

APPROVAL SHEET

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JOHN FELLOWS: A MINOR AMERICAN DEIST

by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In an age of great men many less significant but still interesting figures pass unnoticed. So it was in revolutionary America that the long shadows of Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, and Paine almost eclipsed the light of other energetic, intelligent, and worthy men. Though such men did not strike fire, though their lives were not beacons to light an age, still much can be gained from considering them. Smaller in stature than the giants, they are closer to the mean of their surroundings and perhaps, in some respects, a better index of the times.

Such a man was John Fellows of Sheffield, Massachusetts. Born in Colonial America in 1759, he fought in the Revolutionary War and again in the War of 1812; he attended one of our oldest colleges, took part in the rise of the Jeffersonian concept of democracy and lived to see the Democratic party transformed into a party of the common man by Jackson. He died in 1844 a year that saw the first electric telegraph.

Not only did he take part in great events, but from the beginning of his life to the end, his acquaintance included some of our greatest literary and political figures. While still a boy, he was on close terms with Joel Barlow, a man who had great influence on his life; and in his last years, he was intimate with the young Walt Whitman, who indeed remembered Colonel Fellows, as he was called, and wrote of him years later.

But his most interesting association was with Thomas Paine during the last years of that great patriot's life. Fellows was one of Paine's

most intimate and loyal friends at a time when Paine was ending his life of service and being repaid with public ingratitude and persecution.

Here then is a man whose life spanned much of our early history, and who seems to have been an intelligent, active citizen throughout that life. To investigate the facts of his life would be to uncover the bone and sinew of our nation.

John Fellows was born in Sheffield, Massachusetts in 1759. After taking part in several battles of the Revolution, he attended Yale college; and later, he moved to New York, around 1773, and went into business as a bookseller.

Siding with such liberals as Barlow, Palmer and Paine, he was soon identified with the more radical elements in early American politics. He and his associates were active supporters of Jeffersonian democracy and adherents of the Democratic-Republican party.

During these early days, he published many of the deistical and political works of Paine, Barlow, and Boulanger. He copyrighted The Age of Reason for Thomas Paine in 1795 and published it in the same year.

In October of 1802, Paine returned from France; and from then until his death, he and Fellows were friends and fellow workers.

Several of Paine's letters written to Fellows still exist. From these, it is evident that the two men were closely associated in literary and political activities. It is unfortunate, as Conway comments in his biography of Paine, that Fellows, who showed considerable literary talent, did not devote this talent to a biographical study of Paine.

Because of his political views and affiliations, Fellows met with poor success in his bookselling venture in the hostile, conservative

climate of New York city. Around the time he knew Paine, he was working as an auctioneer, and later he worked as the supervisor of the City Water Works, from 1806 to 1809.

After Paine's death, Fellows edited a journal called the Theophilanthropist which published articles of a deistical nature, including some of Paine's.

At the outbreak of war with Great Britain in 1812, Fellows was commissioned Military Storekeeper for the city of New York; a position he held until June of 1821. He returned to his job as auctioneer and sometime later worked as constable in the city courts. It was in this capacity that he came to know Walt Whitman. Whitman has written an excellent account of their relationship in his Specimen Days.

During his life, Fellows wrote books on Freemasonry, Junius, and the life of Putnam. He edited several books and magazines and was instrumental in the publication of other books and pamphlets.

Hitherto the best account of Fellows' life is that in F. B. Dexter's Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College.¹ Dexter's sketch is very accurate in detail but limited. The National Encyclopedia of American Biography also gives an account of Fellows' life, but it is highly inaccurate. This biography confuses Fellows' father and uncle. General John Fellows, the uncle of the later John Fellows, was in command of the Massachusetts militia during the Revolutionary War.² The writer in the National Encyclopedia states that the General was the father of John Fellows.

Furthermore as both uncle and nephew have the same name, there is some confusion in the bibliographical listing of manuscripts.

Moncure Conway in his biography of Thomas Paine gives a brief

resume of Fellows' life and relates many incidents from his relationship with Paine.

Until the present, there has existed no detailed biography of John Fellows nor any complete bibliography of his literary productions. In my research I have been able to gather a number of unpublished manuscripts relating to Fellows that throw new light on his life and work.

FOOTNOTES

1. New York, 1885-1912, IV, 265-268.
2. New York, 1898, IV, 362.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF JOHN FELLOWS

According to F. B. Dexter, John Fellows, son of Ezra and Charity Fellows of Sheffield, Massachusetts, was born in that town on November 17, 1759. He was prepared for college by Reverend Ammi R. Robbins (Yale, 1760), of Norfolk, Connecticut.¹ The Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the Revolution records that in April of 1775, John Fellows served for some months, intermittently, with Captain William Bacon's company of minute-men in the regiment of Colonel John Fellows.² This Colonel John Fellows, who later became a general, was the uncle of the John Fellows we are studying.

