 'task thankless and bitter as that of the Israelite crawling over the sun-baked fields of Egypt in search of straw and stubble wherewith to accomplish his tale of bricks'.⁴⁴ The motif of exodus is, therefore, explicit in The Professor, whose hero moves from the slavery of false ideals to the freedom of the spirit and the discovery of a personal identity. The radical reformer Hunsden, who rebukes William for submitting to tyranny and urges him to rebel, is termed by Michael D. Wheeler 'a kind of anti-Evangelist, who advises

⁴³Jane Eyre, p. 340.

⁴⁴The Professor, p. 33.

Crimsworth on the path he should take'.⁴⁵ As his name suggests, he is nomadic, warlike in his taunts, and heroic in the eyes of the young and impressionable Victor, who has a propensity for tales of adventure. He advises William to travel even though he is uncertain of the way, and, in the manner of Bunyan's Evangelist, presents him with a letter of introduction. Just as Christian's burden slips from his back, so William's load is lifted off his heart: 'I felt light and liberated. . . . Life was again open to me; no longer was its horizon limited by the high black wall surrounding Crimsworth's mill'.⁴⁶

Frances's composition on the topic of emigration to the new world, in which she emphasizes the need for patient resolve, and that on King Alfred's courage and faith amid despair illustrate the marked accent on self-reliance and fortitude throughout Charlotte Brontë's fiction. Her heroes and heroines are conscious of the grand possibilities, but also of the dangers and difficulties, of embarking upon a new venture. Frances's perseverance and sense of duty are contrasted with the young Sylvie's inactivity and dependence upon a confessor. Preoccupation with the issue of progress is treated humorously through the voice of Zoraïde Reuter: 'I have found it necessary to change frequently -- a change of instructors is often beneficial to the interests of a school; it gives life and variety to the proceedings; it amuses the pupils, and suggests to the parents the idea of exertion and progress'.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁵Michael D. Wheeler, 'Literary and Biblical Allusion in "The Professor"', Brontë Society Transactions, 17, no. 1 (1976), p. 50.

⁴⁶The Professor, p. 37.

⁴⁷The Professor, pp. 136-37.

importance given by Charlotte Brontë to faithful action is exemplified in the success of the Crimsworths, who, in their joint pilgrimage 'marched hand in hand', and never 'murmured, repented, nor faltered' in their pursuit of 'the full career of progress'.⁴⁸

Shirley opens with an invitation to a meal which includes unleavened bread with bitter herbs, suitable for Good Friday in Passion Week. This allusion to the Passover implies that a journey involving the meeting of God and persons is about to begin. Imagery of pilgrimage depicts Caroline's entry into the school of experience: 'Could we but reach this land, we think to hunger and thirst no more; whereas many a wilderness, and often the flood of Death, or some stream of sorrow as cold and almost as black as Death, is to be crossed ere true bliss can be tasted. . . . The heart's blood must gem with red beads the brow of the combatant, before the wreath of victory rustles over it'.⁴⁹ Rose Yorke wishes to move beyond the circumscribed sphere of Briarfield and to live a complete life, while Henry Sympson is restless for action, even though it may include suffering. Shirley's surname, Keeldar, exemplifies her initiative, based upon balance and energy, or 'daring', in embarking upon the voyage of life. In trying to maintain an equilibrium between her feminine and masculine qualities she shakes the foundations of social convention. It is worth noting the frequency with which the word 'dare', usually italicized, is used throughout this novel. Brontë's allusion to Saul who lent his armour to David for his attack against the Philistines heightens the contrast

⁴⁸The Professor, p. 221.

⁴⁹Shirley, p. 121.

between the curates's fears of taking a risk in the face of physical peril and the daring thoughts and actions of the major figures. Shirley, for example, addresses Louis in her characteristically forceful way: 'Die without me, if you will. Live for me if you dare'. To this he replies: 'I dare live for and with you, from this hour till my death'.⁵⁰

The note of change, on a social and personal level, dominates Shirley. Although Charlotte Brontë's focus is more upon the change within the heart than upon that within society as a whole, her message is clearly that the individual cannot be severed from the community. She recognizes the limitations and dangers of an unbridled laissez-faire approach to economic matters, such as that of Robert, who, oblivious to the hardship he causes those he no longer employs, is determined to follow the course of increased mechanization at the expense of others. The concluding references to industrial growth and the disappearance of fairies in Fieldhead Hollow underscore the words of Patrick Brontë: 'The signs of our times are significant in a high degree, and sufficiently prominent to attract the attention even of the unwary, and to put every one upon asking, "What is truth?" One of these signs is a restless and somewhat turbulent propensity towards change'.⁵¹

The journey theme is introduced at the outset of Jane Eyre and gains impetus as the work progresses. Jane's interest in adventure and the realm of the imagination is revealed by her delight in Be. wick's

⁵⁰Shirley, p. 578.

⁵¹Patrick Brontë, 'The Signs of the Times; Or a Familiar Treatise on Some Political Indications in the Year 1835', Brontëana: The Rev. Patrick Brontë, his Collected Works and Life, edited by J. Horsfall Turner (Bingley, Yorkshire, 1898), pp. 221-22.

History of British Birds, in which 'each picture told a story', Gulliver's Travels, featuring 'a most desolate wanderer in most dread and dangerous regions', and Arabian Nights.⁵² Her favourite books of the Bible -- Revelation, Daniel, Genesis, Samuel, Job, Jonah, and parts of Exodus, Kings, and Chronicles -- indicate the episodic, visionary, and apocalyptic nature of her pilgrimage. As a child she cannot yet see her sufferings in the light of the divine plan and, therefore, does not appreciate the Psalms, which arise out of intimate fellowship with God amid the changing circumstances of life.

Jane welcomes the thought of school as 'a complete change; it implied a long journey, an entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life'.⁵³ And, when about to depart from Lowood, she thinks of the richness of life and the courage required of those who go forth into the world to seek knowledge and experience. Her first encounter with Rochester enables her to be of assistance to a fellow-pilgrim and awakens in her an interest in the world beyond Thornfield. The experience of Christian and the exhortation of hymns of pilgrimage are recalled in Rochester's words to Jane: 'It is always the way of events in this life . . . no sooner have you got settled in a pleasant resting-place, than a voice calls out to you to rise and move on, for the hour of repose is expired'.⁵⁴ St John, cast from the heroic mould, 'lived only to aspire -- after what was good and great, certainly; but still he would never rest, nor approve of others resting round him'.⁵⁵

⁵²Jane Eyre, pp. 40, 53, 70.

⁵³Jane Eyre, p. 57.

⁵⁴Jane Eyre, p. 278.

⁵⁵Jane Eyre, p. 418.

Whereas Rochester urges Jane forward in her awareness of earthly joys, St John uplifts her vision to those of heaven and reminds her that she is merely a wayfarer in this world. Like Shirley, Jane dares to speak the truth, which, she finds, gives her a sense of freedom and triumph. After her verbal attack upon Mrs Reed she is accused by Bessie of having 'a new way of talking', which prepares her to 'dare censure' for Rochester's sake and to address St John in a direct, original, and brave manner.⁵⁶ It is no doubt Jane's lack of submissiveness that caused Elizabeth Rigby to denounce the novel:

Altogether the autobiography of Jane Eyre is pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition. There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which, as far as each individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God's appointment -- there is a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man, for which we find no authority either in God's word or in God's providence.⁵⁷

Such a limited viewpoint surely misconstrues the essential nature of the Christian pilgrimage, which demands the undaunted courage and venturesome enthusiasm of those who risk their lives in climbing mountains to make discoveries. Throughout her fiction Charlotte Brontë implies that the stained-glass image of the meek and mild Jesus, for too long perpetuated by the Church, encourages docility and servility rather than an active quest for truth.

At the beginning of Villette Lucy compares her visit to her godmother, Mrs Bretton, with 'the sojourn of Christian and Hopeful

⁵⁶Jane Eyre, pp. 71, 233, 400.

⁵⁷Elizabeth Rigby, Quarterly Review, 84, no. 167 (December 1848), pp. 173-74, quoted in Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre and Villette: A Casebook, edited by Miriam Allott (London, 1973), p. 71.

beside a certain pleasant stream'.⁵⁸ She is, however, soon forced to continue on the pilgrim way, upheld by her own energy and tenacity. All of Brontë's travellers follow the pattern set forth in The Pilgrim's Progress, that of repose in an arbour of refreshment balanced by trial or temptation. Arriving in London, which appears as 'a Babylon and a wilderness', Lucy concludes that it is 'better to go forward than backward' even along a narrow and difficult way.⁵⁹ Her awareness of being in the vicinity of St Paul's Cathedral gives assurance of the divine presence and also serves to foreshadow the protective watchfulness of Paul Emanuel. Despite the peril, loneliness and uncertainty of her position, she has a sense of being on the threshold of life: 'my inner self moved; my spirit shook its always-fettering wings half loose'.⁶⁰ Challenged by Madame Beck to teach the English class, she decides once again to go forward. In attempting to instruct the 'stiff-necked tribe' of students and to instil in the classroom some semblance of order and diligence, she encounters a refusal to contend with problems, and may be compared with Moses in his struggle to encourage the recalcitrant Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 32. 9; 34. 9).⁶¹ Like Bunyan's Simple, Sloth, and Presumption, who are destroyed by their own indolence, the young Labassecouriennes possess none of Lucy's fortitude and perseverance. The name of the country, which means 'farmyard', reinforces the impression gained by the

⁵⁸Villette, p. 62.

⁵⁹Villette, pp. 106-7.

⁶⁰Villette, p. 108.

⁶¹Villette, p. 146.

fastidious foreign teacher of the 'sensual indulgence' of its inhabitants:

Each mind was being reared in slavery
 the CHURCH strove to bring up her children
 robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy,
 hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning.
 'Eat, drink, and live!' she says. 'Look after
 your bodies; leave your souls to me. I hold
 their cure -- guide their course: I guarantee
 their final fate'.⁶²

Like her sister-in-suffering Jane Eyre, Lucy has an affinity for the drama of Nature, which stirs in her a longing for upward and onward movement: 'the tempest took hold of me with tyranny: I was roughly roused and obliged to live'.⁶³ Compelled by Monsieur Paul to take part in the school play, she discovers her love for dramatic action, which she subdues as unbecoming one who is a mere spectator of life. She is, however, as is true of all of Charlotte Brontë's protagonists, forced to experience life's drama for herself, to be active rather than passive. Influenced by Paul, who thrives amid movement and animation, she progresses by means of venturing and learns that remembrance of the past, while inspiring the pilgrim, must never cause the journey to be halted. Risk is an essential element of the story of spiritual pilgrimage.

II. The Wilderness of Suffering

Charlotte Brontë's major characters are usually sufferers as well as seekers, whose conflicts are fought on internal as well as external

⁶²Villette, pp. 195-96.

⁶³Villette, p. 176.

battlegrounds. Throughout her fiction there is an intensity of spiritual turmoil or divine discontent, usually arising out of the dualities of human nature and experience. Charlotte's words to Ellen Nussey reveal the central battle of her own and her protagonists' lives:

If Christian perfection be necessary to salvation, I shall never be saved; my heart is a very hot-bed for sinful thoughts, and when I decide on an action I scarcely remember to look to my Redeemer for direction. I know not how to pray; I cannot bend my life to the grand end of doing good; I go on constantly seeking my own pleasure, pursuing the gratification of my own desires. I forget God, and will not God forget me? And, meantime, I know the greatness of Jehovah; I acknowledge the perfection of His word; I adore the purity of the Christian faith; my theory is right, my practice horribly wrong.⁶⁴

In the manner of the apostle Paul, and of Bunyan's and Milton's heroes, her pilgrims are caught in combat between perfection and imperfection, vision and reality, heaven and hell. The Celestial City is glimpsed through a thicket of thorns which must be brushed aside in the running of the race.

The Professor conveys this sense of tension at the heart of things in its reference to the mediating power of hope over despair in the battle of 'real life':

But the man of regular life and rational mind never despairs. He loses his property -- it is a blow -- he staggers a moment; then, his energies, roused by the smart, are at work to seek a remedy; activity soon mitigates regret. . . . Death takes from him what he loves . . . but some morning Religion looks into his desolate house with sunrise, and

⁶⁴Quoted in The Life of Charlotte Brontë, pp. 177-78.

says, that in another world, another life, he shall meet his kindred again. She speaks of that world as a place unsullied by sin -- of that life, as an era unembittered by suffering; she mightily strengthens her consolation by connecting with it two ideas -- which mortals cannot comprehend, but on which they love to repose -- Eternity, Immortality . . . he takes courage -- 'goes out to encounter the necessities and discharge the duties of life; and, though sadness may never lift her burden from his mind, Hope will enable him to support it.⁶⁵

The Preface to the novel, in the vein of the Apology to The Pilgrim's Progress, states the author's intention that her hero 'should work his way through life . . . that whatever small competency he might gain, should be won by the sweat of his brow; that, before he could find so much as an arbour to sit down in, he should master at least half the ascent of "the Hill of Difficulty" As Adam's son he should share Adam's doom, and drain throughout life a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment'.⁶⁶ William, struggling with the pebbles and briars along the straight, steep, and stony track, feels like 'a morning traveller who doubts not that from the hill he is ascending he shall behold a glorious sunrise'.⁶⁷ When he is assured of Frances's love, however, and sees that his prospects are brightening, he suddenly encounters difficulty in the form of hypochondria. R. B. Martin, commenting on this episode as 'an example of the intrusive concern that is introduced into the novel without any apparent relevance', fails to perceive its significance in the work's thematic

⁶⁵The Professor, pp. 140-41.

⁶⁶The Professor, p. xi.

⁶⁷The Professor, p. 46.

structure.⁶⁸ Inherent in the pilgrimage are both progress and regress, light and darkness. In comparing himself with Job, William reveals his awareness of the vulnerability of the pilgrim when seemingly most successful and confident. Christian is in jeopardy while on the Enchanted Ground, and Professor Teufelsdröckh is plunged into the abyss of anguish at the height of his romance. The danger of repose in earthly bliss is a reminder that, as William discovers, 'in the midst of life we are in death'.⁶⁹

The conflict between the ideal and the real and between the reason and the imagination, which is experienced by William and Frances, is centred in Hunsden, who acts as mentor in the ways of the world but whose inner and outer selves are at war. Ironically, he restores to William the portrait of his mother, whose countenance reveals intelligence and sensibility, the two attributes which he cannot unite in his own personality. He has yet to learn that wonder, beauty, and empathy must accompany duty and endurance along the way of pilgrimage. Frances, upholding the immeasurable value of love and the power of the poetic and intangible to bestow meaning upon the mundane and material, affirms that it is 'better to be without logic than without feeling'.⁷⁰ Whereas Hunsden possesses only the portrait of the woman he loves, William and Frances have assimilated in their

⁶⁸ Robert Bernard Martin, The Accents of Persuasion: Charlotte Brontë's Novels (London, 1966), p. 40.

⁶⁹ The Professor, p. 202. These words are taken from the section entitled 'Burial of the Dead' in the Book of Common Prayer, p. 332.

⁷⁰ The Professor, p. 212.

marriage aspiration and fulfilment. The work ends with Victor, whose name appropriately points to the triumphant conclusion of the pilgrimage, about to enter the school of life, in which 'the leaven of the offending Adam' will be disciplined and the conflict between passion and reason resolved.⁷¹

Shirley, with its emphasis upon the 'real, cool, and solid', rarely permits the reader to forget 'this struggle for life, / This travail and pain, / This trembling and strife'.⁷² Battles are being fought internationally between the Duke of Wellington and Napoleon, nationally between the industrialists and the labourers, and individually between the warring aspects of human nature, moulded in the Creator's image but fallen into degeneracy. The basic conflict, Charlotte Brontë continually asserts, is neither political nor economic, but spiritual and moral. In none of her other novels, as Martin points out, is there 'so much talk of churches, parish schools, clergymen, and the religious affiliations of characters, and . . . so little sense of Christianity having any effect upon its adherents'.⁷³ Matthew Arnold's dictum that one cannot do without religion and yet cannot do with it in its present state could be read as a commentary on the novelist's plea for reformation: 'Let England's priests have their due: they are a faulty set in some respects, being only of common flesh and blood, like us all; but the land would be badly off without them: Britain would miss her church, if that church fell. God

⁷¹The Professor, p. 235.

⁷²Shirley, pp. 39, 163.

⁷³The Accents of Persuasion, p. 115.

save it! God also reform it!'.⁷⁴

The military metaphor in Shirley is developed by means of character description, dialogue, and action. The Christian soldier receives satirical treatment in the person of Helstone, the 'clerical Cossack' who had chosen the wrong vocation, and who in conversation with Robert Moore speaks of 'a poor over-wrought band of bondsmen' defended by 'the God of battles', with the implication that strength often arises out of weakness.⁷⁵ The incident in which the church procession encounters the union of Dissenters, Methodists, Baptists, Independents, and Wesleyans, with the result that the Dissenter who had announced the hymn is pushed into the ditch, takes place in Royd-lane, as narrow as the pathway through Bunyan's Valley of the Shadow of Death, suggesting that dissension only makes a mockery of faith and threatens its life-giving possibilities. Moreover, Shirley's longing for 'danger; for a faith -- a land -- or, at least, a lover to defend' indicates that the challenge of pilgrimage has been tamed by the complacency of the clergy and the members of the Church.⁷⁶

An awareness that life is indeed a battle and that suffering is the price of victory pervades Shirley. Attempting to console William Farren, who suffers in patience, Mr Hall sounds like one of Job's comforters: 'These are grievous times; I see suffering wherever I turn. . . . It is the will of God: His will be done! but He tries us

⁷⁴Shirley, p. 298.

⁷⁵Shirley, pp. 68-70.

⁷⁶Shirley, p. 299.

to the utmost'.⁷⁷ Miss Mann 'had passed alone through protracted scenes of suffering, exercised rigid self-denial, made large sacrifices of time, money, health, for those who had repaid her only by ingratitude', and Miss Ainley, who 'treads close in her Redeemer's steps', seeks to alleviate the sufferings of others.⁷⁸ Caroline, facing 'rude disappointment! sharp cross', must learn 'the great lesson how to endure without a sob' and how to 'look on life steadily, as it is'; struggling alone, she feels totally abandoned by Providence and utters a Job-like cry of despair: 'Truly, I ought not to have been born: they should have smothered me at the first cry'.⁷⁹ Briarfield is for her merely a thorny wilderness. In offering his niece 'balm in Gilead' in the form of a holiday and a new frock, Helstone reveals his blindness to the needs of the heart, since Caroline's spiritual misery cannot be healed by material gifts.⁸⁰

The height of affliction, however, is often the initial stage of deliverance. All trials are purposive when considered from the perspective of faith. As in The Professor, the Deluge and the reassuring return of the sun after a storm are central biblical images in Shirley. Mrs Pryor overcomes intense personal suffering: 'Oh, child! the human heart can suffer. It can hold more tears than the ocean holds waters. We never know how deep -- how wide it is, till

⁷⁷ Shirley, p. 159.

⁷⁸ Shirley, pp. 194, 285.

⁷⁹ Shirley, pp. 127-28, 130, 240.

⁸⁰ Shirley, p. 205.

misery begins to unbind her clouds, and fill it with rushing blackness'.⁸¹ When her newly-acknowledged daughter becomes desperately ill, she engages in 'divine conflict' by wrestling with God in prayer till break of day, like Jacob at Peniel, and is victorious.⁸² In her belief that suffering is essentially a mystery, the key of which lies in God's hands, she is in sympathy with Cowper, who in the depths of spiritual anguish wrote a hymn of faith:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.⁸³

As Caroline recites Cowper's poem 'The Castaway', she seems to share the experience of the abandoned mariner, who symbolizes the shipwreck of the soul:

No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perish'd -- each alone!
But I -- beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.⁸⁴

Tragedy, however, is not the only facet of the human drama, as suggested by the medallions depicting Shakespeare and Milton in the sitting-room windows of the Yorke home. Shakespeare, as Caroline points out to Robert, makes one aware of the vitality and variety of

⁸¹Shirley, p. 412.

⁸²Shirley, p. 418.

⁸³Olney Hymns: in Three Books, Hymn 15, p. 294.

⁸⁴Shirley, p. 232.

life and of the heights and depths of human nature. If Shakespeare's intention is to justify the ways of man, Milton's is to 'justifie the wayes of God'.⁸⁵ Mr and Mrs Yorke represent the tendency of the Puritan conscience to envisage only the dark side of life and the constant struggle within the individual between the forces of good and evil. Mr Yorke believes in God but lacks imagination, and Mrs Yorke, who considers herself perfect, regards others with suspicion, which acts as 'a mist before her eyes, a false guide in her path, wherever she looked, wherever she turned'.⁸⁶ In contrast, Shirley finds earth 'an Eden, life a poem', and Caroline reflects that 'God surely did not create us, and cause us to live, with the sole end of wishing always to die. I believe, in my heart, we were intended to prize life and enjoy it, so long as we retain it'.⁸⁷ Amidst the battle of life, Charlotte Brontë affirms, joy, however moderate and fleeting, is present for those with vision to discern it.

In the opinion of George Henry Lewes, 'deep, significant reality' is the great characteristic of Jane Eyre, 'an utterance from the depths of a struggling, suffering, much-enduring spirit'.⁸⁸ At Gateshead Jane's life begins as a battle. John Reed, who addresses her and treats her as an animal, is compared with a slave-driver and a Roman emperor, and her confrontation with Mrs Reed proves to be her

⁸⁵ Paradise Lost, I. 26.

⁸⁶ Shirley, p. 166.

⁸⁷ Shirley, pp. 374, 376.

⁸⁸ George Henry Lewes, 'Recent Novels: French and English', Fraser's Magazine, 36, no. 216 (1847), p. 691.

hardest battle and first victory. It is, however, at Lowood that the major conflicts of the novel are introduced. Here the dichotomy between the ideal and the real and between the spiritual and the material is presented in graphic terms. The Preface clearly indicates the author's concern for a right relationship between spirit and form, inner faith and outer expression:

Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee, is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns. These things and deeds are diametrically opposed: they are as distinct as is vice from virtue. Men too often confound them: they should not be confounded; appearance should not be mistaken for truth; narrow human doctrines, that only tend to elate and magnify a few, should not be substituted for the world-redeeming creed of Christ.⁸⁹

The fifth to the seventh chapters of the Gospel of St Matthew, which the pupils of Lowood are required to memorize, provide the thematic heart of the novel. The Sermon on the Mount opens with the Beatitudes, the first of which has to do with the poor in spirit (5. 3), those who recognize their own insufficiency and need of divine grace. Reference is made to followers of Christ as 'the light of the world' (5. 14), to the necessity of reconciliation with others before worship of God (5. 23-24), to adultery and divorce (5. 27-28, 31-32), to the casting away of the offensive right eye or right hand (5. 29-30), to the service of two masters (6. 24), to asking, seeking, and knocking (7. 7-8), and to the strait gate and narrow way (7. 13-14). In reading the stone tablet over the entrance to Lowood Jane attempts to connect the first words, naming Naomi Brocklehurst as the founder,

⁸⁹ Jane Eyre, p. 35.

and the passage of scripture 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven' (5. 16).⁹⁰ Biblical quotation is used ironically in this instance to illustrate human pride and glorification of self rather than of God.

The light and warmth shed by the Gospel message are extinguished by the gloom and chill of Gateshead and Lowood. Images of cold and impersonality abound in the opening chapters of the work. Jane looks out a window of Gateshead Hall onto the grounds, where 'all was still and petrified under the influence of a hard frost', and later, after being subjected to the stony glare of the 'black pillar' with 'the grim face at the top' and the icy eye of Mrs Reed, walks through the grounds, where 'the black frost reigned, unbroken by sun or breeze'.⁹¹ The bitter cold experienced by the girls during their winter walks to Brocklebridge Church emphasizes the concern for the spiritual destination of their pilgrimage but lack of sensitivity towards the physical hardships endured by the young pilgrims along the way: 'Sundays were dreary days in that wintry season. . . . We set out cold, we arrived at church colder: during the morning service we became almost paralysed. . . . At the close of the afternoon service we returned by an exposed and hilly road, where the bitter winter wind, blowing over a range of snowy summits to the north, almost flayed the skin from our faces'.⁹² Miss Temple's exhortation to march

⁹⁰Jane Eyre, p. 81.

⁹¹Jane Eyre, pp. 62-63, 68, 70.

⁹²Jane Eyre, p. 92.

like soldiers must have recalled in the minds of the pupils many a hymn featuring soldiers of the Cross engaged in the good fight of the Christian life. In Mr Brocklehurst's view, the march from this world to that which is to come demands mortification of the flesh in order to secure edification of the spirit: 'Oh, madam', he reproves Miss Temple, 'when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls!'.⁹³ Belief in natural depravity, especially common during the nineteenth century, finds expression in educational attitudes which separate the sacred from the secular in their consideration of the child as an immortal soul clothed in an expendable garment of flesh rather than as a spiritual and physical entity.

Helen Burns resolves the conflict between this world and the next by looking beyond the present reality of suffering to the end of the journey: faith that she is going to an eternal home to be received by the 'mighty universal Parent' enables her to regard the trials of this life in 'a light invisible' to other eyes and to return good for evil.⁹⁴ Rasselas, her favourite book, reinforces her conviction that complete happiness is not to be found on earth: 'God waits only a separation of spirit from flesh to crown us with a full reward. Why, then, should we ever sink overwhelmed with distress, when life is so soon over, and death is so certain an entrance to happiness -- to

⁹³ Jane Eyre, p. 95.

⁹⁴ Jane Eyre, pp. 113, 88.

glory?'.⁹⁵ By warning Jane against placing too much trust in the love of human beings, Helen prepares her to withstand temptation in her relationship with Rochester and increases her awareness of the resurgent power of the spirit. The names Helen (connoting the ascetic and stoic strains of Hellenism) and Burns (signifying passion or suffering) reflect their bearer's self-abnegation which leads to self-fulfilment, not in this but in another world.

Jane's struggle through the thorns of life, however, concludes with happiness in the present. Imagery of waters which overwhelm, and of progress impeded, heightens the intensity of the spiritual battle preceding the victory:

Till morning dawned I was tossed on a buoyant
but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled
under surges of joy. I thought sometimes I saw
beyond its wild waters a shore, sweet as the hills
of Beulah . . . but I could not reach it . . . a
counteracting breeze blew off the land, and continually
drove me back.⁹⁶

The archetypal patterns of fear and despair which come to the surface in her paintings and dreams serve to foreshadow the spiritual shipwreck experienced as a result of Rochester's revelation of his true position. Jane's desolate prospects are described in terms of a Christmas frost at midsummer, the doom which struck the first-born of Egypt, and a suffering child in a cold cradle.⁹⁷ Like the drowning soul of the castaway, sinking in deep mire and flooding waters, she recalls the cry of the psalmist (Psalm 69. 2) and is upheld only by faith in the

⁹⁵ Jane Eyre, p. 101.

⁹⁶ Jane Eyre, p. 182.

⁹⁷ Jane Eyre, pp. 323-24.

presence of God. Banished by those upon whose doors she has knocked for aid, Jane, like the prodigal in the far country, suffers the degradation of longing for food intended for pigs. The words she speaks to Rochester on the eve of her departure from him, 'we were born to strive and endure', are actualized in her own bitter experience.⁹⁸ Rochester has also known life to be a hell and has heard 'the sounds of the bottomless pit'.⁹⁹ St John Rivers, whose vocation as a missionary enables him to be both pioneer and warrior, is likened to 'Greatheart, who guards his pilgrim convoy from the onslaught of Apollyon'.¹⁰⁰ Enlisting under the banner of the captain of the Church militant, he enters into 'a last conflict with human weakness', in which he knows he will overcome at last.¹⁰¹ The final word of Jane Eyre upon the battle between renunciation and affirmation is thus a triumphant one.

The notes of despair which sound throughout Villette are harmonized with those of hope, and frequent mention of Nebuchadnezzar and Saul emphasizes the centrality in the novel of lonely suffering. Lucy, who regards it as her destiny to conduct the war of life single-handedly, learns to make her own way in the world as a single woman. Although the negation of suffering is to her mind the nearest approach to happiness she expects to know, her wish for wings of escape is denied and she is forced into a deep struggle. Her 'rough

⁹⁸ Jane Eyre, p. 343.

⁹⁹ Jane Eyre, p. 335.

¹⁰⁰ Jane Eyre, p. 477.

¹⁰¹ Jane Eyre, p. 388.

and heavy road' is marked by constant tests and trials with which Paul Emanuel challenges her integrity and endurance:

What thorns and briars, what flints, he strewed
in the path of feet not inured to rough travel!
He watched tearlessly -- ordeals that he exacted
should be passed through -- fearlessly. He
followed footprints that, as they approached the
bourne, were sometimes marked in blood -- followed
them grimly, holding the austerest police-watch
over the pain pressed pilgrim.¹⁰²

The figure of the castaway reappears in Villette. Polly's favourite biblical story is that of Joseph cast into the pit by his brothers, and Lucy, who compares herself with a life-boat which only ventures forth in rough weather, has nightmares of perishing in a shipwreck.

The greatest contrast of character in the novel is that between Lucy, the sufferer and weary wayfarer who continues to look upward and march onward, and Ginevra Fanshawe, who has 'no notion of meeting any distress single-handed', and who, suffering little, fights 'the battle of life by proxy'.¹⁰³ Ginevra's nicknames for Lucy, Diogenes and Mother Wisdom, draw attention to the Carlylean themes of the superiority of the spirit over the vanities of the flesh, symbolized by clothes, and the importance of work. The thoughts of the coquettish Ginevra are directed for the most part towards acquiring beautiful attire and presenting an image of perfection to her male admirers. Whereas no earthly paradise awaits Lucy, Paulina and Graham are blessed with happiness and harmony, 'the attesting trace and lingering evidence of Eden'; God looked upon their union and 'saw

¹⁰²Villette, pp. 349, 438.

¹⁰³Villette, p. 577.

that it was good'.¹⁰⁴ Lucy, deprived of the actual presence of Paul, must work to support herself. She realizes, however, that the joys and the sorrows of life together form part of the creative and redemptive impulse of God, who never leaves the individual entirely bereft of aid. The light and warmth of enduring love, suggested by the Christian name Lucy, guide the pilgrim through chill wastes where the path and destination of the pilgrimage are often blanketed in mystery, suggested by the surname Snowe. Those travellers who encounter 'weather fitful and gusty, wild and variable -- breast adverse winds, are belated and overtaken by the early closing winter night', win at the end of their arduous journey 'a glory, exceeding and eternal. Let us so run that we may obtain; let us endure hardness as good soldiers; let us finish our course, and keep the faith, reliant in the issue to come off more than conquerors: "Art thou not from everlasting mine Holy One? WE SHALL NOT DIE!"'.¹⁰⁵ Villette, more than any of her other works, conveys Charlotte Brontë's faith that 'this life is not all; neither the beginning nor the end'.¹⁰⁶

III. Redemption Through Love

The path metaphor is the means of full exploration of Charlotte Brontë's fiction. Leading directly to the heart of her work, it is in itself the message: the meaning of the spiritual pilgrimage is only

¹⁰⁴Villette, pp. 468, 533.

¹⁰⁵Villette, pp. 468, 534.

¹⁰⁶Villette, p. 451.

to be found by following the way of the pilgrim, who, confronted with two paths or two masters, must choose which way to travel and whom to serve. At each major turning-point in their lives the protagonists resemble Christian in the dilemma which leads to his decision to flee the City of Destruction and to go through the Wicket Gate opening onto a straight and narrow path. In William Crimsworth's experience 'rough and steep was the path indicated by divine suggestion; mossy and declining the green way along which Temptation strewed flowers'.¹⁰⁷ Jane, standing on a hard path and leaning against a gate at Gateshead, considers her wretched condition as she whispers 'over and over again, "What shall I do? -- what shall I do?"'.¹⁰⁸ The image of the path is implicit in Rochester's warning to Jane to 'dread remorse when . . . tempted to err'.¹⁰⁹ His juxtaposition of the words 'err' and 'Miss Eyre' intensifies the stress laid throughout the novel on direction and decision. Jane the child who, in the eyes of her elders, constantly errs, becomes Jane the young woman who, in marrying Rochester, strays from the conventional ways of society and from the route laid down by St John Rivers, but never errs in following the dictates of her own inner voice. Although tempted to err by accepting her beloved's proposal, Jane wrestles within herself as Rochester had wrestled with Bertha, and determines to leave the place of doom instantly. Her question 'What am I to do?' and her response to the answer, which comes to her intuitively, are those of Christian as he

¹⁰⁷The Professor, p. 166.

¹⁰⁸Jane Eyre, p. 70.

¹⁰⁹Jane Eyre, p. 167.

evades his loved ones, who would restrain him from following the way of eternal life: the injunction 'was so prompt, so dread, that I stopped my ears'.¹¹⁰ And, as he is guided to the Wicket Gate by a shining light, so Jane departs from Thornfield through a wicket in one of the main gates and is led through the darkness of the marshland by a light in the window of Moor House to another wicket-gate, symbolic of crisis and decision. On either side of the gate is a bush, either holly or yew, representing life or death. The two names of the home in which Jane is restored to health, Marsh End and Moor House, point to the crucial nature of her present position: she must yet avoid the sinking ground of complying with St John's commands and must cross the lonely moor of asserting her independence. With Rochester she experiences the temptations of the flesh, but with St John she experiences the temptation of losing her own soul. When forced to answer her importunate cousin, Jane fervently prays to be shown the right path.

Likewise, Lucy, contemplating her solitary and desperate position, echoes the question uttered by the prototype of all pilgrims: 'What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do?'.¹¹¹ At Madame Beck's school she frequents the forbidden 'strait and narrow path' adjacent to the garden, thereby establishing her independence of spirit.¹¹² With the realization that Paul is about to depart from

¹¹⁰Jane Eyre, p. 325.

¹¹¹Villette, p. 107.

¹¹²Villette, p. 174.

the country, she faces the major crisis of her life: 'There seems, to my memory, an entire darkness and distraction in some certain minutes I then passed alone -- a grief inexpressible over a loss unendurable. What should I do; oh! what should I do; when all my life's hope was thus torn by the roots out of my riven, outraged heart?'.¹¹³

The predominant crisis in Charlotte Brontë's novels is that of identity. The quest for self-knowledge and self-fulfilment motivates her characters to go on their highly individualized pilgrimages. They are, to use Matthew Arnold's epithet for the Brontës, 'unquiet souls', who seek to discover themselves through vocation and relationship.¹¹⁴ For Ginevra, who asks, 'Who are you, Miss Snowe?' and 'But are you anybody?', identity is purely a matter of name or connection, and not one of personal character and integrity, as it is for Lucy.¹¹⁵ Carlyle's insistence upon work as a means of attaining identity is reflected in Charlotte Brontë's heroes and heroines, all of whom take pride in being 'working people', who must earn their bread 'by exertion, and that of the most assiduous kind'.¹¹⁶ The centrality of teaching, especially that of English literature, is notable in each of the novels. To educate is to nurture and to bring to maturity. The school of life is the means whereby growth from the darkness of ignorance into the light of understanding may be achieved. Discipline,

¹¹³Villette, p. 541.

¹¹⁴'Haworth Churchyard: April, 1855', The Poems of Matthew Arnold, p. 397.

¹¹⁵Villette, pp. 392, 394.

¹¹⁶The Professor, p. 218.

which William Crimsworth and Lucy Snowe find so difficult to inspire in their Continental pupils, is shown to be an integral element of both the learning process and the spiritual pilgrimage. The focus upon composition and literature heightens the human need for communication and the universal search for values in life. William, who is himself on the path of learning, is also master and guide to others. In Mr Helstone's opinion, 'the great knowledge of man is to know himself, and the bourne whither his own steps tend', to which Mr Yorke replies: 'Ignorance was carried away from the very gates of heaven, borne through the air, and thrust in at a door in the side of the hill which led down to hell'.¹¹⁷ Knowledge of human nature and vision of the path of pilgrimage are, therefore, crucial in the discovery of personal identity. Charlotte Brontë's major figures wrestle with the issue of vocation, which, they come to realize, involves the total personality, as it unites being with doing and the inner with the outer.

For most of the characters, vocation cannot be severed from relationship. The crisis of identity is resolved in the revelation of the self to another. Human personality, created in the divine image, is innately relational. In the encounter of the 'I' and the 'Thou', to use Martin Buber's terminology, the most profound relationship is formed; 'all real living is meeting'.¹¹⁸ Only in the depths of relationship can life be lived genuinely and intensively,

¹¹⁷Shirley, p. 85.

¹¹⁸Martin Buber, I and Thou, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith, second edition (Edinburgh, 1958), p. 11.

and self be given reality and expression. There is in all of Charlotte Brontë's fiction a concern for the home as the dwelling-place of the spirit and a haven of loving relationship. This quest for a centre of identity which transforms isolation into communion reveals the universal need for reconciliation on both divine and human levels. William refers to his home as his heaven; Caroline feels 'at home' with Mrs Pryor; Jane, who earlier wished that Thornfield were her home, finally wends 'homeward' with Rochester; and Lucy, given a home by Paul, knows that her 'final home' will be 'His bosom, who "dwells in the height of Heaven"'.¹¹⁹ Inspired by divine love, humanity is to make love the basis of all relationships. In other words, the pilgrim responds to the unconditional love of God by loving others. Paulina, reflecting upon the line in Schiller's poem 'Ich habe gelebt und geliebet!', asks whether 'the summit of earthly happiness, the end of life', is to love or 'to be loved'.¹²⁰ Whereas loving is giving and being loved is receiving, love in mutuality is both giving and receiving, the essence of any vital relationship.

The characters in the novels travel the long road of learning to love and of growing together. It is this centrality of love that Harriet Martineau objected to in Villette:

All the female characters, in all their thoughts and lives, are full of one thing, or are regarded by the reader in the light of that one thought -- love.
 . . . It is not thus in real life. There are

¹¹⁹The Professor, p. 223; Shirley, p. 422; Jane Eyre, pp. 273, 473; Villette, p. 534.

¹²⁰Villette, p. 389.

substantial, heartfelt interests for women of all ages, and under ordinary circumstances, quite apart from love.¹²¹

Caroline, however, expresses Charlotte Brontë's conviction that 'love is a divine virtue' and that it is the compelling power which gives meaning to the pilgrimage of both men and women.¹²² The analogy of marriage to indicate the union of the sacred and the secular recurs throughout the Bible: the relationship between God and Israel and between Christ and the Church is described in terms of the love of the bridegroom for his bride. And in The Pilgrim's Progress the land of Beulah, on the borders of heaven, signifies the renewal of the marriage vow between the divine and the human. Love between man and woman is, therefore, more than mere romantic fantasy in Brontë's creative imagination. As the climactic experience of pilgrimage, it brings to fruition the quest for reconciliation between the spiritual and the material and resolves the crisis of identity and vocation.

Charlotte Brontë introduces into the realm of fiction a new intensity of living and loving. Her frank presentation of women in love shocked the average mind of her day. Passion, usually depicted as the prerogative of the hero but never of the heroine, is experienced in her works by both male and female partners. Caroline 'had loved without being asked to love, -- a natural, sometimes an inevitable chance, but big with misery', while Shirley, resolved to love before she marries, is denounced by her uncle for being indecorous

¹²¹ Harriet Martineau, Daily News, 3 February 1853, quoted in Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre and Vilette: A Casebook, p. 76.

