

Home-Schooling in Oldtown: The Education of a Virtuous Citizenry

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Abstract

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) was the beneficiary of a unique blend of educational influences. The daughter, sister, and wife of Congregational ministers, she inherited the faith of New England Puritanism and its subsequent redirection by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). Studying and then teaching at her sister Catharine's female seminary, she shared some of her sister's dissent from the received faith. Her maternal grandmother ensured that Harriet was a welcome shareholder in the Episcopal Church, to which she would convert near the end of her life. Stowe's New England novels trace each of these influences. In *Oldtown Folks* (1869), she is particularly concerned with the application of Christian principles to the upbringing of three children raised in the ordinary households of a post-Revolutionary War New England community. Irrespective of its theological disputes, Oldtown families consider themselves heirs of Hebrew theocracy and rely on Biblical principles. In the Preface, the novel's narrator argues that the communities in which these households operated created a seed-bed of virtue that eventually helped characterize an entire nation. Stowe's novel thus embodies the source and constituent parts of the virtuous citizenry that the American Founders felt was necessary for a successful republic.

Introduction

A common refrain of the Revolutionary period in America was that self-government required citizens who were virtuous. As Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745-1813) put it in 1778, "Virtue, Virtue alone...is the basis of a republic" (Norton, 242). Shortly after the peace treaty with England, John Witherspoon (1723-1794), a signer of the Declaration of Independence, President of the College of New Jersey (later, Princeton University), and a minister, stated in a Thanksgiving sermon that "civil liberty cannot be long preserved without virtue." If a Republic were to survive it "must either preserve its virtue or lose its liberty." Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) was even more blunt in 1789: "...only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters" (Eidsmoe, 91-92, 211).

Americans shared a prevailing assumption of Western culture, propagated as early as Socrates, that virtue could be taught. The Founders were raised to be conscientious about virtue. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney (1746-1825) of South Carolina, for example, became a general in the Continental Army, delegate to the Constitutional Convention, and was twice presidential nominee of the Federalist Party. While in school in England in 1758, his mother wrote him, "you must know the welfair of a whole family depends in a great measure on the progress you make in morral Virtue, Religion, and Learning." Only a few months later, his father died. His will expressed the wish that Charles "be virtuously, religiously and liberally brought up so...that he will employ all his future abilities in the service of God and his country, in the cause of virtuous liberty...and in support of private right and justice between man and man" (Eidsmoe, 331).

After the Revolution, virtues education was emphasized. Although schools were not yet widespread, motherhood was. Mary Beth Norton notes the nexus between political imperatives of the time and increasing emphasis on the importance of women: "The domestic realm, which had hitherto been regarded as peripheral to public welfare, now acquired major importance. With the new stress on the household as the source of virtue and stability in government, attention necessarily focused on

women, the traditional directors of household activities.” Portraits of post-revolutionary women no longer stressed their “weakness, delicacy, and incapacity” but began to acknowledge that those who had managed their family estates through a political crisis and bitter war and shared the anxieties and dangers of the times had proven themselves essential to the success of the republic (Norton, 228, 243).

Harriet Beecher Stowe was a daughter of her times, and given her unique background and literary skill, she was able to deepen understanding of them. As a precocious child of eight, she began attending a female academy led by Sarah Pierce in Litchfield, Connecticut (Hedrick, 24-30). Pierce well represented Republican thinking. She told her students that even if they were not “called to act a conspicuous part on the grand Theatre of life,” as mothers they were charged with instilling children with virtue, and that in itself was of momentous importance to the republic’s success (Norton, 248). In addition to being one of the beneficiaries of pioneering efforts to educate young women, Stowe also brought to bear her Calvinistic inheritance and an understanding of the Puritan tradition of instilling virtue. From her father and a long line of Protestant reformers before him, Stowe came to see Christianity as the premier model of virtue. In her view, long before the American Revolution, Christian communities, particularly in her native New England, were already committed to forming a virtuous citizenry. The American Republic essentially capitalized on work already done.

Among Stowe’s novels, the best-developed ideas about education can be found in *Oldtown Folks*, set shortly after the Revolutionary War. Here the reader sees that education in the early republic inherits methods from an older tradition. It is localized and emanates from the home outward to community, state, and nation. It depends on the institutions of family, church, and community. In the novel, three orphan children become a kind of test case of the community. Will they be left in unenlightened poverty, dehumanized, lost? Will they drift away from the church and community? Will church doctrine drive them away? Ultimately, family and community successfully join forces to rescue them and set them on the path of success and virtue. They will be educated in an environment that shares both Puritan traditions and new Republican ideas. In essence, these children “flesh out” Stowe’s conception of virtuous citizens. The novel analyzes their formation, the formative community, and the deeds that are the ultimate fruits of their virtue.

Discussion

The three orphans are Horace Holyoke, the novel’s narrator, and Harry and Tina Percival. Horace has grown up in Oldtown, a fictional representation of Natick, Massachusetts, where Harriet’s husband Calvin was raised (Hedrick, 335). When Horace’s father dies, he and his mother move in with Grandfather and Grandmother Badger and Aunt Lois. Meanwhile, Harry and Tina and their mother have been abandoned by their dissipated father, an English soldier who fought in the Revolutionary War. Readers are introduced to the mother and children as they wander into the town of Needmore, suffering from deprivation, the mother seriously ill. They are taken into perhaps the least auspicious home they could have found. It belongs to the aptly named Crab Smith, who complains about the inconvenience of it all. After the mother entrusts care of Tina to Harry and dies, Crab adopts Harry for an extra hand on his farm, and his sister Asphyxia adopts Tina for help around her home. Obviously unfit to parent the children because of their lack of heart and crass materialism, Crab and Miss Asphyxia succeed in driving them into running away. They make their way to the Badgers’ home where they are taken in immediately, Harry adopted by the Badgers themselves and Tina by their neighbor, the middle-aged spinster Miss Mehitable Rossiter.

Stowe is at her best when she creates portraits of communities and the ways in which they act or fail to act on Biblical principles. The obviously deficient Needmore, which bows down to “the golden calf” of efficiency, violates what Stowe frequently refers to as the “peculiarities” of persons, roughly equivalent to their individuality.¹ Crab and Asphyxia are pictured as grotesques seemingly formed from the stony New England landscape, lacking in the mitigating effects of culture, church, and community. Asphyxia’s teachings about God repel Tina and send her into rebellion and despair (162, 168). Although Brother Harry is good-natured, his righteous anger rises at injustices forced on him by Crab. Although still a boy, he has been raised by a pious and confiding mother into habits of virtue. A responsible older brother, he uses his mother’s admonition to care for his sister as his motivation for running away. The two are pictured as Hansel and Gretel-like as they escape danger and wend their way through the forest.

Oldtown is far more fitting for these wanderers. Intrinsic in its name are the traditional teachings of a Puritan culture that urges virtuous behavior but not without the grace that seems to have passed by Needmore. The first half of the novel explores in subtle detail the virtues and values of this community.