The most extensive and reliable information in relation to Fellows' military service, his education and his later activities in New York city is found in a letter written by Fellows in May, 1821, to William Lee of Washington. At the time the letter was written, Fellows was employed as Military Storekeeper in New York city; and in an effort to keep this position, which indeed he lost that same year, he cites his war record and past service.

To be under the necessity of asking favors even from our best friends is irksome and mortifying but in the present case I flatter myself that I have some claims for them from the present administration. To do which you must indulge me in giving the following brief sketch. In the year 1775, when the revolutionary war commenced, I volunteered to accompany my uncle, John Fellows, who commanded a regiment, to the vicinity of Boston, I served that campaign in Dorchester. When the British troops has possession of New York, I again volunteered under the same, who then commanded a brigade of militia

and served some months at White Plains. I afterwards enlisted for a short period with another uncle, who commanded a company in the brigade of General Putnam. On my return home, by the pressing solicitation of Joel Barlow, my father was induced to give me a Collegiate Education. And I afterwards graduated at Yale College.... In the year of 1793, to the best of my recollection, I established a Book Store in the city of New York. This I believe was about the time that party spirit began to rage with violence in the United States, I immediately espoused the democratic cause in its fullest extent. Among other republican works I published the writings of Thomas Paine and Joel Barlow, with both of whom I corresponded. In short my store became notorious for containing what the Federalists considered heretical works, I was eventually obliged to relinquish the business, after sinking a considerable sum of money in it. I mention these circumstances as the leading causes of my not succeeding in business in New York, in fact, to them that it has been my attachment to principle, and not to money making that renders the patronage of the government needful to me. On the day of the declaration of war in 1812 I received from Secretary Eustis, to whom I was well known before, the Commission of Military Storekeeper, to be stationed at New York. And I feel conscious of having faithfully performed the duties of that office to this time. The office is a very responsible one. Property to a very large amount has been intrusted to my charge, and the services required in time of the war were very great. That some trifling mistakes should have occurred in complying with the multiplicity of orders that were constantly presenting, I should suppose would not appear surprising, particularly when it is considered that several other persons were almost constantly required to aid in packing and delivering the stores. Any errors that occurred were promptly rectified on due notice.... I am fully confident that complete satisfaction has been given to the officers generally that have had any concern with me in the store. I mention these things to enable you to remove any prejudice, if any exists, in the mind of the Secretary on account of a few trifling complaints with which he has occasionally been troubled. In fact, I have found some young officers who appear fond of giving trouble, and rendering themselves conspicuous by preferring complaints to the Secretary of war.... As you were so good as to say you would again converse with the Secretary of War in my behalf, I have given you this hasty sketch in order to enable you to give to the Secretary a fuller view of my claims than you otherwise could. Perhaps I have said more than was necessary. My character was

known to Presidents Jefferson and Madison. But I had not had the honor of being known before to the present President or to the Secretary of War. I can I believe with the fullest confidence refer to gentlemen of high standing here, viz The Secretary of the Navy - The Treasurer, the Commissioner of the Land Office and General Brown. The latter may have a very pressing letter in my behalf from a friend, a cousin Judge Spencer. I fear I have wearied your patience with this long letter. My circumstances must plead my excuse. I conceive that the place I now hold is as yet unoccupied by another, and I could not think of relinquishing it without making every effort to retain that honour would sanction.³

By his own testimony then, Fellows took part in two and perhaps three campaigns of the Revolutionary War. The first campaign to which he alludes may have included the Battle of Bunker Hill. Fellows does not mention Bunker Hill by name, but his friend and co-worker Gilbert Vale, in an obituary notice, states that Fellows was present at that historic encounter.⁴ Fellows himself specifies his presence at the disastrous battle of White Plains in the summer of 1776 at which Washington was defeated, and General Fellows' Massachusetts regiment completely routed. Finally, though he mentions no date, he must have served with Putnam in 1777, when Putnam's forces were engaged around Saratoga.

Fellows states that he attended and graduated from Yale College, but he gives no exact chronology. These facts however are easily ascertained by reference to the Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, president of Yale College for many years. On June 7, 1780, Stiles lists Fellows as a member of the Freshman class; and on June 27, 1780, he records that John Fellows took a dismissal to Dartmouth College, where he had an uncle in Hanover, New Hampshire. On May 5, 1782, Stiles writes that he has readmitted Fellows into the Junior class at Yale; and on September

10, 1783, Stiles lists Fellows as a member of that year's graduating class.⁵ The Yale College Triennial Catalogue notes John Fellows took a BA at Yale College in 1783.