¹²² Shirley, p. 313.

and unwomanly; Rochester teases Jane that it was she who proposed to him, and Lucy loves Paul in his wrath 'with a passion' beyond what she has ever felt.¹²³ According to Richard Chase, 'the "principle" of life and thought in the Brontë novels is sexual Energy'.¹²⁴ The abundant sexual energy of her protagonists cannot be denied, but of even deeper significance is their spiritual energy, which infuses all their relationships. M. H. Scargill reveals critical insight into the prevailing mood of Brontë's fiction in his statement that Jane Eyre is essentially a novel of spiritual pilgrimage:

Intensity of feeling Jane Eyre has, but it is not centred exclusively upon love; in fact, in the total impact of Jane Eyre religious ecstasy plays a part as important as love for a person. . . . It is a love story; it is a fight for the free expression of personality in love; but it is also a record of the eternal conflict between the flesh and the spirit, a conflict which is solved satisfactorily when all passion is spent. Jane Eyre may speak for many women, but it speaks also for all humanity, and it speaks in unmistakable terms. Jane Eyre is the record of an intense spiritual experience, as powerful in its way as King Lear's ordeal of purgation, and it ends nobly on a note of calm.¹²⁵

The great impact of the Bible and Paradise Lost upon Charlotte Brontë's thought and art is most evident in her treatment of the love relationship. The story of the garden of Eden in Genesis 2 and 3 and Milton's poetic interpretation of it provide the mythological

¹²³ Shirley, pp. 129, 444; Jane Eyre, p. 291; Villette, p. 581.

¹²⁴ Richard Chase, 'The Brontës: A Centennial Observance (Reconsiderations VIII)', Kenyon Review, 9, no. 4 (1947), p. 490.

¹²⁵ M. H. Scargill, "'All Passion Spent": A Revaluation of Jane Eyre', University of Toronto Quarterly, 19, no. 2 (1950), p. 121.

framework for her understanding of human nature, the interaction of the sexes, the problem of suffering, and the redemptive process from the promises of creation to their fulfilment in the new creation. In all four of her works she attempts to restore the perfection and harmony of a lost Eden, and in so doing never loses sight of the garden in the midst of the wilderness. Caroline regards the parlour of Hollow's cottage as 'her earthly paradise; how she longed to return to it, as much almost as the First Woman, in her exile, must have longed to revisit Eden'.¹²⁶ Charles Burkhart suggests that the most fundamental of the tensions presented in the novels is that inherent in myth, which 'by its statement of the way things should be is a human cry against things the way they are'.¹²⁷ In Charlotte Brontë's vision the universal and ideal realms of myth are given contemporary and practical relevance in her exploration of the ultimate romance of life, the partnership of man and woman on spiritual pilgrimage.

Although she represents her own era to the extent that marriage is the goal sought by her protagonists and the framework within which they realize their potential as persons created in the divine image, it is evident from her treatment of the garden of Eden story that she read it not from a literal point of view but rather with the insight that accompanies an understanding of myth as a literary form. According to Genesis 1. 26-27, male and female are created in God's likeness and, according to Genesis 2 and 3, they are created

¹²⁶ Shirley, p. 253.

¹²⁷ Charles Burkhart, Charlotte Brontë: A Psychosexual Study of her Novels (London, 1973), p. 31.

individually and purposefully. Inseparable from the breath of life is the innate longing for intimate fellowship with the Creator and other created beings. Charlotte Brontë's frequent use of the words 'suit', 'suitable', and 'suitability' in reference to men and women in love is basically biblical in its stress upon the complementariness of the marital partnership, which is in essence an adventure of mutual growth. In the garden of Eden myth humanity in its pristine state does not know loneliness or alienation but rather enjoys reciprocity of trust and pleasure. This 'Heav'n on Earth', or 'blissful Paradise / Of God', is entered by William and Frances, who together read 'how in the womb of chaos, the conception of a world had originated and ripened'.¹²⁸ Although the unity of the sexes is a constant refrain throughout Paradise Lost, Milton distorts the biblical myth by stressing Eve's 'Beauty and submissive Charms', upon which Adam 'smil'd with superior Love', and by stating that man is woman's Guide and Head.¹²⁹

Whereas in the Genesis story the nature and destiny of the female is identical to that of the male and sexual differentiation is for the purpose of total communion between the sexes, in Paradise Lost the woman is dependent upon the man for her spiritual, intellectual, and social identity. Sexual differentiation, which in mythic terms is a divine gift for the purpose of assuring harmony, becomes in Miltonic terms a divisive dictation of roles and a limitation of the creative intention of God. The rightful allegiance of both male and female to

¹²⁸Paradise Lost, IV. 208-9; The Professor, p. 155.

¹²⁹Paradise Lost, IV. 498-99, 442-43.

the Lord of all creation is split so that half the human race looks to the other half for its authority and direction:

In thir looks Divine
 The image of thir glorious Maker shon,
 Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
 Severe, but in true filial freedom plac't;
 Whence true autoritie in men; though both
 Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemed;
 For contemplation hee and valour formd,
 For softness shee and sweet attractive grace,
 Hee for God onely, shee for God in him.¹³⁰

In his presentation of men and women on pilgrimage Bunyan is closer to the biblical model than is Milton. Christiana, invited directly by the King of Heaven, makes her own way to the Celestial City in full knowledge that the journey of the spirit cannot be made vicariously. Gaius recognizes women as partners with men, as 'heirs together of the grace of life' (I Peter 3. 7). The relationship of the sexes to their God and to each other is the focus of Charlotte Brontë's exploration of the conflict between the sacred and the secular. Each of her novels contains references to the garden of Eden myth and reveals her familiarity with its thematic implications, but at the same time makes it clear that she cannot accept the Miltonic interpretation of the position and role of women.

Caroline laments the difference between Robert's 'mental condition' and her own: 'I think only of him; he has no room, no leisure to think of me. The feeling called love is and has been for two years the predominant emotion of my heart; always there, always awake, always astir: quite other feelings absorb his reflections, and

¹³⁰Paradise Lost, IV. 291-99.

govern his faculties'.¹³¹ Her sensitive, romantic outlook and his realistic, business-oriented frame of mind suggest Milton's notion that man is meant to do and woman is meant to be. The dissatisfaction of Caroline and Shirley with what are commonly regarded as feminine roles is, however, reflected in their desire for creative work and relationships rich in meaning. St John, in claiming Jane for God rather than for himself, states that she is 'formed for labour, not for love'.¹³² Misinterpreting 'helpmeet' to mean woman's role in general rather than a particular woman who is a suitable companion for a particular man, he reduces the relations of the sexes to a business contract in which he sets all the terms: 'I want a wife: the sole helpmeet I can influence efficiently in life, and retain absolutely till death'.¹³³ In seeking to further their own ends both Robert and St John ignore the power of human love. At the opening of Shirley Robert appears to Caroline as two distinct men, the self-contained millowner and the engaging lover. In a similar way St John the missionary repulses St John the man. Whereas Robert places his trust in the material rather than the spiritual, St John upholds the spiritual and shuns the material. Both are guilty of separating the sacred from the secular in their attitudes towards women and love. Jane's offer to accompany St John to India as a companion and equal before God reflects the biblical emphasis upon the sharing of service and destiny, but St John's assertion that in rejecting him as a husband

¹³¹Shirley, p. 188.

¹³²Jane Eyre, p. 428.

¹³³Jane Eyre, p. 431.

she is denying God illustrates Milton's confusion of divine and human authority in regard to women. When the will of God is replaced by the will of one person, the intended concord of Eden is shattered so that 'the very name of love is an apple of discord'.¹³⁴

The two misogynists who serve as catalysts for the feminist statements of the heroines of Shirley support the view expressed in Paradise Lost that woman is 'in outward shew / Elaborate, of inward less exact'.¹³⁵ To Mr Helstone, women belong to an inferior order of existence; they are simply 'toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour and to be thrown away'.¹³⁶ It is ironic that a member of the clergy should feel such antipathy to marriage, a dominant biblical motif and an institution blessed by the Church. In his opinion, however, 'a wife could not be her husband's companion, much less his confidant, much less his stay'.¹³⁷ Joe Scott is also a firm believer in the submission of women: 'I think that women are a kittle and a froward generation; and I've a great respect for the doctrines delivered in the second chapter of St Paul's first Epistle to Timothy. . . . "Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man; but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve"'.¹³⁸ Caroline's comment on the need to place this passage in its historical context

¹³⁴Jane Eyre, p. 434.

¹³⁵Paradise Lost, VIII. 538-39.

¹³⁶Shirley, p. 138.

¹³⁷Shirley, p. 82.

¹³⁸Shirley, p. 322.

before its relevance for the present can be determined, and Shirley's view that Milton misunderstood the first woman, indicate that Charlotte Brontë was well in advance of her times in her awareness of hermeneutical principles and of the complexity of relating the sacred to changing secular conditions.

The argument for the subordination of women, based upon the so-called order of creation which concentrates on the letter rather than the spirit of the Genesis myth, is refuted throughout her fiction, which is prevailingly progressive in tone and synthesizing in intent. Lucy, experiencing 'the godlike thirst after discovery', is warned by Paul against trespassing the limits proper to her sex and conceiving 'a contraband appetite for unfeminine knowledge'; the woman of intellect, she is told, is 'a luckless accident, a thing for which there was neither place nor use in creation, wanted neither as wife nor worker'.¹³⁹ But, like Jane Eyre, who knows when it is her time to assume ascendancy, Lucy is conscious of a knowledge of her own, that feminine knowledge of the heart: 'Whatever my powers -- feminine or the contrary -- God had given them, and I felt resolute to be ashamed of no faculty of His bestowal'.¹⁴⁰ As Lucy and Paul begin to understand each other better, they become like brother and sister; the battle of the sexes ends as they reveal their mutual concern for the other as a child of the same divine Parent. In calling Lucy his 'little god-sister', Graham, too, treats her as an equal for whom

¹³⁹Villette, pp. 440, 443.

¹⁴⁰Villette, p. 440.

relationship to God is prior to that to any human being.¹⁴¹

The desire to escape finiteness and to become autonomous destroys the relationship of trust and love that humanity originally enjoyed with God, and results in the Fall, the climax of the garden of Eden myth. As Milton indicates, freedom of the will lifts human behaviour from the level of natural impulse to that of deliberate intention:

freely we serve,
Because we freely love, as in our will
To love or not; in this we stand or fall.¹⁴²

In the opinion of Roland Mushat Frye, Satan falls because he aspires 'to enjoy himself rather than God, to become the bearer of his own image, to become power without love'.¹⁴³ In tempting Eve 'to reach, and feed at once both Bodie and Mind' with 'Fruit Divine', he employs subtle deception and flattery to bring about humanity's gain of self-knowledge but loss of paradise.¹⁴⁴ The major temptation of Everyman and Everywoman is to make the human central in life, to worship the creature rather than the Creator. Eve addresses Adam as her 'Glorie' and 'Perfection' but even though she loves him dearly she also reveals love of self in her temptation to 'keep the odds of Knowledge' in her power 'without Copartner'.¹⁴⁵ Her prior allegiance to the divine is overshadowed by her adoration of the human.

¹⁴¹Villette, p. 529.

¹⁴²Paradise Lost, V. 538-40.

¹⁴³God, Man, and Satan, p. 23.

¹⁴⁴Paradise Lost, IX. 779, 776.

¹⁴⁵Paradise Lost, V. 29; IX. 820-21.

In the same manner Miss Marchmont, as she confesses to Lucy, still thinks of Frank more than of God. And Ginevra, in her self-love, exemplifies love of the creature at its most degrading and idolatrous level: 'I am pretty; you can't deny that; I may have as many admirers as I choose. . . . There is me -- happy ME'.¹⁴⁶ Jane's greatest ordeal, 'full of struggle, blackness, burning', is the renunciation of the one she loves best: 'My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world; almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol'.¹⁴⁷ Danger, she discovers, is ever-present in the garden of Eden; there is a way to hell even from the gates of heaven. She must 'distinguish between a fallen seraph of the abyss and a messenger from the eternal throne -- between a guide and a seducer'.¹⁴⁸ In pronouncing judgment upon herself she uses the imagery of the creation myth: 'That a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life: that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies, and swallowed poison as if it were nectar'.¹⁴⁹

Charlotte Brontë's conception of the hero, characterized by moral imperfection, is clearly derived from Milton's figure of Satan. Robert, for example, errs in proposing to Shirley, whom he does not actually love, and is condemned to 'Cain-like desolation': 'Lucifer --

¹⁴⁶Villette, p. 215.

¹⁴⁷Jane Eyre, pp. 342, 302.

¹⁴⁸Jane Eyre, p. 168.

¹⁴⁹Jane Eyre, p. 190.

Star of the Morning . . . thou art fallen. You -- once high in my esteem -- are hurled down: you -- once intimate in my friendship -- are cast out. Go!'.¹⁵⁰ The garden of Thornfield, the idyllic setting for Jane's temptation by Rochester, is similarly presented in terms of Milton's garden of Eden. Passion causes Eve's Fall and entices Jane, like the moth which alights on a plant at Rochester's feet but shortly after flies away, towards 'the paradise of union' with her lover.¹⁵¹ After Eve tastes the forbidden fruit, the peace of the garden is shattered:

Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe,
That all was lost.¹⁵²

As soon as Jane and Rochester agree to marry, the moonlight which had shone upon their sheltered Eden-like nook fades and a storm strikes, symbolizing the conflict between the human and the divine will. 'Back to the Thicket slunk / The guiltie Serpent'; likewise, the face of the guilty Rochester can hardly be seen in the darkness of Thornfield.¹⁵³

The chestnut tree, split down the centre, evokes the tree of life with its promise of enduring strength and abundant growth blighted. In its loss of 'community of vitality' it represents the separation of Jane and Rochester but, as its 'firm base and strong roots' remain unsundered, it also foreshadows their eventual reunion: 'You did

¹⁵⁰Shirley, pp. 501, 500.

¹⁵¹Jane Eyre, pp. 277, 284.

¹⁵²Paradise Lost, IX. 782-84.

¹⁵³Paradise Lost, IX. 784-85.

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right to hold fast to each other I think, scathed as you look, and charred and scorched, there must be a little sense of life in you yet, rising out of that adhesion at the faithful, honest roots'.¹⁵⁴

The tree and the torn wedding veil serve as symbols of human defiance of God, most blatantly revealed in the Crucifixion of Christ: 'And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent' (Matthew 27. 51). The Cross, however, stands at the junction of death and life, of estrangement and union. The travail of the whole creation since the Fall will result in a rebirth at the time of the final redemption, when God's supreme purposes will become clear.

In formulating his own relative and situational system of ethics Rochester, 'human and fallible', tries to 'arrogate a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be safely entrusted'.¹⁵⁵ Jane, however, refuses to compromise 'the law given by God; sanctioned by man', which she believes was ordained for guidance in times of crisis: 'I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself'.¹⁵⁶ Her undeniable integrity awes and challenges the frustrated Rochester, who discovers the strength underlying her apparent frailty. Lucy, too, learns that love can mean saying 'no'; she must sometimes resist the absolutism of Paul in order to maintain her own individuality. Morality, in Charlotte Brontë's view, is, therefore, not so much an issue of

¹⁵⁴Jane Eyre, p. 304.

¹⁵⁵Jane Eyre, p. 169.

¹⁵⁶Jane Eyre, p. 344.

understanding as of power; the intellect must be reinforced by the will and the human aligned with the divine. Martin is correct in his assessment of the novelist's presentation of a conventional situation in an unconventional way:

To settle for nothing less than the best is not to be narrow; the test is to become worthy of love, not to take it on any terms but to deserve it: not to violate one's own nature and morality but so to expand that nature that it deserves reward. Jane and Rochester, learning to respect the inviolability of the soul as much as earthly delights, become a microcosm of man's striving for Christian reward.¹⁵⁷

The immediate result of the Fall is the alienation of humanity from God and Nature. Sin, which is essentially divisive, breaks all bonds of communion and trust so that enmity becomes a fact of human existence. Milton portrays Adam and Eve, whose 'inward State of Mind' was once 'full of Peace', as being 'tost and turbulent':

Love was not in thir looks, either to God
Or to each other, but apparent guilt,
And shame, and perturbation, and despaire,
Anger, and obstinacie, and hate, and guile.¹⁵⁸

The rule of man over woman (Genesis 3. 16) is one manifestation of the tragedy and chaos which follow upon rebellion against God and is an element of the disorder that destroys the spiritual and sexual harmony known prior to the Fall. The punishment meted out to Adam and Eve is what will be, not what ought to be; it is, in other words, descriptive, not prescriptive. Having replaced their faith in the divine by

¹⁵⁷The Accents of Persuasion, p. 83.

¹⁵⁸Paradise Lost, IX. 1125-26; X. 111-14.

assertion of the human, and having lost their true freedom which is found only in obedience, both man and woman, now mortal and desolate, stand in need of radical regeneration. The experience of dispossession, disorientation, and discord is, however, often the pathway from spiritual loss to spiritual gain. The expulsion from Eden precedes the entrance into the new creation.

Estrangement of the sexes and their struggle towards reconciliation is central in Charlotte Brontë's treatment of the pilgrimage. Martin makes the important point that she was 'occasionally impatient with Milton's view of the order of the sexes, but in her heart she was in agreement with him, for all her heroines look to their lovers for domination in one form or another'.¹⁵⁹ The male and female protagonists of each novel interact as masters and pupils and as arbiters of each other's destiny. Frances, 'as docile as a well-trained child', continues to address her husband 'with an air of marked deference': 'it was her pleasure, her joy to make me still the master in all things'.¹⁶⁰ Robert tutors Caroline in French, whereas she serves as his 'little pastor' and 'pretty priestess' in spiritual matters.¹⁶¹ Louis's 'quiet authority', to which Shirley submits passively, is illustrated in his affinity for animals, in whose presence he feels that he is 'Adam's son; the heir of him to whom dominion was given over "every living thing that moveth upon the earth"'.¹⁶² His desire to be first tutor and then husband, to tame

¹⁵⁹The Accents of Persuasion, p. 42.

¹⁶⁰The Professor, pp. 219, 223.

¹⁶¹Shirley, p. 561.

¹⁶²Shirley, pp. 440, 433.

and then to reward with his love, meets a challenge in Shirley: 'I should find more congenial responsibility in the charge of a young lioness or leopardess. . . . I fear I should tire of the mute, monotonous innocence of the lamb However kindly the hand -- if it is feeble, it cannot bend Shirley; and she must be bent: it cannot curb her, and she must be curbed'.¹⁶³ Despite her independent spirit, Shirley addresses Louis as her master, and in her acceptance of her tutor's superiority may be compared with Milton's Eve, who adores the godlike Adam: 'Her face, before turned from him, returned towards him. When he ceased, she took the word up as if from his lips: she took his very tone; she seized his very accent'.¹⁶⁴ Biblical imagery of the shepherd and the sheep reveals their intimate but unequal relationship: 'I am glad I know my keeper, and am used to him. Only his voice will I follow; only his hand shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose'.¹⁶⁵

From the beginning of their acquaintance Jane and Rochester are far more flexible in their master-pupil roles. He offers her new ideas gained from his experience in the world, while she in turn opens his eyes to new vistas of the spiritual world. Rochester, the master, submits to the authority of Jane, the governess he has employed, who becomes 'the arbitress' of his life, his 'genius for good or evil':

I never met your likeness. Jane, you please me,
and you master me -- you seem to submit, and I
like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while

¹⁶³Shirley, pp. 490-91.

¹⁶⁴Shirley, p. 463.

¹⁶⁵Shirley, p. 579.

I am twining the soft, silken skein round my
finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart.
I am influenced -- conquered . . . and the
conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any
triumph I can win.¹⁶⁶

Paul, the arbiter of Lucy's destiny from the moment she arrives at
Madame Beck's pensionnat, spreads over her his banner of vigilant love
until, 'penetrated with his influence, and living by his affection,
having his worth by intellect, and his goodness by heart', she prefers
him 'before all humanity'.¹⁶⁷ Caroline expresses the deep desire of
all Charlotte Brontë's major characters to restore the harmony of
Eden: 'Robert is a first-rate man -- in my eyes: I have loved, do
love, and must love him. I would be his wife, if I could; as I cannot,
I must go where I shall never see him. There is but one alternative --
to cleave to him as if I were a part of him, or to be sundered from
him wide as the two poles of a sphere'.¹⁶⁸ At the heart of the love
relationship is the archetypal quest for total unity which re-creates
man and woman as one flesh in the image of God.

Before the intended unity of creation can be effected, however,
there must be a change of attitude towards the distaff side of the
human race. Charlotte Brontë challenges the conventional roles which
have stereotyped and limited women's creative contributions within the
home and within society at large. Her heroines advocate liberation
of women from stultifying inactivity and recognition of their equal
status with men on the pilgrimage of life. Women must once again be

¹⁶⁶ Jane Eyre, pp. 339, 289.

¹⁶⁷ Villette, p. 592.

¹⁶⁸ Shirley, p. 262.

regarded as suitable companions for men and be enabled to realize their intellectual and spiritual potential. Victorian women were, for the most part, bound by the exhortation of Adam to Eve found in Paradise Lost, but not in Genesis: 'leave not the faithful side / That gave thee being, still shades thee and protects'.¹⁶⁹ Frances, wishing to retain her independence by continuing to teach after marriage, shuns the thought of 'lingering at home, unemployed and solitary': 'I must act in some way, and act with you. I have taken notice, Monsieur, that people who are only in each other's company for amusement, never really like each other so well, or esteem each other so highly, as those who work together, and perhaps suffer together'.¹⁷⁰ William, however, struggles against the temptation to be overly-protective towards Frances by making himself her god. Love of man for woman, if modelled after Christ's love for the Church, allows freedom for the attainment of full maturity as humanity under God moves towards a new heaven and a new earth.

Caroline reflects upon the character of the 'virtuous woman' of Proverbs 31 and pleads for an altered attitude towards Victorian womanhood, which, to her mind, has fallen far short of its biblical model. Shirley also decries the present position of women, whom men misapprehend 'both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend'.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹Paradise Lost, IX. 265-66.

¹⁷⁰The Professor, p. 200.

¹⁷¹Shirley, p. 343.

Jane Eyre, who declares that she is not an angel and should not be considered any more celestial than Rochester, voices the discontent of many a middle-class woman who finds herself placed on a pedestal as a decorative guardian of domestic respectability:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.¹⁷²

Monsieur de Bassompierre comes to realize that his daughter Paulina cannot remain in a perpetual state of childhood, and Graham Bretton learns the folly of regarding Ginevra as his divinity. In the eyes of Paul Emanuel, Lucy, who travels about unaccompanied, is 'adventurous, indocile, and audacious', with 'no spirit of grace, faith, sacrifice, or self-abasement'.¹⁷³ The portraits of the four demure young ladies, 'insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities', and of the sensuous Cleopatra, which Lucy views at the gallery, exemplify the polarities in male attitudes towards the female during the Victorian period: a woman is either angel or temptress, all spirit or all flesh.¹⁷⁴ And, as Lucy learns at the theatre, the tragedy of the banished Queen Vashti (Esther 1-2), condemned as evil incarnate, awaits

¹⁷²Jane Eyre, p. 141.

¹⁷³Villette, pp. 386-87.

¹⁷⁴Villette, p. 278.

the woman who dares defy the command of her husband.

Charlotte Brontë's heroines, however, possess independence of spirit and determination to pursue their own vocational paths in an age when, in the words of Elaine Showalter, 'womanhood was a vocation in itself'.¹⁷⁵ Lucy, for instance, is not left in a domestic situation but in an autonomous position as director of her own school. Jane, too, is made independently wealthy; she is her own mistress. The fact that they have viable alternatives to marriage makes their decision and their eagerness to marry more significant.¹⁷⁶ In order that a woman may enter wholly into marriage she must first understand herself and be understood by her partner as a complete personality in her own right. Knowledge of the 'I' is a necessary stage in the journey towards reconciliation with the 'Thou'.

Each of Charlotte Brontë's novels is marked by a vigorous feminine consciousness, and references to the mother figure are numerous. William invokes his mother as he examines her portrait and Jane pledges her obedience to the maternal heart of the universe. Caroline yearns to know her mother, the source of her being. Jane's recurring dream of the helpless and crying child in her arms represents the struggle to bring forth new life, the progress from the known to the unknown, and the nurturing and unifying nature of the feminine. Her

¹⁷⁵ Elaine Showalter, A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing (Princeton, New Jersey, 1977), p.21.

¹⁷⁶ Patricia Beer, Reader, I Married Him: A Study of the Women Characters of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot (London, 1974), p. 92.

pity for Rochester is 'the suffering mother of love: its anguish is the very natal pang of the divine passion'.¹⁷⁷ Paul, whose heart is 'tender beyond a man's tenderness', exhibits sensitivity towards women and girls and, in his childlike faith, prays 'as devoutly as a woman'.¹⁷⁸ Shirley's vision of the mythical and mystical Eve, the 'undying, mighty being' who spans all time from the dawn of creation through the advent of the Messiah to the new creation, ridicules Milton's taming of the first woman's greatness and vitality: 'The first woman was heaven-born: vast was the heart whence gushed the well-spring of the blood of nations; and grand the undegenerate head where rested the consort-crown of creation'.¹⁷⁹ Deeply aware of the untapped potential of the female half of humanity, Charlotte Brontë's women are characterized by discontent and continuous striving towards the goal of their pilgrimage. They know the power of love in effecting the silent revolution, the change that takes place within the heart.

The conclusion of Jane Eyre illustrates the redemptive nature of the spiritual pilgrimage. It is Charlotte Brontë's belief that the goal of the journey, knowledge of God and of self, is found in love. Jane discovers her identity and vocation through her relationship with St John Rivers and Rochester. Which master should she obey? Should she respond to the divine or the human voice? In the words of John Halperin, she is faced with the alternatives of 'reason without

¹⁷⁷ Jane Eyre, p. 334.

¹⁷⁸ Villette, pp. 425, 474.

¹⁷⁹ Shirley, pp. 316, 315.

feeling, a rampant possessiveness desirous of marriage without love, duty without commitment', and 'feeling without reason, a rampant possessiveness yearning for love without marriage, gratification without commitment', but dares to avoid both extremes.¹⁸⁰ Union is impossible with the self-sufficient St John, in whom there is little, if any, character development, and it can only be achieved with Rochester when his egoism is converted to humility.

On the evening Jane makes her choice between the two men, St John appropriately selects Revelation 21 as his reading before prayers. In this chapter the apocalyptic vision of the holy city is presented in terms of a bride adorned for her husband and stress is laid upon the dwelling of God with humanity and the end of all sorrow and suffering. Imagery of gates and walls, the river and the tree of life, the Lamb and the light of the glory of God, which is employed throughout the novel, serves to intensify Jane's sense of being on the threshold of the final stage of her pilgrimage. She rejects St John, 'pure-lived, conscientious, zealous', but void of compassion and 'that peace of God which passeth all understanding'.¹⁸¹ With 'Christian stoicism' the martyr-like missionary sacrifices an earthly haven with Rosamond Oliver for 'the true, eternal Paradise'.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ John Halperin, Egoism and Self-Discovery in the Victorian Novel: Studies in the Ordeal of Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1974), p. 47.

¹⁸¹ Jane Eyre, p. 378.

¹⁸² Jane Eyre, pp. 393-94.

Denying his need of human love, St John presses forward in his vocation, his 'great work', along with those 'who have merged all ambitions in the glorious one of bettering their race': 'It is what I have to look forward to, and to live for'.¹⁸³ He acknowledges the justice and might of his Leader but never mentions the compulsion of his love. As 'the servant of an infallible Master' he is 'an exacting master' to Jane, whom he commands in the manner of the centurion who is used to being obeyed (Matthew 8. 9) but without the authority of love.¹⁸⁴ Jane, however, does not love her servitude and feels that in pleasing him she must disown half her nature and follow a path for which she has no natural vocation.

Jane Eyre begins and ends with the theme that duty uninformed by love is of no avail. Mrs Reed believes she is doing her duty by taking a child she cannot love into her family, and St John's counterfeit offer of marriage is scorned by Jane. His part in the redemptive mission of God is uppermost in St John's thoughts and prayers, which concentrate on 'wanderers from the fold', those who are lured from the narrow path by 'the temptations of the world and the flesh', and brands 'snatched from the burning'.¹⁸⁵ Although he seeks intimacy with God, he remains at a distance from his fellow-creatures. He is not truly present in both spirit and flesh. Jane realizes that his telescopic vision, which, like the perspective glass used by Bunyan's pilgrims, enables him to see the Celestial City,

¹⁸³ Jane Eyre, pp. 399-400.

¹⁸⁴ Jane Eyre, pp. 427, 423.

¹⁸⁵ Jane Eyre, pp. 442-43.

must be balanced by vision which focusses on what is near at hand. Failing to perceive the spiritual in the midst of the material, he compartmentalizes his Christianity and thus severs the sacred from the secular.

Rejecting St John's offer of what he terms 'the only union that gives a character of permanent conformity to the destinies and designs of human beings'; Jane returns to Rochester, with whom she enters into a transforming, not a conforming, union.¹⁸⁶ Convinced that God does not give life to have it thrown away and that salvation is not to be selfishly enjoyed but selflessly shared, she learns that the greatest achievement of the pilgrim is not to become dehumanized or over-spiritualized but rather rehumanized as a new creation in the image of God. The loss of the transitory paradise of Thornfield, where romantic passion was unalloyed with knowledge of God and self, leads to the gain of the permanent paradise of Ferndean. The moonlight gives place to the sunlight as Jane and Rochester, tested by separation and suffering, commit themselves to each other as mature persons, no longer neophytes who 'have not passed the porch of life, and are absolutely unacquainted with its mysteries'.¹⁸⁷

Earlier addressed as his 'ministrant spirit', Jane indeed appears at the close of the novel as Rochester's comforter.¹⁸⁸ Bearing water and candles, she serves as a divine instrument of restoration. Having snatched him from burning to death at Thornfield, his 'cherished

¹⁸⁶ Jane Eyre, p. 432.

¹⁸⁷ Jane Eyre, p. 167.

¹⁸⁸ Jane Eyre, p. 233.

preserver' now saves him from spiritual despair through her baptism of love.¹⁸⁹ The change in Rochester's countenance betokens a change within. He has passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death and recognizes his own weakness and need of grace, that power not his own. The 'sightless Samson', like the 'stately house' which has become 'a blackened ruin', is assured by Jane that he must not compare himself with the lightning-struck chestnut tree in Thornfield orchard, as he is still vigorous.¹⁹⁰ Although his impaired vision and diminished strength symbolize his former shallowness of perception and possessive manipulation of others, his physical loss constitutes spiritual gain. Broken in body and spirit, he is reduced to a state of wretchedness similar to that expressed in the hymns of Newton and Cowper, and seeks to be made new: 'You know I was proud of my strength: but what is it now, when I must give it over to foreign guidance, as a child does its weakness? Of late, Jane -- only -- only of late -- I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance, the wish for reconcilment to my Maker'.¹⁹¹

The biblical pattern of breaking down in order to build up, of dying in order to be born again, is illustrated in Rochester's experience of sin, suffering, and redemption. Once he recognizes the darkness of his own nature the light of regeneration begins to dawn. His recovery of sight in one eye and the birth of his son indicate that the new creation commences with the adoption of the childlike

¹⁸⁹Jane Eyre, p. 182.

¹⁹⁰Jane Eyre, pp. 456, 449, 469.

¹⁹¹Jane Eyre, p. 471.

stance of faith in the divine. Having lost his proud independence and disdain for 'every part but that of the giver and protector', he cleaves unto Jane, 'his prop and guide'.¹⁹² In mutual submission of love they discover the meaning of giving and receiving, the paradoxical nature of freedom. The words 'Reader, I married him', Jane's declaration of her decision to enter into the willing servitude of love, reveal Charlotte Brontë's attitude towards marriage.¹⁹³ Not one of her heroines sacrifices her personality in marriage but rather sees the bonds of love as the means of achieving perfect freedom and full maturity.

The depth and intensity of the reunion at Ferndean is described in language of religious devotion. Eden is indeed restored as Jane and Rochester meet as companions in flesh and spirit. The sacred and the secular are reunited as person and vocation, love and duty, become one. Their perfect suitability is symbolized by the cord of communion which Rochester feels is situated somewhere under his ribs in the region of his heart and which is 'inextricably knotted to a similar string' in Jane's frame.¹⁹⁴ Rochester suits Jane 'to the finest fibre' of her nature, and she is 'the apple of his eye'.¹⁹⁵ Whereas at Thornfield Rochester had spoken of Jane as a possession, as a jewel which he might attach to his watchguard, at Ferndean he gives her his watch in the knowledge that his times are in the hands

¹⁹² Jane Eyre, pp. 470, 473.

¹⁹³ Jane Eyre, p. 474.

¹⁹⁴ Jane Eyre, p. 280.

¹⁹⁵ Jane Eyre, pp. 470, 476.

of God and that Jane is now watching over him. In his presence her whole being is brought to life and light; she lives in him and he lives in her with an intimacy like that known between Christ and those who love him (John 14. 20): 'No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. . . . All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character -- perfect concord is the result'.¹⁹⁶ The 'alpha and omega' of Rochester's longing find fulfilment in Jane's response of love, for which he thanks his merciful Redeemer.¹⁹⁷

It is thematically important that the novel closes with reference to St John Rivers and his faithful pursuit of 'the path he had marked for himself'.¹⁹⁸ In portraying the responses of St John and Rochester to the redemptive power of God Charlotte Brontë may have had in mind John Wesley's distinction between 'the faith of a servant', which results in 'a working righteousness', and 'the faith of a son', which transforms the entire personality.¹⁹⁹ Jane, responding to the divine call in the human, feels like 'the messenger-pigeon flying home', whereas St John sacrifices an earthly home for a heavenly reward.²⁰⁰ News of his missionary work serves to extend Jane's vision beyond the circumscribed domestic scene and makes her

¹⁹⁶Jane Eyre, pp. 475-76.

¹⁹⁷Jane Eyre, p. 471.

¹⁹⁸Jane Eyre, p. 477.

¹⁹⁹Quoted in 'The Father of the Family', p. 97.

²⁰⁰Jane Eyre, p. 447.

aware of the universal nature of the human family. St John's anticipation of 'his incorruptible crown' also reminds Jane of the ultimate destination of the pilgrimage.²⁰¹ Although eternal life is experienced as a present reality in human love, its final consummation will be known in divine love. Jane and Rochester, representing the new creation on earth, have proof of what St John, representing the ranks of the redeemed in heaven, knows by faith; namely, that love is the way and the end of spiritual pilgrimage. Whereas St John fails to progress beyond the faith of a servant to that of a son, thereby becoming 'an heir of God through Christ' (Galatians 4. 7), Rochester and Jane become 'heirs together of the grace of life' (I Peter 3. 7). By the end of the novel Jane's surname takes on the connotation of 'heir', as she in fact inherits her uncle's material wealth and shares with Rochester the spiritual riches of a transfiguring love.

Villette, concluding on a more subdued note than Jane Eyre, is Charlotte Brontë's mature statement of the pilgrimage theme. The invocation 'Herald, come quickly!' uttered by Lucy early in her journey becomes the affirmation 'he is coming' at its end, signifying that the redemptive purpose of creation will be fulfilled and that the pilgrim's response and readiness are of utmost importance.²⁰² Like Jane and Rochester, Lucy and Paul, recognizing their own separateness and uniqueness, find their true identity and vocation in love of each other. Paul, acting initially as a watchguard for Lucy, whom he believes needs keeping down and watching over, becomes 'blind

²⁰¹Jane Eyre, p. 477.

²⁰²Villette, pp. 252, 595.

and helpless' in her hands when she accidentally breaks his lunettes.²⁰³
Both reduced to a state of humility and dependence, they acquire the inner vision and sensitivity which results from a loss of pride.

Imagery of walls and gardens also features prominently in Villette. Paul and Lucy, locked into the sectarian thought-patterns of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, are estranged by 'the apple of discord'.²⁰⁴ To Lucy the theological work which Paul lends her has 'a honied voice; its accents were all unction and balm'; the Roman Catholic faith is, in her opinion, satanic, as it seeks to lure her from her own understanding of the Christian way.²⁰⁵ And to Paul there is danger in her 'terrible, proud, earnest Protestantism', that 'strange, self-reliant, invulnerable creed', which clothes its adherents in an 'unblessed panoply'.²⁰⁶ When they see themselves and each other in the light of the 'Mercy beyond human compassions', the 'Pity which redeems worlds -- nay, absolves Priests', they experience the unifying presence and power of Christ amidst the diversifying tendencies of his followers: 'then, at last, came a tone accordant, an echo responsive, one sweet chord of harmony in two conflicting spirits'.²⁰⁷ Paul becomes for Lucy a Christian hero, who, in his sacrificial giving of self, lives a consecrated life. Roman Catholicism becomes individualized; the saint and the man are one. To

²⁰³Villette, p. 413.

²⁰⁴Villette, p. 503.

²⁰⁵Villette, p. 507.

²⁰⁶Villette, p. 512.

²⁰⁷Villette, pp. 515, 517.

'offer homage' to her 'king' is 'both a joy and a duty'.²⁰⁸ As 'a freeman, and not a slave', Paul bestows upon Lucy freedom to be herself and to be true to her own faith: 'Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for "Lucy"'.²⁰⁹ Martin aptly describes 'the simple meal served on the balcony of Lucy's new home' as 'almost a sacramental experience of a shared religious sense that lies beyond sect'.²¹⁰ When the walls of spiritual pride come tumbling down, humanity can be reintegrated as part of the intended cosmic harmony: 'We walked back to the Rue Fossette by moonlight -- such moonlight as fell on Eden -- shining through the shades of the Great Garden, and haply gilding a path glorious, for a step divine -- a Presence nameless'.²¹¹

Lucy's promise to be Paul's faithful steward and her tending of his favourite plants during his absence symbolize the concord and abundance of life in the new creation. His admonition to be ready suggests the need for preparation and faithfulness, stressed in Jesus's parables of the kingdom of heaven. She awaits the return of the bridegroom and anticipates the wedding banquet in the assurance that her Greatheart will overcome Apollyon. His letters are a restorative power, 'real food that nourished, living water that refreshed'.²¹²

²⁰⁸Villette, p. 587.

²⁰⁹Villette, pp. 594-95.

²¹⁰The Accents of Persuasion, p. 185.

²¹¹Villette, p. 591.

²¹²Villette, p. 594.

Paul, in the manner of his apostolic namesake, makes a missionary voyage and suffers shipwreck, but, true to his surname, Emanuel, meaning 'God with us', remains spiritually present to Lucy. Although he fails to return to his earthly port, he will be received by his Divine Pilot, who calms the storms of life and rescues from peril. Lucy learns to accept the truth that, whereas fulfilment is not always known on earth, 'our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory . . . for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal' (II Corinthians 4. 17-18). The promised land may not be reached, but its 'sweet pastures' glimpsed 'from the desolate and sepulchral summit of a Nebo' are a foretaste of the life to come.²¹³ For Charlotte Brontë the story of spiritual pilgrimage has to do not with the distance gained on the highway to heaven but with the direction faced, not with the attainment but with the expectation.

²¹³Villette, p. 310.

CHAPTER 5

ELIZABETH GASKELL

I. New Directions for Pilgrimage

The compelling interest of Charlotte Brontë in the spiritual pilgrimage is shared by her first and as yet unsurpassed biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell, whose treatment of the theme provides a transitional link between the essentially romantic vision of Brontë and the more realistic vision of George Eliot. Although they both reflect in their writing a strong biblical heritage and the conviction that fundamental change is needed within the realm of the spirit before any other forms of change can take place, Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell portray vastly different worlds. In Brontë's novels, with the exception of Shirley, there is little consciousness of circumstances beyond the immediate concern of the protagonists, whereas in Gaskell's works external forces and events press in upon the characters and demand some kind of resolution which will integrate the self with society.