The mainstay of Oldtown is Grandmother Badger, whose independence and self-respect are reminiscent of qualities newly afforded to “liberty’s daughters,” as Mary Beth Norton terms the women of the Revolutionary War period. Yet, it is clear that Stowe attributes her character to an older Puritan tradition. She raises a large and extended family, feeds the hungry, chastises the vagabond, takes in the orphan, and still finds sufficient time to read and involve herself in the issues of church and state. She is someone who upholds the faith by putting it into practice. As Stowe describes her, she “belonged to that tribe of strong-backed, energetic, martial mothers in Israel, who brought to our life in America the vigorous bone and muscle and hearty blood of the yeomanry of Old England. She was a valiant old soul, who fearlessly took any bull in life by the horns, and was ready to shake him into decorum” (64). Not formally schooled, she nonetheless avidly reads history, biography, and theology. She is “an earnest Puritan Calvinist” who has “been nourished in the sayings and traditions of the Mathers and the Eliots, and all the first generation of the saints who had possessed Massachusetts.” She has also followed avidly the later generations of Puritan thought, committing herself to “the earnest study of the writings of Edwards and Bellamy, and others of those brave old thinkers who had broken up the crust of formalism and mechanical piety that was rapidly forming over the New England mind” (70-71).²

To Horace, his grandmother is a bit of a contradiction but precisely represents the fruit of the “theologic stratum” in which the New England mind is embedded. Theoretically, she subscribes to the “severest Calvinism,” reciting to her children Michael Wigglesworth’s “Day of Doom” “with a reverent acquiescence” in its many horrors. Yet, she has an abounding charity and “could not refuse a beggar that asked in a piteous tone; she could not send a child to bed that wanted to sit up; she could not eat a meal in peace when there were hungry eyes watching her...” (391). Rigid in her beliefs, generous in her social relations, Grandmother Badger is the most positive representative of the descendants of New England Puritanism in the novel.

¹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Oldtown Folks*, ed. Henry F. May (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1966), 149-50. All subsequent page references to this source will be cited parenthetically in the text.

² Richard Mather (1596-1669), Increase Mather (1630-1723), Cotton Mather (1663-1728), John Eliot (1604-1690), and Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) studied with Edwards, opposed the half-way covenant, and later trained over forty pastors in his home including Edwards’ son, Jonathan Edwards, Jr., and grandson, Aaron Burr (Park Net, “The Joseph Bellamy House: The Great Awakening in Puritan New England,” National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/85bellamy/85bellamy.htm> (accessed August 31, 2009)).

Grandmother is outspoken in her views of childrearing. In response to Miss Asphyxia, who does not understand that a mother's foremost purpose is providing comfort to a child, she asks rhetorically, "Ain't the world hard enough, without fighting babies, I want to know?" She cites a Biblical basis for her position: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you" (Isa. 66:13), the implication being that mothers are "made to comfort children" (275). She is equally dismissive when Miss Mehitable consults a treatise by John Locke that might help her in raising Tina. "Well, one live child puts all your treatises to rout." At bottom, Grandmother instinctively doubts the rationality of Locke and the self-serving materialism of Crab and Asphyxia. She insists that a mother must decipher God's intentions "when he put the child together...and not stand in his way..." (276). As old-fashioned as she is, this last view is harmonious with Stowe's late nineteenth-century view that the individuality of a child must be considered very seriously in his or her upbringing.

Grandmother Badger's hearth not only nurtures her own family but the entire community, and this is not without educational effect on her grandson. Horace imagines her as a character in John Bunyan who could be "the housekeeper whose name was Bountiful" (118-19). Fulfilling a communal obligation dating back to Oldtown's once being a Puritan missionary village to Native American converts of John Eliot (a clear parallel to Calvin Stowe's Natick), Grandmother is shown feeding two hungry Indian women. She also provides food for her black servants, Sam Lawson (the local ne'er do well and folksy philosopher), and several other neighbors.

Besides being a source of warmth and sustenance, the Badger hearth also serves as a forum for the exchange of social, religious, and political ideas. Again, these conversations are not without effect on Horace. He describes a typical conversation as "a fabric of thought quaint and various" (125). Among the pressing political issues discussed is the ratification of the United States Constitution. Major Broad, a local delegate to the Massachusetts ratification convention, cannot support the document because it gives too much power to the president and recognizes and encourages slavery. To Grandmother, a scar on the forehead of servant Caesar from a previous master serves as a vivid example of the evils of slavery, and she thanks Broad for representing her own position: "I don't want anything that we can't ask God's blessing on heartily . . ." (121).

Also part of the "quaint fabric" spun by the hearthside is a multitude of theological themes and variations. Horace learns very early that Puritanism is not one pure light but is split into a spectrum of theories. He is well aware of the Arminianism of Reverend Lothrop, the Hopkinsian preacher in a nearby town (114),³ the talk of Joseph Bellamy's "True Religion Delineated, and Distinguished from All Counterfeits," and the "good, strong, old-fashioned doctrine" that Grandmother Badger prefers (116). The Puritan heritage, after its transformation by the Great Awakening, far from being narrowly focused, seems to encourage robust debate about a variety of theological positions and their pragmatic application to everyday life.

One such application was to the question of church and state. Here Stowe, like many historians after her, correlates cultural Puritanism and revolutionary politics. Several scholars have argued that American religious debates of the early eighteenth century were the essential foreground to political

³ Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803) was a disciple of Jonathan Edwards who developed a systematic theological system. He believed that "self-love was the source of moral evil, and therefore one should even be willing to give up his eternal salvation and suffer eternal damnation for the glory of God" (Eidsmoe, 321-22; *The Free Dictionary*, "Hopkins, Samuel," <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Samuel+Hopkins> (accessed August 31, 2009)).

independence from England.⁴ Paul Johnson, for example, contends that the Great Awakening was “the proto-revolutionary event, the formative moment in American history, preceding the political drive for independence and making it possible” (Johnson, 116). Stowe argues a similar position. As Horace explains, the habit of open political debate was a logical extension of ministers’ openly debating God’s rule over mankind. Moreover, he points out, whatever the topic in early New England, “every human being was addressed as a competent judge” (400). Common ordinary persons were assumed to be both moral and intellectual enough to make judgments on theological or political issues.

Thus, the novel dramatizes the precept of the American Founders that virtue was a necessary precondition for self-government. James Madison put it this way: “To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea” (Madison, 208). Stowe’s fellow-New Englander, John Adams, of Puritan descent, believed that Christianity was particularly conducive to successful self-government. As he wrote in his diary August 14, 1796, “No other Institution for Education, no kind of political Discipline, could diffuse this kind of necessary Information, so universally among all Ranks and Descriptions of Citizens. The Duties and Rights of the Man and the Citizen are thus taught from early Infancy to every Creature. The Sanctions of a future Life are thus added to the Observance of civil and political, as well as domestic and private Duties. Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude, are thus taught to be the means and Conditions of future as well as present Happiness” (Eidsmoe, 294). Adams focused on the democratic nature of Christianity: that is, its spread throughout the community rather than only among an elite. Its principles extended to women, children, and servants, as well as men. That all could be professors of morality through the simple but effective message of Christianity opened up a wide range of democratic possibilities, all facilitated through Christian education. The Golden Rule, contended Adams, was “the great principle of the law of nature and nations”: understandable, believable, and venerable to all people (Johnson, 208).