Fellows recalls that he started his career as a bookseller and publisher in New York city around 1793. Fellows' recollection is confirmed by George L. McKay's Register of Artists, Engravers, Booksellers etc. in New York City 1630-1820, in which he is listed as a bookseller at 192 Water Street for the year 1793.⁶

As his letter suggests he was concerned with publishing deistical philosophy and political speculation. Outstanding among those published by him were works by Thomas Paine and Joel Barlow.

On October of 1793, he wrote to Jedediah Morse asking for the return of a book by Hanna Adams and inquiring about the copyright. This letter is interesting as both Hanna Adams and Jedediah Morse are of some consequence in American literary and religious history.

Morse, a classmate of Fellows, was a congregational clergyman of Connecticut and a staunch defender of orthodoxy throughout his life. In 1798, just five years after the date of the letter quoted below, he was engaged in an attack on the deistic elements associated with politics and Freemasonry in New York. Some years later, 1805, he founded the Panoplist, a periodical aimed at combating the growing Unitarianism. In politics, he was a Federalist and he consistently opposed the liberal currents of that time. Early in life, 1784, he wrote the first geography book by an American, Geography Made Easy, which has earned him the title of "father of American geography."

Hanna Adams is also unique inasmuch as she is considered to be the first professional woman of letters in America. Her most popular works

included: Alphabetical Compendium of the Various Sects, A Summary History of New England, and The Truth and Excellence of the Christian Religion, the work in which Fellows expressed interest.

Despite their radical divergence of theological views, Fellows remained on good terms with his former classmate and wrote freely on religious matters:

The Clergy are more excusable for neglect of temporal matters, on accounts of the laborious duties of office, I can therefore easily forgive your not forwarding the book for which we exchanged viz. Hannah Adams' View of Religion; will thank you however to improve the present opportunity by Wills, who is the bearer of this, he will let you know where he lodges in Boston. I wish to be informed whether there are many of this book in print and whether the copyright is secured.

There is no record that Fellows ever published this work.

Besides works of Paine and Barlow, he also edited, during this period, other books and a magazine. In 1796, he arranged the publication of Strictures on Bishop Watson's "Apology for the Bible", by a Citizen of New York and The Character and Doctrines of Jesus Christ from the Author's Manuscript, to Which is added, Reasons for Scepticism in Revealed Religion, by John Hollis; Also, The History of Man After God's own Heart. The first section of this work, The Character and Doctrines of Jesus Christ, is signed J. F. and was written by Fellows himself.

In that same year, in partnership with J. Lyon, Fellows published and edited the Ladies and Gentleman's Pocket Magazine which appeared monthly from August to November. The magazine contained articles of general interest, essays, stories, and foreign and domestic news events.

Joel Barlow, whom Fellows mentions as having been instrumental in

his attending Yale, was one of the Harvard Wits; he was a strong supporter of Jefferson and one of the Americans granted French citizenship during the Revolution in France. He was an important figure in the literary world and later, under Madison, became minister to France. Barlow was a close friend of the Fellows' family.

Later when Fellows was established as a bookseller and publisher in New York, he reprinted several of Barlow's political tracts. In 1794 while registered as a bookseller at 131 Water Street, Fellows published for Barlow, Advice to the Priviledged Orders in Europe; and in 1795 while registered as a bookseller and stationer at 139 Water Street, he published for the same author, A Letter to the National Convention of France, and A Letter addressed to the People of Piedmont.

Barlow spent many years in Europe, and in 1795 he wrote to Fellows from Hamburg a now famous letter. Throughout his life, Barlow maintained an external show of allegiance to conventional Christianity, while in fact his real convictions were deistic. In the letter quoted below, Barlow expressed himself rather freely on the subject of Christian ritual; it subsequently fell into the hands of his enemies and was frequently quoted and reprinted in order to embarrass the author.

How the manuscript got out of the possession of Fellows is not known, but this accident certainly provided the orthodox with an effective weapon to use against Barlow. The text of the letter as quoted here was printed in the Connecticut Journal for August 28, 1799. The following remarks about Fellows appear as an introduction to the letter:

Fellows was at the date of this letter a bookseller in New York, and in every way worthy of the friendship and confidence of Joel Barlow. Having been the retailist sic of Barlow's, Paine's and Boulanger's seditious, treasonable,

impious, and atheistical works, he received from the file leader of the phalanx, the tribute of "well done."

The letter reads:

I received a few weeks ago by Capt. Jenkins your favor of the 12th March with the bundle of pamphlets and books. This being the first copy I have seen of the New York edition of the first part of the Advice. I am mortified to find it full of errors.... I now send you a corrected edition of the four political pieces, which I wish you to publish in the order I place them: with the title I have put to the whole.... I rejoice at the progress of good sense over the damnable imposture of Christian mummery. I had no doubt of the effect of Paine's Age of Reason. It must be cavilled at a while, but it must prevail.... I need not request your particular attention to the press in the new edition of my works. I observe with pleasure in the letter to the Piedmontese, there are only two slight mistakes and I will not swear that these were not in the copy. You must not send me any more after you get this, as I shall, I hope, be with you before winter. I wish you would not suffer a word of this letter to go into a newspaper.⁸

The four political pieces mentioned by Barlow were published by Fellows in New York in 1796 under the title, The Political Writings of Joel Barlow; and in the same year he published Barlow's The Hasty Pudding a Poem in Three Cantos.