If solitary struggle towards the ideal of a perfect love is the distinguishing mark of Charlotte Brontë's fiction, solidarity and interdependence, sought with a passion no less intense but with a more realistic awareness of changing social conditions, are the goals in

Elizabeth Gaskell's view of the spiritual pilgrimage. This contrast between the two writers is perhaps best illustrated by reference to Brontë's letter of 9 July 1853 to Gaskell:

Do you, who have so many friends, -- so large a circle of acquaintance, -- find it easy, when you sit down to write, to isolate yourself from all those ties, and their sweet associations, so as to be your own woman, uninfluenced or swayed by the consciousness of how your work may affect other minds; what blame or what sympathy it may call forth? Does no luminous cloud ever come between you and the severe Truth, as you know it in your own secret and clear-seeing soul? In a word, are you never tempted to make your characters more amiable than the Life, by the inclination to assimilate your thoughts to the thoughts of those who always feel kindly, but sometimes fail to see justly?¹

Gaskell did indeed have a wide circle of friends and acquaintances which included Carlyle, Dickens, Thackeray, Forster, Darwin, Froude, Kingsley, Harriet Martineau, Geraldine Jewsbury, Harriet Beecher-Stowe, Florence Nightingale, and Brontë herself.² Unfortunately, she never met George Eliot, for whom she felt a deep literary affinity, but she did correspond with her briefly. Closely associated as she was with some of the great seminal minds of her age, Elizabeth Gaskell remained her 'own woman', but not in the sense which Charlotte meant. It was impossible for her to be 'uninfluenced' by the awakened social conscience of Victorian England and to be satisfied with glossing over the harsh truths of existence occasioned by indifference and injustice.

Her openness to the spirit of the times and her trust in the human capacity to transform society are direct manifestations of her

¹Quoted in The Life of Charlotte Brontë, pp. 504-5.

²Winifred Gérin, Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography (Oxford, 1976), p. 243.

religion, the creative impulse behind all her writing. As Coral Lansbury points out, 'Elizabeth Gaskell has been consistently misunderstood because insufficient attention has been paid to her religion, and what it meant to be a Unitarian, isolated and privileged, dedicated to the principle of individual independence and yet determined to ameliorate society'.³ Unitarianism, in its encouragement of progressive thought and scientific enquiry, is based upon a theology of optimism. Rejecting the doctrine of the divinity of Christ and thereby also that of the Trinity, it replaces the need for miracles in the life of faith with a new emphasis on rationality and human perfectibility. Because they did not believe in the Atonement already effected by the Redeemer, Unitarians adopted for themselves the work of redemption through practical application of Christian love. The Unitarians of Gaskell's day were largely unshaken by the conflict over biblical criticism and by the prevailing doubt, which rendered many within the ranks of the Established Church and Nonconformist denominations totally ineffective on account of excessive introspection. Intellectually and spiritually free of unnecessary burdens, they became actively involved in the pressing political, social, and economic issues of their time. The dichotomy between sacred and secular which plagued mainstream Christianity of the Victorian era appears not to have troubled the Unitarians, in whose minds there were no artificial boundaries between belief and practice.

As with Brontë, the pilgrimage motif explored by Gaskell emerged

³Coral Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis (London, 1975), p. 15.

from her own experience of life. Her literary career was in fact initiated by an effort to turn her overwhelming grief over the death in 1845 of her infant son, William, into a means of healing both for herself and for others. In encouraging her to write a novel, Rev. William Gaskell offered the practical advice which was the message of many of his sermons, that sorrow turned in upon itself leads to a paralysis of thought and action, whereas directed outwards it can be redemptive. Out of her own acquaintance with loss came a genuine empathy with the sufferings of others and a deep insight into the heart's mysteries, two of her outstanding gifts as a novelist.

Having shared in her husband's parish work, she was alert to the appalling poverty and distress of the slum-dwellers, not far from the doorstep of her home. She had seen with her own eyes the deplorable effects of the depression of 1836 and of the grim years from 1839 to 1842, when the Chartists were making their agonized but futile pleas before Parliament. The strong impression made upon her by her surroundings is evident in the Preface of her first novel, Mary Barton (1848):

Living in Manchester, but with a deep relish and fond admiration for the country, my first thought was to find a frame-work for my story in some rural scene . . . when I bethought me how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided. I had always felt a deep sympathy with the care-worn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations between work and want; tossed to and fro by circumstances, apparently in even a greater degree than other men.⁴

⁴Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life, edited by Stephen Gill, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 37.

Thus Elizabeth Gaskell discovered the theme which was to recur in her work, that of the pilgrimage, which takes its rise from the everyday struggles of ordinary people, is characterized not only by periods of activity and advance but also by times of bewilderment and endurance, and involves learning to cope with new and difficult circumstances.

In Mary Barton she introduces her concept of the universal human pilgrimage, which is at once personal and collective: 'we are all of us in the same predicament through life. Each with a fear and a hope from childhood to death'.⁵ Conscious of the trials and temptations faced by sundry individuals, many of them unsung heroes, who constitute the urban population, she asks: 'Errands of mercy -- errands of sin -- did you ever think where all the thousands of people you daily meet are bound?'.⁶ For Gaskell, deeds and their motivation determine the nature of the spiritual pilgrimage. Although The Pilgrim's Progress is frequently referred to in her novels, the progress of her characters takes a different form from that of Christian. The journey taken by her protagonists is one that leads not towards a celestial city but rather more deeply into the pain and complexity of life in the earthly city.

Gaskell's use of chapter mottoes in Mary Barton and North and South (1855) reveals her familiarity with the custom of stating the biblical text to be expounded in a sermon, whether delivered in church or chapel, or printed as suitable Sunday reading for the Victorian household. Quoting from popular literature and songs, she firmly establishes the

⁵Mary Barton, p. 343.

⁶Mary Barton, p. 102.

pilgrimage motif as the structural and thematic framework of these two novels. Her headings include references to a bark upon the sea, the restless wave, life's voyager, shipwreck, danger and distress, doubt and trouble, fear and pain, a dreary labyrinth, dark ways underground, one Guide, briars besetting every path, and a cross in every lot; the motto for chapter 28 of North and South is reminiscent of several of the hymns of pilgrimage sung during the nineteenth century:

Through cross to crown! -- And though thy spirit's life
Trials untold assail with giant strength,
Good cheer! good cheer! Soon ends the bitter strife,
And thou shalt reign in peace with Christ at length.⁷

Mary Barton and Ruth (1853) are especially rich in the more traditional and biblical terminology of pilgrimage, whereas the later works give the path metaphor a new dimension, evident in the use of language which becomes increasingly secular in its connotation. Elizabeth Gaskell drew upon the Bible as an inspirational source to the same extent as did Charlotte Brontë but in her fiction its parabolic and paradoxical meaning is more subtly integrated with characterization, symbolism, and development of theme. For Gaskell the path of pilgrimage unites those who seek a guide for living in a wilderness of change. The way ahead is not always clearly defined but her protagonists convey their sense of being pathfinders on a recently-discovered and often lonely track leading to new spiritual frontiers.

Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot all

⁷Mary Barton, pp. 343, 443; Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South, edited by Dorothy Collin, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 143, 180, 280.

experienced at an early age the death of their mothers, Elizabeth when she was only thirteen months old. This loss is reflected in their fiction in the recurring portrayal of motherless girls or complete orphans as heroines. In Brontë's novels the figure of the orphan reinforces the idea of the solitary pilgrimage but in Gaskell's it heightens the need for social interdependence and responsibility. Brontë's pilgrims tend to bear their own burdens, whereas Gaskell's help to bear the burdens of others. Gaskell, therefore, goes beyond Brontë in her treatment not only of the spiritual struggles of the individual but also of the myriad struggles of common humanity. Whenever she presents the orphan, outcast, or wanderer, she is indeed making a social comment.

Mary Barton, in her times of trouble and perplexity, yearns for the maternal presence and recalls 'those days when she had felt as if her mother's love was too mighty not to last for ever'.⁸ She is, however, not forced to remain an 'unassisted and friendless self, alone with her terrible knowledge, in the hard, cold, populous world', for, following John Barton's death, Jane Wilson comforts her with the assurance that, since God is the orphan's friend, she can never be entirely alone, and offers to love her as a daughter, as her 'own ewe-lamb'.⁹ Their relationship is likened to the bond between Naomi and Ruth in the Old Testament story of faithful love and acceptance of a stranger; Mrs Wilson, agreeing to accompany Mary and Jem on their journey to a distant land, echoes the words of Ruth to her mother-in-law:

⁸Mary Barton, p. 286.

⁹Mary Barton, pp. 303, 448.

'Where you go, I'll go'.¹⁰ Mary, herself a stranger in Liverpool, is received into the home of Mr and Mrs Sturgis, who care for her as if she were their daughter. To Gaskell the family is never merely an isolated unit but a channel for the extension of divine compassion and aid.

Like Jane Eyre and Caroline Helstone, the orphan-heroine Ruth Hilton dreams about her mother, whose death brought her first intimation of the changes that beset life. In the depth of her despair thoughts of her mother have a healing influence upon her. She remains unmoved by Mr Benson's reference in traditional religious terms to the merciful God, but when the words 'for His sake' are exchanged for 'in your mother's name' the power of maternal love arouses her crushed spirit, and in the care of the Bensons she once again breathes that 'diviner air' which surrounded her in childhood, when her 'gentle, blessed mother' made her home 'holy ground'.¹¹ One of the novelist's favourite verses seems to have been 'The Lord preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow' (Psalm 146. 9a), which she makes the inspiration behind Nelly Brownson's faith that her young grandson will always be under divine protection: 'Some one else would have saved him, if this fine young spark had never been here. He's an orphan, and God watches over orphans, they say'.¹²

Those on the periphery of society, 'the stray and wandering ones',

¹⁰Mary Barton, p. 461.

¹¹Elizabeth Gaskell, Ruth, in The Works of Mrs Gaskell, Knutsford edition, 8 vols (London, 1906; reprint, 1925), III, 99-100, 140.

¹²Ruth, p. 26.

also receive special attention in Gaskell's fiction.¹³ Mary's Aunt Esther, having sacrificed herself to prostitution for the sake of her starving child, sees herself as 'the abandoned and polluted outcast', and fears God's punishment for her 'leper-sin', which she believes has separated her 'as far asunder as heaven and hell can be' from her 'little angel'; remembering the text 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God', but applying it to her daughter rather than to herself, she forgets that God's love breaks the old bonds of ritual purity and recognizes instead the motivation and penitence of the heart.¹⁴ Although Jem's words of kindness sound in her ears as 'a sort of call to Heaven, like distant Sabbath bells', she is convinced that the 'Eden of innocence' is lost to her forever.¹⁵ Totally devoid of any hope for herself, however, she seeks to prevent Mary from 'following in the same downward path to vice'; her desperate question 'Oh, what shall I do to save Mary's child? What shall I do? How can I keep her from being such a one as I am; such a wretched, loathsome creature!' recalls Christian's dilemma at the beginning of The Pilgrim's Progress, except that he is only concerned about his own salvation.¹⁶ And the hope on the part of Jem and Mary to restore Esther to the family, thereby loving her back to virtue, would find an answering chord in the minds of most Victorian readers, familiar as they were with hymns having to do with wanderers far from their spiritual home.

¹³Mary Barton, p. 328.

¹⁴Mary Barton, pp. 290, 207, 211.

¹⁵Mary Barton, pp. 291-92.

¹⁶Mary Barton, pp. 207, 170.

This emphasis on rescue and reconciliation is the thematic core of Mary Barton: Esther endeavours to save Mary, John wonders if religion might save Esther, with whom Jem pleads to return home, Mary journeys to Liverpool in an effort to reach Will, who can save Jem from being convicted of murder, and she also saves her dying father, an outcast in his guilt, from the vengeful wrath of Mr Carson. In Gaskell's novels death is often the sole means of uniting those who remain unreconciled during life; for example, the 'two wanderers', John Barton and Esther, known as Butterfly, symbolic of the spiritual beauty which will emerge from her shattered earthly existence, share a common grave, bearing the inscription of Psalm 103. 9: 'For He will not always chide, neither will He keep his anger for ever'.¹⁷ The characters in the novels frequently remind each other that God's mercy always surpasses the human measure of forgiveness. Mary, in exhorting Margaret Jennings, who has never wavered from the right path, to be merciful in her judgment of others, for whom it may be easy to go astray but very difficult to return, expresses Elizabeth Gaskell's central message: only in empathetic response to others, whatever their circumstances, can genuine understanding and reconciliation be achieved.

Whereas Brontë portrays personal suffering in all its psychological intensity, Gaskell portrays the mass suffering of the poor with a sensitivity which does not lose sight of the one among the many and which is free from either sentimentality or condescension. The living conditions of the Manchester factory-workers are depicted in Mary Barton with painfully graphic realism. 'Whole families', wrote Gaskell in one of the numerous authorial comments found in her early works, 'went

¹⁷Mary Barton, p. 465.

through a gradual starvation. They only wanted a Dante to record their sufferings. And yet even his words would fall short of the awful truth'.¹⁸ This reference to Dante is the first of several which appear in her novels and which usually receive but scanty critical attention. The Divine Comedy, however, written by the banished Dante during a period of great political upheaval in the early fourteenth century, when Italy was divided into two factions, one upholding the authority of the State, and the other, the authority of the Church, bears special significance for Gaskell's fiction, much of which examines the effects of an economically and socially partitioned England.

Transported 'like a pilgrim' from 'human unto the Divine / From time unto eternity', Dante becomes 'new designed' by his vision of the 'love which moves the sun and every star'.¹⁹ Rather like his later counterpart, Christian, whose progress begins with the realization that he is lost, the poet commences his pilgrimage at the mid-point of his life 'within a darkling wood, / Where from the straight path' he 'had gone astray'; also like Bunyan's pilgrim, he encounters wild beasts, symbolic of human passions, as he travels along 'the weary road' and engages in 'the long warfare'.²⁰ A 'pathway steep and wild' leads him to 'the city of woe', above whose gateway are the words 'Ye who here enter, leave all hope behind' and out of which issue 'accents of anger and the words of pain'.²¹ The account of this nether region, with its

¹⁸Mary Barton, p. 125.

¹⁹Dante Alighieri, 'Paradise', The Divine Comedy, translated by James Innes Minchin (London, 1885), XXXI. 43, 37-38; XXXIII. 136, 145.

²⁰'Hell', The Divine Comedy, I. 2-3; II. 5, 4.

²¹'Hell', The Divine Comedy, II. 142; III. 1, 9, 26.

tumult of wailing, eternal darkness, flames, fiends, giants, precipices, and bottomless pit, has particular relevance for Gaskell's industrial novels. Bessy Higgins, in North and South, is often overcome by a sense of doom at the thought of her miserable existence, which offers no prospect of change:

And I think, if this should be th' end of all, and if all I've been born for is just to work my heart and my life away, and to sicken i' this dree place, wi' them mill-noises in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop, and let me have a little piece o' quiet -- and wi' the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath o' the clear air yo' speak on . . . I could go mad and kill yo', I could.²²

The comment in Mary Barton that former times had chastised the poor with whips 'but this chastised them with scorpions' (I Kings 12. 11), as well as the description of the workers, 'like demons, in their fire-and-soot colouring' amid the fierce heat and lurid red glare of the furnace-house, call to mind the imagery of Dante's 'Inferno'.²³ And surely no more sordid scene of utter hopelessness and infernal wretchedness is to be found in Victorian fiction than that of the hovel inhabited by the Davenport family. A letter written by Ben Davenport, while away from Manchester to look for work, is, in the opinion of George Wilson, who is asked to read it to the illiterate Mrs Davenport, 'as good as Bible-words; ne'er a word o' repining; a' about God being our father, and that we mun bear patiently whate'er he sends'.²⁴ John Barton, however, mocks such religious platitudes and points out the

²²North and South, p. 145.

²³Mary Barton, pp. 157, 276.

²⁴Mary Barton, p. 104.

inequalities between those who are supposedly children of the same heavenly Father. In his refusal to accept the facile explanation that suffering is the will of God he may be compared with Job, the classic biblical figure of one who retains his faith in a God of justice and mercy in the face of unmerited anguish, but who undergoes intense spiritual wrestling before he can make the triumphant affirmation 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him' (Job 13. 15). The events surrounding John Barton also serve to refute the middle-class argument, to which the author makes a brief concession, that suffering is the result of a 'child-like improvidence' and is, therefore, the fault of the individual and not of society.²⁵

Ben Davenport's final words before he is summoned by 'the Conqueror on his Pale Horse' form a prayer of thanks that the hard struggle of life is over, but his wife pleads for one word to help her through life.²⁶ Gaskell was well aware that the popular theology of many of her contemporaries was limited to the idea conveyed in certain hymns that this world is a vale of tears from which death offers a blessed release, but to her mind the real value of religion was the practical assistance it could give in the ongoing battle of life here and now. More suited to her own theology is Isaac Watts's hymn 'Our God, our help in ages past', with its conviction that, far from pertaining only to the next life, God is active in historical circumstances, as implied in Samuel Bamford's poem on the plight of the poor, read by Job Legh to John Barton:

²⁵Mary Barton, p. 60.

²⁶Mary Barton, p. 141.

And shall they perish thus -- oppressed and lorn?
 Shall toil and famine, hopeless, still be borne?
 No! God will yet arise, and help the poor.²⁷

The stark contrast between the starvation of the poor and the elegant style of living maintained by the rich is most poignantly presented when John Barton, having seen his employer's wife laden with purchases of food for a party, returns home to find his only son dead from hunger. The superficiality of the idle Mrs Carson, who, as well as ordering salmon for her family, indulges in 'the luxury of a head-ache', and the extravagance of her youngest daughter, Amy, who 'can't live without flowers and scents', throw into striking relief the privation of those who in their cramped dwellings never know freedom from want or from threat of contagion.²⁸ With the death of their brother, Harry, the Carson sisters suddenly experience a reality which for the poor is a fact of daily existence. Particularly in Mary Barton the novelist confronts the great gulf which divides England into two major economic and social classes, capital and labour, and which is viewed with a sense of doom akin to that pervading Dante's 'Inferno' by such as Mrs Norton, quoted in the motto to chapter 9:

A life of self-indulgence is for us,
 A life of self-denial is for them . . .
 Not doomed by us to this appointed pain --
 God made us rich and poor -- of what do these complain?²⁹

In Ruth, too, social station is seen by the young heroine to create such distances that those who tread paths of pleasure appear to belong to 'another race of beings' from those forced to struggle along the way

²⁷Mary Barton, p. 156.

²⁸Mary Barton, pp. 254, 108.

²⁹Mary Barton, p. 140.

of hardship.³⁰ Gaskell, however, never confuses what is divinely ordained with what is the result of human unwillingness to implement God's will, and, always optimistic, asserts that the gulf separating person from person and class from class can indeed be bridged.

In recognizing that her era was especially marked by conflict not only on the personal level but also increasingly on the political and economic front, Gaskell bears closer affinity to George Eliot than to Charlotte Brontë. Terminology traditionally associated with spiritual battle is in Gaskell's fiction applied to the public as well as the private pilgrimage. The God who protects the solitary pilgrim on the road to salvation is understood also to support the masses in their struggle to reform the material conditions of life. At the beginning of each of her industrial novels Gaskell presents both masters and men believing that they alone are right and that warfare is necessary to secure or advance their own positions, but at the conclusion their divisive attitudes give way to conciliatory ones as they are brought closer together through a vision of a common purpose.

The significance of Carlyle in Gaskell's writing is evident in the motto on the title-page of Mary Barton, a quotation from his essay 'Biography', which refers to the incalculable potential of the novelist to effect changes in society. In her first work of fiction Gaskell adopts the prophetic and visionary tone of her admired philosopher-friend and even invests her protagonists with something of the quality of the Carlylean hero:

³⁰Ruth, p. 17.

All sorts of Heroes are intrinsically of the same material; that given a great soul, open to the Divine Significance of Life, then there is given a man fit to speak of this, to sing of this, to fight and work for this, in a great, victorious, enduring manner; there is given a Hero, -- the outward shape of whom will depend on the time and the environment he finds himself in.³¹

The new pilgrim-hero is one who, attuned to the spirit of the times and to the vast purposes of God, attains as a result of inner conflict a degree of personal freedom to act on behalf of others and to make a difference in the world. Jem Wilson, for example, described as a 'bold hero' for his rescue of two men from Carson's blazing mill, is singled out by Esther for the special office of being her niece's 'preserving angel, through the perils of life'; not motivated by self-interest, as is Harry Carson, but willing to bear the burden of unrequited love in order to save her, he braces himself to do his duty as Mary's 'earthly keeper', even though his path is still 'full of stinging thorns'.³²

This subtle allusion to the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4. 9) reveals Gaskell's understanding that true heroism has a creative and redemptive power over others and seeks to reconcile rather than to conquer.

John Barton evokes many characteristics of the philosopher-hero Teufelsdröckh. Insisting that he wants employment and not charity, he echoes Carlyle's emphasis on the value of work as a means of establishing a sense of identity and of community. And, chosen to represent the starving labourers before Parliament in London, he assumes the stature of Moses, the ancient hero who appealed to Pharaoh for the release of the enslaved Hebrews. The rejection of the

³¹On Heroes, p. 115.

³²Mary Barton, pp. 91, 216.

Chartists's petition, submitted in good faith that such a life-and-death issue would receive a fair hearing, is the turning-point in the life of John Barton, who, his inward storm over and the Centre of Indifference reached, becomes an embittered man, known by his 'measured clock-work tread'.³³ His former eagerness to wage battle for the sake of helping others is replaced by a grim determination, born out of extreme disillusionment, to take vengeance upon the oppressor.

In her description of the meeting between the millowners and the workers Gaskell obviously has Carlyle in mind:

In choosing their delegates, too, the operatives had had more regard to their brains, and power of speech, than to their wardrobes; they might have read the opinions of that worthy Professor Teufelsdruch, in Sartor Resartus, to judge from the dilapidated coats and trousers, which yet clothed men of parts, and of power.³⁴

Harry Carson's caricature of this delegation symbolizes the inability of either side to perceive real persons beneath the external trappings and serves as catalyst for the decision to take violent action. Barton's resultant drawing of the lot of assassin and taking upon himself all the guilt of others for the wrathful deed leads him to experience the torment of spiritual punishment similar to the living death suffered in Dante's 'Inferno'. Also, like Teufelsdröckh, he is tempted to commit suicide in order to escape his own conscience and would willingly pass through hell-fire to free himself from sin. In his wrestling of soul and integrity of thought and action he is clearly heroic in the manner of Moses, Job, Christian, and Teufelsdröckh,

³³Mary Barton, p. 412.

³⁴Mary Barton, p. 233.

prototypes of the spiritual pilgrim, though unlike these prototypes, and typical of Gaskell, his journey is essentially secular.

Throughout her fiction Elizabeth Gaskell confronts the problem of suffering and its effects upon attitudes to life. Whereas deep disappointment crushes John Barton, who can see no way through the trials of the poor, Alice Wilson believes that sorrow is sent for ultimate good and counsels Margaret with the maxim 'An anxious mind is never a holy mind'.³⁵ The idea that suffering is a crucible for spiritual refinement and a means of bringing one face to face with the Source of all meaning dominates Victorian writing and is certainly at the heart of each of the Gaskell novels. Her protagonists are allowed growing-space in which to come to terms with their various kinds of distress, something that she constantly longed for but seemed to be denied. Writing to Eliza Fox in 1850, she mentioned her 'never ending sorrow': 'I think that is one evil of this bustling life that one has never time calmly and bravely to face a great grief, and to view it on every side as to bring the harmony out of it'.³⁶ Her most engaging characters are endowed with this ability to face trial and change with courage and to harmonize memories of the past and hopes for the future with practical action in the present.

The references in Cranford (1853) to Samuel Johnson's Rasselas point to that aspect of human nature which seeks to avoid reality to take refuge in dream or vision. Brontë's Helen Burns, who is inspired

³⁵Mary Barton, p. 84.

³⁶The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, p. 111.

by the quest motif of Rasselas to look beyond her weary pilgrimage to a better life to come, and Gaskell's Miss Jenkyns, who in her great esteem for the work looks back to a more congenial and ordered age, illustrate the words of Imlac, Rasselas's guide and spiritual director: 'The truth is, that no mind is much employed upon the present: recollection and anticipation fill up almost all our moments'.³⁷ In a sense Cranford is like the Happy Valley of which Rasselas grows weary, where 'all the diversities of the world were brought together, the blessings of nature were collected, and its evils extracted and excluded'.³⁸ Leaving this Eden-like setting, he encounters the vicissitudes of life which challenge the spirit and hence provide opportunity for growth. Imlac, however, recognizes that 'long journies in search of truth are not commanded. Truth, such as is necessary to the regulation of life, is always found where it is honestly sought'.³⁹ Although she would agree that the struggle to overcome immediate difficulties and to find an eternal pattern in mundane activity is the making of true heroism, Gaskell sees beyond Imlac's vision of human existence as 'a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed'.⁴⁰ For instance, the assumption that whatever is pleasurable bears the taint of wrong, the basis of Miss Matty's fear that dining with Mr Holbrook may be improper and of Ruth's hesitation in

³⁷ Samuel Johnson; The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, edited by Geoffrey Tillotson and Brian Jenkins (Oxford, 1977), p. 80.

³⁸ Rasselas, p. 2.

³⁹ Rasselas, p. 31.

⁴⁰ Rasselas, p. 33.

accompanying Mr Bellingham on a walk to her old home, is in her estimation a misinterpretation of the biblical myths of creation, which predicate a divinely-ordained harmony and perfection. Recognizing that joy is as much a part of life as suffering, Gaskell is, therefore, like Brontë, critical of the Puritan tendency to make prescriptive what is purely descriptive of the human condition after the Fall.

Never one to minimize the presence of evil, Elizabeth Gaskell does, nevertheless, claim that suffering can be an ennobling experience which draws forth one's full potential to endure and overcome. Bessy Higgins's reaction to the woe of this world is to focus her longing eyes on the land of Beulah (Isaiah 62. 4) and the new Jerusalem. Perceiving her own private suffering to be part of the fulfilment of God's purposes, she finds her greatest comfort in the Book of Revelation, especially in its seventh chapter, which refers to those who 'came out of great tribulation', who 'shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more', and from whose eyes 'God shall wipe away all tears' (verses 14, 16, 17). With hope in a resolution of all her ills in the next world, she asks Margaret to read her 'not a sermon chapter, but a story chapter; they've pictures in them, which I see when my eyes are shut. Read about the New Heavens, and the New Earth; and m'appen I'll forget this'.⁴¹ This passage makes very clear the importance of biblical imagery to the average Victorian, for whom the story of pilgrimage held a timeless appeal. It is the story, the encompassing metaphor of the journey which leads towards a new heaven and a new

⁴¹North and South, pp. 260-61.

earth (Isaiah 65. 17; Revelation 21. 1), not the letter of the old law, which enables Gaskell's characters to discern meaning in the stories of their own lives. In encouraging Bessy to dwell more on the clearer parts of the Bible, those having to do with present conduct, than on the prophecies, Margaret bears an intellectual and spiritual affinity to Nicholas Higgins, who places his faith in the here and now:

When I see the world going all wrong at this time o' day, bothering itself wi' things it knows nought about, and leaving undone all the things that lie in disorder close at its hand -- why, I say, leave a' this talk about religion alone, and set to work on what yo' see and know. That's my creed. It's simple, and not far to fetch, nor hard to work.⁴²

Similar to the disciple Thomas in his need for proof, Nicholas mocks religion which is removed from the realities of daily existence. He tells Mr Hale that the primary concern of the poor does not have to do with eternal life, as does that of Bunyan's pilgrim, but rather with the harsh exigencies of this life. When she dissuades her father from reading for Nicholas's benefit the fourteenth chapter of Job, on the brevity and travail of mortal life, and suggests instead that they ask him about the strike, which is uppermost in his mind, and try to give him as much sympathy as possible, Margaret again reveals her practicality and impatience with philosophizing which leads nowhere. Higgins, who waits for five hours to have an interview with Mr Thornton, takes on the heroic qualities of determination and single-mindedness, which bring results in the end. Whereas his daughter endures suffering in the expectation of entering a new heaven, he endures humiliation in the

⁴²North and South, p. 133.

hope of helping to create a new earth.

The practical wisdom of Ecclesiastes, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might' (9. 10), also quoted by Carlyle, is offered by Minister Holman to Paul as well as by Sally to Ruth, and expresses Gaskell's strongly-held belief in cheerful and purposive activity.⁴³ Sally discovers through personal experience that life consists not in morbid pining over past misfortunes and mistakes or in withdrawing to prepare the soul for eternity but in ministering to 'one another with heart and hand, as Christ did to all who wanted help'.⁴⁴ The Bensons, characterized by kind sympathy and freedom from consciousness of their own spiritual progress, become instruments for the redemption of Ruth and thereby actualize Sally's insight. The difference in temperament between Faith and Thurstan illustrates the value Gaskell places upon action as opposed to excessive introspection:

Miss Benson had more faith than her brother -- or so it seemed; for quick, resolute action in the next step of Life was all she required, while he deliberated and trembled, and often did wrong from his very deliberation, when his first instinct would have led him right.⁴⁵

Once again her fiction gives evidence of the influence of Professor Teufelsdröckh, for whom conviction is of no account unless it issues in conduct: "Do the Duty which lies nearest thee," which thou knowest to be a Duty! Thy second Duty will already have become clearer'.⁴⁶

⁴³Sartor Resartus, p. 157; Elizabeth Gaskell, Cousin Phillis, in Cranford and Cousin Phillis, edited by Peter Keating, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 292; Ruth, p. 175.

⁴⁴Ruth, p. 174.

⁴⁵Ruth, p. 203.

⁴⁶Sartor Resartus, p. 156.

In contrast to Miss Benson, whom she rebukes for her anxiety about her age and appearance, Sally disregards the passage of time and applies all her energy to working in the present. In giving her savings unconditionally to Thurstan she combines theory and practice, and thus epitomizes Gaskell's belief in Christianity as a guide for living.

The spiritual pilgrimage as explored by Gaskell has to do, therefore, with searching out the path of right action in present circumstances and making an effort of will to perform the immediate task. In all of her novels the Bible is the undisputed and implicit authority in matters of conduct, which for her, as for Matthew Arnold, constitutes three-fourths of life.⁴⁷ The pervading spirit of Gaskell's fiction is conveyed by the words of James Martineau, Unitarian minister in Liverpool and colleague of William Gaskell at Manchester New College:

The grand secret of human power, my friends, is singleness of purpose; before it, perils, opposition, and difficulty melt away, and open out a certain pathway to success. . . . Let them keep a steady eye fixed on the great ends of existence; let them bear straight onwards, never stepping aside to consult the deceitful oracle of human opinion . . . and each man will be equal to a thousand; all will give way before him; he will scatter renovating principles of moral health; he will draw forth from a multitude of other minds a mighty mass of kindred and once latent energy; and, having imparted to others ennobled conceptions of the purposes of life, will enter the unfolded gates of immortality, breathing already its spirit of sublimity and joy.⁴⁸

⁴⁷'Literature and Dogma', p. 175.

⁴⁸James Martineau, Studies of Christianity: A Series of Original Papers, Now First Collected, or New (London, 1858), pp. 493-94.

II. 'Strong-Minded' Women

Whereas Charlotte Brontë's heroines are usually defined in relation to their lovers, even though they refuse to be compromised for the sake of love, Elizabeth Gaskell's are far less preoccupied with romance and marriage as ends in themselves and accept instead the more difficult challenge of venturing upon new paths as independent and socially responsible human beings. In a letter of February 1850 to Eliza Fox, Gaskell delineated her own quest, which is shared by her protagonists:

If Self is to be the end of exertions, those exertions are unholy, there is no doubt of that -- and that is part of the danger in cultivating the Individual Life; but I do believe we have all some appointed work to do, whh no one else can do so well; Wh. is our work; what we have to do in advancing the Kingdom of God; and that first we must find out what we are sent into the world to do, and define it and make it clear to ourselves, (that's the hard part) and then forget ourselves in our work, and our work in the End we ought to strive to bring about.⁴⁹

Gaskell's high ideal of woman's vocation was certainly derived from her immense admiration for her friend Florence Nightingale. From Lea Hurst, the home of the Nightingale family, the novelist wrote on 27 October 1854 to Emily Shaen of Florence's 'natural intense love of God -- as a personal being', her enthusiasm for life, which she found 'so vivid that books seem poor', her independent and indomitable will that gave her family the impression that she was led by a higher power and that every obstacle must be moved from her path, her gentleness and yet 'unbendableness' of character, as well as her 'want of love for

⁴⁹The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, p. 107.

individuals', which 'becomes a gift and a very rare one, if one takes it in conjunction with her intense love for the race' and 'her utter unselfishness in serving and ministering'.⁵⁰ These are the qualities invested in the Gaskell heroines, who, departing from the highly individualized vocations of Brontë's women, affirm their own personalities in order to equip themselves to serve others.

Gaskell explores in her fiction the dichotomy between love of the human race and love of the individual, which she notes in Florence Nightingale's character. Although she acknowledges that in a swiftly-changing society interdependence must take priority over independence, she recognizes, too, that the quality of all social progress is still determined by the nature of the personal pilgrimage. The titles of the novels in themselves indicate her position, which is expressed in the reverie of Margaret Hale: 'love for my species could never fill my heart to the utter exclusion of love for individuals'.⁵¹ During the course of their spiritual journeys the female protagonists come to an awareness of the complexity of human nature and especially of the potential which the individual holds for both good and ill. Gaskell is, in fact, always careful to show that these opposing forces are present in each person; even Sally Leadbitter, for instance, whose name implies that she is an earthbound and corrupting creature, evinces self-denial and tenderness in caring for her aged mother. The only sure hope for society as a whole lies in the individual's capacity to

⁵⁰The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, pp. 317-18, 320.

⁵¹North and South, p. 488.

be redeemed, and, as the heroines discover, the most difficult transformation to bring about is that within the human heart. Gaskell's women reveal their greatness when they act upon the realization that evil is not only external but is also a force to be reckoned with in themselves and that their own strength of will plays a vital part in the overcoming of obstacles and weakness of purpose. In their vitality and determination they are indeed, to use the adjective applied to Deborah Jenkyns, 'strong-minded', and are, therefore, successors to Charlotte Brontë's heroines and forerunners of George Eliot's.⁵²

Gaskell's treatment of Mary Barton may be considered a preliminary sketch for her later portraits of young women who possess the qualities she most admired: intelligence, energy, perception, and self-reliance. The novelist originally intended her first work to bear the title John Barton, and, in the opinion of Gerald DeWitt Sanders, John Barton remains the pre-eminent character, with Mary more or less irrelevant to the main theme.⁵³ In agreement with this point of view is Arthur Pollard, who sees Mary's role as 'one of action rather than of feeling, of responding to events by doing rather than of generating them by being'.⁵⁴ It is, however, Mary's ability to respond and to act which makes her a catalyst for many of the events that take place in the novel and which precipitates her own spiritual struggle, resulting in her redemptive power over both John Barton and Jem. Although she is

⁵²Elizabeth Gaskell, Cranford, in Cranford and Cousin Phillis, p. 51.

⁵³Gerald DeWitt Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell (New Haven, Connecticut, 1929), p. 28.

⁵⁴Arthur Pollard, Mrs Gaskell: Novelist and Biographer (Manchester, 1965), p. 56.

a weak and flirtatious figure at the beginning of the work, she develops that independence and acuteness which Gaskell marks in the countenances of the manufacturing population, and comes to reveal an inner strength in times of crisis, which sets her apart from feeble and ineffective women such as Mrs Carson, who goes mad when confronted with the death of her son. Far from offering temptation and danger in the manner of Dalilah or the fatal Helen, with whom she is compared by Mrs Wilson and Mr Carson, Mary serves as a creative rather than a destructive influence upon others and actually provides practical and moral support for the two male protagonists. Women are frequently given central significance in Gaskell's novels as spiritual guides or mentors. John Barton, bereft of his gentle and loving wife, becomes a changed man, and Jem, whose thoughts of his mother 'stood like an angel with a drawn sword in the way to sin', fears what he may become if Mary rejects his love, 'the very groundwork of all that people call good' in him.⁵⁵

The long path of pilgrimage along which Mary must travel is suggested early in the novel through allusion to the garden of Eden: 'Such is the contrariness of the human heart, from Eve downwards, that we all, in our old-Adam state, fancy things forbidden sweetest'.⁵⁶ Listening to the voice of the tempter in the person of her rich wooer, she masks her real love for Jem in her attempts to convince herself that she loves Harry Carson instead. At this early stage of her journey she is torn between succumbing to impossible romantic dreams

⁵⁵Mary Barton, pp. 186, 175.

⁵⁶Mary Barton, p. 121.

and appraising her situation with her innate practicality and realism. Her fantasies about becoming, in John Barton's words, 'a do-nothing lady' are eventually swept away as she matures and authenticates her existence by 'earning her bread by the sweat of her brow, as the Bible tells her she should do'.⁵⁷ When she is most disheartened, Mary gains solace and encouragement from her friend Margaret, whose 'angelic voice' brings inspiration to others; suffering from incipient blindness, Margaret renders the songs 'Lord remember David' and 'Comfort ye' (Isaiah 40. 1), both expressions of hope born of deep distress.⁵⁸ Margaret's physical blindness serves to heighten Mary's spiritual blindness over the nature of Jem's devotion. In a moment of clear revelation she sees that 'she had hitherto been walking in grope-light towards a precipice', but becomes alert to the danger and resolutely alters direction.⁵⁹ Filled with self-reproach, she tells a starving Italian lad who asks her for food that the hunger of the body is nothing compared with the agony of soul of one who fears that she has led another to commit violence through her own selfishness.

The turning-point in Mary's pilgrimage comes with her confession of wrongdoing and her determination to act as liberator or deliverer of the convicted Jem. Now that her 'eyes are opened' to her former desire to gain social prestige for herself and to her present intent to save someone else, she knows that God will assist her because she is 'doing right': 'I'm acting for the innocent and good, and not for

⁵⁷ Mary Barton, p. 44.

⁵⁸ Mary Barton, pp. 225, 74, 142.

⁵⁹ Mary Barton, p. 177.

my own self, who have done so wrong'.⁶⁰ These words recall Gaskell's letter to Eliza Fox on the importance of the motivation behind every deed. Mary's journey to Liverpool to find Will foreshadows her emigration to Canada, as it is her first experience of moving beyond the bounds of Manchester. Although she longs for familiar surroundings, she learns that change is one of the inescapable realities of life and also that great endurance is needed by those who set out into unknown territory. She discovers the truth of Alice Wilson's adage that 'waiting is far more difficult than doing', and in despair of ever contacting the only person who could present an alibi on Jem's behalf she wonders if in the dark waters of the Mersey there might be 'rest from the troubles of earth'.⁶¹ Emerging from her Slough of Despond, however, she brings release to Jem and healing to her father. Strengthened by 'the resolve to endure to the end', she bears the burden of knowing that her father is guilty of murder but loves him even more faithfully in his time of greatest need.⁶² More deeply concerned about the sinner than about the sin, Mary illustrates the abundant mercy of God and reaches the end of her pilgrimage in the certainty that it is better to love than to be loved.

At the end of the novel Mary and Jem find themselves on a clear and practical pathway leading to a new life in Canada. Exiled from Manchester, Jem uses his technical knowledge in an agricultural college in Toronto, thus linking industry and the land. Although the

⁶⁰Mary Barton, pp. 319, 318.

⁶¹Mary Barton, pp. 190, 361.

⁶²Mary Barton, p. 421.

work opens in the pastoral setting of Green Heys Fields and closes in the primeval forest, Gaskell recognizes that urban culture is a force to be reckoned with and that England can never return to its pre-industrial state, symbolized by Alice Wilson's reveries of her childhood home. The past cannot be repeated, but it can be built upon as a foundation for the future. The pervading theme of loss and gain is brought to a fitting conclusion with the good news that Margaret has regained her sight and looks forward to joining them in the New World.