The Founders, although delighted to capitalize on the virtues of Christianity, were reluctant to praise individual doctrines, even though they were all products of them. Benjamin Rush, for example, argued that virtue as taught by Christianity was an excellent preparation for citizenship, but he also had “veneration for every religion that reveals the attributes of the Deity, or a future state of rewards and punishments.” He “had rather see the opinions of Confucius or Mahomed inculcated upon our youth, than see them grow up wholly devoid of a system of religious principles” (Rush, 400). Latter day Puritans such as Stowe were more partisan in championing their particular faith. To them, virtue alone without a revealed explanation of life’s purpose that took into account the darker aspects of mankind’s history tended too much toward a Deist’s ideal. No cultural relativist, Stowe argues that a *Calvinist* view of mankind was both the best preparation for citizenship and a necessary motivator of the orthodox descendants of the Puritans to fight for independence. Horace establishes a nexus between practicing Calvinism and the prosecution of the Revolutionary War in a chapter called “My Grandmother’s Blue Book,” a reference to Joseph Bellamy’s “True Religion Delineated, and Distinguished from All Counterfeits” published in 1750 “just twenty-six years before the Declaration of Independence,” as Horace significantly emphasizes (397). Highly influential in New England, it was read by the generation that fought the War, and Horace insists on a necessary connection between that generation’s Calvinistic *ethos* and the drive for political independence: “They were a set of men and women brought up to *think*,—to think not merely on agreeable subjects, but to wrestle and tug at the very severest problems. Utter self-renunciation, a sort of grand contempt for personal happiness when weighed with things greater

⁴ For a survey of the historical debate on this point, see Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), chap. 18.

and more valuable, was the fundamental principle of life in those days. ...They who had faced eternal ruin with an unflinching gaze were not likely to shrink before the comparatively trivial losses and gains of any mere earthly conflict. Being accustomed to combats with the Devil, it was rather a recreation to fight only British officers” (397-98). These habits of thoughtfulness, independent thinking, duty, and self-renunciation were essential to the Revolution, and the novel emphasizes that they remain living components of the culture in which the children of Oldtown are raised.

Readers begin to see the justification for Stowe’s claim in this novel that American Puritan culture was like none before it. It fostered virtue, yes, but it also encouraged serious metaphysical questioning by the ordinary citizens of small towns and rural villages. As Stowe writes, “Never, in the most intensely religious ages of the world, did the insoluble problem of the WHENCE, the WHY, and the WITHER of mankind receive such earnest attention. New England was founded by a colony who turned their backs on the civilization of the Old World, on purpose that they might have nothing else to think of. Their object was to form a community that should think of nothing else” (391-92).

That Puritans dismissed traditions that might distract them explains the starkness of the meeting house in which the people worshipped and the independence with which they consulted the Bible: “They shut out from their religious worship every poetic drapery, every physical accessory that they feared would interfere with the abstract contemplation of hard, naked truth, and set themselves grimly and determinately to study the severest problems of the unknowable and the insoluble. ...They wanted no smoke of incense to blind them, and no soft opiates of pictures and music to lull them; for what they were after was *truth*, and not happiness, and they valued *duty* far higher than *enjoyment*” (392). When Horace’s father is laid to rest early in the novel, the narration stresses the “severe bareness” (83) of the funeral service. The meeting house itself is, according to Horace, “one of those huge, shapeless, barn-like structures, which our fathers erected apparently as a part of that well-arranged system by which they avoided all resemblance to those fair, poetic ecclesiastical forms of the Old World . . .” (87).

If the meeting house symbolizes the unadorned Puritan faith, it also represents a social institution necessary for unifying, on the basis of charity, a country that still exhibited traditional social stratification, not to mention the recent differences between Loyalist and Revolutionary. Even after the Revolution, “the seeds of democratic social equality lay as yet ungerminated in her [Massachusetts’] soil” (93). Horace notes class differences, but he also stresses that, whatever their social position, everyone attended worship services, including Indians and Africans. Moreover, the commoners could assert their rights, however comically, and be accepted. Joe Stedman, for example, reasons that if Captain Brown can wear his red military coat, then he should be able to wear a leather work apron to church. Although scandalous to the higher classes, all controversy ceases when Joe asserts that “the apron was a matter of conscience with him . . .” (93). Horace argues that for all the complaining about the intolerance of Puritan society, “this weekly union of all classes” was “a most powerful and efficient means of civilization.” Whatever distinctions there were, church members were united by a “strong bond of neighborhood charity” (101).

The meeting house, however, was not sufficient for a moral education. In the Protestant tradition, each person must grapple with the Bible on his or her own. Grandfather Badger thus reads scripture twice a day, and the children have a “constant face-to-face intimacy with Hebrew literature” (296). As with the unadorned meeting house, the Bible is read without aid or interpretation. Horace argues, however, that children did not have to understand it fully to take a “quaint and solemn delight” in it (295).

Ultimately, Oldtown provides a good upbringing for the three orphans. They are surrounded by love, charity, and virtuous examples. The more extreme forms of Calvinism are modified by a sort of practical love in the heart. Even Polly, Miss Mehitable’s staunch housekeeper, who believes that a child’s

will must be nipped in the bud, is completely charmed by Tina and soon spoils her as much as others do. In Horace's view, the influences on the children were "all homely, innocent, and pure" (413).

About halfway through the novel, Stowe expands her orphans' educational horizons with a trip to Boston. The contrast between the two environments is a direct reflection of her own experiences. After her mother's death in 1816 when Harriet was only five, she and her siblings retained their ties to the maternal side of the family, who were Episcopalians living, not in Boston, but in Nutplains near Guilford, Connecticut (Hedrick, 10-16). Not only did Harriet have a lifetime of memories from visits to Nutplains, her sister Catharine, several of her children, and then she herself would eventually become Episcopalian in the latter years of her life (Foster, 163-73).

Pastor Lothrop's wife, who grew up Episcopalian, determines to introduce the children to "the true church's" celebration of Easter in Boston. The children will stay with Lady Widgery and Miss Deborah Kittery, staunch Tories and Anglicans. Grandmother Badger resists, complaining of remnants of popery, and Polly denounces Easter celebrations as "pagan flummery" (312). But ultimately, the Oldtown folks relent. As Grandmother puts it, "I haven't anything against Tories or Episcopalians...but they aren't our sort of folks. I dare say they mean as well as they know how" (311). As the children wonder who the "whore of Rome" is, Grandmother reinforces them with stories from Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) and exacts a promise that they will visit the graves of "the Saints" on Copp's Hill. As Horace puts it, "...I was sent to bed that night thoroughly fortified against all seductions of the gay and worldly society into which I was about to be precipitated..." (314).

Throughout the novel, but particularly as the children are confronted with influences outside Oldtown, readers see especially the way in which Horace Holyoke has to mediate between conflicting views and forceful personalities. He has little problem doing so, perhaps because he has inherited his father's objective, skeptical stance toward the world. He seems to delight in the forceful and opinionated Miss Debby, who is as decided as she is opposed to Grandmother Badger. In fact, a bemused Horace wonders "what strange concussions of the elementary powers would result" if the two ever met (339-40). To Debby, the Declaration of Independence "is the most abominable and blasphemous document that ever sinners dared to sign" (323). Of Puritans, she says, "...their ancestors were schismatics and disorganizers...and came over here because they didn't like to submit to lawful government" (324).

Horace and the Percival children find the world of Tories and Episcopalians novel and educational. Horace gazes at Anthony van Dyck's portrait of Charles I and commits to memory "The Twelve Good Rules of the Most Blessed Martyr, King Charles First, of Blessed Memory" framed beneath it. Thus Stowe illustrates the notion that virtue can be learned even from opposing sides in religious and political argument. At Easter services at Old North Church, the children are awed by the grandeur but struck by the incongruity of "drowsy preaching" in such a setting. "Well-fortified" by his Puritan upbringing, Horace deduces that such preaching results from the "sin of ritualism" (337).