North and South, which is in fact structured upon the pilgrimage motif, traces the various challenges faced and overcome by Margaret Hale on her journey towards an informed awareness of changing social realities and of the particular role she can perform in helping to improve the quality of life around her. At the beginning of the novel, during her sojourn with Aunt Shaw in Harley Street, Margaret is surrounded by an air of unreality. Her cousin Edith, described as Titania and as the Sleeping Beauty, exists in a world of romantic dreams, in which the chief anxiety of her self-indulgent and idle life as a young bride on the island of Corfu is the difficulty of keeping a piano well tuned. References to music, and especially to singing, appear frequently in Gaskell's fiction and serve to reveal either depth or shallowness of character. Both Amy Carson in Mary Barton and Edith engage themselves in copying manuscript music. The conventional and passive young women merely copy, as they are bound by stereotyped patterns of feminine behaviour and thus have no scope for self-expression, such as that of Margaret Jennings, whose musical talents take her out of herself and enable her to uplift others. Margaret Hale, however, moves beyond the drawing-room setting in which North and South opens and

also beyond Helstone, her home to which she returns from London and which appears to her as a village 'in one of Tennyson's poems', making all other places she visits in England seem 'hard and prosaic-looking'.⁶³ Through her struggle to reconcile the poetry and the prose of life she reaches a new understanding of the idyllic past and the demanding present, of rural peace and urban conflict. Her delight in the freedom and violence of nature, denied in London, to which she was taken as a child 'all untamed from the forest', indicates the passionate intensity of her own nature, which is tested when her southern preference for people and occupations of the land is confronted by the northern pride in industrial growth.⁶⁴ Whereas Mary and Jem move from the city to the primeval forest, Margaret is forced to move out of the country village into the city, where she learns to build on the past and to discard elements of superstition and prejudice that hinder her future progress.

Margaret's pilgrimage alternates between city and country; in her Helstone home she reads Dante's 'Paradiso', but it is there that she first encounters the hell of spiritual suffering which precedes entrance into the heavenly realms depicted by her beloved poet and which is intensified by her later experiences in Milton-Northern. When her father renounces his priesthood in the Church of England and becomes 'a schismatic -- an outcast', torn by 'doubts which were to her temptations of the Evil One', she faces the first real crisis of her life and feels herself to be adrift in a desolate world from which

⁶³North and South, p. 42.

⁶⁴North and South, p. 38.

God has vanished.⁶⁵ Mr Hale's act of conscience, which results in his having to travel a great distance to begin a new life, and Frederick Hale's opposition to injustice, which costs him his position as a naval officer and makes him an outlaw from his own country, introduce the conflict between the individual and the institution or between the man and the masses, which is a central issue of the novel. In Gaskell's view, one who dares to take a difficult and lonely stand for the sake of a strongly-held conviction possesses heroic qualities. Margaret's acceptance of the painful task of informing her mother of the momentous change soon to take place in their lives and her decision to trust despite perplexity and to 'ask to see the one step needful for the hour' reveal her ability to take positive action in the present.⁶⁶ Unlike her mother and her aunt, who bewail their lot, she determines to be a victor over circumstance and not a victim of it.

The deep bond that develops between Mr Hale and Margaret is only one of several close father-daughter relationships that prevail in Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction. In some of these relationships, notably those between Minister Holman and Phillis and Mr Gibson and Molly, the father acts as mentor, but Margaret Hale, both of whose parents are incapable of coping with new situations, adopts the paternal as well as the maternal role. She counteracts her father's uncertainty on the evening before their departure from Helstone by assuring him that they can never retrace their steps but can only go forward. Rather like Susan Palmer in the short story 'Lizzie Leigh' (1850), the efficient

⁶⁵North and South, pp. 76-77.

⁶⁶North and South, p. 77.

home-manager, teacher, and comforter, whose father is described as useless, Margaret has spiritual insight and practical sense far surpassing that granted to Mr Hale. Serving as his 'staff' and 'right hand', she supports him 'as if he were blind, and she his faithful guide'; she is, in short, 'a strong angel of comfort to her father and brother'.⁶⁷ At her mother's death she recites the words of consolation from the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John: 'Let not your heart be troubled', and she, instead of her father, goes to the aid of the grieving Mrs Boucher.⁶⁸ In her ready application of religious convictions she discovers that she has a gift for communicating compassion and strength to those who suffer and that as she utilizes this gift her own faith is renewed. In contrast, Mr Hale, when asked by Higgins for assistance in obtaining work, can offer no practical advice: 'Help you! How? I would do anything, -- but what can I do?'.⁶⁹ Whereas her father's only suggestion is that he himself might approach the millowner Thornton on the worker's behalf, thereby relying on the old paternalistic system, Margaret inspires confidence in Nicholas to step forth on his own path and approach Thornton personally. The ministerial function she assumes becomes increasingly secular; to her mind the contemporary pilgrimage has to be centred in new ways of acting out the challenge given by Jesus: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you' (Matthew 7. 7).

The greatest challenge that Margaret faces is that of overcoming

⁶⁷North and South, pp. 223, 338, 316.

⁶⁸North and South, p. 317.

⁶⁹North and South, p. 381.

her self-righteousness and her prejudice against Thornton and the industrialism he represents. In their initial meeting Thornton notes her bearing of authority and 'feminine defiance', which causes him to regard her as a queen and himself 'her humble, unwashed vassal'; her 'proud indifference' towards him, however, eventually gives way to an appreciation of his character and of the motivation informing his words and actions so that, as their understanding of each other deepens, they can look beyond themselves, thereby becoming instrumental in improving communication between manufacturer and worker.⁷⁰ Thornton's fascination with the bracelet which keeps slipping down Margaret's arm to her wrist is a subtle allusion to the Fall of humanity, which, subsequent to the expulsion from Eden, experiences alienation rather than harmony and acknowledges dominance and submission to be the normative and not the aberrant basis of relationship. Elizabeth Gaskell, like Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, invests jewellery with both spiritual and sexual significance. The loosening of Margaret's bracelet symbolizes her impatience with social conventions which restrict natural and honest converse between men and women and also foreshadows the loss of pride which results in her union with Thornton.

Margaret soon learns that 'Milton is not the place for cowards' and that 'a brave heart' is as necessary a prerequisite for progress in the industrialized landscape of nineteenth-century England as it is for Christian in Bunyan's allegorical landscape.⁷¹ Having exhorted

⁷⁰North and South, pp. 100, 117, 100.

⁷¹North and South, pp. 162-63.

Mr Thornton to face the enraged strikers with manly courage in an attempt to prevent further violence, she reveals her own heroism when she shields him from physical attack by throwing her arms around him. Her action is described in terms of Bunyan's hero and also of Christ's forgiveness of those who are crucifying him. She stands before the 'angry sea of men, her eyes smiting them with flaming arrows of reproach', and, concerned only about saving the one 'she had urged and goaded to come to this perilous place', cries out to the mob: 'You do not know what you are doing'.⁷² Her sympathy is equally with the members of the crowd, whom she calls 'these poor strangers', and with Thornton, who upbraids them for trying 'to oust the innocent stranger'.⁷³ This reference to the stranger emphasizes the lack of understanding between the industrialist and his labourers and also at this point between Thornton and Margaret; furthermore, it has biblical overtones of the pilgrim or stranger seeking a better land.

Recalling her defence of the proud manufacturer 'as if he were a helpless child', Margaret considers her protective, peacemaking gesture to be 'a woman's work' and assures herself that, insulted as she may be, she walks 'pure before God'.⁷⁴ She is profoundly humiliated by Thornton's assumption that her deed was motivated by a personal love for him; whereas she sees the human condition, he sees merely the sexual relationship. Degraded even further by Thornton's discovery of her falsehood about her presence at Outwood station as well as by her

⁷²North and South, pp. 233-35.

⁷³North and South, pp. 232, 235.

⁷⁴North and South, p. 247.

own discovery that, despite her rejection of his marriage proposal, he has generously saved her from having to testify at a trial, she realizes the extent to which she values his good opinion but tries to avoid acknowledging her love for him: 'Oh! had anyone such just cause to feel contempt for her? Mr Thornton, above all people, on whom she had looked down from her imaginary heights till now! She suddenly found herself at his feet, and was strangely distressed at her fall'.⁷⁵ Margaret, the innocent sufferer, bears alone the burden 'heavy in weight and long carried' and finds her only consolation in directly beseeching God for absolution of her guilt.⁷⁶ The compassion of the Almighty is greater than that of Mrs Thornton, who reprimands her for her indiscreet action and warns her that she runs the risk of losing her reputation. Such questioning of her conduct arouses in Margaret 'the battle-spirit', since in both cases of seeming impropriety her sole motivation had been a selfless concern for another; in her opinion one's character is formed more by struggling with the exceedingly complex moral issue of correct conduct in the untried circumstances of this 'hard world' than by simply following social mores which entail little or no risk to the individual.⁷⁷ Even though she is infuriated by Mrs Thornton's accusation, she gives her credit for seeking to do what is right. As always, the motivation behind the deed most concerns Gaskell. Contrasted with Fanny Thornton, who, in her brother's opinion, never has 'weighty reasons for anything' and

⁷⁵North and South, p. 356.

⁷⁶North and South, p. 348.

⁷⁷North and South, pp. 393, 377.

must be guarded by others, Margaret is 'a guardian to herself', and, in her spirited independence of action, is kindred to Jane Eyre.⁷⁸

Having been 'buffeted about' in her spiritual struggle, Margaret compares her own experience with Edith's placid existence and is tempted to think that 'even stagnation would be a rest and a refreshment'; she thus reaches the point in her pilgrimage at which she questions the purpose of her past tribulations and anticipates the future with dread: 'What shall I do? . . . Oh, how unhappy this last year has been! I have passed out of childhood into old age. I have had no youth -- no womanhood; the hopes of womanhood have closed for me -- for I shall never marry . . . I am weary of this continual call upon me for strength'.⁷⁹ She perceives, however, that strength is needed until the end of the journey is reached and that temporary withdrawal only serves to renew the spirit for further combat. Although she recognizes that her father's intention to deliver a series of lectures in Milton-Northern is merely for him a matter of duty, devoid of 'the genial impulse of love towards his work and its end', she is also aware of the difficulty of living a 'brave and noble' life filled with zest which sanctifies labour: 'And now she had learnt that not only to will, but also to pray, was a necessary condition in the truly heroic. Trusting to herself, she had fallen'.⁸⁰ 'Taught by death what life should be', she comes, rather like George Eliot's Dorothea, to a sense of accountability for her own life and tries 'to settle

⁷⁸North and South, p. 389.

⁷⁹North and South, pp. 408, 400-1.

⁸⁰North and South, pp. 422, 502.

that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working'.⁸¹ Against Edith's advice to avoid being 'strong-minded' and 'to keep one or two vanities, just by way of specimens of the old Adam', Margaret has by the end of the novel both a vision and a task for her life; inspired by a passage from St François de Sales, she regains her courage and resolves to set out on 'the lost path' of humility.⁸²

The pattern of loss and gain associated with industry and trade, which Margaret in her former arrogance condemns, is paralleled by the humiliation and redemption of the hero and heroine. Thornton, too, must undergo the crushing of his own 'rock-like power' and acknowledge a higher power before a new start may be made.⁸³ He now understands that Margaret is not one to 'droop, and flush, and flutter to his arms, as to her natural home and resting-place', and she in turn knows him to be 'a man', in Thornton's words 'a higher and a completer being than a gentleman'; by referring to each other at the conclusion of the novel as 'that man!' and 'that woman!' they reveal the distance they have travelled in their spiritual growth since their early conversation on the distinction between the words 'man' and 'gentleman'.⁸⁴ They have both been tested in endurance and faith like the castaway, the prisoner, and the saint, mentioned by Thornton, and have reached a new

⁸¹North and South, pp. 502, 508.

⁸²North and South, pp. 508-9, 426.

⁸³North and South, p. 256.

⁸⁴North and South, pp. 251, 217, 530.

awareness of themselves and of each other in relation 'to life -- to time -- to eternity'.⁸⁵ Hope of reconciliation within society as a whole rests ultimately with the individual and with the potential for change in the human heart. As illustrated by her friendship with the Higgins family, Margaret does not hesitate to cross social boundaries and to meet people on a one-to-one basis. Through her influence Nicholas Higgins and Thornton gain mutual respect for each other and are enabled to work together on behalf of those they represent. Margaret, with her personal interest in the poor, and Thornton, with his hope of changing the fundamental relationship between capitalist and worker, need each other to create a balance between the two poles that Gaskell's characters seem perpetually to move between, those of love for the individual and love for humanity. Together they look to the future with new energy based upon faith and the will to act upon it.

Unlike Christian in The Pilgrim's Progress, Margaret and Thornton have no celestial city awaiting them at the end of their pilgrimage. Neither do they withdraw to an idyllic and isolated setting, as do Mary and Jem. The conclusion of Mary Barton gives the impression that the journey has ended in contentment, but that of North and South is merely a stage and not the destination. Problems are yet to be solved within the urban context. The novelist realizes that it is not possible to retreat from the affairs of the city, however complex they may be, as it is not possible for Margaret to return to former simplicities,

⁸⁵North and South, p. 218.

real or imagined. Searching for her spiritual roots, the heroine discovers that the past is no more ideal than the present and that perpetual change in the world about her and also within herself is necessary for progress. The place-name Milton-Northern is a significant allusion to the author of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. In the manner of Adam and Eve, who depart from Eden to begin their pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world, Margaret leaves Helstone, the scene of her untested innocence, to make a joint pilgrimage with Thornton amid the realities of life. Paradise is for Gaskell wherever her characters themselves create it. In the new Jerusalem is found not only personal but also social harmony, nurtured by the 'pure river of water of life' and 'the tree of life', intended for 'the healing of the nations' (Revelation 22. 1-2).

Elizabeth Gaskell, who required her protagonists to be resolute and undaunted by challenge, revealed her own courage in the writing of Ruth. Always supportive of the victims of exploitation, Gaskell was first among the Victorians to make the seduced woman the central character of a novel and to condemn the double standard in sexual morality.⁸⁶ In treating 'the subject of a woman's life', that of woman in relation to man, she exposes the hypocrisy of a Pharisaical society that shuns the one who is sinned against but exonerates the sinner.⁸⁷ Far from being for her simply an abstract theory, this topic grew directly out of her own philanthropic work in Manchester. In a

⁸⁶ Angus Easson, Elizabeth Gaskell (London, 1979), p. 114.

⁸⁷ Ruth, p. 43.

letter of 8 January 1850 to Charles Dickens she expressed her particular interest in the suggestion of Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts that emigration might be arranged for young women who had been led into vice either through innocence or the demands of poverty and who had no prospects for the future.⁸⁸ The plight of such women was obviously of great practical concern to Gaskell, who portrays in 'Lizzie Leigh' a young wanderer who is reclaimed by means of her child but, unlike Ruth, withdraws from society to absolve herself from the taint of sin. Although 'Lizzie Leigh' and Ruth are both in effect Victorian parables of the lost and found, the reinstatement of the fallen woman within society is, according to Aina Rubenius, 'the newest idea in Ruth, both as regards the literary tradition and Mrs Gaskell's earlier stories'.⁸⁹ In her portrayal of Ruth the novelist was undoubtedly conscious of the recurring figure of the prostitute in the Old and New Testaments. A. B. Hopkins points out that 'society has been a long time in catching up with Hosea who advocated equal standards in the eighth century, B.C.', and Mr Benson, contemplating early in the novel the possible regeneration of Ruth, cites the example of Mary Magdalen, who witnesses to the forgiving love of Christ, whose vision is never restricted to what persons have been in the past but perceives what they can become.⁹⁰

⁸⁸The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, pp. 98-99.

⁸⁹Aina Rubenius, The Woman Question in Mrs Gaskell's Life and Works, Essays and Studies on English Language and Literature, 5 (Upsala, 1950), p. 204.

⁹⁰A. B. Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work (London, 1952), p. 127; Ruth, p. 118.

The pilgrimage motif is clearly established near the beginning of Ruth when the heroine returns home and meets her old friend Thomas, who used to read her stories from The Pilgrim's Progress and who, fearing that she may now be 'treading in perilous places', warns her in biblical and Bunyanesque language that 'the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour' (I Peter 5. 8).⁹¹ Ruth works as a dressmaker's apprentice, but her real training is in the realm of the spirit. During a free moment she gazes out the window to catch a glimpse of natural beauty amid her stark surroundings and is compared with a bird pressing against the bars of its cage. This image foreshadows the sexual captivity that befalls the vulnerable Ruth, whose surname, Hilton, bears within it the word 'hilt', with its suggestion that, although she is pierced to the heart with suffering, her strength is 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' (Ephesians 6. 17). Animal as well as bird imagery is employed in the novel to emphasize Ruth's simplicity and her deceiver's sensuality. Mr Bellingham, who desires 'to attract and tame her wildness, just as he had often allured and tamed the timid fawns in his mother's park', is later likened by Jemima to a headstrong racehorse; his change of name from Bellingham to Donne, a homonym for 'done' and 'dun', implies the irrevocability of his deed of thoughtless passion, commonly symbolized by the horse.⁹² When he is no longer amused by Ruth, his 'new toy', he simply casts her off as a 'little blockhead', a 'beautiful ignoramus', and a 'little goose'.⁹³ Because she believes

⁹¹Ruth, p. 50.

⁹²Ruth, pp. 33, 261.

⁹³Ruth, pp. 73, 66, 74.

Mr Bellingham's protestations that for her sake he would brave fire and water, she is forced to endure a baptism of suffering which ends in her sacrificial death. Whereas he speaks in heroic tones, she lives heroically. The stages in Ruth's changing awareness of her position and of the consequences to be faced are indicated in the careful rewording of her cry of despair 'what shall I do?' upon being cast out by Mrs Mason (whose action corresponds with her stone-cold nature implied in her name) to the more thoughtful 'what can I do?' and then to the decisive 'what must I do?'.⁹⁴

In a lecture F. D. Maurice paid tribute to Gaskell's novel:

I desire to thank a noble-hearted and pure-minded writer of our day for the courage with which she has illustrated the doctrine . . . in the story of one of her sex who had fallen into evil. I allude to the beautiful tale of 'Ruth,' which on this point and on all others is, I think, as true to human experience as it is to the divinest morality.⁹⁵

Significantly, the 'doctrine' referred to by Maurice is that contained in I Timothy 2. 15a: 'Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing'. Joe Scott, in Shirley, justifies his misogynist views through a literal interpretation of this chapter, which in its latter half takes as its theme the silent obedience of women. It is ironically Ruth's submissiveness which leads her into ruin: 'She was little accustomed to oppose the wishes of any one; obedient and docile by

⁹⁴Ruth, pp. 54, 56, 75.

⁹⁵Frederick Denison Maurice, The Unity of the New Testament: A Synopsis of the First Three Gospels, and of the Epistles of St James, St Jude, St Peter, and St Paul (London, 1854), p. 630.

nature, and unsuspecting and innocent of any harmful consequences'.⁹⁶ Always desirous of pleasing those whose affection she craves, she must learn the difficult lesson, along with Mary Barton and Brontë's Paulina, that 'it is more blessed to love than to be beloved'.⁹⁷

At the opening of the novel Ruth is like an innocent child and, even after her seduction, is only made conscious of her degraded state by the words and attitudes of others. It is precisely this Victorian insistence upon regarding women as children that Gaskell derides in her fiction. Challenging the pattern prescribed for ideal womanhood, she creates sharp contrasts in her novels between women who are plaintively helpless and compliant and those who are spirited and determined to make their lives count for good. Ruth, who meekly submits to having her hair shorn by Sally and who obligingly accepts Mr Bradshaw's gift against her own better judgment, is in danger of becoming a person like Mrs Bradshaw, the obedient wife whose shadowy, prosaic existence is brightened somewhat by romantic novels and whose sole attempt to exert herself in an outcry against her husband's wrathful treatment of her son. On the other hand, Jemima, whose father wanted to call her Hephzibah, meaning 'my delight is in her' (Isaiah 62. 4), but who is named after one of Job's daughters, described as the fairest in the land and as possessors, along with their brothers, of an inheritance (Job 42. 14-15), rebels against her mother's submissive lot and against paternal control based upon the assumption that she will always be a child, whether as daughter or as

⁹⁶Ruth, p. 60.

⁹⁷Ruth, p. 246.

wife. Also fully aware of the injustice of the double standard, illustrated by Richard's condescending manner, she struggles to gain courage to act independently and to follow the dictates of her own heart. Overwhelmed by her intense jealousy of Ruth, which awakens her to the dark gulf of evil within herself, she realizes, like Job, that peace is won only after much searching and wrestling of spirit.

The journey away from 'child-like dependence on others' taken by many of Gaskell's characters is introduced at the outset of Ruth:

'The daily life into which people are born, and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, forms chains which only one in a hundred has moral strength enough to despise, and to break when the right time comes -- when an inward necessity for independent individual action arises, which is superior to all outward conventionalities'.⁹⁸

Ruth, who, in the opinion of Mrs Pearson, is an irretrievable outcast and 'a disgrace to our sex' and whom Mr Bradshaw commands Jemima to shake off from her 'as St Paul shook off the viper -- even into the fire', learns that the pilgrimage of life is essentially undertaken alone.⁹⁹ As one who knows what it is to be 'a deserted, desolate creature' and a 'poor, lost wanderer', she reminds her son, also 'an outcast in the world', that nothing but his own sin can make him 'an outcast from God', and advises him to place his trust in divine power rather than in human judgment.¹⁰⁰

The attitude of Thurstan Benson towards Ruth's child, whom he

⁹⁸Ruth, pp. 79, 2.

⁹⁹Ruth, pp. 318, 335.

¹⁰⁰Ruth, pp. 94-95, 342.

persuades his sister to view as 'God's messenger to lead her back to Him' instead of as 'this badge of her shame' or 'this miserable offspring of sin', causes him also to be cast off by Mr Bradshaw, who 'can no longer regard him as a fitting exponent of the will of God'.¹⁰¹ Believing firmly that no person who has gone astray should be judged as lost beyond recall and that God will open a way for Ruth's redemption, Mr Benson takes his stand on the side of the compassionate Christ. Although he has the physical stature of a dwarf, he has the spiritual stature of a hero. His conviction that even an illegitimate child can become the instrument of purification prompts Faith Benson's comment 'These are quite new ideas to me', which reflects Elizabeth Gaskell's view that when one truly seeks to discover what course should be taken in a new and demanding situation, faith is tested and character is forged.¹⁰² Longing to protect Ruth from avoidable trial, Thurstan, however, succumbs to the temptation to conceal her past and to declare her a widow. Whereas he formerly never confused consequences with sin and experienced no hesitation in performing actions which he thought were according to the will of God, he reaches a point at which his pathway becomes less clear and he makes only groping progress. He is forced to reconsider 'the sophistry' which led him to think that 'wrong could be right' and to examine his own conduct in the light of his earlier statement to the lawyer Hickson that evil cannot be justified by good results; in conversation with Mr Bradshaw he acknowledges that, although the means he chose to obtain his end were deceitful,

¹⁰¹Ruth, pp. 118-19, 348.

¹⁰²Ruth, p. 118.

his goal of opening out 'a path of usefulness' for Ruth was well-intentioned.¹⁰³

Conduct, along with its motivation and consequences, becomes the substance of pilgrimage in the Gaskell works. Mr Bradshaw, whether engaging in political manoeuvre or arranging his daughter's marriage to further his aims in business, adapts his means to his ends in order to ensure success. Whereas he is motivated purely by calculated self-interest, Mr Benson acts out of a spontaneous love for others. Although both men are guilty of deception for the sake of expediency, they differ vastly in their degree of integrity. Gaskell never minimizes the difficulty of deciding how to act in order to accomplish the highest good but she also refuses to exempt the individual from full responsibility for whatever action is taken.

Ruth, who in all her undertakings wishes the divine will to be done, does not concern herself unduly with eventualities but rather leaves means and ends in God's hands. As Thurstan foresees, her son becomes the means of her own redemption: 'so near, so real and present, did heaven, and eternity, and God seem to Ruth, as she lay encircling her mysterious holy child'.¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Gaskell's belief that a woman's ultimate happiness lies in marriage and motherhood is evident in the new sense of direction and fulfilment experienced by Ruth in caring for Leonard, and also in the restlessness and maternal affection of such childless women as Faith Benson and Miss Matty. Motherhood matures Ruth and endows her with dignity, arising from the

¹⁰³Ruth, pp. 358, 253, 346.

¹⁰⁴Ruth, p. 163.

deep significance which life now holds for her. Thinking not of herself but of her child, whom she has been entrusted to guide and teach, she is completely unconscious of her 'uncommon power, or unusual progress'; Mr Benson notes that her intellectual and spiritual growth coincide and marvels at 'the bounds by which she surmounted obstacles, the quick perception and ready adaptation of truths and first principles, and her immediate sense of the fitness of things'.¹⁰⁵ Her path is, however, overshadowed by the temptation to make Leonard her idol: 'Her whole heart was in her boy. She often feared that she loved him too much -- more than God Himself'.¹⁰⁶ But her love for her child serves to deepen her love for God, who knows the motivation of her heart.

The greatest temptation Ruth faces is that posed by her seducer, who returns with an offer to advance Leonard on any path she might choose for him. At first charmed by the tempter's voice, which, like that of the devil, who adopts different guises, remains subtly the same, she is warned by 'the higher spirit' of her conscience, which makes 'her path more and more easy to follow'.¹⁰⁷ It is fitting that Ruth makes her crucial decision on the shore at Abermouth, where she recognizes Mr Donne's proposal of marriage and promise to confer all manner of material benefits upon her son as shifting sands and not as a foundation upon which to build her future life. Claiming to have her in his power, Mr Donne is thwarted by Ruth, who experiences 'a

¹⁰⁵ Ruth, p. 185.

¹⁰⁶ Ruth, p. 207.

¹⁰⁷ Ruth, p. 281.

strange exultant sense of power over herself'.¹⁰⁸ Like Jane Eyre, who escapes Rochester's alluring but enslaving mastery, she assumes spiritual ascendancy over him and separates herself permanently from the idol of her youth. The watch and chain which Mr Donne places around Leonard's neck is reminiscent of that offered by Rochester to Jane and symbolizes the power which one person wields over another. Ruth becomes aware of an inner source of power which increases her independence of spirit and enables her to reject the way of expediency.

Ruth's suffering teaches her spiritual truths and heralds a new phase in her pilgrimage. In the church her faith is renewed as she identifies herself with the anguished countenance of the gargoyle which directs her thoughts to the 'hills from whence cometh our help' (Psalm 121. 1) and as she listens to the reading from Matthew 26 on Christ's agony in Gethsemane.¹⁰⁹ In the same manner as Brontë, Gaskell uses the device of pathetic fallacy to indicate the intense heartache of her heroines. Ruth, whose inner storm is quelled by the violence of the storm without and whose sorrow is transmuted by the beauty of the sunset into a sense of God's presence and infinity, discovers the restorative power of Nature, which surpasses 'any words, however wise and tender'.¹¹⁰ Thus strengthened by her 'spiritual buffeting' to 'work out her self-redemption' as exhorted by St Paul in Philippians 2. 12, she resolves to try especially hard to fulfil her duty to God and to her son, who must also join 'the heroes and warriors

¹⁰⁸ Ruth, p. 274.

¹⁰⁹ Ruth, p. 280.

¹¹⁰ Ruth, p. 302.

in the army of Christ' on 'the hard and thorny path which was trodden once by the bleeding feet' of the Saviour.¹¹¹ In Gaskell's understanding of the spiritual journey the end of the pathway through the wilderness of suffering is not always clearly discernible, but the will to choose the right way and to persevere in it is essential if the destination is to be reached. Both Ruth and Leonard realize the importance of translating their faith into practice or conduct. The words which she utters before his birth, 'I will be so good!', are echoed by him: 'Mamma! mamma! I will be good -- I make a promise'.¹¹² Whether or not the novelist had in mind the promise made by Queen Victoria upon her accession to the throne in 1837, she was assuredly acquainted with the scriptural concept of covenant as a renewal of hope and as a fresh start along life's pathway.

Ruth, like Richard Bradshaw, cast out by his Pharisaical father for his crime of forgery, must prove her penitence by means of socially acceptable conduct. She is eventually eulogized by the community which once spurned her, but only after she expends herself in the vocation of service. Early in the novel her sense of being needed in the world deters her from committing suicide, and she is frequently shown to be more concerned about others than herself. Her moral courage, which issues in action, is most evident in her decision to serve in the fever-ward. Jemima's attempt to dissuade her from following this course may well be derived from Gaskell's knowledge of Florence Nightingale's persistence in answering her call to nursing

¹¹¹Ruth, pp. 288, 345, 354.

¹¹²Ruth, pp. 117, 203.

despite family opposition. Convinced that her personal security, even among the typhus victims, is in God's hands, Ruth acts out her firm faith in loving deeds: 'She did not talk much about religion; but those who noticed her knew that it was the unseen banner which she was following. The low-breathed sentences which she spoke into the ear of the sufferer and the dying carried them upwards to God'.¹¹³ Because of her determination to go to the aid of the fever-stricken Mr Donne, she is called a 'tender-hearted fool of a woman', but as such illustrates the Christian paradox that God chooses 'the foolish things of the world to confound the wise' and 'the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty' (I Corinthians 1. 27).¹¹⁴ Mr Donne's delirious comments about water-lilies, symbols of purity, indicate his subconscious guilt over his conduct towards Ruth, and his subsequent offer to provide for Leonard out of a sense of duty is in sharp contrast to her selfless care of him. According to Lansbury, 'it is not when she is desired sexually that Ruth becomes most passionate but when she can assume a maternal role with Bellingham. She does not yearn to be his lover, but his nurse'.¹¹⁵ In loving, rather than in seeking to be loved, Ruth reaches the end of her pilgrimage 'out of darkness into light'.¹¹⁶ Like the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, she is esteemed 'blessed' for her character and deeds, and is paid the highest tribute by Mr Benson, who, instead of preaching

¹¹³Ruth, p. 388.

¹¹⁴Ruth, p. 438.

¹¹⁵Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis, p. 60.

¹¹⁶Ruth, p. 440.

a sermon at her funeral, reads the description of the redeemed in the eternal city, where 'the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes' (Revelation 7. 17).¹¹⁷

Sylvia Robson is another of the Gaskell heroines whose spiritual progress arises out of intense suffering. At the opening of Sylvia's Lovers (1863) her character is as undeveloped as a child's and she is regarded as a child by her mother, who, by relating the story of Nancy Hartley, warns her of the possible danger of loving the wrong man, as Thomas warns Ruth. Philip's gifts of the ribbon with the briar-rose pattern and the copy of Sorrows of Werther, which she is unable to read for herself, are signs of the long, thorn-strewn path that stretches before her. Her personal suffering is closely associated with that experienced by the entire community of Monkshaven, vulnerable to attack by the press-gang, which descends upon the innocent and unsuspecting as swiftly as the day of judgment.

The pervading atmosphere of Sylvia's Lovers is one of ominous peril and brave resistance to injustice. External and internal forms of power are brought into conflict in Gaskell's treatment of the starkly inexplicable and often calamitous nature of circumstance, which can either crush or ennoble those caught within its grasp. Charley Kinraid's impressment, which for him is tragic, becomes in Philip's mind providential. Tempted by 'the dread Inner Creature' to withhold Kinraid's message from Sylvia, Philip justifies such a deed by assuring himself of his moral superiority to the specksioneer and

¹¹⁷Ruth, pp. 426, 453.

of the necessity of protecting the one he hopes to win for himself.¹¹⁸ His antagonism towards Kinraid alerts Philip to the old Adam, the ever-present enemy which Jeremiah Foster views as the cause of all strife. The novel conveys an overwhelming sense of a vast spiritual battle 'against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world' (Ephesians 6. 12), illustrated by the terror and hostility which hold Daniel Robson in a supernatural kind of possession. In the retaliatory assault of the Monkshaven men, deceived by the ringing of the fire-bell, violence is depicted on a massive scale in terms of 'some raging, ravening beast growling over his prey'.¹¹⁹ For his valiant liberation of the captives of the press-gang Daniel is looked upon as a hero, but for his part in inciting riot resulting in wanton destruction he is himself taken prisoner. Again Gaskell explores the social implications of well-meant conduct. Although Daniel, like Thurstan Benson, acts out of genuine concern for others, he confuses means with ends and discovers that the law of his heart is overruled by the law of the land. As his experience makes plain, violence which attempts to check violence merely perpetuates injustice and leads to further suffering.

The pattern of revenge and forgiveness which underlies the work centres upon the changing attitudes of the protagonist. Daniel and Kester receive Sylvia's forgiveness for their harsh words, but Philip's request that she pardon Dick Simpson, who under coercion gave evidence

¹¹⁸Elizabeth Gaskell; Sylvia's Lovers, in The Works of Mrs Gaskell, VI, 235.

¹¹⁹Sylvia's Lovers, p. 276.

against her father at his trial, is vehemently refused. Aware of her own strong passion for love and hate, she declares that it is not within her nature to forgive and confesses that in her grief over her father's execution she has 'turned savage'.¹²⁰ From this early stage of her pilgrimage, marked by relentless thirst for vengeance, Sylvia advances to that in which she makes the difficult decision to marry Philip. In the chapter entitled 'The Ordeal' she seeks Kester's guidance by repeatedly asking 'What can I do?' and, like Ruth, rephrases her question to 'What mun I do?'.¹²¹ Indicating her readiness to make an effort of will, she tells her old friend and mentor that she will try to make Philip happy. The heaviness of spirit with which she enters upon this marriage of expediency, which is more for her mother's sake than for her own, is revealed in her determination to wear black on her wedding day. The silhouettes made of the couple during the first month of their married life and described as 'black profiles . . . about as poor semblances of humanity as could be conceived', symbolize their relationship, which is devoid of vitality and depth.¹²² Sylvia feels like a prisoner as Philip's wife and as the mother of his child, and he, too, 'gazing at the tiny creature with wondering idolatry', is 'kept prisoner by a small, small finger curled round his strong and sinewy one'.¹²³ Emphasizing as she does in each of her novels that no one can live in isolation, Gaskell

¹²⁰Sylvia's Lovers, p. 337.

¹²¹Sylvia's Lovers, pp. 341-42, 345.

¹²²Sylvia's Lovers, p. 409.

¹²³Sylvia's Lovers, p. 371.

portrays the intricacies of the human condition, in whose web all are caught. Although her characters may be bound by circumstances beyond their control, there is within those circumstances scope to assert their will to endure and to triumph.

The crisis of Kinraid's return is presaged by Philip's recurring dreams, which are given great prophetic significance by Sylvia, who also has a dream in which her lover appears 'clear and life-like'.¹²⁴ During his enforced absence from her as she recovers from brain fever, Philip becomes 'bound down with strong resolution to patience' and finds his chief solace from distress in his brightening business prospects and increasing participation as a church-officer.¹²⁵ The motivation behind his regular church-attendance is subtly queried by the novelist, but she refrains from taking a judgmental or cynical stance towards his conduct. For Sylvia, however, church-going is a hardship which she associates with respectability and mere form, lacking the necessary spark of life, and thus it becomes in her mind a type of deception. Whereas she receives no comfort within the confines of the church, in the freedom of Nature's sanctuary she is calmed by the tempest of the elements and by the maternal, restorative influence of the sea. As with all of the Gaskell protagonists, Sylvia discovers that a period of waiting or of desperation often signals the moment of change and recovery. The inner strength she has developed becomes evident when, acknowledging that she is 'bound and tied' by her oath to Philip and by her responsibility to her child, she resists

¹²⁴ Sylvia's Lovers, p. 374.

¹²⁵ Sylvia's Lovers, p. 376.

the temptation to begin a new life with Charley and resolves never to see him again; in her refusal to 'spoil' her soul, even though her life has already been spoilt, she resembles Jane Eyre.¹²⁶

Such heroism which conquers self is also evinced by Hester, who overcomes her envy of Sylvia and, like 'a star, the brightness of which was only recognised in times of darkness', remains silently faithful to her commission to take care of the deserted wife and child, but since she casts the blame for Philip's unhappiness upon Sylvia, acts out of a sense of duty rather than love.¹²⁷ Sylvia, on the other hand, looks up 'to Hester as some one very remarkable for her goodness. If only she could have liked her!'.¹²⁸ True goodness, Gaskell implies, arises not from conventional piety or self-righteous isolation from the sins and sorrows of others but from attitudes and deeds of mercy. Sylvia is eager to search out 'the meaning of sin and godliness! -- words that had only passed over the surface of her mind till now! For her child's sake she should like to do the will of God, if she only knew what that was, and how to be worked out in her daily life'.¹²⁹ With increasing spiritual insight she seeks to create unity between the sacred and the secular. Taught by Alice Rose to read the first chapter of Genesis, she begins her quest for renewal of harmony and purpose in her life, and becomes aware of the heroic nature of Philip's faithful love, which is likened to that of Jacob for Rachel

¹²⁶Sylvia's Lovers, p. 404.

¹²⁷Sylvia's Lovers, p. 382.

¹²⁸Sylvia's Lovers, p. 446.

¹²⁹Sylvia's Lovers, p. 442.

(Genesis 29).¹³⁰ This reference to the story of the patriarch who is deceived by the one he serves, but who in the end wins his reward, reinforces the point that constancy is at the heart of true heroism and that self-deception is much harder to master than is the deception of others.

Alice Rose's statement that Sylvia is being humbled by her trials applies also to Philip, who is 'driven forth like Cain' as a 'hungry, broken-hearted outcast' into 'some strange country'.¹³¹ In this case, allusion to Genesis focusses attention on the old Adam inherent in human nature. Deceived into thinking that martial glory will secure him Sylvia's love, Philip enlists to do physical battle in an effort to ease the battle within himself. In the hope of entering upon a new life, he adopts the name of Stephen Freeman, but not until he risks his own life for a selfless end does he become, like the martyr Stephen (Acts 7), completely free. Having saved Kinraid from certain death on the battlefield, he is injured during the course of duty and experiences utter desolation and hopelessness. Out of his physical wounds, however, comes spiritual healing. The military campaign in which he serves is symbolic of 'the good fight of faith' (I Timothy 6. 12), in which the real heroes are those who lose according to the world's standards. And, although it may appear to be a rather contrived setting, the Holy Land, where the old covenant gave place to the new, is appropriate as the scene in which Charley and Philip meet 'not as

¹³⁰ Sylvia's Lovers, p. 261.

¹³¹ Sylvia's Lovers, pp. 436, 509, 447.

rivals or as foes, but as saviour and saved'.¹³²

In the manner of Bunyan's Christian, Philip needs a period of rest and refreshment before continuing his pilgrimage. This he finds at the Hospital of St Sepulchre, a refuge from the world, yet also, as its name suggests, a place of temptation. Perceiving that an abundance of peace and comfort can lead to spiritual death and that reconciliation with God cannot be divorced from reconciliation with humanity, Philip renounces the religion of withdrawal to return to Monkshaven to seek Sylvia's forgiveness. He again endangers his own life to save his daughter Bella and thus illustrates Gaskell's conviction that penitence is proved more by deeds than by words.

In Philip's extremity grace is made effectual through Sylvia's love, which is called forth by his helplessness and need. Within sight and sound of the sea, symbolic of the ebb and flow of human life against the vast background of eternity, Philip and Sylvia are reconciled to each other. The novel's closing chapter, entitled 'Saved and Lost', resounds with the hymnic refrain 'And the waves kept lapping on the shelving shore', which becomes a theme with variations, as it occurs seven times in slightly modified form.¹³³ It seems likely that throughout the final scene, in which Philip reminds Sylvia that God's mercy far surpasses their forgiveness of each other, Gaskell is conscious of Christ's injunction to forgive 'until seventy times seven' (Matthew 18. 22). Sylvia, in her spiritual maturity, is described as being 'upborne from earth', and Philip,

¹³²Sylvia's Lovers, p. 476.

¹³³Sylvia's Lovers, pp. 522-29.

reviewing the battle of his life from his boyhood yearning to be like Abraham, David, or St John, who loved and were loved by God, sees himself in all his present nakedness of soul and dies a hero, having endured to the end; whereas he once kept Sylvia 'shrined in the dearest sanctuary of his being', he now sees his overwhelming love for another creature from the perspective of the Creator's immeasurable love.¹³⁴ Gaskell, who originally intended Philip's Idol to be the title of this work, clearly shares Brontë's awareness of the danger of idolizing another human being.¹³⁵ Sylvia, the 'strong-minded' heroine, is forced to live on in her suffering, but she is determined to 'try hard to be very good'.¹³⁶ The novel concludes with a sense of the precious opportunity afforded by life to create good out of evil and of the paramount importance of the spirit behind acts of conciliation. Hester, for instance, turns her disappointment and sorrow into the good work of founding almshouses. Sylvia's pilgrimage from an attitude of revenge to one of forgiveness, from the old creation to the new, teaches her that circumstances which are ostensibly hopeless can be filled with redemptive possibilities, as illustrated by Hester's words: 'With God all things are possible' (Matthew 19. 26).¹³⁷ Mention of Bella's emigration to America in the closing sentence reinforces the general theme that change within the individual can result in a new life and in a new world.

¹³⁴Sylvia's Lovers, pp. 522, 136.

¹³⁵Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis, p. 160.

¹³⁶Sylvia's Lovers, p. 529.

¹³⁷Sylvia's Lovers, p. 516.

The next of the Gaskell heroines to grow in faith and in the capacity to begin anew is Phillis Holman. In the first three pages of Cousin Phillis (1864), which introduce Paul Manning, the narrator, there are five references to independence, which set the tone for Phillis's struggle towards independence of spirit and action. Paul, starting on a 'new course of life', is granted 'the independence of lodgings' by his father, 'a sturdy Independent by descent and conviction', and is taken to visit 'the Independent minister' of Eltham before settling to his 'new independence'.¹³⁸ When he first meets Phillis, daughter of Ebenezer Holman, also an Independent minister, she is at seventeen years of age dressed like a child and is even called 'the child' by her parents; but despite her childlike simplicity she appears to Paul 'more like a man than a woman -- she knows Latin and Greek'.¹³⁹ Phillis's scholarly training, received from her father, does not, however, prepare her to face life. Her womanhood is actually awakened by Edward Holdsworth, who directs 'her studies into new paths'.¹⁴⁰ It is ironic that she is assisted in the reading of Dante's 'Inferno' by Holdsworth, as he leads her into the hell of suffering. Comparing her with 'the sleeping beauty', he assumes that she will remain in her seclusion, 'like a rose that had come to full bloom on the sunny side of a lonely house, sheltered from storms', until he returns from Canada to marry her.¹⁴¹ Pathetic fallacy

¹³⁸ Cousin Phillis, pp. 219-21.

¹³⁹ Cousin Phillis, pp. 298, 252.

¹⁴⁰ Cousin Phillis, p. 271.

¹⁴¹ Cousin Phillis, pp. 276, 289.

in the form of a thunderstorm heightens the impact of the crisis faced by Phillis when she learns of Holdsworth's marriage to a Canadian. Awakened to the harsh reality of life's dreams that are never to be fulfilled, she reacts with a single outburst of frustrated anger over the dreariness and futility of the way that lies ahead. Up to this point in the narrative she is depicted as a model Victorian daughter, demure and obedient, but in her cry of rebellion she steps out of her stained-glass perfection to become eminently human.

In his efforts to shield his daughter from the taint of worldly vanity and to halt 'her progress towards womanhood', Minister Holman in fact increases her shock and suffering upon first encountering the thorns along life's pathway.¹⁴² Overly protective of her, he has yet to recognize that she is an independent being who cannot engage in the spiritual pilgrimage vicariously. Phillis, disgraced for loving a man who has not professed his love for her, and tortured by her father's reproach that she was willing to go away with a 'stranger, wandering over the world', succumbs, like Sylvia, to brain fever.¹⁴³ Her precarious state is symbolically foreshadowed by the moth which flutters round the candle-flame and which is reminiscent of Jane Eyre's moment of crisis in the garden with Rochester. Holman, broken by anxiety and remorse, shares in Phillis's spiritual struggle. Although he is exhorted by the pious Brother Robinson to resign himself to the loss of his daughter as punishment for his sin of idolatry, he continues to hope for her recovery and his faith is rewarded.

¹⁴²Cousin Phillis, p. 307.

¹⁴³Cousin Phillis, p. 309.

Whereas he reveals his thankfulness in renewed kindness and patience, Phillis requires the timely advice of Betty: 'If I were you, I'd rise up and snuff the moon, sooner than break your father's and your mother's hearts wi' watching and waiting till it pleases you to fight your own way back to cheerfulness'.¹⁴⁴ With the same forthrightness that characterizes Dixon, Sally, and Kester, Betty asserts her view that courage to face the future is often imparted more by challenge than by sympathy. Throughout Gaskell's fiction the message is unmistakable that self-effort, rather than resignation, is required if one is to overcome the trials of the wilderness. Phillis must now prove her maturity by placing concern for others before indulgence in self-pity. Her desire for 'change of thought and scene' indicates her determination to emerge triumphantly from suffering and to redeem time past by action in the present: 'Only for a short time, Paul. Then -- we will go back to the peace of the old days. I know we shall; I can, and I will!'.¹⁴⁵ Just as Margaret Hale returns to Milton-Northern refreshed but changed after her visit to Helstone, so Phillis will discover as she returns to Hope Farm that she can never render permanent a sacred moment in the past. The conclusion of Cousin Phillis is in effect a new beginning of the pilgrimage, as the heroine is left with a vision and the will to make it a reality.

Molly Gibson, the last of Gaskell's 'strong-minded' women, learns, like Phillis, that life is in a constant state of flux and that the heroic spirit accepts this fact as a challenge to growth. Wives and

¹⁴⁴ Cousin Phillis, p. 316.

¹⁴⁵ Cousin Phillis, p. 317.

Daughters (1866), which treats the relationship between two generations, might also have been entitled 'Old Ways and New Ways', the heading of chapter 30, the mid-point of the novel. Although the opening sentence could very well introduce a romantic tale, the work is in fact a profoundly realistic study of human nature and conduct, suggested by the sub-title, An Every-Day Story. Beginning on a conventional note, as she does in North and South, Gaskell soon shatters the reader's expectations of yet another variation on the theme of the English provincial novel by her graphic portrayal of characters struggling to come to terms with changing reality.

The youthful and energetic Molly, 'a novice amongst the great folk' as well as in knowledge of life, compares herself when being managed by others with 'a lighted candle when they're putting the extinguisher on it'.¹⁴⁶ Undaunted by her father's wish to have her remain a child unburdened by intellectual pursuits, she is eager to learn and reads every book that is available to her. Although Gaskell's fiction is marked by a respect for scholarly achievement, it also conveys her belief that moral development is always more important than intellectual, and that the prime purpose of study is to equip the learner for life. Like Ruth, Sylvia, and Phillis, who are given instruction by their mentors, Molly finds a spiritual confidante and surrogate mother in Mrs Hamley, whose mental and spiritual submissiveness have made her a physical invalid and a mere spectator of events taking place around her. The incapacity of this lonely woman to face life is

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, edited by Frank Glover Smith, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 44, 58.

evident in her fondness for sentimental poetry and romantic fiction, which she shares with her young visitor. Molly, however, aided by her father's unsentimental nature, advances far beyond the romanticism of her gentle but ineffectual friend.

The first break in the peaceful pattern of Molly's life occurs when Mr Gibson announces his intention to marry again. Jolted out of her sheltered existence, which she desires to secure by fastening herself and her father to either end of a long chain so as to prevent them from ever losing each other, she experiences a sense of anger, desolation, uncertainty, and violent unhappiness: 'It was as if the piece of solid ground on which she stood had broken from the shore, and she was drifting out to the infinite sea alone'.¹⁴⁷ In the same way that Betty admonishes Phillis, Roger Hamley, in a severely brief sermon, enjoins Molly to think more of others than of herself, and, awakening in her 'a new current of thought', braces her for the inevitable change in her life.¹⁴⁸ Not concerned with metaphysics, he devotes his energies to problems of an everyday nature and encourages her to confront her earthly trials one at a time with courage and confidence. His words, which are practical rather than speculative, take on for Molly 'the force of precepts -- stable guides to her conduct', strengthening her to cope with a new and dreaded situation.¹⁴⁹ Resolved to try hard to love Mrs Kirkpatrick, soon to be the new Mrs Gibson, she exemplifies the Victorian concern for application of faith

¹⁴⁷Wives and Daughters, p. 145.

¹⁴⁸Wives and Daughters, p. 155.

¹⁴⁹Wives and Daughters, p. 181.

to life.

Molly's determination to adjust her own attitudes in order to bring about harmony within her recently-extended family contrasts vividly with Mrs Gibson's equally strong determination to make everyone else adapt to her ways and whims. Motivated by a selfish desire to be a lady of leisure exempted from the struggle of self-support, Hyacinth, whose name in itself implies her concern for passing fancies rather than enduring character, looks upon marriage as a means of escape from hardship and upon her husband as a servant to be possessed and manipulated. Only acknowledging what suits her, she dismisses from her mind the unpleasant facts of life and death associated with the medical profession. The hard-working and reliable Dr Gibson, however, takes immediate action in the real world, in which he seeks to relieve suffering. Although deeply disappointed that his wife's standard of conduct is not as high as that which he upholds for himself and for his daughter, he refuses to fret over the minor irritations caused by his second marriage and instead involves himself more deeply in the troubles of his patients. As a result of the conflicting interests of her parents, Molly is thrust onto her own course and forced to choose between following the example of affectation and duplicity or of integrity and good conduct.

Cynthia, who also falls short of Mr Gibson's high standard of right and wrong, is the catalyst for Molly's spiritual crisis. Described in terms of the glittering pieces of a broken mirror, her shallow and fragmented personality creates discord rather than harmony. The name Cynthia, which is to Mr Gibson 'such an out-of-the-way name, only fit for poetry, not for daily use', signifies the moon personified

and suggests the age-old tradition in which inaccessibility is the essence of romance.¹⁵⁰ Her relationship with Cynthia, therefore, places Molly in the situation faced by Margaret Hale of having to reconcile the poetry and the prose of life. The difference in nature between the two young women is evident in their musical performance, in which Cynthia is graceful but inaccurate and Molly is conscientious but self-effacing. Unlike Molly, who has the power to love and to be loved, Cynthia can neither give nor receive love. Unforgiving towards her mother, who neglected her as a child, and reluctant to ask for forgiveness from others, she cannot bear to have her faults known by those she considers to have higher standards of morality than she could ever attain. She would rather be worshipped from afar than intimately loved, since mere adoration demands no responsibility. For the sake of expediency she pledges herself to Mr Preston, whose devotion she eagerly accepts until she is required to confirm her commitment in marriage. Gratified by knowing that his love places him in her power, she is, nevertheless, unable to accept his power over her, and, when faced with the consequences of her deed, reacts in a vengeful way.

Similarly, in her decision to break her engagement to Roger, who, she fears, will require her 'to walk on tiptoe' for the rest of her life, she is freed from the anxiety of 'straining up to his goodness', but she is still bound by her own superficial and deceptive self.¹⁵¹ Whereas Molly believes that goodness is 'the only enduring thing in the world', Cynthia confesses that 'steady, every-day goodness' is

¹⁵⁰Wives and Daughters, p. 139.

¹⁵¹Wives and Daughters, pp. 486, 600.

beyond her; Roger, however, who combines 'goodness and real solid power' epitomizes Elizabeth Gaskell's understanding of the type of conduct which is a source of spiritual power that works for creative change and is not merely an occasional concession to morality.¹⁵² Goodness, or virtue, in the Gaskell novels, far from being associated with legalism or self-righteousness, is synonymous with living in such a way that one becomes a channel for divine love and thereby points towards the essential goodness of creation (Genesis 1. 31), which is intended to be filled with harmony but is blighted by the self-seeking nature of humanity. Molly, like Ruth, is frequently told that she is very good, but with genuine humility she acknowledges that she finds it a hard struggle to be good.

That Molly's 'grain is different' from Cynthia's is evident in her meeting with Mr Preston: 'There she stood, frightened, yet brave, not letting go her hold on what she meant to do, even when things seemed most against her'.¹⁵³ Thus taking the typical stance of the pilgrim whose mettle is tested by ordeal, she acts in a direct and sensible way, even though she may be considered naïve for assuming that others have as high a standard of conduct as she. Innocent as 'a pure angel of heaven' of the fact that she is endangering her own reputation by her secret meeting in the wood, she is secure in the knowledge that she is trying to 'walk in a straight path; and if she did wander out of it, it should only be to save pain to those whom she

¹⁵²Wives and Daughters, pp. 258, 273.

¹⁵³Wives and Daughters, pp. 535, 533.

loved'.¹⁵⁴ By attempting to 'set Cynthia in a straight path -- in a clear space' Molly is made a temporary outcast from Hollingford society and as such bears the consequences of her stepsister's deed of youthful folly.¹⁵⁵ Like Margaret Hale, she is reprimanded for her compromising conduct, which is motivated by her willingness to be of service. Exploited by Cynthia and Mrs Gibson for her selflessness, she is in fact Christ-like in her vicarious suffering and determination to continue to the end of her chosen course.

Unlike Cynthia, who compares herself with Cinderella, Molly matures in her understanding of the ideal and the actual and of what constitutes real heroism. Although she once idolized Osborne as her romantic hero, she becomes disillusioned by his apparent purposelessness and inability to overcome the obstacles of life. In Gaskell's view character is always best revealed through conduct, which, as Osborne and Roger illustrate, either fails or succeeds in making a creative impact upon life. On one hand, Osborne is theoretical and self-centred, and, on the other, Roger is practical and thoughtful of others. Osborne's potential as a scholar and poet come to naught, since his learning is unrelated to everyday matters and his poetry, so admired by his mother, is purely imitative and sentimental. Roger, known for his favourable conduct as well as for kindness and reliability, makes 'his own way' in the world.¹⁵⁶ Unlike 'the languid, careless, dilettante Osborne', he is 'the providence of the family', as he possesses the

¹⁵⁴Wives and Daughters, pp. 533, 525.

¹⁵⁵Wives and Daughters, p. 528.

¹⁵⁶Wives and Daughters, p. 89.

kind of knowledge which issues in constructive action; he has both a vision and the 'energy to force his way to it'.¹⁵⁷ The portrait seen by Molly of the two brothers as young boys captures the essential difference between them: Osborne sits reading, while Roger, alert to his environment, points out the window to some object in the distance. Roger, engaged in scientific discovery, departs from the rest of the Hamleys, who are not noted for being 'an adventurous race'.¹⁵⁸ Upon returning from his expedition, modelled after that of Darwin, he appears 'more muscular', his words are filled with meaning, and he is determined to do what is right.¹⁵⁹ Through this veiled reference to the muscular Christianity of the Christian Socialists the novelist makes the point that faith and ethics cannot be separated and that religion is only valid when it is applied to everyday life. The heroes of the new age are those such as Roger who rely not on the heritage of the past but on their own strength of will to lead them confidently into the future. In keeping with Gaskell's conviction that moral or spiritual progress is fundamental to all other forms of achievement, Roger is honoured more for his goodness than for his scholarship and social position. Less overtly religious in tone than any of the other novels, Wives and Daughters makes clear its author's insight that true nobility or worth is found in integrity of thought and action.

Molly and Roger, whose faces reveal the character that

¹⁵⁷Wives and Daughters, pp. 395, 397, 391.

¹⁵⁸Wives and Daughters, p. 72.

¹⁵⁹Wives and Daughters, p. 644.

develops out of suffering overcome, find in each other the qualities they most admire, and enter into a marriage which shows signs of being the kind of working partnership which was Elizabeth Gaskell's ideal. Since Molly takes a genuine interest in Roger's scientific pursuits, which combine an appreciation of the natural world with the inventive energy of the new technology, their union will result in that intellectual and spiritual companionship not experienced by Mr and Mrs Gibson. In Gaskell's view the sharing of practical, everyday details of work gives rise to mutual growth and understanding. Molly exemplifies those women who struggle to ascertain the proper balance between commitment to others and fulfilment of themselves. Although she makes no direct authorial comment on woman's vocation, as does Brontë in Jane Eyre, the novelist conveys in no uncertain terms her belief that women play just as vital a role as men in searching out paths of exploration leading to the betterment of the human race. It is appropriate that Wives and Daughters is incomplete, as its open-ended conclusion reflects the prevailing theme of all of the novels that the evolution of the human spirit is to be continued. In her final work Gaskell affirms that the pilgrimage begins anew with each generation and that hope lies with the daughters to move forward with a new faith into a new world.

III. 'Two Worlds' Reconciled

The concept of two worlds is established in Gaskell's first novel and recurs throughout her work as the fundamental motif for her treatment of the spiritual pilgrimage, with its goal of reconciliation in both the private and public spheres of life. In her artistic intent

to create harmony out of disparity, Gaskell shares the preoccupation of other Victorians with the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. Her own personal experience bridged two social worlds and her fiction likewise encompasses the world of time and the world of eternity. The city, represented by Manchester, which, according to Asa Briggs, is a 'Symbol of a New Age', is far more than a setting in Mary Barton and North and South; centralizing the various conflicts of the period, it in fact almost assumes the role of a character in its own right.¹⁶⁰ As the central symbol of the potential for good or evil and of the quest for power, the city offers ample scope for an exploration of the purposes of human endeavour.

Margaret Hale, for example, exults in the sense of power exhibited in Milton-Northern:

It might be rather rampant in its display, and savour of boasting; but still they seemed to defy the old limits of possibility, in a kind of fine intoxication, caused by the recollection of what had been achieved, and what yet should be. If in her cooler moments she might not approve of their spirit in all things, still there was much to admire in their forgetfulness of themselves and the present, in their anticipated triumphs over all inanimate matter at some future time which none of them should live to see.¹⁶¹

Pride in power, such as that of Mrs Thornton in the eminence of her city as a manufacturing centre and in her son as one of its leading millowners, leads inevitably to conflict and results in the meaningless quest which never moves beyond the self. North and South, as a retelling of the myth of the tower of Babel in a nineteenth-century

¹⁶⁰ Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities (London, 1963), p. 83.

¹⁶¹ North and South, p. 217.

industrial setting, makes clear that any attempt to scale the heights of material prosperity at the neglect of spiritual truths will be confounded. Focussing her attention on the period of transition between a dying order and a new world in the process of being born, Gaskell confronts her characters with the change and suffering associated with an apocalyptic age. She is especially concerned about the increasing alienation caused by the desire for mastery rather than for mutuality and, although she never despairs of the human condition, is convinced that the way of Christian love is the only certain solution for society's problems. Realizing that economic and sexual exploitation are linked by the same double standard, she employs the image of the gulf to signify the deep division between sacred and secular, and thus also between precept and practice, underlying all forms of social discord.

Gaskell uses scripture as a prophetic challenge to the abuse of power which results in the emergence of 'two nations' and as a means of disclosing the changing attitudes and spiritual growth of her characters. John Barton's application of the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16. 19-26) is restricted to the condemnation of the rich, whose religion he regards as 'a humbug':

We are their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows; and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus, with a great gulf betwixt us.¹⁶²

In his denunciatory rhetoric he reveals that he is bound by the

¹⁶²Mary Barton, p. 45.

Hebraism of the Old Testament, which to his mind sanctions the human proclivity for vengeance. His preoccupation with honest labour and with reparation in the next world for those who have suffered in this is shared by John Thornton, who places great value on 'the position he had earned with the sweat of his brow' and whose household works its way 'steadily through the Old Testament' at evening prayers.¹⁶³ Ironically, Barton adopts the proscriptive Calvinism of the Victorian middle classes, whose insistence on the work ethic serves to justify their material success, which is equated with moral superiority. Allusion to the old dispensation is also made by Miss Simmonds, who, upon hearing of Harry Carson's murder, hopes that 'the wretch that did it may be hanged as high as Haman'.¹⁶⁴ The Book of Esther, to which her words refer, has as its theme retributive justice, which reappears in Cranford in Miss Matty's comparison of her father's wrath with that of King Ahasuerus. The thirst for revenge and the emphasis upon the letter rather than the spirit of the law is deprecated by Gaskell in Mary Barton: 'Are we worshippers of Christ? or of Alecto? Oh! Orestes! you would have made a very tolerable Christian of the nineteenth century!'.¹⁶⁵ The heavenly reward promised in the parable of Dives and Lazarus is also claimed by Bessy Higgins, who assures Margaret that she will cross 'the great gulf' to aid her in her distress in return for her kindness on earth, but Margaret, who has been cast as the Dives figure, and who perceives Bessy's distorted and

¹⁶³North and South, p. 196.

¹⁶⁴Mary Barton, p. 272.

¹⁶⁵Mary Barton, p. 266.

categorical interpretation of the passage, replies: 'It won't be division enough, in that awful day, that some of us have been beggars here, and some of us have been rich, -- we shall not be judged by that poor accident, but by our faithful following of Christ'.¹⁶⁶

References to the Dives and Lazarus parable are balanced in Mary Barton by those to the parable of the Good Samaritan, with its example of a healing of the breach between those who normally have no dealings with each other. Recalling his deed of violent revenge, John Barton believes that he has 'forfeited all right to bind up his brother's wounds'.¹⁶⁷ But the parable which has an even greater impact upon Gaskell's writing is that of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15. 11-32), in which alienation is superseded by reconciliation. This story goes directly to the heart of human experience in its incisive disclosure of the universal sense of being lost, of being an alien in a strange land, or of being in exile, and affirms that the kingdom of God consists in finding what is lost. As many of the Gaskell protagonists who lose their way on the journey of life learn, recognition of incompleteness and estrangement is the beginning of the process of being found. Ruth, for instance, kneels on the floor of the church-pew and with a broken and contrite spirit prays in the manner of the Prodigal Son: 'Father! I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy child!'.¹⁶⁸ Osborne Hamley, who travels to the metaphorical far country, pleads with his father

¹⁶⁶North and South, p. 202.

¹⁶⁷Mary Barton, p. 435.

¹⁶⁸Ruth, p. 153.

for the right of his inheritance, as the younger son in the parable asks for the portion belonging to him, but he also reflects the attitude of the elder son, for whom home has become a place of duty rather than of love. Mr Bradshaw, however, who, like the elder brother, tends to draw 'a clear line of partition' between the righteous and those who go astray, and whose motivation is moral duty 'with very little of that Hope and Faith which is the Spirit that maketh alive', becomes, following his acquaintance with grief and repentance, more like the forgiving father in the parable.¹⁶⁹

In each of her novels Gaskell treats the battle between the forces of alienation and hostility and those of reconciliation and love for ultimate triumph over the human spirit. John Barton, eager to find 'the right way', turns to scripture as the guide to the Source of spiritual power, and discovers that, when he tries 'to live Gospel-wise', heaven and earth are linked; but, unable 'to make folks' actions square wi' th' Bible', declares it a sham, thus illustrating the tragedy of the pilgrim who loses his way because of the discrepancy between the ideal and the actual.¹⁷⁰ The turning-point for Mr Carson, likewise eager for guidance, occurs when he reads the Bible 'with all the interest of a little child' and sees in his former 'task-book' 'the Spirit that made the Life'.¹⁷¹ Both he and Barton know intellectually that the Bible is 'a good book', but they must also come to possess it spiritually; following 'the Bible rules', to use Barton's phrase, merely

¹⁶⁹ Ruth, p. 320.

¹⁷⁰ Mary Barton, pp. 440-41.

¹⁷¹ Mary Barton, pp. 439-40.

as a means of obtaining personal salvation is in effect a travesty of this means of grace, which, if made an end in itself, loses its power to redeem.¹⁷² Solitary Sunday reading of the Bible, performed by several of Gaskell's characters, must result in application of the text to everyday concerns before Law can be converted into Love and self-righteousness into communion with others. Carson, whose previous understanding of the Bible has been as distorted as Barton's, is enabled by his acknowledgement of need, and by his desperate search, to overcome the avenging spirit and to seek Barton's forgiveness. The importance given in the novels to a human reading of the Bible reveals the influence of Matthew Arnold, Francis Newman, and F. D. Maurice, all of whom advocated breaking the bonds of bibliolatry to release the Spirit of Christ. Gaskell maintains that the Bible is the common inheritance that unites Barton and Carson; the story of Christ, which they read in the Gospels, has a universally compelling power which is often lost when codified in the dogma and creeds of the churches.

Newly aware of the depths of divine mercy, Barton and Carson open their hardened hearts to the power of Christian love, which transforms death into life. Replacing their self-assertive pride with childlike trust and humility, they progress out of the old creation, symbolized by the old Adam, into the new, marked by unity and compassion. Their pilgrimage has led them from the tower of Babel attitude, by which humanity seeks to ascend to God (Genesis 11. 4), to the pentecostal experience, in which God descends to humanity (Acts 2. 1-4). In the same way that Margaret Hale has 'need to learn a different language'

¹⁷² Mary Barton, p. 440.

in Milton-Northern in order to communicate with the people, the manufacturer and the labourer in Mary Barton learn the new language of reconciliation.¹⁷³ No longer confined by their individual limitations or by partial interpretations of the will of God, such as that of Brother Robinson, who expresses the view, that 'by learning other languages than our own, we were flying in the face of the Lord's purpose when He had said, at the building of the Tower of Babel, that he would confound their languages so that they should not understand each other's speech', they perceive that Christ lives beyond the pages of the Bible and that the unpredictable energy of love is also beyond human comprehension.¹⁷⁴ Gaskell's characters frequently use feminine imagery when referring to the Deity; for example, Mrs Boucher's neighbour speaks of God in terms of a mother, Bell Robson is certain that 'the Lord is like a tender nurse', and Minister Holman wishes to gather Phillis under his wings just as Jesus wished to gather together the children of Jerusalem (Matthew 23. 37).¹⁷⁵ In an age when the merciful nature of God was often overshadowed by the concept of a legalistic Lord of Hosts, Elizabeth Gaskell conveys her faith in the Creator as a loving Parent rather than as a stern Judge. Those of her figures who attain to spiritual maturity discard rarefied religious terminology that creates a gulf between meaning and application in favour of words connoting love, which speak directly to the needs of the human heart.

¹⁷³ North and South, p. 212.

¹⁷⁴ Cousin Phillis, p. 290.

¹⁷⁵ North and South, p. 372; Sylvia's Lovers, p. 329; Cousin Phillis, p. 306.

In Gaskell's fiction readiness to forgive and to receive forgiveness is always balanced by readiness to give tangible evidence to the spirit of reconciliation. In her view, the inner journey must issue in constructive change in attitudes, systems, and institutions. Mr Carson, 'at one of the breathing-places of life', is conscious that the foundations of his former life have been shaken and that he has been freed from a negative authoritarianism to make real in the industrial world a positive power for good; having himself experienced 'the cross of agony', he catches a glimpse of 'one of the grandest ends which sorrow can accomplish; the sufferer wrestling with God's messenger until a blessing is left behind, not for one alone but for generations'.¹⁷⁶ Like Jacob, who prevails in his struggle with God at Peniel and is given a new name (Genesis 32. 28), Carson initiates a new order of harmony between employers and workers, each activated by the Spirit of Christ, and embodies his vision in practical improvements within the city of Manchester. Thus the old covenant based upon the law, which obsessed John Barton, is replaced by the new covenant of love.

North and South illustrates the biblical emphasis on both personal and social progress from the old creation towards the new. Nicholas Higgins has, in Margaret's opinion, 'grand makings of a man . . . pride and all', and, according to Mr Hale's reflections, the masses must pass through 'the troublesome stage which intervenes between childhood and manhood, in the life of the multitude as well as that of the

¹⁷⁶ Mary Barton, pp. 451, 459.

individual'.¹⁷⁷ Nicholas agrees with Margaret that society's ills stem from the fact that 'every man has had to stand in an unchristian and isolated position, apart from and jealous of his brother-man', but, like John Barton, he takes an antagonistic rather than a conciliatory approach to union: 'Our only chance is binding men together in one common interest; and if some are cowards and some are fools, they must come along and join the great march, whose only strength is in numbers'.¹⁷⁸ He is reminded by Mr Hale, however, that the power of Christianity arises from its divine, not human, resources and from its wider purpose, which is to seek 'the good of all, instead of that merely of one class as opposed to another'.¹⁷⁹

In this novel, military language is applied to class conflict as well as to spiritual warfare. Gaskell shares the concern of Carlyle that human qualities accompany the vast strides of progress, and also the compassion of Bunyan, 'for those who are trampled on 'in the triumph of the crowded procession'; to her mind 'the roadway of the conqueror' is always ultimately that of caring love and not that of dissension.¹⁸⁰ The breaking down of Thornton's 'iron nature' so that it may be spiritually restored is symbolized by 'the mighty fall of the ponderous gates' (II Samuel 1. 19, 25).¹⁸¹ Formerly speaking of masters and men under the metaphor of battle, Thornton enters into a

¹⁷⁷ North and South, pp. 384, 167.

¹⁷⁸ North and South, pp. 169, 296.

¹⁷⁹ North and South, p. 296.

¹⁸⁰ North and South, p. 108.

¹⁸¹ North and South, pp. 130, 231.

relationship of mutuality with the workers through his dining-room plan and discovers that such personal contact which extends 'beyond the mere "cash nexus"' is 'the very breath of life'.¹⁸² As a Unitarian, Elizabeth Gaskell would not have celebrated the Eucharist or Holy Communion, but by using imagery associated with this central act of the Christian community she conveys her belief that all are in need of the grace of God and that love, which unites, will eventually triumph over all that divides. Just as Thornton shares a meal with his employees, Margaret requests as a keepsake of her friendship with Bessy a common drinking-cup, symbolic of a shared faith, and Nicholas is given Mr Hale's Bible, not to preserve as a relic, but to apply to life. In both Mary Barton and North and South Gaskell takes a revolutionary approach to power by declaring that in its most enduring form it lies not in authority and strife but in servanthood and love.

The child plays an important role in Gaskell's novels in effecting reconciliation. Mr Carson appropriates the way of forgiveness after hearing a little girl who has been knocked down in the street say of the one who had trespassed against her, 'He did not know what he was doing'.¹⁸³ Mr Bradshaw finds his sympathy awakened by the intense grief of Leonard, whom he leads out of the darkness of the graveyard into the light of healing love. And Squire Hamley's blessing of his grandchild brings him comfort in his sorrow over the death of his estranged son, with whose French wife he is reconciled through mutual suffering: 'it was just like tearing down a curtain that had

¹⁸²North and South, p. 525.

¹⁸³Mary Barton, p. 438.

been between them'.¹⁸⁴ In making the child, 'the offspring of a servant', heir to the Hamley estate, Gaskell affirms one of the paradoxes of the Christian faith, that in the kingdom of heaven the last shall be first.¹⁸⁵

To Gaskell 'the ministry of reconciliation' (II Corinthians 5. 18) is the essence of Christianity and the grand purpose of the spiritual pilgrimage. The protagonists of her novels serve as reconciling agents in the world and try to make goodness a reality. Any act of reconciliation, such as that of Lady Harriet in reinstating Molly in the favour of Hollingford society and that of Mr Gibson in arranging to settle Aimée in lodgings close to Hamley Hall, is 'a good day's work'.¹⁸⁶ In their quest for that power which issues in purposeful and selfless deeds Gaskell's characters seem to receive little assistance from the Church, commissioned to bridge the gulf between sacred and secular and to create a reconciling spirit amongst diverse peoples. The Church as institution is notably absent in the novels, reflecting the disaffection of the working-classes with 'the ministers of religion', who are seen to be 'their oppressors and enemies . . . in league for their prostration and enthrallment'.¹⁸⁷ Although she understood that Christianity has to do with liberation and never with repression, Gaskell is also aware that the institutionalizing of religion can result in the death of the spirit,

¹⁸⁴Wives and Daughters, p. 697.

¹⁸⁵Wives and Daughters, p. 695.

¹⁸⁶Wives and Daughters, pp. 585, 698.

¹⁸⁷Mary Barton, p. 126.

and she does not hesitate to ask whether the Church has experienced a loss of power and has become a stumbling-block in the way of pilgrimage rather than a channel of divine love to a suffering world. Mr Ashton, the vicar, described as being 'hopeless and impracticable', is known for his indolence of thought and inability to communicate with his parishioners on an everyday level.¹⁸⁸ Monkshaven parish church, situated high above the town, is more closely associated with the inescapable fact of death than with the pressing problems of life. Although its commanding position overlooking both town and sea, 'types of life and eternity', reminds the inhabitants of its sway over the secular as well as the sacred, the inscription on its bell, 'I to the grave do summon all', suggests that as an institution the Church assents to the hopelessness of the human condition rather than attests to the resurrection of the spirit.¹⁸⁹ The vicar, Dr Wilson, finds it beyond his power to bestow comfort and to cancel the discord between the human law of wrath and the divine law of love. Beloved more for his practical kindness than for his power in preaching, he exemplifies the novelist's conviction that words apart from deeds are 'as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal' (I Corinthians 13. 1).

Throughout her work Gaskell is always more concerned about the practice than the preaching of the gospel of reconciliation. Philip's ironic mention of the sermon on mercy and forgiveness which he hears preached to the judges in York illustrates the novelist's disdain for the discrepancy between profession and action, which is also decried

¹⁸⁸ Wives and Daughters, p. 261.

¹⁸⁹ Sylvia's Lovers, pp. 67, 72.

by Dante:

Now they but seek for fine words, and a jest,
In preaching, and who only wins a smile
Swells in his cowl, and asks no further test.¹⁹⁰

Gaskell, who in fact described herself, in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton in December 1857, as 'a sermon hater', invests her clerical figures with more vitality and purpose when they are out of the pulpit and performing their pastoral rather than their priestly functions.¹⁹¹ In her preference for the prophetic over the priestly element in religion she was no doubt influenced by the thoughts of James Martineau:

The Prophet is the representative of God before men, commissioned from the Divine nature to sanctify the human. He bears a message downwards, from heaven to earth; his inspirer being above, his influence below.... Instead of carrying the foulness of life to be cleansed in heaven, he brings the purity of heaven to make life divine. Instead of interposing himself and his mediation between humanity and Deity, he destroys the whole distance between them; and only fulfils his mission, when he brings the finite mind and the infinite into immediate and thrilling contact, and leaves the creature consciously alone with the Creator.¹⁹²

Martineau goes on to say that the 'true prophet is earnestly prospective; more filled with the conception of what the Creator will make his world, than of what he has already made it'.¹⁹³ This vision

¹⁹⁰'Paradise', The Divine Comedy, XXIX. 115-17.

¹⁹¹The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, p. 492.

¹⁹²Studies of Christianity, p. 42.

¹⁹³Studies of Christianity, p. 45.

of a faith which enables people to act with vigour and courage in the present and to look towards the building of the new earth in the future finds expression in the reference in Mary Barton to 'the same earnestness and clearness of thought that in some of old took the form of Prophecy'.¹⁹⁴

In Gaskell's view, Christianity fulfils the insights of the Old Testament prophets in regard to the limitations of religious ritual and tradition, and has meaning far beyond ecclesiastical structures and hierarchies. As a Unitarian, the novelist regarded religion as a means and not as an end, and envisaged the merging of the sacred and the secular, resulting in the transformation of the entire creation, as the goal of Christ's ministry. Since she believed that God is to be found in contemporary events and ordinary persons rather than relegated to religious systems, she placed little store in the professional priesthood or ministry. By relieving Mr Hale of his clerical garments, suggestive of Carlyle's denunciation of Church-clothes which are no longer of any use, Gaskell frees him to serve as one of the people, so that he becomes, in the true sense of the word, a minister. Nicholas's reference to Mr Hale as 'a parson out o' work', placing them both in the same position, points with subtle humour to Gaskell's vision of a day when the sacred will not be distinguishable from the secular and all persons will minister to each other.¹⁹⁵ Whereas his lectures on ecclesiastical architecture do not meet the needs of his manufacturing audience, Mr Hale's gentle kindness continues to be a

¹⁹⁴Mary Barton, p. 459.

¹⁹⁵North and South, p. 289.

blessing to others. Brontë's concern over the opening of North and South, expressed in a letter of 30 September 1854 to Gaskell, reveals her more restricted view of the role of the clergy:

The subject seems to me difficult; at first, I groaned over it. If you had any narrowness of views or bitterness of feeling towards the Church or her Clergy, I should groan over it still; but I think I see the ground you are about to take as far as the Church is concerned; not that of attack on her, but of defence of those who conscientiously differ from her, and feel it a duty to leave her fold. Well, it is good ground, but still rugged for the step of Fiction; stony, thorny will it prove at times, I fear.¹⁹⁶

In Gaskell's mind, however, the Church exists not only for those within its fold but for the world.

Minister Holman exemplifies the ideal Christian who lives out a faith which links sacred and secular, faith and work. His given name, Ebenezer, means in Hebrew 'stone of help', signifying a reversal of defeat into victory (I Samuel 4. 1-22; 7. 12), and his surname bears the connotation of wholeness. In his close relationship with ^{the} land and the seasons and also in his eager pursuit of knowledge he is aware of God's presence in all of life. Described as 'a very powerful labourer', he gives evidence of his 'muscular Christianity' by doing all 'to the glory of God'.¹⁹⁷ He is, nevertheless, profoundly human and earth-centred in his love for Phillis, in his errors of judgment over her upbringing, in his impatience with Timothy Cooper, and in his

¹⁹⁶ Quoted in The Brontës: Life and Letters, II, 446.

¹⁹⁷ Cousin Phillis, pp. 231, 238.

capacity to appreciate the richness of creation. Illustrated in the words of the psalm which he sings in the fields, 'Come all harmonious tongues', his life is filled with harmony: his interests include the classical past and the industrial present, and in praying for a blessing he does not neglect the task at hand which may be used by God as a means to the desired end.¹⁹⁸ Holman refutes Dixon's comment that 'there are no longer any saints on earth'; in Gaskell's fiction there are saints of a new and different kind who do not remain atop a pedestal of purity uncontaminated by the world, but who rather, as Margaret Hale does, make themselves useful in 'wretched places' of need and despair.¹⁹⁹

The 'diminution of the "religious message" element' noted by Edgar Wright in Gaskell's later works is in itself a comment on her concept of Christianity as a faith which is so diffused throughout life that 'it is beheld as the actuating principle, from which we never swerve! When it is seen that, instead of over-much profession, it is worked into the life, and moves every action!'.²⁰⁰ By removing the lines of demarcation between the private world of religious experience and the sphere of public involvement, Elizabeth Gaskell affirms that the divine and the human meet at the place of daily work, in the crowded city street, in the vast movements for social change, and in all efforts to relate the vision of a renewed and expanding world to the immediate task.

¹⁹⁸ Cousin Phillis, p. 231.

¹⁹⁹ North and South, p. 520.

²⁰⁰ Edgar Wright, Mrs Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment (London, 1965), p. 14; Mary Barton, p. 317.

CHAPTER 6

GEORGE ELIOT

I. Religion of Humanity

George Eliot advanced far beyond Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell in her exploration of new spiritual and social frontiers. Intensely aware of the values worth conserving from past ages, she was also alert to those ideas and traditions which no longer directly impinge upon the demands of the present or offer guidance for the future. Her fiction reveals both a particularity and a universality, stemming from her own sense of regional rootedness on the one hand and of spiritual restlessness on the other. Although she shared with Brontë and Gaskell the basic understanding of life as a pilgrimage and, like them, gave the dichotomy between expectation and experience, or between vision and reality, central importance in her work, she arrived at a very different intellectual and spiritual destination. Brontë began and ended her journey with faith in God and in Christ as the earthly embodiment of the divine. Gaskell rejected the doctrine of Christ's divinity but upheld his ministry and teaching as the supreme guide to conduct. Eliot went one stage further to replace her faith in the God

of dogmatic religion and in the historical Jesus with faith in humanity.