The antagonist of the novel, Ellery Davenport, is also introduced to the children in Boston. This Byronic grandson of Jonathan Edwards is brilliant but irreverent. Horace finds himself simultaneously attracted to and repelled by him. He is like "some beautiful but dangerous animal" (328). At this point in the novel, Stowe employs Davenport to join in repartee with Debby on political and theological issues. He has been mediating between different religious views much longer than Horace, and it has turned him profoundly skeptical if not cynical. Miss Debby, his cousin, sees him as the epitome of America, the fruit of irreverence for tradition. To her charge that "these horrid old Calvinistic doctrines...are the ruin of children," he responds, "...there is an abominable sight of truth in them. Nature herself is a high Calvinist..." (343). Not without sympathy for her position, he acknowledges that the Anglican

catechism is better for children than the Calvinistic one: “. . . tell a child that he is ‘a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven,’ and he feels, to say the least, civilly disposed towards religion; tell him ‘he is under God’s wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and the pains of hell forever,’ because somebody ate an apple five thousand years ago, and his religious associations are not so agreeable. . .” (341).

Miss Debby provides a clear delineation between the independent-mindedness of the Calvinist tradition and a conventional sense of a citizen and parishioner’s role. She also sees the religious tradition of Puritanism as the cause of a Revolution that originated with “the vile democratic idea that people are to have opinions on all subjects, instead of believing what the Church tells them; and, as you say, it’s Calvinism that starts people out to be always reasoning and discussing and having opinions. . . all I want to know is *my duty*, and to do it. I want to know what *my* part is, and it’s none of my business whether the bishops and the kings and the nobility do theirs or not, if I only do mine” (344). Ellery concedes the attractiveness of conformity but associates Calvinism with habits of independence and rationality which, once attained, cannot be relinquished: “I must confess that I like the idea of a nice old motherly Church, that sings to us . . . and coddles us when we are sick . . . Nothing would suit me better, if I could get my reason to sleep; but the mischief of a Calvinistic education is, it wakes up your reason, and it never will go to sleep again, and you can’t take a pleasant humbug if you would” (342).

The acerbic Debby and the witty Ellery, however, are of less interest to Horace than the kindly Lady Kittery, who has lost a son in the Revolution and prays for the Royal family before meals. Her gentle hand on each child’s head before he or she goes to bed, her encouragement of Ellery to “know the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and willing mind . . .,”⁵ and her generous efforts to exonerate both George Washington and King George III from responsibility for the late war all endear her to Horace. As he describes it, “Among all the loves that man has to woman, there is none so sacred and saint-like as that toward these dear, white-haired angels, who seem to form the connecting link between heaven and earth . . .” (329-31, 339, 347-48).

Thus, the children learn from both sides of the family, synthesizing conflicting doctrines with the help of the dissolving agent of “good hearts.” With all the precision of Stowe’s ability to capture the arguments of the time, she still insists on the necessity of a sort of nineteenth century sentimentality that she calls “good feeling.” Without it, the children might be at the mercy of a world dominated by Crabs and Asphyxias, and the wounds of the Revolution might have prevented any social intercourse between Oldtown Calvinists and Boston Episcopalians. Reconciliation, as Sam Lawson states it, is incumbent on all: “there’s all sorts o’ folks go to make up a world, and, lordy massy, we musn’t be hard on nobody; can’t ‘spect everybody to be right all round” (312).

Sam unknowingly touches the heart of an important issue relevant to the teaching of virtue in this novel. Several of those characters with “peculiar natures” are in some danger in a Calvinistic society of being damaged severely and even lost altogether. The novel suggests that not all persons can be taught in the same way, particularly about the essential issues of sin, salvation, everlasting life, and death. The nature of a person is at last as sacred, if not more so, than the doctrines developed to explain God’s word and intentions. Although the three orphans seem to navigate safely through the disputatious religious

⁵ In the King James Version, 1 Chron. 28:9 reads, “And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.”

factions of New England, there are troubles all around them. None is more important to the novel than the Rossiter family's tragedy.

Miss Mehitable Rossiter is eccentric and full of secret sorrow. Her impulsive decision to adopt Tina Percival is almost a last moral gasp to find and give love. Frozen in an inherited melancholy, she also holds in her heart a terrible fear concerning her sister Emily's fate. After the Rossiter parents died, young Emily was adopted by relatives in the country and came under the preaching of Dr. Moses Stern. Horace describes his system as "calculated, like a skilful engine of torture, to produce all the mental anguish of the most perfect sense of helplessness with the most torturing sense of responsibility" (403). His harsh doctrines were horrific in their effect upon young teenaged Emily, especially when her favorite brother, Theodore, died suddenly without any visible assurance that he had ever received grace. Frightened and then disenchanted with the church, she went to Boston, came under the influence of a French family living in exile, read Jean Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761), and eventually wrote her sister that she was running away. Readers learn these secret details from a letter Mehitable writes to her brother Jonathan asking his advice about raising Tina. It becomes clear that she wishes to save her adopted child from Emily's fate.

This incident dramatizes a very important issue in the lives of Harriet Beecher Stowe and her elder sister Catharine. Catharine lost her fiancé at sea with no visible assurance that he was saved, and Harriet's loss of two children left her in the same dilemma. Neither could reconcile herself with the cruelty of a theological system that assumed damnation unless some extraordinary event proved otherwise. Harriet and Catharine may have felt precisely as the young Emily does: "convulsed and agonized" because of "the revolt of a strong sense of justice and humanity against teachings that seem to accuse the great Father of all of the most frightful cruelty and injustice" (409). Although their father Lyman Beecher was not the model for Dr. Stern, he nevertheless attempted to reconcile his daughters by urging them to submit to God's will, which caused both rebellion and sorrow (Hedrick, 40-41, 276).

Perhaps Jonathan Rossiter's long reply to Mehitable's letter contains the answer that Harriet and her sister were looking for. His solution is to skip over Jonathan Edwards and search for guidance among the original Puritans who came to America: "Plant the footsteps of your child on the ground of the old Cambridge Platform, and teach her as Winthrop and Dudley and the Mathers taught their children."⁶ By this he means that Tina "is already a member in the Church of Christ,—that she is in covenant with God, and hath the seal thereof upon her, to wit, baptism; and so, if not regenerate, is yet in a more hopeful way of attaining regeneration and all spiritual blessings, both of the covenant and seal." Here Jonathan is quoting from the platform as presented in *Magnalia Christi Americana*. This special dispensation, Jonathan argues, will make Tina feel safe in the care of the Father and not like disinherited outcasts, as the Rossiters have felt.