The distinctive tenor of George Eliot's mind was theological. Pre-eminent among Victorian novelists for her prodigious scholarship, she ventured into that realm of thought which Ruskin declared a 'dangerous science for women -- one which they must indeed beware how they profanely touch -- that of theology'.¹ In a letter of 6 November 1838 to Maria Lewis, her Nuneaton governess and first confidante, Eliot expressed her early preoccupation with the spiritual life and her wish not to 'rest contented with making Christianity a mere addendum' to her pursuits, or 'with tacking it as a fringe' to her garments: 'May I seek to be sanctified wholly'.² The influence of Miss Lewis's Evangelical Christianity upon the earnest and impressionable young scholar is evident in her letter of 18 August 1838, in which she confessed her tendency towards renunciation of all that is worldly for the sake of achieving inner purity:

Still I must believe that those are happiest who are not fermenting themselves by engaging in projects for earthly bliss, who are considering this life merely a pilgrimage, a scene calling for diligence and watchfulness, not for repose and amusement. I do not deny that there may be many who can partake with a high degree of zest of all the lawful enjoyments the world can offer and yet live in near communion with their God; who can warmly love the creature, and yet be careful that the Creator maintains His supremacy

¹John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens', Sesame and Lilies, in The Works of John Ruskin, edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, Library edition, 39 vols (London, 1903-12), XVIII, 127.

²The George Eliot Letters, I, 12.

in their hearts; but I confess that in my short experience and narrow sphere of action I have never been able to attain this; I find, as Dr. Johnson said respecting his wine, total abstinence much easier than moderation.³

Somewhat like Charlotte Brontë in her youthful ardour for assurance of salvation, Mary Anne Evans progressed beyond this early stage of spiritual development to formulate a Religion of Humanity, which resolved the tension in her mind between the sacred and the secular.

Although her beliefs underwent radical change, her conception of life as a pilgrimage remained constant. She wrote to her friend Sara Hennell on 3 November 1842 that 'this earth is not the home of the spirit — it will rest only in the bosom of the Infinite'.⁴ All the great religions of the world were in her view 'the record of spiritual struggles which are the types of our own', and this universal battle of the spirit she described by means of the classic image of the pilgrimage: 'There is no short cut, no patent tram-road, to wisdom: after all the centuries of invention, the soul's path lies through the thorny wilderness which must be still trodden in solitude, with bleeding feet, with sobs for help, as it was trodden by them of old time'.⁵ Regarded as a freethinker by the members of her family and actually spurned by her father for refusing to attend church-services,

³The George Eliot Letters, I, 6.

⁴The George Eliot Letters, I, 151.

⁵Letter of 19 October 1873 to John Walter Cross, The George Eliot Letters, V, 448; George Eliot, 'The Lifted Veil', in Works of George Eliot, Library edition, 10 vols (Edinburgh, 1901), V, 272.

she maintained her right to question the orthodox expression of faith she could no longer accept as her own:

I have not returned to dogmatic Christianity -- to the acceptance of any set of doctrines as a creed, and a superhuman revelation of the Unseen -- but I see in it the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind, and I have the profoundest interest in the inward life of sincere Christians in all ages.⁶

George Eliot's sympathetic observation of the varieties of spiritual experience is indeed borne out in the diverse systems of theology presented in her fiction: Evangelicalism in Scenes of Clerical Life (1858), Methodism in Adam Bede (1859), Congregationalism in Silas Marner (1861) and Felix Holt (1866), Roman Catholicism in Romola (1863), Anglicanism in Middlemarch (1872), and Judaism in Daniel Deronda (1876).

Even after her renunciation of Evangelical Christianity, Eliot continued to revere the Bible. Her vigorous prose is attributed by Haight to her diligent study of the King James Version, which she read over and over again while at school and throughout her life.⁷ J. W. Cross refers to her enjoyment of reading aloud parts of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and St Paul's epistles, which 'best suited the organ-like tones of her voice'; the Bible, he writes, 'was a very precious and sacred Book to her, not only from early associations, but also from the profound conviction of its importance in the development of the

⁶Letter of 6 December 1859 to François D'Albert-Durade, The George Eliot Letters, III, 231.

⁷Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot: A Biography (Oxford, 1968), p. 9.

religious life of man'.⁸ She was indebted to the Old Testament for her recurring images of Eden, the Flood, the wilderness, and the promised land, and to the New Testament for those of temptation, conversion, sacrifice, and rebirth.

According to Cross, The Pilgrim's Progress and Rasselas also 'had a large share of her affections' as did Thomas à Kempis's The Imitation of Christ, of which she wrote to Sara Hennell on 9 February 1849: 'One breathes a cool air as of cloisters in the book -- it makes one long to be a saint for a few months. Verily its piety has its foundations in the depth of the divine-human soul'.⁹ This great classic of devotional literature, which was her constant companion, provided her with a sense of 'hope of our future improvement and greater spiritual progress'; it also suggested several of the themes explored in her novels, such as spiritual conflict and creative suffering: 'Who has a fiercer struggle than he who strives to conquer himself? . . . For our merit and spiritual progress does not consist in enjoying . . . sweetness and consolation, but rather in the bearing of great burdens and troubles'.¹⁰ The Imitation's central motif of pilgrimage is conveyed in biblical terminology: 'Keep yourself a

⁸George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals, edited by J. W. Cross, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1885), III, 420, 419.

⁹George Eliot's Life, I, 23; The George Eliot Letters, I, 278.

¹⁰Thomas à Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, translated by Leo Sherley-Price, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1952), pp. 57, 31, 88.

stranger and pilgrim upon earth, to whom the affairs of this world are of no concern. Keep your heart free and lifted up to God, for here you have no abiding city'.¹¹ Thomas à Kempis's conviction that 'complete self-denial is the only road to perfect liberty' and his reminder that 'man sees your actions but God your motives' had an impact upon George Eliot, whose novels reveal her keen perception of the inner life and of the complex nature of human development.¹² John Keble's Christian Year, which Eliot bought in 1840 and described to Maria Lewis as 'a volume of sweet poetry', also brings comfort to Dorothea in Middlemarch.¹³ Hymns were another important source of inspiration for George Eliot; on 16 September 1843 she wrote to Sara Hennell: 'Many thanks for procuring me the Hymns and Anthems; I was right glad to play "Ancient of Ages" again'.¹⁴ In a letter of 16 December 1841 to her friend Martha Jackson she declared Carlyle to be

¹¹The Imitation of Christ, p. 60.

¹²The Imitation of Christ, pp. 137, 75.

¹³Letter of 30 March 1840, The George Eliot Letters, I, 46.

¹⁴The George Eliot Letters, I, 160. In the George Eliot Collection of the Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery is a music manuscript, comprising transcripts of psalms and hymns, all with hand-ruled staves, musical notation, and titles, the last two ('Blessed be thy name for ever' and 'But the Lord is mindful of His own') with words supplied, dated 1834 by watermarks. The inside front cover bears the inscription: 'This book belonged to "George Eliot" -- the hymns were probably copied by her as favourites'.

'a grand favourite' of hers, and recommended Sartor Resartus, which must have impressed her as a new and compelling treatment of the archetypal theme of pilgrimage.¹⁵ Intellectually, she was to follow a similar course to that taken by Carlyle, who, despite his loss of belief in the dogmas of the Church, retained in his own writing the metaphorical style and prophetic power of the Bible.

Under the impact of David Friedrich Strauss's The Life of Jesus Critically Examined, Ludwig Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity, Charles Hennell's An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity, Charles Bray's The Philosophy of Necessity; or, the Law of Consequences as Applicable to Mental, Moral and Social Science, and Auguste Comte's treatises on his philosophy of Positivism, Eliot rejected Christianity as a divine revelation. She came instead to regard the Scriptures as 'histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction' and to emphasize the mythological significance of Christ:

It seems to me the soul of Christianity lies not at all in the facts of an individual life, but in the ideas of which that life was the meeting-point and the new starting-point. We can never have a satisfactory basis for the history of the man Jesus, but that negation does not affect the Idea of the Christ either in its historical influence or its great symbolic meanings.¹⁶

In all her questing after a more richly human expression of religion, free from ecclesiastical trappings, she remained captivated by the person of Jesus. She kept near her desk an engraving of Delaroche's

¹⁵The George Eliot Letters, I, 122.

¹⁶Letter of 28 February 1842 to Robert Evans, The George Eliot Letters, I, 128; Letter of 30 July 1863 to Mrs Peter Alfred Taylor, The George Eliot Letters, IV, 95.

Christ and a cast of the Risen Christ, sculpted by Thorwaldsen, whose studio in Rome Dorothea visits with Will Ladislaw. To these figures of Jesus Eliot looked for courage to endure 'dissecting the beautiful story of the crucifixion' in her translation of Das Leben Jesu, published on 15 June 1846.¹⁷ On 26 November of that year she wrote to Sara Hennell:

I have been thinking of that most beautiful passage in Luke's Gospel -- the appearance of Jesus to the disciples at Emmaus. How universal in its significance! The soul that has hopefully followed its form -- its impersonation of the highest and best -- all in despondency -- its thoughts all refuted, its dreams all dissipated. Then comes another Jesus -- another, but the same -- the same highest and best, only chastened, crucified instead of triumphant -- and the soul learns that this is the true way to conquest and glory.¹⁸

As this letter indicates, Eliot could never entirely dissociate herself from Christ, the sharer in human suffering, and the supreme lover of the world. The concept of the suffering God of love, which is integral to both Old and New Testaments, is one of several legacies of biblical thought to find its way into her fiction.

Basil Willey aptly points out that the development of George Eliot as intellectual and novelist is a paradigm of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ In an age of increasing fragmentation and alienation she sought to create a synthesis out of the ideal and the actual, the static and the

¹⁷Letter of 14 February 1846 from Mrs Charles Bray to Sara Hennell, The George Eliot Letters, I, 206.

¹⁸The George Eliot Letters, I, 228.

¹⁹Nineteenth Century Studies, p. 204.

dynamic, the rational and the intuitive. It was largely her era's compartmentalization of the sacred and the secular that forced her to abandon a religion which she thought had failed to establish a reconciliation between the divine and the human. Her aversion for belief which is unrelated to life, shared by Brontë and Gaskell, is expressed in Mr Tulliver's notion that the clergy have 'a sort o' learning as lay mostly out o' sight'.²⁰ Throughout her work she emphasizes the need for a vision which encompasses both the tragedy and the glory of human existence and which discerns a spiritual dimension even in the mundane facts of everyday experience.

Evangelical Christianity's other-worldliness and preoccupation with worldly success as a sign of a favouring Providence were equally abhorred by Eliot for fostering a spirit of exclusivism. The self-righteous Bulstrode, whose name is ideally suited to one who merely paves his own road to salvation with little or no heed for those encountered along the way, represents the distorted view that the ambition of the elect of necessity coincides with the will of God. The motto heading chapter 85 of Middlemarch, in which he is presented in disgrace 'for not being the man he professed to be', associates him with the temptation and superficiality of Bunyan's Vanity Fair and with the judgment that befalls those whose labours in life have been purely

²⁰George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, edited by A. S. Byatt, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1979), p. 72.

for the sake of self-glorification.²¹ Fred Vincy, also a believer in the power of Providence, assumes that circumstances will arise in accordance with his wishes and convenience. Unlike Gaskell's Ebenezer Holman, who tries to do his part in fulfilling the divine will, Bulstrode and Vincy regard the divine and human as separate spheres and are, therefore, thwarted in pursuing their goals. Whereas Bulstrode in his spiritual blindness seeks both prosperity on earth and reward in heaven, Felix Holt adopts poverty on earth to enable himself to enrich others and is indifferent to what happens beyond this life. George Eliot retained from the Calvinistic religion of her youth a conviction of the irrevocable consequences of human deeds, but as author she adopts the role of judge which she formerly attributed to the Deity and, instead of deferring retribution or reward until the next life, makes her characters subject to her implacable laws here and now.

This awareness of the potential and continuity of life, in which the present can never be completely divorced from the past and the future, is expressed in the novels by the recurring metaphor of the river or stream. Her historical-linear vision thus places Eliot alongside the major literary figures of the nineteenth century, who, optimist and pessimist alike, thought of the whole cosmic process in terms of spatial progression. The concern for social reform which permeates her fiction, but which is especially evident in Felix Holt and Middlemarch, is indissolubly linked with the transformation of the

²¹George Eliot, Middlemarch, edited by W. J. Harvey, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 881.

individual. In the same way that the old order of society is seen in her work to be giving way to change, her heroes and heroines are portrayed in a state of transition between spiritual incompleteness and maturity. Reminiscent of Margaret Hale's comment on Nicholas Higgins is Eliot's observation about Lydgate: 'character too is a process and an unfolding. The man was still in the making'.²² This stranger in Middlemarch has a reforming effect even upon Bulstrode: 'One can begin so many things with a new person! -- even begin to be a better man'.²³ Romola desperately appeals to Tito: 'Is it not possible that we could begin a new life?'.²⁴ And Deronda exhorts Gwendolen to break away from her former self and become a new creature: 'I believe that you may become worthier than you have ever yet been -- worthy to lead a life that may be a blessing. No evil dooms us hopelessly except the evil we love, and desire to continue in, and make no effort to escape from'.²⁵ In her last novel George Eliot suggests that all change is not identical to progress, 'since mere motion onward may carry us to a bog or a precipice'.²⁶ As a meliorist, she believed that the human lot would be improved not by divine grace or miraculous intervention, but by the transfiguring action of the

²²Middlemarch, p. 178.

²³Middlemarch, p. 153.

²⁴George Eliot, Romola, edited by Andrew Sanders, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 493.

²⁵George Eliot, Daniel Deronda, edited by Barbara Hardy, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 765.

²⁶Daniel Deronda, p. 584.

heart: 'the reason why societies change slowly is, because individual men and women cannot have their natures changed by doctrine and can only be wrought on by little and little'.²⁷ At once a realist and an idealist, she presents a singularly earth-centred pilgrimage, which, she affirms, is worthy of the struggle of those who enter upon it. She was well aware that amid changing circumstances spiritual aspirations have a universal sameness: 'The great river-courses which have shaped the lives of men have hardly changed; and those other streams, the life-currents that ebb and flow in human hearts, pulsate to the same great needs, the same great loves and terrors'.²⁸

Religion to George Eliot involves much more than a scheme of salvation which focusses on deeds in this world only insofar as they determine one's position in the world to come; it should, in her view, encourage a social vision which perceives in this present life opportunity to grow in understanding of and service to others: 'Heaven help us! said the old religions -- the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another'.²⁹ In agreement with the thought of Matthew Arnold, Eliot replaces a supernatural religion with one of humanism, in which 'our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathize with individual

²⁷Letter of 11 December 1880 to Mrs Elma Stuart, The George Eliot Letters, VII, 346.

²⁸Romola, p. 43.

²⁹Letter of 22 January 1853 to Charles Bray, The George Eliot Letters, II, 82.

suffering and individual joy'.³⁰ Since she gives priority to the empirical over the transcendent and yet retains the biblical language of consecration, judgment, and atonement, she may be compared with those of Mr Tryan's hearers who 'had gained a religious vocabulary rather than religious experience'.³¹

The path metaphor is as recurrent in the fiction of George Eliot as it is in that of Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell. The path taken by Eliot's characters on their spiritual journeys, however, leads to a purely humanistic response to life. Scenes of Clerical Life, the starting-point for Eliot's own literary pilgrimage, introduces in the manner of an overture the dominant motif which is orchestrated in increasing complexity and variation throughout her novels until it reaches its fullest expression in the finale, Daniel Deronda. Her first work reflects the degree to which she had absorbed the major tenets of Feuerbach, who argues that 'the substance and object of religion is altogether human'.³² In The Essence of Christianity are found important clues to Eliot's understanding of the terms 'human' and 'divine', which feature prominently in her treatment of the theme of spiritual pilgrimage. According to Feuerbach, 'the false or theological essence of religion' propounds an antithesis between the attributes of God and those of humanity, whereas 'the true

³⁰ Letter of 15 November 1857 to Charles Bray, The George Eliot Letters, II, 403.

³¹ George Eliot, 'Janet's Repentance', Scenes of Clerical Life, edited by David Lodge, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 319.

³² Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, translated by George Eliot, Harper Torchbooks (New York, 1957), p. 270.

or anthropological essence of religion' recognizes no distinction between them:

Religion is the disuniting of man from himself
 God is the infinite, man the finite
 being; God is perfect, man imperfect; God
 eternal, man temporal; God almighty, man weak;
 God holy, man sinful. God and man are extremes:
 God is the absolutely positive, the sum of all
 realities; man the absolutely negative,
 comprehending all negations. . . . Disunion
 exists only between beings who are at variance,
 but who ought to be one, who can be one, and
 who consequently in nature, in truth, are one.³³

Convinced that 'the revelation of God is nothing else than the revelation, the self-unfolding of human nature', he concludes that 'the beginning, middle and end of religion is MAN'.³⁴ Her new Religion of Humanity provided George Eliot with a sense of the sacredness of the writer's art, with the result that the moral earnestness which Evangelical Christianity had instilled in her during her youth was directed towards her literary creations. In Feuerbach's identification of the divine with the human she envisioned a fresh spiritual challenge to the furthering of sympathy, which was, to her mind, the goal of the pilgrimage.

In a letter of 6 November 1856 George Henry Lewes explained to John Blackwood the thematic intent behind Scenes of Clerical Life:

It will consist of tales and sketches illustrative of the actual life of our country clergy about a quarter of a century ago; but solely in its human and not at all in its theological aspect . . .

³³The Essence of Christianity, pp. 185, 33.

³⁴The Essence of Christianity, pp. 118, 184.

representing the clergy like any other class with the humours, sorrows, and troubles of other men.³⁵

Considered by Jane Carlyle to be 'a human book', it fulfilled its author's artistic purpose, which was not 'the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters', but 'the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgment, pity, and sympathy'.³⁶ Eliot's choice of 'struggling erring human creatures' as her first heroes links her with Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, who were also aware that an ordinary person or ordinary situation can be an entry point for the divine presence.³⁷ Gaskell's portrayal of the clergy who, despite their frailty, fear, and inadequacy, serve as channels of compassion and as reminders that love is best conveyed not through the wisdom of words but through shared suffering, undoubtedly influenced Eliot's approach to her own clerical figures.

The protagonist of 'The Sad Fortunes of The Rev. Amos Barton' is 'in no respect an ideal or exceptional character'; having 'not the slightest mystery hanging about him', he is 'palpably and unmistakably commonplace'.³⁸ Barton, who has 'a narrow face of no particular

³⁵The George Eliot Letters, II, 269.

³⁶Letter of 21 January 1858 to George Eliot, The George Eliot Letters, II, 425; Letter of 18 February 1857 to John Blackwood, The George Eliot Letters, II, 299.

³⁷Letter of 5 July 1859 to Charles Bray, The George Eliot Letters, III, 111.

³⁸Scenes of Clerical Life, p. 80.

complexion . . . with features of no particular shape, and an eye of no particular expression', is described as 'rather a low-bred fellow' by the doctor, Mr Pilgrim, who is likewise undistinguished in his profession and whose name belies his fondness for ease, which places him alongside Bunyan's pilgrims who prefer the pleasant arbour to the Hill of Difficulty.³⁹ However, even in a person as mediocre as Amos Barton lies the possibility of spiritual growth. Amos's unimaginative style of preaching to the inmates of the workhouse and his harsh manner towards them alienate him from those he seeks to uplift. Eliot's treatment of his intellectual and homiletic weaknesses recalls the views expressed in her article 'Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming', in which she asserts that 'the clergy are, practically, the most irresponsible of all talkers' and denounces Dr Cumming for dwelling on 'salvation as a scheme rather than as an experience. He insists on good works as the sign of justifying faith, as labours to be achieved to the glory of God, but he rarely represents them as the spontaneous, necessary outflow of a soul filled with Divine love'.⁴⁰ In his severe reprimand of Master Fodge, Amos, in the manner of Brontë's Rev. Brocklehurst to the young Jane Eyre, refers to God as Judge rather than as Redeemer: 'If you were not naughty, you wouldn't be beaten. But if you are naughty, God will be angry . . . and God can burn you for ever. . . . if you will be a good boy, God will love you, and you

³⁹'Amos Barton', pp. 53, 47.

⁴⁰Westminster Review, 8 (October 1855), 438-39. Dr John Cumming (1807-1881) was minister of the Scottish National Church, Crown Court, Covent Garden, from 1832 to 1879.

will grow up to be a good man'.⁴¹ Since George Eliot held 'the great vocation of the preacher' in high regard, she was 'often vexed at the thought of the multitudinous pulpits, which are such a vantage ground for teachers, and yet are for the most part filled with men who can say nothing to change the expression of the faces that are turned up towards them'.⁴² Like Gaskell, she had more confidence in the power of deeds than of words to move the human heart.

Eliot's emphasis upon sensibility may well be derived from Feuerbach's definition of God as 'pure, unlimited, free Feeling', and her 'doctrine' of sympathy attained through suffering, from his theory of the Incarnation and the Suffering God:

An essential condition of the incarnate, or, what is the same thing, the human God, namely, Christ, is the Passion. Love attests itself by suffering.

I feel the wretchedness of another, I suffer with him; in alleviating his wretchedness, I alleviate my own; -- sympathy with suffering is itself suffering. . . . Just as the feeling of human misery is human, so the feeling of divine compassion is human.⁴³

The path towards experiential knowledge must be taken by Amos Barton, who 'thought himself strong' but 'did not feel himself strong. Nature had given him the opinion, but not the sensation'.⁴⁴ His sermon on the Incarnation, printed in The Pulpit, is merely argumentative and

⁴¹'Amos Barton', p. 65.

⁴²Letter of 10 December 1869 to Harriet Beecher-Stowe, The George Eliot Letters, V, 72.

⁴³The Essence of Christianity, pp. 10-11, 59, 229.

⁴⁴'Amos Barton', p. 60.

not persuasive. By concentrating on diverse doctrines Amos avoids going to the heart of the Incarnation, the love-filled life and atoning death of the suffering Christ; his vision is partially obscured by his insistence upon the head rather than the heart. Mr Ely's preaching is also 'too cold It has no fervour -- no heart'.⁴⁵ Although he values his wife as a treasure, Amos is not sufficiently aware of the suffering she undergoes in her struggle to feed and clothe her family, especially when the visit of the self-invited Countess imposes an even heavier strain upon her. In her subtly ironic statement that 'husbands are not clairvoyant' Eliot indicates his blindness to what is happening around him, an extremely common failing, and one which is, therefore, even more full of pathos; he is deceived by Countess Czerlaski, yet another who has rather middling faults: she is 'a little vain, a little ambitious, a little selfish, a little shallow and frivolous, a little given to white lies'.⁴⁶ In contrast, Milly, who is more closely attuned to the divine source of compassion, is shortsighted, symbolic of her ability to see clearly the task at hand and to put her love to practical daily use. As a result of her self-sacrifice and untimely death Amos undergoes the baptism of suffering. Realizing too late the depths of his unexpressed affection for 'that sacred human soul', 'the divinest thing God had given' him to know, he is 'consecrated anew by his great sorrow' and, whereas he 'failed to touch the spring of goodness by his sermons', is enabled to do so by his affliction.⁴⁷ It is, therefore, not by virtue of his

⁴⁵'Amos Barton', p. 71.

⁴⁶'Amos Barton', pp. 99, 78-79.

⁴⁷'Amos Barton', pp. 111, 109, 113.

spiritual position in the community but by his very humanity that he establishes a bond with his parishioners, who look upon him with pity.

The significance of the name Amos, which in Hebrew means 'strong, bearing a burden', was assuredly in George Eliot's mind as she wrote her first study of the power which issues from the bearing of heavy sorrow. About the middle of the eighth century B.C. the Old Testament prophet of the same name journeyed from Tekoa in Judah to preach to the people of the northern kingdom, Israel. Amos Barton, too, embarks upon a journey, both physically, to a parish in a large manufacturing town, and spiritually, to a deeper feeling of love and sensitivity towards others. Like every pilgrim, he experiences the tension that accompanies the risk of setting forth into new territory with its undreamt of possibilities for creative change:

Amos felt the oppression of that blank interval in which one has nothing left to think of but the dreary future -- the separation from the loved and familiar, and the chilling entrance on the new and strange. In every parting there is an image of death.⁴⁸

Although little consolation is found in the inscription on Milly's tombstone, 'Thy will be done', the apparent necessity of resignation in the face of death is tempered somewhat for Amos by the manifestation of human sympathy: 'outward solace came. Cold faces looked kind again, and parishioners turned over in their minds what they could best do to help their pastor'.⁴⁹ The restorative power, as always in George Eliot's novels, is expressed solely in human terms and through human agency.

⁴⁸'Amos Barton', p. 114.

⁴⁹'Amos Barton', pp. 114, 111.

Following Milly's death there is no reference to the abiding presence and comforting love of a supernatural being. On the contrary, the proper object of faith is seen to be humanity itself:

That is a deep and wide saying, that no miracle can be wrought without faith -- without the worker's faith in himself, as well as the recipient's faith in him. And the greater part of the worker's faith in himself is made up of the faith that others believe in him.⁵⁰

The focus is on life in this world rather than on hope for the next: 'the parishioners were more likely to have a strong sense that the clergyman needed their material aid, than that they needed his spiritual aid, -- not the best state of things in this age and country, where faith in men solely on the ground of their spiritual gifts has considerably diminished'.⁵¹ Mr Cleves, the least clerical-looking of Amos Barton's colleagues, but the best-loved priest and pastor, offers his sympathy in the form of a silent handshake and practical help. His name, highly connotative of the homonym 'cleaves', which can mean either 'separates' or 'clings to', indicates that, in breaking away from the conventional image of the clergyman, he is better able to establish a close bond with ordinary men and women.

The brief conclusion of this work reinforces the point that the only means of knowing divine love is human love. Amos is greatly changed by his suffering, but he is not left to despair alone. Milly's loving influence continues in the companionship of Patty, who 'makes

⁵⁰, Amos Barton', p. 52.

⁵¹, Amos Barton', pp. 83-84.

the evening sunshine' of her father's life.⁵² The relationship between Amos and Patty is similar to that between John Barton and Mary, suggesting that George Eliot was influenced by the early work of her contemporary, to whom she wrote on 11 November 1859:

I had the pleasure of reading Cranford for the first time in 1857, when I was writing the 'Scenes of Clerical Life,' and going up the Rhine one dim wet day in the spring of the next year, when I was writing 'Adam Bede,' I satisfied myself for the lack of a prospect by reading over again those earlier chapters of 'Mary Barton'.⁵³

Although both novelists place the same importance upon the interdependence of human life and the role of suffering in spiritual development, Eliot reveals a greater stylistic maturity in her first work of fiction and a firmer grasp of those ideas which she subsequently elaborates upon than does Gaskell at the same stage of her literary career.

Mr Gilfil, like Amos Barton, is not noted for his intellectual or spiritual brilliance. Having 'easy speech and familiar manners', he belongs 'to the course of nature, like markets and toll-gates and dirty bank-notes'; his sermons extol 'common virtues, lying quite on the surface of life, and having very little to do with deep spiritual doctrine'.⁵⁴ But he, too, experiences the 'unspoken sorrows' and

⁵²'Amos Barton', p. 115.

⁵³The George Eliot Letters, III, 198.

⁵⁴'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story', Scenes of Clerical Life, pp. 125, 122, 126.

'sacred joys' of Eliot's 'commonplace people' and, despite his 'dim and narrow existence', shares 'the glorious possibilities' of human nature.⁵⁵ In the second of the 'scenes' the characters who have the capacity to feel with others are contrasted with those lacking such empathy. Mr Gilfil, whose personal suffering culminates in the death of his beloved Tina, acts as a channel of peace to the heartbroken and in his old age as an example of a noble and faithful human soul which has been wounded but not defeated in the battles of life.

Caterina, whose 'only talent lay in loving', finds her small world shattered when her devotion to Anthony Wybrow is not reciprocated, but, rather like Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, Ruth Hilton, and Sylvia Robson, she receives a certain measure of comfort from Nature:

The trees are harassed by that tossing motion, when they would like to be at rest; the shivering grass makes her quake with sympathetic cold; and the willows by the pool, bent low and white under that invisible harshness, seem agitated and helpless like herself. But she loves the scene the better for its sadness: there is some pity in it. It is not like that hard unfeeling happiness of lovers, flaunting in the eyes of misery.⁵⁶

In her tigress-like passion of revenge and in her decision to journey far from Cheverel Manor, if somewhat melodramatic, she foreshadows the experience of Hetty in Adam Bede. Anthony, unlike Caterina, insists that feeling is subservient to duty. Passion makes no real imprint upon his heart, which is subject to palpitations, symptomatic of the

⁵⁵'Amos Barton', p. 81.

⁵⁶'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story', pp. 160, 176.

spiritual disorder of self-love, which eventually proves to be fatal. Described in terms of a delicately-carved cameo, he protects himself from the risks of strong emotion and thereby prevents any kind of inner growth from taking place. Eliot was well aware that suffering love, the heart-beat of Christianity, is a vital stage of the spiritual pilgrimage. Whereas Anthony himself remains unchanged, his death deeply affects those closest to him. For instance, Sir Christopher, who has previously devoted more attention to the architectural metamorphosis of the family mansion than to those living within its walls, undergoes in his loss a spiritual metamorphosis:

The tears would rise, would roll in great drops down his cheeks. The first tears he had shed since boyhood were for Anthony. . . . 'God help me! I didn't think anything would unman me in this way; but I'd built everything on that lad. Perhaps I've been wrong in not forgiving my sister. . . . I've been too proud and obstinate'.⁵⁷

As Brontë and Gaskell also illustrate, only after the spirit is broken and made contrite can it be truly regenerated and directed beyond itself.

Maynard Gilfil, in offering his unspoken sympathy to Sir Christopher and in articulating the lesson of humility and tenderness learned by suffering, assumes the divine role of giving succour to the helpless and despairing. His petition for light in the darkness is in fact answered by his own words and deeds of sympathy. Intensely aware of Caterina's anguish, he does not allow her trust in the loving-kindness of God to be betrayed, but actualizes it in human form. By suffering with her he brings about her physical and spiritual restoration and

⁵⁷ 'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story', p. 224.

thereby makes real to her, ridden as she is with guilt, God's forgiveness and all-encompassing vision:

God saw your whole heart; He knows you would never harm a living thing. He watches over His children, and will not let them do things they would pray with their whole hearts not to do. It was the angry thought of a moment, and He forgives you. . . . God sees us as we are altogether, not in separate feelings or actions, as our fellow-man sees us. . . . We don't see each other's whole nature.⁵⁸

Through her confession and his assurance of pardon their relationship is sanctified, and, just as Amos Barton is consecrated anew by his sorrow, they, too, experience the consecration of suffering¹ which issues in love. To George Eliot the sacred is not revealed through vision or prayer but through the intervention of a loving human being. Dorcas, whose namesake in Acts 9. 36 is noted for her good works, is another who exemplifies in her care of Caterina Eliot's ideal of compassionate concern for others.

The deep bass note which is accidentally struck on the harpsichord and which puts new life into Caterina possesses a depth and resonance that signifies the earth-centred and earth-bound nature of common humanity. As an accomplished pianist, Eliot understood the quickening power which music has upon the soul, and, like Gaskell, made it serve in her fiction as an indicator of a character's spiritual progress. Caterina is once again able to render an air from Gluck's Orfeo, symbolic of her own rescue from the dark underworld of despair by her guide, who eventually becomes her husband, upon whose love she depends

⁵⁸'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story', pp. 234-35.

for the rest of her life. In the Epilogue, which focusses upon Maynard Gilfil as a kindly but ordinary grey-haired vicar, whose passionate love died with his wife many years ago, George Eliot elicits the reader's sympathy with the reminder that 'many an irritating fault, many an unlovely oddity, has come of a hard sorrow, which has crushed and maimed the nature just when it was expanding into plenteous beauty; and the trivial erring life which we visit with our harsh blame, may be but as the unsteady motion of a man whose best limb is withered'.⁵⁹

In 'Janet's Repentance' Eliot again employs the metaphor of music, in this case to describe the diffuse effect of Evangelicalism upon the town of Milby:

The movement, like all other religious 'revivals', had a mixed effect. Religious ideas have the fate of melodies, which, once set afloat in the world, are taken up by all sorts of instruments, some of them woefully coarse, feeble, or out of tune, until people are in danger of crying out that the melody itself is detestable.⁶⁰

Even though she admits that 'folly often mistook itself for wisdom, ignorance gave itself airs of knowledge, and selfishness, turning its eyes upward, called itself religion', she also credits the Evangelicals for their awareness that 'there was a divine work to be done in life'.⁶¹ Always tolerant of human frailty and imperfection, Eliot cites Bunyan's pilgrim as an example of one of 'the real heroes, of God's making',

⁵⁹'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story, p. 244.

⁶⁰Scenes of Clerical Life, p. 319.

⁶¹'Janet's Repentance', p. 320.

who 'know one or two of those deep spiritual truths which are only to be won by long wrestling with their own sins and their own sorrows'; Janet Dempster, who enters the Slough of Despond but is supported by 'the deep-down fibrous roots of human love and goodness', is a protagonist of this kind.⁶² Mrs Raynor hopes that divine providence will protect her daughter, whose idea of the best Gospel is one which gives happiness to all, and yet whose life is filled with tribulation on account of her husband's drunken violence:

Surely the eternal love she believed in through all the sadness of her lot, would not leave her child to wander farther and farther into the wilderness till here was no turning -- the child so lovely, so pitiful to others, so good We reap what we sow, but Nature has love over and above that justice, and gives us shadow and blossom and fruit that spring from no planting of ours.⁶³

The verifying of that eternal love is the purpose of Janet's pilgrimage.

Too proud to admit her husband's faults, and stoical in the face of his cruelty to her, Janet eventually succumbs to alcohol as an anodyne to feeling. In her despair she seeks genuine pity but finds this lacking even in her mother: 'You are cruel, like the rest; every one is cruel in this world. Nothing but blame -- blame -- blame; never any pity. . . . God has made me with a heart to feel, and He has sent me nothing but misery'.⁶⁴ Mrs Raynor, however, attempts to assure

⁶²'Janet's Repentance', pp. 321, 299.

⁶³'Janet's Repentance', p. 291.

⁶⁴'Janet's Repentance', p. 338.

her that there is an abundance of pity available in the world and that the compassion Janet herself has felt for others flows directly from God. Whereas her mother believes that affliction can be ennobling by drawing the sufferer closer to the Source of all love, Janet mocks such a view. When she is cast out by Dempster and feels utterly forsaken by both God and humanity, she recalls the stages she has experienced on her marital journey as 'the bride, passing with trembling joy from the outer court to the inner sanctuary of woman's life -- the wife, beginning her initiation into sorrow, wounded, resenting, yet still hoping and forgiving -- the poor bruised woman, seeking through weary years the one refuge of despair, oblivion'.⁶⁵ In her desolation of spirit she feels the anguish of the weary pilgrim for whom the pillars of fire and cloud no longer give guidance through the wilderness: 'if there was any Divine Pity, she could not feel it; it kept aloof from her, it poured no balm into her wounds, it stretched out no hand to bear up her weak resolve, to fortify her fainting courage'.⁶⁶ The harsh north-east wind is the only sign of pity of which she is conscious, but soon even that becomes cruel as it pushes her back from the door at which she seeks help.

Divine solace, however, as Eliot constantly affirms, is only to be known in human form. Mrs Pettifer, whose name suggests that she is a bearer of pity (the Latin verb fero means 'to bear' or 'to carry'), is the first human instrument to reawaken in Janet feelings of hope and trust. Although Mrs Pettifer calls upon God to save and comfort her

⁶⁵'Janet's Repentance', p. 344.

⁶⁶'Janet's Repentance', pp. 344-45.

distressed friend, she in fact serves in her practical way as protector and strengthener. This is recognized by Janet, who gives her human redeemer 'earnest sacramental kisses -- such kisses as seal a new and closer bond between the helper and the helped'.⁶⁷ Mr Tryan, himself acquainted with sorrow, is the second bearer of pity for Janet. The third of George Eliot's early clerical figures who are presented in all the frailty of their humanity but who by virtue of that very frailty and knowledge of life's common lot are enabled to effect change in others, Mr Tryan 'puts himself on a level with one, and talks to one like a brother. . . . He knows how to lift up those that are cast down'.⁶⁸ Although he might be accused of adhering to a narrow doctrinal system and of possessing a limited intellect, he is generous in offering sympathy and service to others. Choosing to live amid the squalor of poverty to the detriment of his own health so that he may remain 'among the people', he wins Mrs Pettifer's approval because 'he thinks of their bodies too, as well as their souls'.⁶⁹ By confessing his fear of physical pain he exposes his own weakness and establishes with Janet a 'fellowship in suffering'; it is, therefore, his humanity rather than his spirituality that encourages her to 'unlock all the chambers of her soul', thereby opening the way for a new inflow of 'strength to do right -- she wanted something to rely on besides her own resolutions; for was not the path behind her all strewn with broken

⁶⁷'Janet's Repentance', p. 347.

⁶⁸'Janet's Repentance', p. 329.

⁶⁹'Janet's Repentance', pp. 306, 330.

resolutions?'.⁷⁰

This desperate cry for power to fulfil one's best intentions is echoed throughout Eliot's fiction as an intimation of her increasing awareness of the fundamental and eternal quest for the ultimate Source of all human resources. The conversation about Janet between Miss Pratt, in whose opinion 'a woman should find support in her own strength of mind', and Rebecca Linnet, who replies that 'she will find poor support if she trusts only to her own strength', illustrates one of the most frequently-posed problems of the Religion of Humanity which Feuerbach's explanation of the I-Thou principle fails to solve:

I reconcile myself with the world only through my fellow-man. . . . The ego, then, attains to consciousness of the world through consciousness of the thou. . . . In isolation human power is limited, in combination it is infinite.⁷¹

Eliot recognizes with Feuerbach that the individual is not an autonomous moral being, but in her system morality becomes an absolute, divorced from the spiritual springs of faith. 'Janet's Repentance' reveals her perception that trust in the human does not lessen the need for a power beyond which directs and energizes the human. For all her efforts to retain 'the essence of Christianity' she in effect loses it. By denying the existence of the transcendent God, from whom all ethical impulses are derived, she denies the spiritual origin of the desire for the holy or sacred, which is the essence of the truly human. Scenes of Clerical Life opens with

⁷⁰'Janet's Repentance', pp. 331, 351.

⁷¹'Janet's Repentance', p. 274; The Essence of Christianity, pp. 82-83.

reference to the many changes which have taken place in Shepperton Church since Mr Gilfil's day and which give rise to Mrs Patten's comment that 'there'll be nothing left as it was in Mr Patten's time; and what's more, I hear you've settled to pull the church down and build it up new?'.⁷² George Eliot attempted to pull down the Christian edifice and to build up a humanistic religion in its stead. She discovered, however, that her carefully-designed monument to the glorification of humanity had within it threatening cracks which destined it for eventual collapse.

As emphasized throughout Eliot's novels, confession to a loving human being leads to spiritual rebirth. Mr Tryan, to whom Janet unburdens her mind and heart, encourages her to keep the 'great end of life' before her so that her 'troubles here will seem only the small hardships of a journey', and he also reminds her that Christ, who drank 'the cup of our suffering to the dregs', enters into her struggles.⁷³ This passage in which Janet is invited to stretch out her hands to receive the unmerited love of God, 'to rest on him as a child rests on its mother's arms', is the fullest expression in Eliot's work of the sacred mystery of divine grace.⁷⁴ Just as Caterina feels a sudden reawakening of the spirit as a result of Mr Gilfil's kindness, Janet, under the 'blessed influence of one true loving human soul on another', comes to a new appreciation of the 'sunlight in the world' and of the 'divine love caring for her'; in her experience of that

⁷²'Amos Barton', p. 48.

⁷³'Janet's Repentance', pp. 364, 362.

⁷⁴'Janet's Repentance', p. 361.

light which emerges from darkness and of gain which is greater than loss, she illustrates George Eliot's conviction that 'the tale of the Divine Pity was never yet believed from lips that were not felt to be moved by human pity'.⁷⁵ Her personal reintegration results in a desire to restore the bonds of love with those from whom she has become estranged. Like Gaskell's Phillis Holman, who asserts her will-power to overcome self-pity and lethargy, Janet declares her intention to be more affectionate towards her mother, and, as the recipient of pity, seeks to bestow compassion and forgiveness upon her husband. Despite the reference to the grave and the resurrection morning, there is, however, no verbal confirmation of a reconciliation between Janet and Robert. The description of Dempster's death is Eliot's first attempt to treat the problem of evil in human nature and to show that it casts a shadow upon the best of intentions.

As in the case of Amos Barton, who realizes upon Milly's death the sacredness of life and of daily companions, Mr Tryan's failing strength and approaching death awaken in Janet and others a sense of gratitude for having known the close communion of his friendship. Prior to his death Mr Tryan is 'conscious of a new yearning for those pure human joys which he had voluntarily and determinedly banished from his life'.⁷⁶ Although Janet's words to her dying friend and their parting kiss are suggestive of union in heaven, the focus is still upon the sacredness of his human love for her. Even when Janet becomes an old woman the love instilled by Mr Tryan remains in her eyes. The

⁷⁵, 'Janet's Repentance', pp. 364, 371, 358.

⁷⁶, 'Janet's Repentance', p. 408.

title of the final story in Scenes of Clerical Life bears Janet's name rather than Mr Tryan's, since she, as a changed person, 'rescued from self-despair, strengthened with divine hopes, and now looking back on years of purity and helpful labour', is his best memorial and living testimony of the divine power which acts in human guise.⁷⁷

The feminine element in the nature of suffering love predominates in George Eliot's fiction, and is possibly derived from Feuerbach's concept of 'the divine family':

The Son is the mild, gentle, forgiving, conciliating being -- the womanly sentiment of God. God, as the Father, is the generator, the active, the principle of masculine spontaneity The highest and deepest love is the mother's love. . . . she is the sorrowing element . . . the true in love. . . . Love is in and by itself essentially feminine in its nature. The belief in the love of God is the belief in the feminine principle as divine.⁷⁸

The recurring hero-mentor in Eliot's novels is balanced by the heroine-redeemer. Milly Barton, for instance, is extolled as 'a large, fair, gentle Madonna', for whom there is no separation between the loving, intuitively-wise heart and the actively reconciling, healing hands.⁷⁹ In the Cathedral of Milan Sarti gazes upon a 'tinsel Madonna as the symbol of divine mercy and protection' and finds that 'the Blessed Mother' always watches over his daughter, Caterina, whenever he leaves her alone; later, when Caterina's safe-keeping is

⁷⁷'Janet's Repentance', p. 412.

⁷⁸The Essence of Christianity, pp. 70-72.

⁷⁹'Amos Barton', p. 54.

in the hands of Mr Gilfil, she again comes under a loving feminine influence: 'In the love of a brave and faithful man there is always a strain of maternal tenderness; he gives out again those beams of protecting fondness which were shed on him as he lay on his mother's knee'.⁸⁰ At his mother's death Robert Dempster loses a vital source of good in his life, and motherhood is endorsed as a transforming power which might have saved Janet from much of her sin and sorrow. The legend of St Ogg, whose boat is guided by the Virgin Mother, as cited in The Mill on the Floss (1860), illustrates the response of pity which enables the divine light to be shed upon the world. In the valley afflicted by the pestilence many legends are told about the loving deeds of Romola, 'the blessed Lady who came over the sea' to rescue the perishing.⁸¹ Dorothea, whose name means 'gift of God', and who is also compared with the Virgin Mary, seeks to devote her life to someone or something greater than herself. George Eliot never trivializes the expensive, meliorative power of love by limiting it to its romantic dimension:

As a fact of mere zoological evolution, woman seems to me to have the worse share in existence. But for that very reason I would the more contend that in the moral evolution we have 'an art which does mend nature.' It is the function of love in the largest sense, to mitigate the harshness of all fatalities.⁸²

In her deep awareness of both the suffering of the world and the feminine capacity of sympathy, Eliot affirms throughout her work the

⁸⁰ 'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story', pp. 150, 230.

⁸¹ Romola, p. 649.

⁸² Letter of 14 May 1867 to John Morley, The George Eliot Letters, IV, 364.

principle of love as the only means of reconciliation and redemption for a humanity fraught with broken relationships but endowed with a vision of wholeness.

II. Quest for Vocation

George Eliot is, according to David Daiches, probably the first English novelist to take the everyday occupations of her characters seriously; in her fiction, he points out, 'it is the relationships into which people are brought in the course of their daily activities that precipitate the changes and the crises out of which the ultimate moral meaning emerges'.⁸³ In agreement with Brontë and Gaskell, who place great importance upon work or vocation as a means of establishing identity and purpose in life, Eliot secularizes the idea of a spiritual calling based upon the doctrine of individual election, so that the inspiration behind all endeavour is no longer the divine voice but fulfilment of one's duty to others and the betterment of society through the extension of human sympathy. The pilgrimage of her characters, who are all, in one way or another, in quest of their vocations, takes the form of following the path of self-discovery, which leads to both personal and social enrichment.

Silas Marner, failing to see the purpose of his toil, falls into the danger of regarding his weaving as an end in itself. Tom Tulliver, like Adam Bede, lives for his work. Felix Holt and Daniel Deronda are

⁸³ David Daiches, 'George Eliot', in Critics on George Eliot, edited by William Baker, Readings in Literary Criticism, 13 (London, 1973), p. 73.

men with a mission. Rufus Lyon encounters the crisis of his ministerial vocation when his love of God conflicts with his love of a woman. Casaubon desperately seeks recognition for his academic labours but is thoroughly frustrated, Bulstrode perverts his calling and having passed through the Valley of Humiliation, retires in disgrace, and the pragmatic Farebrother admits that he is unsuited to the role of clergyman. Lydgate, upon meeting Rosamond, changes his mind about not marrying 'until he had trodden out a good clear path for himself away from the broad road which was quite ready made', and finds himself in a marriage described in terms of the Slough of Despond; faced with Rosamond's selfish dissatisfaction over his profession, which he claims to be the grandest in the world, he gradually loses all hope of making an outstanding contribution to medical science.⁸⁴ Ladislaw, criticized by Casaubon for declining to choose a profession, is defended by Dorothea, who perceives in his hesitation the process of self-discovery and growth. Caleb Garth and Adam Bede are the only two of Eliot's characters to experience pride and enjoyment in their work, which assumes for them the quality of religious devotion.

A graphic image of the pilgrim appears at the opening of Silas Marner in the reference to 'remnants of a disinherited race' and 'alien-looking' wanderers bearing mysterious burdens; Silas himself is first depicted 'leaning against a stile with a heavy bag on his back'.⁸⁵

⁸⁴Middlemarch, p. 121.

⁸⁵George Eliot, Silas Marner, edited by Q. D. Leavis, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1967), pp. 51, 54.

Marner's New Testament namesake, Silas, who accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys, is described in I Peter 5. 12 as 'a faithful brother'; Eliot's choice of this name is significant not only for its association with pilgrimage, but also because Silas, as a shortened form of Silvanus, connotes the sylvan or rustic figure representative of the common humanity so highly esteemed by the novelist, and because Marner, despite his Job-like suffering and alienation from the human and the divine, is restored to a new faith within the community. When his covenant of friendship with William Dane is broken and he is expelled from the church in Lantern Yard through an unjust accusation of sin, Marner's covenant with God is also broken and he enters the wilderness of despair. In his mind faith in other human beings and faith in God are equated, so that the loss of the one involves the loss of the other. Apart from society he has no real sense of vocation or direction for his life. The breaking of his brown earthenware pot suggests that in his blindness to the 'Unseen Love that cared for him' he has, in the words of Jeremiah 2. 13, forsaken 'the fountain of living waters' in favour of 'broken cisterns, that can hold no water'.⁸⁶ Marner's spiritual crisis is brought about by the theft of his gold, without which he feels like 'a forlorn traveller on an unknown desert'.⁸⁷ With the loss of his earthly treasure he realizes his essential poverty and solitariness of spirit, and thus in his extremity becomes receptive to the forces working for inner renewal.

The developing pattern of Silas's experience is symbolized by the

⁸⁶Silas Marner, p. 65.

⁸⁷Silas Marner, p. 94.

place-name Raveloe and the loom at which he labours: the ravelled threads of suffering become disentangled through the advent of love into his life, and, although the mystery of evil and pain is not completely resolved, the intended harmony in the design of creation is glimpsed by the lonely old man. One of his comforters is Dolly Winthrop, who believes that this world is merely a place of sojourn and that there is a better life to come; the cakes which she offers to Silas and which are imprinted with the first three letters of the name Jesus in Greek, I. H. S., becomes a form of manna in his wilderness, but in George Eliot's understanding of pilgrimage evidence of an embracing care is always conveyed by a human hand and never directly from God. The appearance of the child on Silas Marner's hearth on New Year's Eve is the juncture at which his former life of exile is rung out and a rebirth of 'old impressions of awe at the presentiment of some Power presiding over his life' is rung in; Eliot's description of Eppie, or Hephzibah (Isaiah 62. 4), leading Silas away from 'the city of destruction' towards 'a calm and bright land' was undoubtedly inspired by Isaiah's vision of the kingdom of heaven, in which peace and unity are restored to all living creatures, led by 'a little child' (Isaiah 11. 6).⁸⁸ Marner's former love of gold did not lead beyond itself, but his love of Eppie affords him extended vision, enabling him to see the road along which he was travelled and also that before him in the light of a vast purpose which links him with others.

Whereas Silas progresses steadily towards the light, Dunstan Cass, who seeks his own gain out of another's misfortune, and his brother

⁸⁸Silas Marner, pp. 168, 190-91.

Godfrey, whose name implies that he desires freedom from all bonds of commitment and is, therefore, bereft of the love which he has failed to give, are cast out of their longed-for paradise into the darkness of retribution. Marner learns that grace often descends unexpectedly to a heart ready to receive it and that love is its own best reward. His life is transformed through discovery of his vocation of love and his pilgrimage ends in an idyllic garden setting evocative of Eden, in which harmony reigns. The disappearance of Lantern Yard Chapel, signifying the demise of the old religion with its limited inner light, opens the way for Silas's acceptance of the new religion which sheds a more diffuse light upon humanity. Encouraged to trust in a higher power by Eppie's vow that she will cleave to him as long as he lives, he becomes increasingly aware of the intimate connection between earth and heaven.

Adam Bede is another delineation of the quest for vocation. The protagonist takes on universal significance, suggested by the name Adam, meaning 'humanity' in Hebrew, and yet is rooted in a particular locale, indicated by the name Bede, connoting the venerable Anglo-Saxon. The names of the three characters with whom the work begins and ends -- Adam, Seth, and Dinah -- are all taken from Genesis, which treats the origins of life and the first stirrings of a spiritual consciousness. Seth prays for his 'poor wandering father' and offers 'the petition that Adam might never be called to set up his tent in a far country, but that his mother might be cheered and comforted by his presence all the days of her pilgrimage'.⁸⁹ Adam is, however, called to undertake

⁸⁹George Eliot, Adam Bede, edited by Stephen Gill, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 91.

a spiritual journey, foreshadowed by the scene in which he and Seth in 'the fresh youth of the summer morning, with its Eden-like peace and loveliness', carry a 'long coffin on their shoulders' from their home to a nearby village.⁹⁰ This description evokes the biblical theme of exile from Eden and also Bunyan's burden-bearing pilgrim. Adam, like the patriarch Joseph, for whom the suffering of exile in a foreign land becomes a blessing, and like Christ, who laboured as a carpenter and who shouldered his own cross to Calvary, bears the burden of sorrow, which awakens him to spiritual forces at work in his life. The chapter-headings 'The Journey in Hope', 'The Journey in Despair', and 'The Quest' outline Hetty's search for inner peace, and the main topics of Dinah's preaching and conversation -- suffering, alienation, seeking and saving of the lost, repentance, forgiveness, and attainment of spiritual vision -- reflect the pilgrimage of the major characters of the novel.

The central action of Adam Bede takes place in and between Hayslope, in Loamshire, and Snowfield, in Stonyshire. The rural village of Hayslope is a picturesque and congenial place, conducive to the feelings of contentment and ease, but, as Dinah notes, 'where the people lead a quiet life among the green pastures and the still waters' there is an ever-present danger of slipping spiritually and morally.⁹¹ In sharp contrast to Hayslope is Snowfield, a grim industrial town, which has the redeeming feature of encouraging its inhabitants to consider themselves pilgrims passing through the

⁹⁰Adam Bede, p. 95.

⁹¹Adam Bede, p. 137.

wilderness of this world and to concentrate on the things of the spirit rather than of the flesh. In the words of Dinah, who moves back and forth between these two vastly different worlds, representative of self-indulgence and self-renunciation, 'the promise is sweeter when this life is so dark and dreary, and the soul gets more hungry when the body is ill at ease'.⁹² Adam, Dinah, Hetty, and Arthur are called out of their sheltered and placid environment into the wilderness of suffering, from which Adam and Dinah return to Hayslope inwardly matured and mellowed. Hetty, however, never returns from her wanderings, and Arthur, impressed by his reading of 'The Ancient Mariner', makes his own spiritual journey leading to new vision, which takes into account the thorns of life (Donnithorne) as well as the potential for redemptive change.

At the opening of the novel, Adam is portrayed as a proud and stalwart workman, whose existence is predominantly rational, earthbound, and socially respectable. Work assumes a spiritual quality in his mind:

There's such a thing as being over-speritial; we must have something beside Gospel i' this world. . . . But t' hear some o' them preachers, you'd think as a man must be doing nothing all's life but shutting's eyes and looking what's a-going on inside him. . . . there's the sperrit o' God in all things and all times -- weekday as well as Sunday -- and i' the great works and inventions, and i' the figuring and the mechanics. And God helps us with our headpieces and our hands as well as with our souls; and if a man does bits o' jobs out o' working hours . . . he's doing more good, and he's just as near to God, as

⁹²Adam Bede, p. 137.

if he was running after some preacher and a-praying and a-groaning.⁹³

Ironically unaware of his own complacency and incompleteness, he sings Thomas Ken's hymn on the awakening of the soul. When he hears the rapping of the willow wand, he is impervious to its message; he makes a superstitious acknowledgement of a spiritual world, but discounts its relevance. However, the initial tremor of his awakening comes with the shock of his father's death and his feelings of guilt over his harsh attitude towards one whose irresponsibility contrasts with his own rigid work-ethic.

The early chapters of the novel depict Dinah Morris, Methodist preacher, as a contented young pilgrim journeying with her Lord and intent on doing his will. Although she may be criticized for appearing too perfect and, therefore, not fully human, she, too, develops spiritually and reaches a deeper understanding of her insufficiency and sense of vocation. Described by Adam characteristically through the metaphor of work as 'a rare bit o' workmanship', she radiates an ethereal calmness and luminous love wherever she goes, and gives the impression that she is not of this world, but an angel in disguise; unlike Adam's keen eyes, which are focussed sharply on his work and the physical world about him, Dinah's seem 'rather to be shedding love than making observations'.⁹⁴ To Arthur, Dinah looks 'like St Catherine in a quaker dress. It's a type of face one rarely sees among our common people'; and Seth concludes sadly that 'she's too good and holy

⁹³Adam Bede, pp. 53-54.

⁹⁴Adam Bede, pp. 185. 67.

for any man, let alone me'.⁹⁵ George Eliot does, however, give her portrait of Dinah a few realistic brush-strokes which place her firmly in the world of ordinary human beings; her hands, for instance, reveal traces of the physical labour that has kept her close to the heart of struggling humanity since her childhood. In the eyes of the other characters, with the exception of the perceptive Mrs Poyser, Dinah has successfully reached the summit of her spiritual mountain, but a crucial crossroads awaits her. It is not a struggle for her to approach life spiritually. Whereas Adam finds his escape in hard physical work, she finds hers in an ascetic denial of herself and devoted service to others. Never entirely at ease in the 'land of Goshen' (Genesis 45. 10), she is constantly drawn back to the dreary wilderness of Stonyshire, where she is physically starved but spiritually nourished.⁹⁶ Imprisoned within an excessively austere world which has dulled her sensitivity to the full orchestration of life's symphony, composed of both light and dark tones, Dinah can perceive only the strains of suffering and death. Intent upon bringing light to those in darkness, she has not yet learned to claim that light for herself. Her strength is her ability to give; her weakness is her inability to receive. Dinah represents renunciation taken to the extreme, resulting in an incomplete understanding of personality and vocation. At this early stage of her pilgrimage her spirituality is not sufficiently humanized: the dichotomy between world and spirit in her consciousness must be bridged before she can achieve wholeness.

⁹⁵ Adam Bede, pp. 107, 77.

⁹⁶ Adam Bede, p. 80.

The most striking character contrast in Adam Bede is that between Dinah and Hetty, who precipitates the crisis of the protagonist. Dinah has to be told to make herself 'a bit comfortable i' the world', but Hetty, who has 'the luxurious nature of a round, soft-coated pet animal', delights in sensuous pleasures and indulges in romantic dreams.⁹⁷ Whereas Dinah believes that she exists for the sake of the world, Hetty believes that the world exists for her own sake. Arthur, to Hetty, is simply a means of becoming a lady; she is not so much in love with him as in love with herself. Likewise, she later agrees to marry Adam because she sees in him her only means of escape from shame. Dinah's supreme joy is to seek out and care for lost lambs, but Hetty, 'that poor wandering lamb', casts off her own child, whom she despises as 'a heavy weight' around her neck.⁹⁸ The vast gulf between these two young women is revealed most dramatically in the bed-chambers scene, in which Hetty admires herself in a mirror, and Dinah, looking out of a window, envisions Hetty setting forth on a solitary and painful path for which she seems as ill-prepared as 'a child hugging its toys in the beginning of a long toilsome journey, in which it will have to bear hunger and cold and unsheltered darkness'.⁹⁹

Throughout her work George Eliot insists that spiritual growth is always a relational and never merely an independent process. The extension of sympathy may have its origin in personal affliction but its goal must be the melioration of a community:

⁹⁷ Adam Bede, pp. 191, 425.

⁹⁸ Adam Bede, pp. 78, 499.

⁹⁹ Adam Bede, p. 203.

Deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state. . . . Doubtless a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out from that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity.¹⁰⁰

The suffering Adam experiences upon his realization that Hetty and Arthur are lovers leads him to a new awe of the complexity of human nature and the interrelatedness of individual actions and to a new pity in which he feels at one with those who suffer. Heretofore Adam has been, as it were, a mere spectator watching others perform a tragedy; but from this point on he becomes the centre of the drama. He has previously taken a purely objective, moralistic view of sin as 'a bit o' bad workmanship', but has never contemplated the possibility that its consequences might actually change the direction of his own life.¹⁰¹ When he discovers his own vulnerability to the passion of revenge, despite his reliance on conscience and a disciplined will, he has begun to learn the difficult lesson of suffering with those who sin rather than sitting in judgment on them. Overcome by grief after his vain search for Hetty in Snowfield, he sobs in Seth's arms. This exposure of his feeling indicates his gradual initiation into the community of suffering. Purified of pride and vindictiveness, his soul is made new by divine workmanship.

Hetty, filled with self-pity, also experiences the baptism of suffering as her vain dreams are shattered. And Arthur, in the loss of his pleasing self-image and assurance that Providence would look upon him favourably, learns that, for all his good intentions and

¹⁰⁰ Adam Bede, pp. 471-72. .

¹⁰¹ Adam Bede, p. 212.

beneficence, he cannot make amends by cancelling out the consequences of his deeds. His hostility is directed not against another person but rather against the implacable determinism of human actions. As in all her novels, Eliot directs attention to the responsibility of each member of society, and, like Gaskell, argues that social ills can only be alleviated when individuals are lifted out of their brokenness and alienation into a new state of being. The coldness and hardness within which Hetty is imprisoned, emphasized in the name Stoniton, are intensified to such a degree by her desperate journey that only Dinah can persuade her to confess and thus break the bonds of guilt and anguish. Since she does not possess the wings with which to soar into the sphere of spiritual, infinite love, she accepts Dinah's gestures of compassion and clings to her as a visible sign of divine mercy. As Adam forgives the repentant Hetty in the prison, he is moved by her mournful gaze, which causes him to regard her as one returned from the dead, and she, too, is struck by his appearance, which seems to reflect the change in herself. Adam gives evidence of a deeper sympathy and Hetty evinces genuine feeling for another person. There is, however, no seeking of reconciliation with God; the only restorative power invoked is that of one human being upon another. The soul-awakening of which Adam sings at the opening of the novel comes about, as both he and Hetty discover, only through personal experience of suffering.

Blessed with the gift of unlocking hearts, Dinah finally unlocks her own, but not without considerable inner turmoil. Adam's love, she is convinced, is a temptation to be resisted, lest love of the creature should surpass that of the Creator. Like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, she struggles to reconcile the realms of the sacred and the secular in her own understanding of vocation:

It seems to me as if you were stretching out your arms to me, and beckoning me to come and take my ease, and live for my own delight, and Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, was standing looking towards me, and pointing to the sinful, and suffering, and afflicted. . . . a great sorrow had come upon me lest I should become hard, and a lover of self, and no more bear willingly the Redeemer's cross.¹⁰²

Adam, however, convinces Dinah that marriage would be the culmination of their spiritual journeys and would enable them to complement and enrich each other: 'I don't believe your loving me could shut up your heart; it's only adding to what you've been before, not taking away from it'.¹⁰³ Whereas Adam's stolid, unimaginative approach to life is instilled with new vitality by Dinah's idealistic love, her other-worldly priorities are modified through his earth-centred vision. Her life now assumes the significance of the Incarnation, that the eternal impinges directly upon the temporal: 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1. 14). Although her outdoor preaching is ended, she continues to minister to people in their homes, and thus the abstract, verbal nature of her earlier ministry is transformed into an intimate, active relationship with others. No longer a visitor, she dwells among the villagers and shares the vicissitudes of their lives. Her words are now made manifest in her deeds, so that divine and human are indeed one. Adam, having journeyed far in spirit, gains 'a new consciousness of the overarching sky', a reminder of the divine promise of mercy, and is welcomed home

¹⁰² Adam Bede, p. 553.

¹⁰³ Adam Bede, p. 553.

by Dinah: 'Come in, Adam, and rest; it has been a hard day for thee'.¹⁰⁴ Her words, reminiscent of those spoken by Christ, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11. 28), suggest that Adam is ready to lay down his burden of sorrow and to enter anew upon his vocation with a broader vision and a deeper love.

In The Mill on the Floss George Eliot traces the pilgrimage of a young woman who, like Dinah Morris, is caught in the conflict between renunciation and the fulfilment of self. Maggie Tulliver's spiritual struggles are associated with those in The Pilgrim's Progress, which has local and immediate meaning for her. For instance, the river crossed by Christiana appears in her imagination as the Floss, and her fascination with the fiery-eyed devil encountered by Christian reveals her own passionate nature. On her journey of escape to the gypsies she is haunted by images of Apollyon obstructing her path and soon wishes to be rescued by Mr Greatheart. She is later disconsolate over the selling of her 'dear old Pilgrim's Progress' along with other household items: 'I thought we should never part with that while we lived -- everything is going away from us -- the end of our lives will have nothing in it like the beginning!'.¹⁰⁵ From the time of her first 'great journey' to visit Tom at school, which gives her a sense of 'beginning to see the world', until, like Christian, she chooses 'the steep and difficult path' in her moment of temptation, Maggie is in

¹⁰⁴ Adam Bede, pp. 574, 584.

¹⁰⁵ The Mill on the Floss, p. 325.

quest of her real vocation.¹⁰⁶ Her love of the changeable River Floss and the continuous working of the mill symbolizes the currents which seem to sweep her along beyond her control as well as the refining and maturing effects of suffering. The biblical connotations of the mill and the flood, which appear together in Matthew 24. 38-41, are those of judgment and reconciliation, themes explored in this novel.

Filled with a thirst for knowledge which is related to life, Maggie seeks 'some key that would enable her to understand and, in understanding, endure, the heavy weight that had fallen on her young heart'; certain that there is a path to be found which leads beyond the stultifying conventionality of St Ogg's to a more spiritually abundant life, she engages resolutely in study, 'though with an occasional sinking of heart, as if she had set out toward the Promised Land alone, and found it a thirsty, trackless, uncertain journey'.¹⁰⁷ Not encouraged in her eagerness to learn by her father, who believes that 'a woman's no business wi' being so clever', or by Tom, who taunts her with the name Miss Wisdom in much the same way that Ginevra Fanshawe teases Lucy Snowe in Villette, Maggie must also face the mortification of Mr Stelling's comment on the intellectual abilities of girls: 'They've a great deal of superficial cleverness: but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow'.¹⁰⁸

Philip extols Maggie for her independence of thought and action, but is rebuked by his father: 'What does that signify? We don't ask

¹⁰⁶The Mill on the Floss, pp. 213, 626.

¹⁰⁷The Mill on the Floss, pp. 379-80.

¹⁰⁸The Mill on the Floss, pp. 66, 220-21.

what a woman does -- we ask whom she belongs to'; these words take on special significance in view of the heroine's deep need of being loved and of belonging to a particular person and place.¹⁰⁹ Although she desires above all her brother's sympathetic companionship, she is more often than not rejected by Tom, who has yet to undergo the humbling and humanizing process which begins with his experience at school. Taking as his heroes the biblical warriors David, Goliath, and Samson, Tom attempts to imitate the military prowess of the Duke of Wellington, but injures his foot, a physical manifestation of the deeper blow to his pride. When his path is suddenly darkened by the more extensive cloud of humiliation caused by Mr Tulliver's failed lawsuit, he is led further out of his own small world of self-righteousness and respectability and is united with Maggie in their common sorrow: 'They had entered the thorny wilderness, and the golden gates of their childhood had for ever closed behind them'.¹¹⁰

For Maggie, as for Caterina, in 'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story', life is quite meaningless apart from love, but in her intense yearning to give and receive devotion she is also aware that love is always mingled with pain. Her wish that she could create for herself a world outside love, such as that known by men, expresses the basic vocational dilemma of women. She cannot, however, escape the compelling call of the feminine heart towards reconciliation, and in her earliest experience of love, that for her brother, she echoes the anguished cry

¹⁰⁹The Mill on the Floss, pp. 542-43.

¹¹⁰The Mill on the Floss, p. 270.

of Lucy Snowe: 'O, please forgive me, Tom; my heart will break'.¹¹¹
 Maggie finds a tranquil refuge from her tempestuous feelings for
 Stephen in her love for Philip, who in turn finds in his 'loving,
 large-souled Maggie' a life-giving power:

The new life I have found in caring for your
 joy and sorrow more than for what is directly
 my own, has transformed the spirit of
 rebellious murmuring into that willing
 endurance which is the birth of strong
 sympathy. I think nothing but such complete
 and intense love could have initiated me
 into that enlarged life which grows and grows
 by appropriating the life of others.¹¹²

She discovers 'that enlarged life' for herself through initiation into
 temptation and suffering. Taking as guides for her spiritual journey
 the Bible, John Keble's The Christian Year, and especially Thomas à
 Kempis's The Imitation of Christ, 'the chronicle of a solitary, hidden
 anguish, struggle, trust and triumph -- not written on velvet cushions
 to teach endurance to those who are treading with bleeding feet on the
 stones', she is persuaded that the secret of life is to surrender
 self-will.¹¹³ Philip's warning against a narrow and rigid asceticism
 which excludes all appreciation and creativity is a reminder to her
 that the sacred should make life more abundant rather than detract
 from it. In her conflict between love of the world and renunciation
 of it Maggie reflects the difficulty faced by George Eliot herself in
 reconciling her belief in the determinism of a rationalistic universe
 with freedom of will.

¹¹¹The Mill on the Floss, p. 88.

¹¹²The Mill on the Floss, pp. 635, 634.

¹¹³The Mill on the Floss, p. 384.

Borne along towards the major crisis of her life on a tide of impulsiveness vainly checked by her conscience and memories of the past, Maggie succumbs to temptation and joins Stephen in the boat; feeling 'as if she were sliding downwards in a nightmare' and 'that she was being led down the garden among the roses', she is conscious of being 'an outlawed soul with no guide but the wayward choice of her own passion'.¹¹⁴ Stephen's trust in the natural affections and in the inclination of the present moment soon comes into sharp conflict with Maggie's conviction that there are absolutes of love and faithfulness which demand obedience. Like Rochester in his passion for Jane Eyre, Stephen appeals to Maggie's need to be loved, and Maggie, like Jane, experiences the soul-struggle between self-gratification and a higher commitment to 'the divine voice within us -- for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives'.¹¹⁵ Stephen wishes to dwell in a garden of Eden which requires no allegiance or responsibility to any power beyond that of his own will, but Maggie realizes that such a vision is divorced from reality and that life with Stephen would hold no sacredness. At her crossroads of decision she is guided by the sacred ties with which memory links the past with the present and the future, and learns the real meaning of renunciation: 'She had thought it was quiet ecstasy; she saw it face to face now -- that sad patient living strength which holds the clue of life, and saw that the thorns were for ever pressing on its

¹¹⁴The Mill on the Floss, pp. 568, 588, 597.

¹¹⁵The Mill on the Floss, p. 604.

brow'.¹¹⁶

Maggie's penitent return to Dorlcote Mill, 'the sanctuary where sacred relics lay', after her journey with Stephen into a distant country is analogous to the homecoming of the Prodigal Son, for whom she had felt such an affinity as a child; although refused a welcome by Tom, who acts in the manner of the elder brother in the parable, she is warmly received by her mother: 'More helpful than all wisdom is one draught of simple human pity that will not forsake us'.¹¹⁷ As the legend of St Ogg illustrates, the need for this response of pity which enables the divine light to be shed upon the world is even greater in an age not noted for its faith in miracles. In Dr Kenn, whose name may have been inspired by that of Thomas Ken, the hymn-writer whose words are sung by Adam Bede, Maggie finds 'a human being who had reached a firm, safe strand, but was looking with helpful pity towards the strugglers still tossed by the waves' and who in his 'natural priesthood' believes that the Church 'opening its arms to the penitent', should 'represent the feeling of the community'.¹¹⁸ When she is caught by the flood and cries out, 'O God, where am I? Which is the way home?', her faith is in 'the Unseen Pity that would be with her to the end'; throughout her life she longs for 'a sense of home' and for a resolution of those 'painful collisions' that arise from the 'contrast between the outward and the inward'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶The Mill on the Floss, p. 597.

¹¹⁷The Mill on the Floss, pp. 606, 614.

¹¹⁸The Mill on the Floss, pp. 553, 624.

¹¹⁹The Mill on the Floss, pp. 651, 649, 320.

The themes of suffering and judgment which pervade The Mill on the Floss emphasize the struggles of the protagonist in search for her proper place in the world and the importance of sympathy in human relationships. The ownership of the mill itself is a matter for legal judgment; Tom and Maggie are told that they must suffer for their father's faults; Mrs Tulliver constantly bewails the fact of Maggie's wilfulness which, she fears, will be regarded as a visitation of judgment for her own sins; Tom is quick to punish his sister for her wrongdoing and even suspects that Philip's physical deformity may be related to Wakem's treachery; and the community of St Ogg's casts its Pharisaical judgment upon Maggie's momentary straying from the path of respectability. Whereas Tom exemplifies those who judge others, Maggie, with the possible exception of Philip, stands alone in the novel as one who judges herself from a perspective of remorse and sympathetic understanding of human frailty: 'Life stretched before her as one act of penitence, and all she craved as she dwelt on her future lot, was something to guarantee her from more falling: her own weakness haunted her like a vision of hideous possibilities that made no peace conceivable except such as lay in the sense of a sure refuge'.¹²⁰

The concern over financial prosperity and collapse evident in much of the dialogue parallels the movement of advance or retreat on the spiritual pilgrimage. Mr Tulliver, who sees little meaning or justice in the perplexing ways of the world, comes at the point of death to see his own unforgiving nature in the light of God's forgiveness. And although Maggie is told by Stephen that she sees

¹²⁰The Mill on the Floss, p. 622.

nothing as it really is, she willingly risks her own life in attempting to rescue Tom, who, brought face to face with his estranged sister, experiences 'an entirely new revelation to his spirit, of the depths in life, that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear'.¹²¹ The flood, therefore, becomes in the biblical sense the means of affecting spiritual rebirth and reunion. The closing words of the novel, 'In their death they were not divided', with their allusion to Saul and Jonathan (II Samuel 1. 23), the mighty fallen in battle, reinforce Eliot's conviction that strength emerges from seeming weakness, as does gain from loss, and that forgiveness and enlargement of sympathy are the goals of the pilgrimage.¹²² Maggie's vocation of loving is fulfilled in her affirmation rather than her renunciation of the world and in her embracing of humanity in the person of her brother.

If, as George Eliot suggests in reference to Maggie, the vicissitudes of life are the essence of history, her novels, in which suffering is an integral element, are par excellence histories of the human spirit. The female protagonists, in search of occupations which will enable them to achieve self-definition and self-realization apart from romantic love, suffer the disillusionment resulting from thwarted aspirations. As in the work of Brontë and Gaskell, a question uttered in the same vein as Christian's 'What shall I do?' initiates the quest of Eliot's heroines for their vocation. Dorothea, in her solitariness before marriage to Ladislav, opens the curtains onto the world beyond

¹²¹The Mill on the Floss, p. 654.

¹²²The Mill on the Floss, p. 657.

the entrance-gates of her own home and sees a man bearing a burden on his back and a woman carrying a baby; feeling herself at one with 'the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance', she understands that the secret of life is not to be a mere spectator of, but rather an active participant in, the drama of human existence.¹²³ In contrast to Dorothea's genuine search for a task to which to apply her creativity are Rosamond's feebly neutral words 'What can I do, Tertius?'.¹²⁴ The nature of the pilgrimage is often determined by the wayfarer's attitude of affirmation or negation, and in the case of George Eliot's women by the resolving of the conflict between their commitment to others and their fulfilment of self. Lillo, Tessa's son, seeking the direction of his future path from Romola, is reminded that the highest vocation is one which contributes not to personal glory but to the good of humanity. The journey on which Eliot takes her characters, heroes and heroines alike, teaches them to transcend the limitations of the ego and restores them to life within the community.

George Eliot is at her best in portraying women who possess a great capacity to love. Dorothea, for instance, considers it a tragedy 'that any one should die and leave no love behind'.¹²⁵ Whereas in Charlotte Brontë's fiction women generally find their vocation within the marital relationship, in George Eliot's novels they usually find their goals and ideals severely tested within marriage. Brontë's

¹²³Middlemarch, p. 846.

¹²⁴Middlemarch, p. 640.

¹²⁵Middlemarch, p. 362.

heroines regard love as an end in itself and marriage as the culmination of their pilgrimage, but those of Eliot grow in a more universal kind of love which is not bound by a particular partnership, and they often find in marriage the way, rather than the end, of pilgrimage. Brontë's lovers discover the world in each other; Eliot's ideal is that lovers together learn to face and serve the world beyond themselves. Just as Dinah is assured by Adam that her love for him will add to and not detract from her personality and vocation, Esther gains a sense of exaltation and blessedness from loving Felix, for whom 'her woman's passion and her reverence for rarest goodness rushed together in an undivided current'; Felix, too, in loving Esther is inspired to act upon 'all the great aims of his life'.¹²⁶ The quest for 'the passionate serenity of perfect love' is frequently presented by Eliot in religious terminology: 'The best part of a woman's love is worship; but it is hard to her to be sent away with her precious spikenard rejected, and her long tresses too, that were let fall ready to soothe the wearied feet'.¹²⁷ Will Ladislaw adores Dorothea, who has one of those 'natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration: they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us; and our sins become that worst kind of sacrilege which tears down the invisible altar of trust'.¹²⁸ The desire to recreate the harmony of Eden, to re-enter

¹²⁶George Eliot, Felix Holt, The Radical, edited by Peter Coveney, Penguin English Library (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 571, 364.

¹²⁷Felix Holt, pp. 547, 469.

¹²⁸Middlemarch, pp. 828-29.

paradise lost, informs the vocation of love as idealized by Eliot's protagonists.

In her portrayal of women on pilgrimage George Eliot moves a stage beyond Brontë and Gaskell; her last four novels examine the suffering of women whose marriages have failed to actualize their expectations of love and whose disillusionment causes them to reappraise their own sense of identity and understanding of vocation. The incompatible marriage thus becomes the starting-point or activating circumstance for the heroine's search for her true self and her place in society. This struggle to reconcile the ideal and the real results in what Eliot calls 'the nameless something which often makes a woman more interesting after marriage than before, less confident that all things are according to her opinion, and yet with less of deer-like shyness -- more fully a human being'.¹²⁹

In the same way that Silas Marner's loss of faith in another human being simultaneously destroys that in God, Romola's faith in 'the Invisible Goodness' is shaken along with her trust in her husband; when she decides to break the 'outward tie that no longer represented the inward bond of love', she discovers the autonomy of her own soul and experiences that conflict also known by her spiritual mentor, Savonarola, between 'the sacredness of obedience' and 'the sacredness of rebellion'.¹³⁰ Her words to Tito on the importance of faithfulness to sacred promises echo Maggie's to Stephen. Whereas memory helps to determine the direction of Romola's pilgrimage, it is perceived by Tito

¹²⁹ Daniel Deronda, p. 741.

¹³⁰ Romola, pp. 588, 391, 553.

to be an ever-expanding web over which he has no control. The armour which he insists upon wearing symbolizes the hardness of his heart and his desperate attempt to save himself; believing that the end of life is the gratification of his own wishes, he refuses to leave Florence in quest of the exiled and enslaved Baldassarre. He rejects the way of repentance, but Romola, 'a wanderer flying from suffering', is persuaded by Savonarola, who is to her 'like a rope suspended securely by her path, making her step elastic while she grasped it', to turn back from 'a long exciting journey' into the wilderness and to take up her vocation amid the barrenness and brokenness of her married life.¹³¹ George Eliot hereby reinforces the point that the contemporary saint is one who, far from seeking to escape from the human tragedy, becomes more intimately involved in it, and also that the divine is often revealed as much in shattered dreams as in glorious visions.

Savonarola, whose speech is permeated by battle imagery, instils into Romola the conviction that she is 'marching with a great army' and that her vocation is to be found as a member of 'the general lot' of toiling humanity.¹³² He becomes an object of worship to her, but when he fails in his mission to purify the Church and the world, she feels orphaned in the universe and reads 'no message of love' in 'the light of the stars, which seemed to her like the hard light of eyes that looked at her without seeing her'.¹³³ Unable to distinguish

¹³¹Romola, pp. 433, 465, 439.

¹³²Romola, p. 552.

¹³³Romola, p. 590.

between the kingdom of God and his own political party, Savonarola blocks divine action through human pride. His is the sorrow of one who aspires to perfection and fails to attain it. Alienated from the Church Militant and bereft of heavenly consolation, he dies in disgrace amid the taunts and curses of his former followers, disappointed in their human saviour. His utter humanity rather than his spirituality makes a lasting impression upon Romola, who shares with him in the fellowship of suffering:

In those times, as now, there were human beings who never saw angels or heard perfectly clear messages. Such truth as came to them was brought confusedly in the voices and deeds of men not at all like the seraphs of unfailing wing and piercing vision -- men who believed falsities as well as truths, and did the wrong as well as the right. The helping hands stretched out to them were the hands of men who stumbled and often saw dimly, so that these beings unvisited by angels had no other choice than to grasp that stumbling guidance along the path of reliance and action which is the path of life.¹³⁴

Through his continuing influence she undergoes the baptism of suffering love. The destructive and creative properties of water are again employed by George Eliot to convey the paradox of salvation: Tito, seeking deliverance from his past by diving into the Arno, finds only death on the opposite shore; Romola, adrift at sea, surrenders herself to death, but discovers that her boat serves instead as 'the gently lulling cradle of a new life'.¹³⁵

The heroine's decision to re-enter and serve the world of humanity

¹³⁴Romola, p. 396.