The source of this problem, debated at several points in the novel by Ellery, Miss Debby, Jonathan and Mehitable Rossiter, and the three orphans, among others, is the formidable Jonathan Edwards himself, whose influence, begun a generation before the novel begins, is still strongly felt. In his efforts to shake up "mere formality" and to communicate his own mystical bond with Christ, he removed generational bonds to the church, insisting that each individual must prove that he or she was touched by

⁶ John Winthrop (1587-1649) and Thomas Dudley (1576-1653). The Cambridge Platform was "a declaration of principles of church government and discipline, forming a constitution of the Congregational churches" adopted by a synod of ministers of Massachusetts and Connecticut at Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1648 (International Pragmatism Society, "The Cambridge Platform," The Pragmatism Cybrary, http://www.pragmatism.org/american/cambridge_platform.htm (accessed August 31, 2009)).

grace before being made a member, a policy that shook many former members away. Critics argue that, at best, he offered his followers a “rungless ladder,” as Charles H. Foster calls it in his study of Stowe’s religious thought. To Jonathan Rossiter, the leader of the Great Awakening is a paradox: “I hold Jonathan Edwards to have been the greatest man, since St. Augustine, that Christianity has turned out. But when a great man, instead of making himself a great ladder for feeble folks to climb on, strikes away the ladder and bids them come to where he stands at a step, his greatness and his goodness both may prove unfortunate for those who come after him. I go for the good old Puritan platform” (416). *Mehitable’s* determination to prevent a recurrence of Emily’s tragedy and to transform “*Doubting Castle*” (237) (the name derived from John Bunyan that she calls her home before Tina’s arrival) into a suitable and joyous home for her adopted daughter does in fact spare Tina. Reinforcing *Mehitable’s* policy is the fact, underscored by Stowe, that Tina is *by nature* suited to a life of joy. As Horace puts it, she “adopted in her glad and joyous nature the simple, helpful faith of her brother,—the faith in an ever good, ever present, ever kind Father, whose child she was and in whose household she had grown up” (416-17).

Oldtown Folks seems to argue that Edwards caused a great disinheritance that is the source of sorrow if not tragedy in many of the lives in the novel, including the Rossiters, Ellery Davenport, Esther Avery, and Horace. He “was the first man who began the disintegrating process of applying rationalistic methods to the accepted doctrines of religion.... He sawed the great dam and let out the whole waters of discussion over all New England, and that free discussion led to all the shades of opinion of our modern days.” Stowe even goes so far as to mention Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker as results of that speculation. Thus, in this novel, Edwards is a mixed blessing. He spawned a class of brooding intellectuals like the Rossiters, “people delightful to the student of human nature, but excessively puzzling to the every-day judgment of mere conventional society” (259-60). He created intense, individualistic searches for truth which yielded independent thinking, but he also strained the church, communal bonds, and the happiness of certain sensitive natures.

Horace certainly qualifies as one of the sensitive natures. He learned early in life to keep to himself. Like a child in one of George MacDonald’s fairy tales, he reads a great deal, sees apparitions, and generally lives a vivid imaginary life. Like many of the peculiar people in Stowe’s novel, he has “an extreme delicacy of nervous organization.” Because his imaginary world clashes with Puritan unadorned practicality, he learns by the time he is ten to keep quiet about his imaginary world (214-15). Thoughtful and somewhat melancholy in outlook, he notes that his own upbringing is contrary to Tina’s: “. . . I was a disinherited child of wrath.” Unlike Emily Rossiter, however, he benefits from a minister who “bore very mildly” on those doctrines. Able to regard doctrine with irony rather than taking it entirely to heart, Horace comments that Dr. Lothrop’s sermons are smooth, sensible, and everyone sleeps through them. On the other hand, Dr. Stern’s sermons were like Aeschylus’ tragedies, and “shook and swayed his audience like a field of grain under a high wind.” Ultimately, Horace tells us that he believes nothing, not even his grandmother. Instead, “the eternal questions seethed and boiled and burned in my mind without answer.” In fact, he longed for the very thing experienced by Edwards: “a visible, tangible communion with God; I longed to see the eternal beauty, to hear a friendly voice from the eternal silence” (417-18).

Horace is more clearly understood when contrasted with Harry Percival who has a very different but equally individualistic nature. Being adopted by the Badgers, Harry grows up essentially as Horace’s brother, and readers immediately notice his salutary effect upon the narrator. Harry’s implicit faith in God contrasts with Horace’s restless doubts. The simple faith of his mother has guided Harry through the humiliating moments of abuse from his father, through the loneliness of the loss of his mother, and on through his life. When confronted with varieties of Christianity at odds with his upbringing, Harry

simply disagrees without a second thought. He rejects one of Dr. Lothrop's Arminian sermons portraying God as distant and having little interest in his people's prayers as handily as he does the other extreme which held that the prayers of the unregenerate inspire God's wrath. Harry simply cannot be budged from his early habit of faith in a benevolent and interested God.

Harry's faith raises the age-old question of the manner in which virtue is acquired. Examining this question may help explain Stowe's appraisals of Calvinism. Socrates and his disciples believed that virtue could be taught, but Aristophanes was skeptical and argued that it could not. In fact, in *The Clouds* he lampoons the new learning, its new divinities (the clouds), and "the pale-faced bare-footed quacks" that inhabit the "Thinkery" where sophistry is taught by a character named Socrates (Aristophanes 78-79, 84). To Aristophanes, virtue came naturally and could not be imposed artificially. "The true possessors of virtue are the men of the old families, reared to righteousness and courage, brought up in good moral habits, from their earliest years accustomed to discipline and duty." In *Ethics*, Aristotle compromised, dividing virtue into two kinds: moral and intellectual. Moral virtue was that which Aristophanes described. The product of habits, or an *ethos*, it was formed early in life from family, class, or community. On the other hand, intellectual virtue could be taught through "systematic instruction" in "philosophy, literature, history and related disciplines" (Kirk, 56).

In *Oldtown Folks*, Stowe seems to be praising the Puritan legacy for being a seedbed of *moral* virtues. Her criticisms seem to be reserved for the *intellectual* virtues that various theoretical disciples of Calvin attempted to inculcate through the systematic instruction of treatises, preaching, and teaching. Thus, Stowe is not troubled by practical Calvinism and Puritanism, but by systems derived from them. She is full of praise and affection for the home-schooling that forms the habits of virtue in the orphan children even as she critiques some of the commentaries designed to explain Calvinism. She seems to see Jonathan Edwards as a virtuous man whose example raised up most of the people of New England but whose system, or systems derived from his theories, oppressed thoughtful and delicate souls.

Despite Aristophanes' skepticism, notable Greek philosophers and most of the Western world came to have implicit faith in education as a means of teaching intellectual virtue. The prominence of the idea in America may be demonstrated by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, in which schools were assumed to provide moral as well as intellectual training: "Religion, morality and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, Schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged" (Johnson, 209). Stowe's orphans fall into the trend of the time, and the reader soon sees them under the formalized instruction of a boarding school.

Now teenagers, the three are offered an opportunity to widen their sphere of learning at the academy in Cloudland where Jonathan Rossiter is the schoolmaster. Stowe anatomizes and eulogizes this community in much the way she does Oldtown. She begins by noting the hierarchical importance of the school. After colonists saw to building a church, they turned to the school-house, and thus "small country academies" filled "the nooks and hollows of New England." Cloudland is one of those "pure wells" that formed the hidden strength of New England. She says repeatedly that such places cannot be replicated because of modern distractions that upset the appropriate nexus between solitude and deep thought:

For that simple, pastoral germ-state of society is a thing forever gone. Never again shall we see that union of perfect repose in regard to outward surroundings and outward life with that intense activity of the inward and intellectual world, that made New England, at this time, the vigorous, germinating seed-bed for all that has since been developed of politics, laws, letters, and theology, through New England to America, and through America to the world. The hurry of

railroads, and the rush and roar of business that now fill it, would have prevented that germinating process. It was necessary that there should be a period like that we describe, when villages were each a separate little democracy, shut off by rough roads and forests from the rest of the world, organized round the church and school as a common centre, and formed by the minister and the schoolmaster. (440)

In addition to the purity ensured by its isolation and autonomy, Cloudland is co-educational. Stowe argues that this was the general rule in country academies of the time. Although boys and girls usually segregated themselves by subject matter, "...if there were a daughter of Eve who wished, like her mother, to put forth her hand to the tree of knowledge, there was neither cherubim nor flaming sword to drive her away" (441). Teachers were also both male and female, sometimes in spite of tradition and formal training. For example, Miss Minerva Randall serves simultaneously as Jonathan Rossiter's housekeeper and an instructor of boys studying Virgil, mathematics, and surveying. She controverts stereotypes not only in her academic specialties but also in her way of grasping opportunity. As Stowe maintains, she "was one of those female persons who are of Sojourner Truth's opinion,—that if women want any rights they had better take them, and say nothing about it. Her *sex* had never occurred to her as a reason for doing or not doing anything which her hand found to do." Stowe pictures "Miss Nery" kneading bread dough while answering student boarders' Latin questions. "... she was as well known and highly respected in Cloudland as the schoolmaster himself: she was one of the fixed facts of the town, as much as the meeting-house" (444-46).

One reason that Miss Mehitable sends fifteen-year-old Tina to the academy with the eighteen-year-olds Harry and Horace is because she is afraid the local schoolmasters allow her charms to turn their heads. Thus, there is some deliberation behind her uncompromising Uncle Jonathan's one day commenting scathingly on her hair ornaments: "If you had only an equal talent for ornamenting the *inside* of your head...there might be some hopes of you" (449). She takes his barb with humility and soon becomes the first scholar in the school. Horace states flatly that the best writers in the school are girls (452). Among the topics on which the students write are: "The Differences between the Natural and Moral Sublime," "The Comparative Merits of Milton and Shakespeare," and "Can the Benevolence of the Deity Be Proved by the Light of Nature?" Twelve-year-old Harriet actually wrote on the last of these topics at Litchfield Academy (Foster, 187-88). Jonathan also tosses them verbose Fourth of July orations and an occasional "sophomorical newspaper declamation" to critique as if he were a huntsman throwing a dead fox to the dogs (453).

Stowe feels called to justify co-educational settings. The objections she answers are, one, Is it proper? And, two, Will "the great mystery of sex...and its strange, blinding, dazzling influences" distract students from the tasks at hand? The answer to the first of these, as so many of her answers in this novel, is drawn from the Puritan cultural example: "This question...was solved without discussion by the good sense of our Puritan ancestors, in throwing the country academies, where young men were fitted for college, open alike to both sexes, and in making the work of education of such dignity in the eyes of the community. . ." (487-88). And what about flirtations? It could be worse, Stowe answers: "... in a good school, the standard of attraction is, to some extent, intellectual. The girl is valued for something besides her person; her disposition and character are thoroughly tested, the powers of her mind go for something, and, what is more, she is known in her every-day clothes. On the whole, I do not think a better way can be found to bring the two sexes together, without that false glamour which obscures their

knowledge of each other, than to put them side by side in the daily drill of a good literary institution” (488-89).

One final perspective on co-education in the novel comes after the three have graduated. Looking back on their time at Cloudland, the boys, who are now at Harvard, regret that Tina, who had “quite as good a mind, and was fully...capable of going through our college course with us . . .” (521), will not go further in her education. As the two boys discuss the girls who shared their academy days with them, Horace notes how difficult it must be for them to have “had their minds braced just as ours have been, with all the drill of regular hours and regular lessons, to be suddenly let down, with nothing in particular to do” (523). This letdown is discussed in Joan Hedrick’s biography of Stowe. Educating women may have indicated Republican foresight, but failing to provide them commensurate places in society afterwards had tragic dimensions (Hedrick, 44).

The boys conclude that a full understanding of any issue is better insured by including both genders. Harry argues that women see things differently than men. He cites Esther whom he acknowledges is his superior in the very studies that he proposes to pursue in college—Greek and math: “. . . and why should she not go through the whole course with us as well as the first part? The fact is, a man never sees a subject thoroughly until he sees what a woman will think of it, for...a woman’s view of every subject...has a different shade from a man’s view, and that is what you and I have insensibly been absorbing in all our course hitherto” (523).

Esther is Esther Avery, daughter of Cloudland’s minister and friend and fellow-student of the orphans. She is yet another of those peculiar and sensitive souls that Stowe seems fascinated by: “one of those intense, silent, repressed women that have been a frequent outgrowth of New England society. Moral traits, like physical ones, often intensify themselves in course of descent, so that the child of a long line of pious ancestry may sometimes suffer from too fine a moral fibre, and become a victim to a species of morbid *spiritual ideality*.” To Horace, Esther thinks too much: more specifically, too much about theology. Here the novel makes explicit what has been implied throughout: that logical systems of theology cannot fully account for God or humanity, particularly female humanity. As Stowe writes, “. . . woman’s nature has never been consulted in theology. Theologic systems...have, as yet, been the work of man alone. They have had their origin, as in St. Augustine, with men who were utterly ignorant of moral and intellectual companionship with woman. . . .” Thus women found Augustine “hardest to tolerate or to assimilate” “and many a delicate and sensitive nature was utterly wrecked in the struggle” (455-56). Here the parallels with Emily Rossiter are very clear. It is a theological system that drains the life out of both her and Esther Avery.

The difficulty is not that men are logically centered and women, not. After Horace points out that she is not a stereotypical woman, he writes, “Esther never could have made one of those clinging, submissive, parasitical wives who form the delight of song and story, and are supposed to be the peculiar gems of womanhood. It was her nature always to be obliged to see her friends clearly through the understanding, and to judge them by a refined and exquisite conscientiousness. . . . Her clear, piercing hazel eyes seemed to pass over everything with a determination to know only and exactly the truth, hard and cold and unwelcome though it might be” (457). Thus, Esther has her own share of clear, cold logic.

Perhaps the problem is her dual nature. Horace goes so far as to suggest that she resembles Plato’s androgynous being:

From a long line of reasoning, thinking, intellectual ancestry she had inherited all the strong logical faculties.... From a line of saintly and tender women, half refined to angel in their nature, she had inherited exquisite moral

perceptions, and all that flattering host of tremulous, half-spiritual, half-sensuous intuitions that lie in the borderland between the pure intellect and the animal nature. The consequence of all this was the internal strife of a divided nature. Her heart was always rebelling against the conclusions of her head. She was constantly being forced by one half of her nature to movements, inquiries, and reasonings which brought only torture to the other half. (456)

Rather than arguing that a woman cannot successfully be both logical and intuitive, Stowe is suggesting that the particular logical systems that Esther ponders create the irreconcilable division. Like Emily Rossiter, the core of her sickness is to be found in interpretations of Calvinism that violate her nature. And like Emily she is in the clutches of a Calvinist minister: her own father.

Ironically, Mr. Avery is the best of the three ministers in the novel; and his faith, the soundest: “The Calvinism of Mr. Avery, though sharp and well defined, was not dull, as abstractions often are, nor gloomy and fateful like that of Dr. Stern. It was permeated through and through by cheerfulness and hope. . . . Mr. Avery never would be brought to believe that any particular human being had finally perished. At every funeral he attended he contrived to see a ground for hope that the departed had found mercy. Even the slightest hints of repentance were magnified in his warm and hopeful mode of presentation” (461). Mr. Avery heals doubts, unlike Stern, who aggravates them, and Lothrop, who glosses over them. The source of the doubts Horace knows very well from Grandmother Badger’s house: “the phase of Calvinism shown in my grandmother’s blue book [which] had naturally enough sowed through the minds of a thoughtful community hosts of doubts and queries. A great part of Mr. Avery’s work was to remove these doubts . . .” (467).