¹³⁵Romola, p. 641.

contrasts with her brother's decision to renounce the world: 'it is a bliss within the reach of man to die to mortal needs, and live in the life of God as the Unseen Perfectness. But to attain that . . . I must have no affection, no hope, wedding me to that which passeth away; I must live with my fellow-beings only as human souls related to the eternal unseen life'.¹³⁶ Fra Luca, whose name bears the ironic meaning of 'light', journeys to 'the shadowy region where human souls seek wisdom apart from the human sympathies which are the very life and substance of our wisdom'; his pathway through the sacred realm never intersects with that through the secular, so that his vision remains untested by reality.¹³⁷ Romola and Savonarola, however, both struggle to live at the crossroads of the divine and the human. The image of the crucifix dominates Romola. Fra Luca believes that he has found the meaning of the sacred symbol in visions which warn him to flee from the world; Tito attempts to bury its significance within the triptych adorned with the figures of Bacchus and Ariadne; but Romola understands that suffering transmuted into love, as exemplified by the crucified Christ, is best known in the world of common humanity. Her pilgrimage has enabled her to discern the divine potential within the self and to actualize her love by caring for others in need.

Esther Lyon, in Felix Holt, learns, as does Romola, that 'there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life' and that the individual can only attain full maturity in

¹³⁶ Romola, p. 212.

¹³⁷ Romola, p. 218.

conjunction with others.¹³⁸ In the Author's Introduction to the novel a lengthy description of stage-coach travel through the England of an earlier day establishes the metaphorical framework for the spiritual journey undertaken by Esther, who is forced to choose between the self-contained world of the Transomes and the world of radical reform, represented by Felix Holt. By comparing the coachman Sampson with the shade of Virgil, who guides Dante through the netherworld, and also with the Wanderer in Wordsworth's Excursion Eliot alerts the reader to the relationships between past and present, determinism and freedom of will, continuity and change. The underlying assumption that the spiritual and the social aspects of reform are inseparable is reinforced by the closing words of the Introduction:

The poets have told us of a dolorous enchanted forest in the under world. The thorn-bushes there, and the thick-barked stems, have human histories hidden in them; the power of unuttered cries dwells in the passionless -- seeming branches, and the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams. These things are a parable.¹³⁹

The paradoxical reference to 'the thorn-bushes' in 'a dolorous enchanted forest' suggests the suffering that accompanies human striving for fulfilment and the tragedy of hope turned to despair.

The novel's alternating pattern of memory and prospect, of the static and the dynamic, is foreshadowed in the opening sentence of the first chapter: 'On the 1st of September, in the memorable year 1832,

¹³⁸ Felix Holt, p. 129.

¹³⁹ Felix Holt, p. 84.

some one was expected at Transome Court'.¹⁴⁰ By associating the Reform Bill with the aristocracy Eliot stresses the interdependent and organic nature of society, in which political change cannot be divorced from the gradual evolution of the human spirit. The note of expectation sounded at the beginning of the work is balanced by that of disillusionment. Mrs Transome, anxiously awaiting the return of her son, listens for the sound of carriage-wheels and paces through room after room of the spacious mansion which has tragically circumscribed her life. The living death experienced by this woman whose capacity for love has degenerated into bitterness and contempt and whose intellectual potential has been stifled by her narrow existence is symbolized by her fine clothes, which she describes as 'only a smart shroud'.¹⁴¹

Fully aware that a deep and mutually supportive relationship is impossible with her husband, 'the frightened old man' whose 'pale mild eyes, receding lower jaw, and slight frame, could never have expressed much vigour, either bodily or mental', and whose main interest is his collection of dried insects, Mrs Transome turns to her son for affection and relief from loneliness.¹⁴² But suddenly conscious that Harold, who now appears to her as a stranger, has changed during his sojourn in a foreign country and that he no longer needs her maternal love, she feels the pangs of 'a woman's hunger of the heart for ever

¹⁴⁰Felix Holt, p. 85.

¹⁴¹Felix Holt, p. 486.

¹⁴²Felix Holt, p. 88.

unsatisfied'.¹⁴³ In her sense of being utterly forsaken and powerless she typifies those women in Eliot's later fiction for whom the dream of domestic happiness has faded and who are brought face to face with their own hidden identities as they seek answers to the questions posed by every pilgrim soul: Who am I? What shall I do? Frequent reference to the opening and closing of gates and doors and to gazing into mirrors and through windows indicates her restlessness as she searches for meaning in life. The name Transome is appropriate in that the transom of a door or window marks a barrier or enclosure which blocks out the light.

Having devoted herself to men who are 'selfish and cruel' and who only care for 'their own pleasure and their own pride', and having been rejected by them, Mrs Transome in turn rejects God, who, she believes, has inflicted unfair punishment upon her; but, although she is trapped by her own misery and concludes that 'God was cruel when he made women', since their 'love is always freezing into fear', her desperate need for sympathy enables her to accept Esther's comfort as a sign that God has some pity on her.¹⁴⁴ Prevented by pride from knocking on Esther's door and asking directly for the compassion she seeks, she becomes the recipient of divine grace when Esther herself opens the door and admits her to the sanctuary of a loving heart. Eliot leaves no doubt that the divine pity is made known in human form, but she conveys her point in language which gives a decidedly religious dimension to the imagery of doors and corridors: the moment of utter desolation, when there

¹⁴³Felix Holt, p. 104.

¹⁴⁴Felix Holt, pp. 597, 488.

appears to be no way forward, is often the moment of breakthrough. Mrs Transome, bearing the heavy burden of her past into the future, fails, however, to find a new path out of the limitations of self and thereby forfeits any hope of a spiritual awakening.

Esther reaches a clearer understanding of her own vocation through her vision of Mrs Transome's wasted life. Although Rufus Lyon, who has experienced 'much inward wrestling' and 'much temptation from doubt', warns his daughter of the dangers that beset 'a path which is indeed easy to the flesh, but dangerous to the spirit', she must choose which course her life will take.¹⁴⁵ In the same way that the stage-coach of the Author's Introduction transports the reader from one perceptual space to another, the Transome carriage takes Esther to the site of her spiritual crisis: 'Towards what prospect was that easy carriage really leading her? . . . She had come to a new stage in her journey; a new day had arisen on new scenes, and her young untired spirit was full of curiosity'.¹⁴⁶ She soon realizes that, if she were to claim Transome Court as her legal inheritance and to marry Harold, she would have to 'adjust her wishes to a life of middling delights, overhung with the languorous haziness of motiveless ease, where poetry was only literature, and the fine ideas had to be taken down from the shelves of the library when her husband's back was turned'.¹⁴⁷

The mediocrity and complacency of Harold, who never longs for what is beyond his reach, contrasts sharply in Esther's mind with the

¹⁴⁵Felix Holt, pp. 141, 476.

¹⁴⁶Felix Holt, p. 484.

¹⁴⁷Felix Holt, p. 547.

noble and visionary nature of Felix Holt, whose words and actions make others aware of the wider life beyond personal ambition. Under Felix's powerful influence she enters upon 'the first religious experience of her life -- the first self-questioning, the first voluntary subjection, the first longing to acquire the strength of greater motives and obey the more strenuous rule'.¹⁴⁸ In his desire to share in the world's suffering and in his willingness to incur risk to himself in order to improve the lot of his fellow-workers Felix embodies 'the human face divine'; like Gaskell's John Barton and Nicholas Higgins, he agrees with the trades-union man who denounces hypocritical religion which, linked with political and economic policies, is merely a monopoly of the rich:

They'll supply us with our religion like everything else, and get a profit on it. They'll give us plenty of heaven. We may have land there. That's the sort of religion they like -- a religion that gives us working men heaven, and nothing else. But we'll offer to change with 'em. We'll give them back some of their heaven, and take it out in something for us and our children in this world.¹⁴⁹

Because his commitment to social change makes him particularly conscious of the need for change within the individual, he cannot bear to see Esther 'going the way of the foolish women who spoil men's lives. Men can't help loving them, and so they make themselves slaves to the petty desires of petty creatures'.¹⁵⁰ Encouraging her to move beyond her trivial concerns so that she may grow 'into the possession

¹⁴⁸ Felix Holt, p. 369.

¹⁴⁹ Felix Holt, pp. 398, 397.

¹⁵⁰ Felix Holt, p. 212.

of higher powers', he awakens in her a vision of what she may become: 'the woman whose beauty makes a great task easier to men instead of turning them away from it'.¹⁵¹ Like Savonarola, who leads Romola to invest her energy and compassion in suffering humanity, Felix persuades Esther to adopt the way of hardship rather than of ease in order to meliorate life for others. As her modern-day hero he replaces the illusion of her favourite Byronic heroes with a new realism that envisages the individual working for the common good instead of for the enhancement of self. Without Felix Esther may have remained content with the accepted lot of woman, who, she says, is 'dependent on what happens to her. She must take meaner things, because only meaner things are within her reach'.¹⁵²

When Felix renounces her for the sake of pursuing his vocation, Esther sees herself 'wandering through the future weak and forsaken', but proves that she is able to tread where it is hard to tread, and feel the chill air, and watch through darkness. It is not true that love makes all things easy: it makes us choose what is difficult'.¹⁵³ As a result of 'an inward revolution' she renounces her 'silken bondage' at Transome Court and chooses the way 'which gives unity to life, and makes the memory a temple where all relics and all votive offerings, all worship and all grateful joy, are an unbroken history sanctified by one religion'.¹⁵⁴ The language of devotion, renunciation,

¹⁵¹Felix Holt, pp. 327, 366.

¹⁵²Felix Holt, p. 367.

¹⁵³Felix Holt, pp. 419, 591.

¹⁵⁴Felix Holt, pp. 591-92, 551.

and confession which pervades the novel conveys the humanist message that the highest vocation open to either man or woman is that of service motivated by feelings of reverence and sympathy for others.

The quest for origin and destination is suggested by the mystery surrounding the paternity of both Esther and Harold, who undergo intense spiritual wrestling as they face the difficult truth that their destinies are as much determined by the acts of others as by their own. Eliot, however, insists upon the freedom of the individual to choose a vocational path which develops out of memories of the past but opens up prospects for the future. Whereas Harold remains caught in his own bitterness and rebellion against the fact that Jermyn is his father, Esther returns to the father who has adopted and loved her and who has given her a solid foundation for discerning her real spiritual home. By choosing to share with Felix Holt a life of material poverty she acts upon the realization that her vocation is in giving rather than in getting, and, unlike Mrs Transome, 'an uneasy spirit without a goal', takes responsibility for her own destiny.¹⁵⁵ The novel concludes with Esther and Felix looking toward the future in the expectation of teaching and improving each other. In George Eliot's view radical reform, whether personal or political, is not a disjunction of past and present, but rather an evolutionary process rooted in the human capacity for creative change.

Middlemarch makes an even stronger statement than does Felix Holt about the reciprocal relationship between the individual and society. In this work the personal quest for vocation is set within a broad

¹⁵⁵ Felix Holt, p. 596.

historical context in which the rapidity and inevitability of change is conveyed by the dominant images of the path and the stream. The journey motif is inherent in the name Middlemarch, which connotes movement between past and present, rural traditionalism and urban mobility, personal aspiration and social reality. George Eliot never loses sight of the fact that, as in the case of Bunyan's Christian, progress does not necessarily follow a linear pattern but often takes the form of halts, detours, and circuitous wandering which ultimately provides the required impetus for advance. From her point of view English provincial life, represented by the community of Middlemarch, is in mid-position between the achievement of human potential and imprisonment within 'a labyrinth of petty courses'.¹⁵⁶ The Prelude and Finale, which focus on the figure of Saint Theresa of Avila, enclose the action of the novel within a thematic framework of spiritual zeal for reform, modified by conditions of time and place. The main characters yearn to reach particular destinations but come to realize that in the pursuit of their goals they have been treading in paths that lead nowhere. Eliot insists, however, that 'every limit is a beginning as well as an ending', and that herein consists the challenge of pilgrimage.¹⁵⁷

At the opening of the novel Dorothea is portrayed as one who delights in reading Pascal and Jeremy Taylor; she possesses a martyr-like spirit and theoretical mind, which sharply differentiate the sacred from the secular. The scene in which she regards her

¹⁵⁶ Middlemarch, p. 51.

¹⁵⁷ Middlemarch, p. 890.

mother's gems as spiritual emblems and refuses to wear a cross as a trinket introduces the conflict she experiences between affirmation and renunciation of the world. Celia gives to her sister the nickname Dodo, which indicates that the protagonist is yet to be awakened from the spiritual death of an other-worldly religiosity. Like Dinah Morris, Dorothea desires to soar to great spiritual heights, symbolized by her plainness of dress, which gives her the appearance of a nun or a Quaker. She has the childish notion that a husband is one 'who would take her along the grandest path' towards 'the New Jerusalem', and, believing Mr Casaubon to be such a guide, she offers him her devotion 'as if he were a Protestant Pope'.¹⁵⁸ Pouring all her religious ardour into her marriage, which, according to Mrs Cadwallader, is 'as good as going to a nunnery', she is 'possessed by the fact that a fuller life was opening before her: she was a neophyte about to enter on a higher grade of initiation'.¹⁵⁹

Dorothea soon discovers, however, that her 'modern Augustine who united the glories of doctor and saint', far from being 'a man who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion', is merely 'a sort of parchment code' which no longer inspires faith.¹⁶⁰ Casaubon, persevering in his quest for the key to all mythologies, acknowledges that he dwells too much with the dead, and, bound by his own arid intellectualism, despairs of ever

¹⁵⁸Middlemarch, pp. 51, 61, 74.

¹⁵⁹Middlemarch, pp. 82, 67.

¹⁶⁰Middlemarch, pp. 47, 44, 94.

completing his joyless task. Knowledge which fails to connect the past with the present and the inner with the outer is, in Eliot's view, a whitewashed tomb, devoid of any living spirit. Casaubon's tragedy is 'to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self'.¹⁶¹ Dorothea's hopes of gaining wisdom and of serving humanity by assisting her husband in his vocation are replaced by spiritual emptiness and discontent when she realizes that she is making no headway on her marital voyage and that she is in fact not even within sight of the sea, but merely 'exploring an enclosed basin'.¹⁶² Lowick Manor, to which she returns after her honeymoon as to a once-hallowed shrine, is in its autumnal gloom highly symbolic of a marriage which stultifies rather than fosters spiritual growth. The image of the candle with its flickering light, suggested by the name Lowick, represents the tenuous relationship between Dorothea and Casaubon, who cast their own shadows upon the path they tread together, so that their progress is impeded.

Dorothea, always concerned about the ends of life, is forced by her disillusionment with marriage to rediscover her own identity and to renew her determination to make her pilgrimage a worthy one. Her abstract idealism, reflected early in the novel in her plans for the construction of labourers' cottages, which never materialize beyond the theoretical stage, and also in her distorted view of marriage, gradually gives way to a more practical idealism based upon experience

¹⁶¹Middlemarch, p. 314.

¹⁶²Middlemarch, p. 228.

in a prosaic world. This enlargement of vision is revealed when she looks out of a window instead of into a mirror and expresses the belief which comforts her in her melancholy: 'It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it. I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl. I used to pray so much -- now I hardly ever pray. I try not to have desires merely for myself, because they may not be good for others'.¹⁶³ Her melioristic faith, which has to do with 'widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower', has as its source of inspiration the human rather than the divine: 'in the long valley of her life, which looked so flat and empty of way-marks, guidance would come as she walked along the road, and saw her fellow-passengers by the way'.¹⁶⁴

Having wrestled with her own grief, she is able to offer sympathetic understanding and solace to one of her 'fellow-passengers' in Middlemarch, Rosamond, whom she saves as if from shipwreck by 'a self-subduing act of fellowship'.¹⁶⁵ She thus becomes a kind of human saviour who finds her vocation not in epic deeds of reform but in extending compassion to those close at hand. Whereas Dorothea once regarded marriage as a means of spiritual improvement, Rosamond regards it as 'a prospect of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people'.¹⁶⁶ Ill-prepared by education to share Lydgate's

¹⁶³Middlemarch, p. 427.

¹⁶⁴Middlemarch, pp. 427, 830.

¹⁶⁵Middlemarch, p. 861.

¹⁶⁶Middlemarch, p. 195.

professional interests and unsuited by temperament to accept financial hardship, Rosamond remains a pitiful burden in her husband's arms. The suffering occasioned by an incompatible marriage leads Dorothea out of herself towards others but draws Rosamond more tightly into her web of selfish egotism.

Lydgate, whose great aim is to 'make a link in the chain of discovery' by searching out the primitive tissue underlying all living creatures, considers himself a failure for not reaching his vocational goals; like Dorothea, who possesses 'a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity', he learns to lower his expectations to suit his circumstances.¹⁶⁷ The reference to the 'trivial chain-work' which Rosamond holds in her hands during the engagement scene reinforces the metaphor of the chain, which provides an ironic contrast between Lydgate's dream of achieving a synthesis in the realm of medical science and the fact of his intellectual and emotional alienation from the woman 'to whom he had bound himself'.¹⁶⁸ In contrast to Felix Holt, whose love for Esther strengthens his vocational resolve, Lydgate loses spirit and places the blame for his frustrated ambitions upon the one with whom he elected to share the marital journey but perceives that 'between him and her indeed there was that total missing of each other's mental track'.¹⁶⁹ The image of the railway is appropriately associated with Lydgate, who, as the representative of the future, is regarded as a stranger in the land

¹⁶⁷Middlemarch, pp. 175, 25.

¹⁶⁸Middlemarch, pp. 335-36.

¹⁶⁹Middlemarch, p. 632.

and whose attempt to introduce new scientific theories and technical skills into the conservative world of Middlemarch is met by suspicion and hostility.

Like Lydgate, Dorothea feels in retrospect that she could have been and done something better. She does not, however, repent of renouncing her fortune in order to marry Will Ladislaw, with whom she is united in an intellectual and spiritual bond based not upon hero-worship but upon a mature self-understanding and appreciation of the other's qualities. The influence of Charlotte Brontë is evident in Eliot's treatment of the climactic storm scene, in which the threat of parting evokes an honest revelation of love from Dorothea, who cries out to Will in the words of Lucy Snowe to Paul Emanuel: 'Oh, I cannot bear it -- my heart will break'.¹⁷⁰ Dorothea's second marriage is only a partial fulfilment of her aspirations, and 'many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done'.¹⁷¹ She thus faces the dilemma of the woman who desires to make an active contribution to society but finds no acceptable channel for her creative energy.

George Eliot, whose novels abound in female dissatisfaction, seems to imply that compromise is often necessary in the search for vocation and that perhaps a woman's greatest hope of gaining happiness

¹⁷⁰Middlemarch, p. 870.

¹⁷¹Middlemarch, p. 894.

lies after all within the domestic sphere. Although Eliot did not subscribe to the prevailing Victorian view that womanhood is in itself both identity and vocation, not one of her heroines, with the exception of Dinah Morris, has a vocational awareness that transcends the romantic or marital relationship.

The Finale of Middlemarch indicates that Dorothea and Will are about to enter new avenues of spiritual growth through which their love for each other will expand to include their erring and suffering fellow-creatures:

Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning, as it was to Adam and Eve, who kept their honeymoon in Eden, but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of the wilderness. It is still the beginning of the home epic.¹⁷²

Ladislaw is a social outcast in Middlemarch and Dorothea is a spiritual exile; both find themselves in alien territory in which they learn to adapt their vision of paradise to the reality of the wilderness. Dorothea no longer seeks meaning in antiquity or in mysticism, but looks with clearer gaze upon the present world as the arena in which a new harmony between sacred and secular may become the unifying principle of life.

Dorothea, circumscribed by the hindrances and heartaches caused by an imperfect social order, is compared with Saint Theresa, whose 'child-pilgrimage was a fit beginning' for her later work of reform, and with the cygnet which is 'reared uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond' and which 'never finds the living stream in fellowship

¹⁷²Middlemarch, p. 890.

with its own oary-footed kind'.¹⁷³ In Middlemarch George Eliot takes up the theme explored by Elizabeth Gaskell in Wives and Daughters, which concludes with Molly and Roger facing an increasingly complex society that demands a rigorous and daring faith. In choosing to continue her pilgrimage with Will, whose nature is as sensitive and passionate as her own, and whose name suggests the importance of will-power in overcoming the law of destiny, Dorothea believes that together they can face a stormy world with its limited horizons and bring a measure of happiness to each other and to those around them. She knows that the path before them will be marked by continuing struggle and self-sacrifice, but also that, should they lose their 'own chief good, other people's good would remain, and that is worth trying for'.¹⁷⁴ Although the 'determining acts' of an individual life may not always be ideal, 'the growing good of the world' depends upon the faithfulness of those who serve as leavening agents but who are unrecognized in the annals of history; Dorothea's influence upon her environment is 'incalculably diffusive': 'Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth'.¹⁷⁵ The main message of Middlemarch is that the path taken by the saints of old must be forsaken in favour of untried ways which lead to a new world. The modern-day saint is one who discerns the sacred in the secular and whose quest for vocation

¹⁷³Middlemarch, pp. 25-26.

¹⁷⁴Middlemarch, p. 868.

¹⁷⁵Middlemarch, p. 896.

places the self in relation to the larger community. As a nineteenth-century Saint Theresa, Dorothea affirms that in the general march of progress the most significant step forward is still that of the human spirit motivated by 'great feelings' and 'great faith'.¹⁷⁶

III. 'A Lasting Habitation'

In Daniel Deronda George Eliot breaks through the bounds of Victorian England to envision the universal stage on which the creation of a new humanity will be enacted. Her final work of fiction places the progress of the individual within the wider context of social evolution and suggests that out of an ancient religion, which loses its contemporary relevance when it severs the sacred from the secular, will arise a liberating faith in the unifying power of human sympathy. The personal quest for identity and vocation is linked in this novel with the historic and national consciousness of the Jews, the pilgrim people whose journey has both temporal and eternal dimensions.

Daniel Deronda, perhaps more than any of her other works, reveals that George Eliot's greatest source of inspiration was the biblical story of pilgrimage, which begins in exile, traces the exodus to its climax in the wilderness of suffering, and concludes with triumphal entry into the promised land. In a letter of 29 October 1876 to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Eliot expressed her view that 'towards the Hebrews we western people who have been reared in Christianity, have a

¹⁷⁶Middlemarch, p. 896.

peculiar debt and, whether we acknowledge it or not, a peculiar thoroughness of fellowship in religious and moral sentiment'.¹⁷⁷ The history of Israel was for her a paradigm of pilgrimage, and, even though many of her characters never move beyond the wilderness, they retain, if only as 'through a glass, darkly' (I Cor. 13. 12), their vision of the glorious country yet to be discovered.

What has been termed 'the disastrous half of the novel that deals with Daniel Deronda and the Jewish question' is in fact the part that gives the entire work its unity and significance.¹⁷⁸ Writing to Madame Bodichon on 2 October 1876, the author decried 'the laudation of readers who cut the book into scraps and talk of nothing in it but Gwendolen. I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there'.¹⁷⁹ The close association between the hero and heroine, which gives the novel its dramatic intensity, is established in the first chapter, in which they observe each other from a distance, and is reinforced in the concluding chapter through Gwendolen's avowal of Deronda's continuing influence upon her. Both uncertain of their own identities, Gwendolen and Deronda must undertake the pilgrimage which leads to the centre of self before they can become oriented towards others. Whereas Gwendolen exemplifies the rootlessness of a materialistic and pleasure-seeking society, Deronda exemplifies that of a wandering people who have no permanent dwelling-place but possess in their

¹⁷⁷The George Eliot Letters, VI, 301-2.

¹⁷⁸Egoism and Self-Discovery in the Victorian Novel, p. 162.

¹⁷⁹The George Eliot Letters, VI, 290.

traditions a rich spiritual heritage.

The protagonists of Daniel Deronda are, in different ways, both in exile from the community in which they live and as such form a direct line of succession from Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke, who, because of their perception and aspiration, are set apart from the surrounding culture. Gwendolen, who lacks a strong sense of home, is described in terms of Israelite bondage in Egypt (Genesis 41, 44):

Always she was the princess in exile, who in time of famine was to have her breakfast-roll made of the finest-bolted flour from the seven thin ears of wheat, and in a general decampment was to have her silver fork kept out of the baggage.¹⁸⁰

Daniel, as the stranger who restores to Gwendolen her pawned necklace, assumes at the outset of the novel the stature of a redeemer in the biblical tradition of the outsider or marginal figure who becomes the unexpected instrument of reconciliation.

The opening gambling scene establishes the motif of risk that is integral to the pilgrimage, and also introduces the symbolism of jewellery, which in Eliot's fiction indicates degrees of spiritual awareness. The diamonds which Grandcourt fastens around Gwendolen's neck like a yoke of submission to his power are contrasted with the turquoise necklace, once part of a chain belonging to her father, whom she has never known, and which she defiantly wears as a bracelet hidden under her glove as a sign of her power to choose her own destiny. The 'memorial necklace' thus unites Gwendolen with her past and with

¹⁸⁰Daniel Deronda, p. 71.

Deronda, who gives her hope for the future.¹⁸¹ Although she appears to others to resemble a serpent, with its mythological overtones of enmity and alienation, Gwendolen is seen through Daniel's eyes to have temporarily forfeited her rightful inheritance and to be searching for a way out of her spiritual poverty. As he attempts to free her from the wilderness of discontent his own vocational path becomes clearer to him. Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda are, therefore, engaged essentially in the same pilgrimage, which has as its goal the restoration of the individual in relation to the total society.

Unlike George Eliot's other heroines, who find their vocation in loving, Gwendolen has the capacity to love only herself. Reminiscent of Gaskell's Cynthia Kirkpatrick, who believes that her physical beauty will ensure her the homage of men and give her the right to her own way, she lives in a narcissistic world of mirrors, which allow her to kiss her cold self-image but prevent her from seeing herself as she really is. She is afraid to be alone in open spaces and cannot bear to have anyone but her mother physically close to her. Her petty concerns about personal happiness are set against the time in history 'when ideas were with fresh vigour making armies of themselves, and the universal kinship was declaring itself fiercely'.¹⁸² This narrowness of vision is illustrated by her choice of song, which is criticized by Herr Klesmer: 'There is a sort of self-satisfied folly about every phrase of such melody: no cries of deep, mysterious

¹⁸¹Daniel Deronda, p. 495.

¹⁸²Daniel Deronda, p. 159.

passion -- no conflict -- no sense of the universal'.¹⁸³

Having concluded Middlemarch with the assumption that no alternatives to marriage exist for the woman of her day, Eliot portrays in her last novel a heroine who tentatively explores the possibility of a stage career as a means of gaining 'empire over her own life'; Gwendolen, however, forced to face the hard truth that she lacks the required 'inward vocation' and self-discipline, resigns herself to the married state, which she believes will be 'the gate into a larger freedom'.¹⁸⁴ 'Overcome like the thirsty one who is drawn towards the seeming water in the desert, overcome by the suffused sense that here in this man's homage to her lay the rescue from helpless subjection to an oppressive lot', she is conscious as she accepts Grandcourt's proposal 'of being at the turning of the ways'.¹⁸⁵ Marriage, which she equates with social promotion and with the opportunity for domination, actually serves to initiate the progress of her spirit towards recognition of a power greater than herself.

Like Dorothea, Gwendolen experiences in marriage a reversal of her expectations and, in the manner of 'a lost, weary, storm-beaten white doe, unable to rise and pursue its unguided way', finds herself in need of rescue.¹⁸⁶ Following the death of her husband, she is free from the constraints of a loveless relationship but sees no clear path of action before her. Through her suffering she achieves a certain

¹⁸³Daniel Deronda, p. 79.

¹⁸⁴Daniel Deronda, pp. 337, 298, 183.

¹⁸⁵Daniel Deronda, pp. 346-47.

¹⁸⁶Daniel Deronda, p. 762.

degree of spiritual clarity and is divested of her romantic illusions, but feels herself to be forsaken and about to sink into despair. Racked by remorse and self-doubt, she seeks the guidance of Deronda, to whom 'she cried as the child cries whose little feet have fallen backward -- cried to be taken by the hand, lest she should lose herself': 'What should you do -- what should you feel, if you were in my place?'.¹⁸⁷

As Evangelist points the way for Christian, Deronda, regarded by Gwendolen as a kind of priest 'without the aid of sacred ceremony or costume', attempts to open up for her a broader vocational path.¹⁸⁸ He impresses her as being not her admirer but her moral superior, who can lead her 'beyond the small drama of personal desires' in 'the narrow theatre' of her life, which she believes is subject merely to blind chance.¹⁸⁹ Always averse to religion, she recognizes 'that liability of hers to fits of spiritual dread, though this fountain of awe within her had not found its way into connection with the religion taught her or with any human relations'; under the influence of Deronda, who exhorts her to put the suffering of others before her own, she feels 'the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving'.¹⁹⁰ Gwendolen thus illustrates Eliot's

¹⁸⁷ Daniel Deronda, pp. 842, 506.

¹⁸⁸ Daniel Deronda, p. 485.

¹⁸⁹ Daniel Deronda, pp. 507, 94.

¹⁹⁰ Daniel Deronda, pp. 94, 876.

humanistic concept of religion, in which a spiritual emptiness and unacknowledged longing to be made whole begin the process of regeneration effected by the sympathetic love of one person for another.

Like Romola and Esther, who derive strength from their male mentors, Gwendolen needs the actual presence of Deronda to enable her to subdue her ego and to strive for goodness. She is, however, at the conclusion of the novel, left to continue her struggle alone in the knowledge that she will be a better woman because she has known him. The conventional happy ending of the Victorian novel is in Daniel Deronda replaced by one in which the heroine does not find her reason for living in marriage but rather remains as a single woman facing an unknown future. She has learned that the spiritual pilgrimage cannot be undertaken vicariously and that the potential for restorative change rests ultimately with the individual. After playing the part of Hermione, Gwendolen experiences the miracle of rebirth in her own life when, like Phillis Holman, she declares: 'I shall live. I mean to live'.¹⁹¹

The theme of redemption, central to Daniel Deronda, has a biblical origin and a universal implication: 'It is a very ancient story, that of the lost sheep -- but it comes up afresh every day'.¹⁹² Deronda leads Gwendolen along the path to spiritual illumination, and she in turn consecrates him for the greater role awaiting him as one who gathers together a dispersed people. Acting as 'a divinely-sent messenger' and 'a rescuing angel' by saving Mirah from drowning and

¹⁹¹Daniel Deronda, p. 879.

¹⁹²Daniel Deronda, p. 494.

placing 'her little feet in protected paths'; Daniel is indirectly delivered by this 'stranger' and 'poor wanderer' to his new life as a member of the Jewish community.¹⁹³ Because her religion is 'of one fibre with her affections', Mirah associates her long and wearisome journey with the affliction of the Hebrews, driven from land to land but united by their indomitable faith. Her strong sense of identity as a Jewess and her desperate search for her mother and brother alert Daniel to his own hidden parentage and lead to the discovery of his sacred inheritance as a Jew.

The crisis of Daniel's pilgrimage occurs when he meets his mother, who, convinced that love is subjection, abandoned him to pursue her own ambitions. Although 'the filial yearning of his life' becomes 'a disappointed pilgrimage to a shrine where there were no longer the symbols of sacredness', his moment of revelation is indeed 'sacramental', as it puts him in touch with an ancient covenant and also determines the future direction of his life.¹⁹⁴ Whereas for Princess Halm-Eberstein Judaism is bondage, for Daniel it is that freedom which accompanies a deep awareness of one's identity and purpose within a community. What he loses in the way of immediate family ties is gained in his new sense of belonging to an ethnic family with firm spiritual as well as social roots.

The Hebrew name Daniel, meaning 'God is my judge', links the protagonist with his namesake in the Old Testament, and suggests parallels between the Babylonian captivity of the Jews and the

¹⁹³Daniel Deronda, pp. 522, 880, 428, 644.

¹⁹⁴Daniel Deronda, pp. 723, 676.

persecution that has figured so prominently in their history since that time. The second half of the novel assumes the apocalyptic character of the Book of Daniel, with its focus upon risk, deliverance, judgment, and prophetic vision of a new Jerusalem. The surname Deronda may be derived from Ronda, a town in Andalusia near the centres of Jewish life in medieval Spain; like the bridge crossing the chasm which divides Ronda, Daniel traverses both the Jewish and the Gentile worlds.¹⁹⁵ In contrast to Gwendolen, who, dominated by her own mirror-image, suffers from myopia, he is able to see beyond himself to a larger world. Sir Hugo's wish that his adopted son may obtain a passport in life is realized in Daniel's consciousness of the needs close at hand and also of the challenges that beckon him to distant shores.

Through Mordecai, his spiritual mentor, Daniel perceives that vocation, although it may begin as abstract idealism, must take the form of a concrete task. Mordecai, also called Ezra, which means 'help', is a spiritual exile with a vision of his people restored to their homeland. Like Ezra, who led the return from Babylon, and like Mordecai, who with the aid of Esther prevented the extermination of the Jews, Mordecai Cohen seeks to 'revive the organic centre' of Judaism in his own day.¹⁹⁶ Contemplating life as a journey, he beholds from his 'mount of vision' undiscovered 'paths of fulfilment'; since he does not allow his visionary nature to blind him to present realities, he

¹⁹⁵William Baker, George Eliot and Judaism, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, 45 (Salzburg, 1975), p. 182.

¹⁹⁶Daniel Deronda, p. 592.

has, in Eliot's opinion, 'the chief elements of greatness: a mind consciously, energetically moving with the larger march of human destinies, but not the less full of conscience and tender heart for the footsteps that tread near and need a leaning-place'.¹⁹⁷ This capacity to reach for the stars and also to reach out a helping hand is the greatness of Israel, according to the prophets, who themselves went out into the wilderness to be alone with God, but always returned to apply their renewed spirituality to the social and political conditions under which they lived.

'The strongest principle of growth', declares Mordecai, 'lies in human choice': 'The divine principle of our race is action, choice, resolved memory. Let us . . . choose our full heritage, claim the brotherhood of our nation, and carry into it a new brotherhood with the nations of the Gentiles. The vision is there; it will be fulfilled'.¹⁹⁸ Throughout Eliot's fiction memory is one of the chief means by which continuity on both an individual and social level is sustained. There are intimations in the novels of a universal memory of the harmony which sanctified Eden and which becomes the Alpha and Omega of the spiritual pilgrimage. In her profound admiration for the Jews, 'whose ideas have determined the religion of half the world', Eliot recognized that 'the eminence, the nobleness of a people, depends on its capability of being stirred by memories, and of striving for what we call spiritual ends -- ends which consist not in immediate material possession, but in the satisfaction of a great feeling that

¹⁹⁷ Daniel Deronda, pp. 600, 604-5.

¹⁹⁸ Daniel Deronda, p. 598.

animates the collective body as with one soul'.¹⁹⁹

Mordecai's emphasis upon the importance of choice and action reveals the ethical genius of Judaism. Religion is for him an energizing power and guide for personal, social, and political life. Eliot's system of ethical humanism, which equates religion with conduct, may be compared with that of Matthew Arnold, who associated 'the love of art and science' with 'the best of the Aryan races' and 'the love of conduct' with 'the best of the Semitic'.²⁰⁰ Mordecai's faith rests with the power of the human will to choose and to act so as to create a better world. The essence of pilgrimage in his view is to press forward with complete cognizance of what is past and with complete faith in what is yet to be; it is the progress from exile through exodus into the promised land.

However, like Moses, the leader of the exiled Israelites, Mordecai does not enter into the promised land. The novel closes with his death but anticipates the fulfilment of his vision through Deronda, who is about to embark on his voyage to the East, where he intends to devote himself to Jewish polity. Deronda is at once idealistic and realistic, since he is aware that all social structures must have secure spiritual foundations. He thus continues in the prophetic tradition, which unites the sacred and the secular in a community ethic. Zionism, which in Daniel Deronda is essentially a secular movement, is the final expression of George Eliot's Religion of Humanity. The unique

¹⁹⁹'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!', Impressions of Theophrastus Such, in Works of George Eliot, X, 174, 172.

²⁰⁰'Literature and Dogma', p. 410.

sensitivity of the Jews to the sacred invests them with a special responsibility to the secular. The Hebrew language, which Deronda learns under Mordecai's tutelage, becomes the means of gathering the dispersed and of creating new meaning out of old codes. Eliot, always conscious that changes in perception demand changes in language, substitutes for the terminology of dogmatic religion words which reflect her humanistic faith; God, for example, is referred to as 'the Eternal Goodness', 'the Supreme Unity', 'Mighty Love', and 'the Invisible Power'.²⁰¹

In the story of Israel 'the grief and the glory are mingled':

If there are ranks in suffering, Israel takes precedence of all the nations -- if the duration of sorrows and the patience with which they are borne ennobles, the Jews are among the aristocracy of every land -- if a literature is called rich in the possession of a few classic tragedies, what shall we say to a National Tragedy lasting for fifteen hundred years, in which the poets and the actors were also the heroes?²⁰²

Redemptive suffering is one of the many paradoxes of the Judaic-Christian tradition which prompted Eliot's literary imagination. The experience of brokenness and desolation is revealed in Daniel Deronda, as in Eliot's other novels, to be the crucible of rebirth and of genuine fellowship. The survival of a remnant, Mordecai believes, will keep alive 'a covenant of reconciliation', through which Israel will fulfil its divine purpose as 'a light of the Gentiles' (Isaiah 42. 6) and help

²⁰¹Daniel Deronda, pp. 644, 802, 842, 875.

²⁰²Daniel Deronda, pp. 812, 575. The second quotation is George Eliot's translation of a passage from Zunz: Die Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters.

to build a community of nations: 'the divine Unity embraced as its consequence the ultimate unity of mankind. See, then -- the nation which has been scoffed at for its separateness, has given a binding theory to the human race'.²⁰³

'Fruit and Seed', the title of the final section of Daniel Deronda, is suggestive of both continuity and change. Out of the past arises hope for the future: 'And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward: For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion' (Isaiah 37. 31-32). Deronda, whose goal is to be 'an organic part of social life, instead of roaming in it like a yearning disembodied spirit, stirred with a vague social passion, but without fixed local habitation to render fellowship real', is given the task of making the spirit 'a lasting habitation -- lasting because movable -- so that it may be carried from generation to generation'.²⁰⁴ Israel, tested in the wilderness of suffering, emerges confident in the wisdom that the spiritual is the most authentic and enduring dimension of human existence and that each generation must begin the pilgrimage anew. A portable faith keeps the pilgrim on the growing edges of life, free from the temptation to become spiritually rooted and to lose sight of the promised land which transcends all boundaries of self and nation. Such a faith is evolutionary, in that it envisages life as process rather than conclusion, as striving rather than achievement.

George Eliot affirms with Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell

²⁰³Daniel Deronda, pp. 597, 802.

²⁰⁴Daniel Deronda, pp. 413, 591.

that the capacity of the individual to make new beginnings gives the eternal quest its majesty and mystery. As the work of these three Victorian novelists illustrates, humanity enters most fully into its spiritual inheritance when it responds to the call to abandon the familiar and to set out faithfully into the unknown. The universal and ongoing story of pilgrimage thus commences with spiritual exile and culminates with the new creation, the kingdom of God on earth.

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