Not only is Mr. Avery the best of the novel’s ministers, but he is generally assumed to be based on Stowe’s father, Lyman Beecher (Crozier, 114; Foster, 174). His is at best an ambiguous portrait. If the main reason he is better than the others is that he is willing to compromise with the cold system of logic his faith is based on, then why is his daughter mired in that logic? If he is cheerful and optimistic, as Horace describes him, then why is his daughter so gloomy? This ambiguity, which lies at the heart of the education of extraordinary personalities, is the most compelling conflict in the novel. Stowe seems to be advocating an exceptionalist doctrine for the particularly sensitive nature.

While Mr. Avery cannot successfully adapt Calvinism for his daughter—the peculiar nature—he is extraordinarily fit for his times in adapting Calvinism to a generally democratic society. Horace explains that the Revolutionary War changed the status of the minister in communities. From almost nobility (Dr. Lothrop, who wears a powdered wig and walks with a gold-headed cane, is a rare survivor of the former tradition (51, 61)), ministers became fellow-citizens with their parishioners. No longer were their words accepted based on authority; the merit of their arguments became the criterion of acceptance. Mr. Avery tunes his sermons to a Revolutionary key by emphasizing free agency: “You are free, and you are able.” Thus, he instills a sense of personal responsibility in his parishioners that both flatters and inspires them (459): they “felt the compliment of being talked to as if they were capable of understanding the very highest of subjects, and they liked it. . . . Their God himself asked to reign over them, not by force, but by the free, voluntary choice of their own hearts” (465). Implied in the transactions between clergy and parishioners was the liberty of the individual. As Horace explains, the “liberty of growth—the liberty to think and to judge freely upon all subjects. . . . formed the great distinctive educational force of New England life, particularly in this period of my youth” (463).

A revival in Cloudland conducted by Mr. Avery provides the backdrop for the climactic scene in which Esther is redeemed from her sorrows. Even the benevolent Mr. Avery follows Edwards' lead in regarding children "out of the fold" until a very particular experience of "conviction and conversion" occurred (476). Thus, when he confronts Harry Percival about his salvation, and Harry tells him that he has felt it from childhood, the reverend is initially skeptical. But Harry prevails upon Avery essentially by identifying himself as someone who has to be granted the freedom to have grown in his own way: ". . . I have not thought, and cannot think, exactly like you, nor exactly like any one that I know of. I must make up my opinions for myself. I suppose I am peculiar, but I have been brought up peculiarly." Being tested in the fire of adversity has sharpened both his faith and his confidence in it. Suffering mortification because of his father's abuse and neglect and his mother's suffering, he nevertheless feels sure that his mother's death was blessed and has never doubted her simple teaching and faith, which he has carried with him daily (477).

Avery accepts Harry's testimony as sufficient because he is someone "who always corrected theory by common sense. When he perceived that a child could be trained up a Christian, and grow into the love of a Heavenly Father as he grows into the love of an earthly one, by a daily and hourly experience of goodness, he yielded to the perceptions of his mind [instead of Edwardsian theory] in that particular case" (478). Here we can recall the ancient arguments about virtue's acquisition either through teaching or by the habits a child is raised with. Harry seems to be possessed of moral virtues: his faith has been formed by early habit, strengthened through adversity, and remained steadfast through the innumerable theological theories he has heard (and often repelled as contrary to his nature). On the other hand, Esther, surrounded by a loving father, caring minister, and security, is habitually taught that she cannot count on her place in God's family until she has experienced something that she has not, and therefore she is tortured by doubt.

Tina and Esther's reactions to the revival in Cloudland provide a contrast that speaks to their educational preparation. Tina, whom Miss Mehitable has freed from the Rossiter despair, is "buoyant and joyous" while Esther sinks into "the very depths of despondency" (478). Geared for the apathetic and materialistic-minded, the pastor's hellfire sermons cause her suffering. Good for the masses, perhaps, this method of religious training is to her "a personal misfortune" (479). Again, Stowe argues that this is not the fault of Calvinism in its essential form, for in its earliest manifestations Esther would have been educated "in the tender and paternal manner recommended by the Cambridge platform, and practised among the earlier Puritans, recognized from infancy as a member of Christ's Church, . . . and her course into the full communion of the Church would have been gentle and insensible as a flowing river" (479). Instead, Esther is "trained to expect a marked and decided period of conversion. . . ." (479). Failing to discern such, she feels herself not only a failure but damned.

The reader can deduce that Mr. Avery has failed to reassure his daughter, as Lyman Beecher failed to reassure the suffering Catharine and Harriet when they lost loved ones. Through the fictional voice of a male narrator, Stowe is able more easily to critique the minister most like her father: "Mr. Avery did not consider that the Assembly's catechism and the Cambridge platform and a great part of his own preaching were, after all, but human speculation, —the uninspired *inferences* of men from the Bible, and not the Bible itself,—and that minds once set going in this direction often cannot help a third question after a second. . . . Such inquiries as Esther's never arose from reading the parables of Christ, the Sermon on the Mount: they are the legitimate children of mere human attempts at systematic theology" (481). Ultimately, then, Stowe argues that systems might do well in general but they can be inimical in individual cases in ways that the Bible itself cannot be.

As adaptable as Mr. Avery is, it is not he but Harry Percival who redeems Esther with his love and special form of faith. Not only does he know and admire her character through studying with her, but his certainty of God's benevolence is precisely the antidote for her morbid sense of her own unworthiness. "Harry was by nature and habit exactly the reverse of Esther. His conclusions were all intuitions. His religion was an emanation from the heart, a child of personal experience, and not a formula of the head. In him was seen the beginning of that great *reaction* which took place largely in the young mind of New England against the tyranny of mere logical methods as applied to the ascertaining of moral truths" (483).

In a conversation between Harry and Horace about Esther, the two identify logic as inadequate to account for the varieties of spiritual natures. Harry postulates, ". . . the difference between Esther and myself is just the reverse kind of that which generally subsists between man and woman. She has been all her life so drilled in what logicians call reasoning, that, although she has a glorious semi-spiritual nature, and splendid moral instincts, she never trusts them. She is like an eagle that should insist upon climbing a mountain by beak and claw instead of using wings. She must always see the syllogism before she will believe." Horace, being of a peculiar nature himself, understands his friend: "I have always felt the tyranny of the hard New England logic, and it has kept me from really knowing what to believe about many phenomena of my own mind that are vividly real to me" (532).

Harry, whose loss of father and mother actually strengthens his faith, becomes the healthy antidote to the troubled souls in the novel. His convictions are deep and certain. Stowe admires them because they are immune to the convolutions of logic that are more likely to create doubt than reassure searching hearts. As he puts it, ". . . my religious faith is what it always was,—a deep, instinctive certainty, an embrace by the soul of *something* which it could not exist without." Adversity actually sharpens his faith, for it rests on two ideas: "man's helplessness, and God's helpfulness. We are sent into this world in the midst of a blind, confused jangle of natural laws, which we cannot by any possibility understand, and which cut their way through and over and around us. They tell us nothing; they have no sympathy; they hear no prayer; they spare neither vice nor virtue. And if we have no friend above to guide us through the labyrinth, if there is no Father's heart, no helping hand, of what use is life?" (532-33).

The denouement of the novel emphasizes the fruit of each character's virtues. If in its classical sense virtue means "the power of anything to accomplish its specific function; strength, force, potency" (Kirk 54), then the three orphans seem ultimately to achieve it because each will use his or her own particular virtue to effect some good result. In addition, Stowe, as was the nineteenth century custom, drapes them with good fortune as well. For instance, Tina and Harry Percival's remorseful English father leaves them his estate, so the homeless siblings of early in the novel become landed proprietors. Horace's education at Harvard College is funded by wealthy well-wishers, and he will eventually become a lawyer. Harry and Esther will marry with Mr. Avery's enthusiastic blessing. And Tina will marry the brilliant and well-connected Ellery Davenport who is now a diplomat.

This last development injects a dose of realism, for there is a problem with Ellery. His is a peculiar nature gone bad. Stowe hints that the grandfather's sin of dispossessing the descendants of the saints is visited upon the grandson. That systems are dangerous is proven by his careening off into seduction, Machiavellian political plotting, unbelief, and destruction. He has the capacity to attract and deceive. He is Jonathan Edwards without his "religious discipline,—a nature strong both in intellect and passion." But he lacks belief. Tina is attracted to him like a bird fascinated by a snake (507).

As Mr. Avery has adjusted his ministry to the rise of democracy, so too has Ellery adjusted to revolutionary times, both in America and France, using them as a pretext “to have his own way, and to carry his own points, and to do as he pleased.” “He loved his own will, and he hated control, and he determined...to carry his own plans in this world.... His unbelief was purely and simply what has been called in New England the natural opposition of the heart to God” (511). It is only after his marriage to the charmed Tina that Oldtown discovers the extent of his misdeeds: Emily Rossiter, with her and Ellery’s child, reappears in Oldtown on Ellery and Tina’s honeymoon night.

Thus the shadowy mystery of Emily is solved near the end of the novel, and the reader finds that she too fits into the pattern of observations of New England character Stowe develops throughout. For instance, Horace argues that in her own way Emily remains very much a Puritan (that is, the habits with which she grew up remain part of her character): “Notwithstanding that Emily had taken a course diametrically opposed to the principles of her country and her fathers, she remained largely the Puritan nature. Instances have often been seen in New England of men and women who had renounced every particle of the Puritan theology, and yet retained in their fibre and composition all the moral traits of the Puritans—their uncompromising conscientiousness, their convictions of their understandings” (589). Miss Mehitable apprehends this aspect of Emily’s character: “...Emily fell by her higher nature. She learned, under Dr. Stern, to think and to reason boldly, even when differing from received opinion; and this hardihood of mind and opinion she soon turned upon the doctrines he taught. Then [she] abandoned the Bible, and felt herself free to construct her own system of morals” (592-93). Thus, Emily ultimately lives by the habits of virtue even as she mistakenly adopts revolutionary France’s utopian intellectual and loosened social systems.

In a chapter entitled “Tina’s Solution,” the power of Tina’s charity is revealed. Jonathan Rossiter harshly condemns his sister: “There is NEVER any excuse for such conduct.” But Tina, his former student, corrects him: “What right have you to talk so, if you call yourself a Christian?” She recalls to him Christ’s words to the sinful woman he saved from stoning, imagining the woman’s attributes: “I can see that she was grand and unselfish in her love, that she was perfectly self-sacrificing, and I believe it was because Jesus understood these things in the hearts of women that he uttered those blessed words” (594-95).

Tina’s solution is to bond with Emily, offer to raise her child, and honor her own marriage to Ellery even though he is unworthy of it. Stowe shows this as a self-sacrifice using a rhetoric that suggests that Tina is marshalling her greatest gifts to try to solve one of the many almost insoluble problems that humans face. In short, this is what Tina was created for. Horace and her brother’s regret that she finds herself in a marriage with a villain are similar to modern readers’ regrets that Uncle Tom submits to the violence of Simon Legree. But Stowe’s Christian thought sees one’s rising to an occasion at his or her own expense as the noblest of human endeavors and the highest of virtuous conduct.

If Tina’s chief virtue is charity, then the fruit of Harry’s spiritual development is hope. His hopefulness will have not only a salutary influence on Esther but on Emily as she attempts to rehabilitate after exposure to Jacobinism:

The experiences of the French Revolution...had had a powerful influence on the mind of Emily, in making her feel how mistaken had been those views of human progress which come from the mere unassisted reason, when it rejects the guidance of revealed religion. She was in a mood to return to the faith of her fathers, receiving it again under milder and more liberal forms. I think the friendship of Harry was of great use to her in enabling her to attain to a settled religious faith. ...his simplicity of religious

trust was a constant corrective to the habits of thought formed by the sharp and pitiless logic of her early training. (600)

Not only does Harry's hopeful Christianity save Emily and Esther from "pitiless logic," but he decides at novel's end to take up his responsibilities as landowner in England. He has always wanted to minister in the United States, but in England he sees a greater need:

...there are whole races who appear born to poverty and subjection; where there are woes, and dangers, and miseries pressing on whole classes of men, which no one individual can do much to avert or alleviate. But it is to this very state of society that I feel a call to minister. I shall take orders in the Church of England, and endeavor to carry out among the poor and the suffering that simple Gospel which my mother taught me, and which, after all these years of experience, after all these theological discussions to which I have listened, remains in its perfect simplicity in my mind; namely, that every human soul on this earth has One Friend, and that Friend is Jesus Christ its Lord and Saviour. (604)

And so the destitute and endangered Tina and Harry, through the early teachings of their mother, the wise governance of Oldtown, and a bit of polishing in boarding school achieve moral success. Essentially, Stowe shows their finding not so much happiness as opportunity to exercise their virtues to do good; to bring charity to the lost and hopefulness to the hopeless. If Stowe is a romantic, she is a Christian one, bringing to bear on the novel's outcome her conception of mankind's fallen nature and the remedies available to it.

If the Percivals bear the fruits of hope and charity, then Horace Holyoke finally develops the virtue of faith. Skeptical most of his life, he nonetheless remains a faithful and patient admirer of Tina. He holds his tongue when she marries a man who is unworthy and is vindicated when Ellery, deeply involved in political intrigue, continues his deceptiveness and eventually is killed in a political duel. Two years later, Horace and Tina marry and raise Emily's child together. Horace and Tina, like Esther and Harry, learned about each other at school in "ordinary clothes" and by sharing intellectual pursuits and watching each other's character in action. Thus, it is fitting that the two couples find common ground on which to make permanent matches. They are especially fit for each other because they have watched each other's virtues in action. Their renunciation of self, patience under adversity, as well as their practice of the theological virtues, mark them as fellow Christians, responsible inheritors of the long Puritan tradition, exemplary citizens of the new Republic, and ambassadors to the world.

Conclusion

When George Washington left the office of the presidency, he published a farewell address in the *American Daily Advertiser*, September 19, 1796. Mindful of the failures of the French Revolution, he stressed that America was not a secular nation. Instead it was based on morals, and morals were dependent on religion. "Of all the dispositions and habits which [lead] to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports." The French were wrong: "national morality" could not prevail "in exclusion of religious principle" (Johnson, 229). Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Oldtown Folks* argues the same position. With all its conflicts and personal tragedies, Puritan New England was an excellent seedbed of virtuous citizenry. Stowe's novel shows the manner in which such citizens were formed, sometimes deformed, and ultimately redeemed to exercise their extraordinary powers.

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