But Fellows' activities were not limited to publication, he was also involved in the political scene. Not only was he a member of the early Tammany Hall group, but when Elihu Palmer, the blind preacher, formed the Deistical Society of New York, Fellows was among the founders and one of Palmer's closest friends. Later when Paine returned from France, Fellows became one of his most loyal friends and associates. These matters will be treated more at length later in this study.

Around the turn of the century, Fellows began working as an

auctioneer, and Longworth's Directory of New York City for 1801 reports him as such and gives his address as 75 Wall Street. The following year, Fellows and Noah are listed as auctioneers and commission merchants at 149 Pearl Street. Fellows continued at this business intermittently till the outbreak of war in 1812.

From 1806 to 1809, Fellows had employment as a public official. Stokes in The Iconography of Manhattan Island lists him as superintendent of the Manhattan Water Works for the years 1806 through 1809.⁹ Several official notices, relating to the operation of the works and signed by Fellows, appear in the New York papers during this period. Particularly in May and July of 1809 when there was some difficulty with the pumps, notices appeared in the New York Communal Advertiser describing the condition of the pumps and the repairs being effected.¹⁰

The following year, in 1810, Fellows edited a monthly journal called the Theophilanthropist. This was the name originally given to a deistical society started in Paris with which Paine had some connection.

During September 1796, while France was under the control of the Directory, a pamphlet appeared in Paris called, Manual of the Theophilanthropophiles. It was published by Chemin and its appearance seems to have suggested a solution to the ban on public worship then in force. Five months later, January 1797, five families gathered together for prayers and hymns to God and also patriotic speeches. The society was deistic in creed and sympathetic to the principles of the Revolution. Paine described the beliefs of the Theophilanthropists as: "... the same as those published in the first part of the Age of Reason...."¹¹

The first meeting, according to Paine, was held on the 5th of January, 1797, in the Street Denis. The services were limited to worship

of God and the endorsement of virtue; there were no priests, ceremonies or decorations. Any member of the society might lead the meeting and the only sacraments, those of marriage and baptism, were reduced to mere civil announcements. While Paine was connected with the society, Ravelliere LaPeaux of the Directory was its leader and the society was given ten churches by the Directory. For about two years the society prospered and in some cases spread to the provinces; but as Christianity revived, it steadily lost ground; and in 1802, Napoleon deprived the society of its churches.

The complex political and economic struggle taking place at this time between England and the United States blossomed into war in June of 1812. As we have seen in the letter quoted above, Fellows renewed his military career in the capacity of Military Storekeeper for New York city. The Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army records the appointment of John Fellows to that post on 15 June 1812, and his subsequent discharge in June of 1821.¹²

From the official documents or records which have survived this tumultuous period in American history, little can be learned about Fellows' activities while he held this position. A few pieces of correspondence relating to his business as storekeeper exist in the holdings of the National Archives and the manuscript collection of the New-York Historical Society. This latter collection includes a letter from Governor D. D. Tompkins to John Fellows requesting tools for the workmen at the Brooklyn Fortifications, and is dated August 1814. Among those held by the National Archives is one written by Fellows to a Major Charles Monroe explaining the disposition of certain supplies; and another written by Fellows to John Caldwell Calhoun, President Monroe's secretary of

of war from 1817 to 1825.¹³ As these manuscripts contain only information about minor details of military logistics, I shall not quote their contents.

The spring of 1821 found Fellows in Washington making use of his personal contacts in that city, in order to keep his job as storekeeper. He was there in May when he wrote the letter to William Lee, already quoted, containing the autobiographical sketch. He was discharged from his post on June 1, 1821, and subsequently returned to his old job as auctioneer.

Around this period of his life, he became acquainted with Gilbert Vale through their mutual association in a society for "free enquirers." Vale was an Englishman who came to America in the late 1820's. Originally he had been intended for the Church; but he abandoned this vocation and by the time he arrived in New York, he was a confirmed deist. For a time he taught navigation and mathematics and later, he edited the Citizen of the World and the Sunday Reporter, both deistical journals reflecting the influence of Paine. His philosophic views were scientific in orientation, which disposition is clearly evident in the pages of the New York Beacon, his most ambitious journalistic undertaking. In 1841 when he was forced to leave New York for some months, he left the paper in the hands of Fellows. In Fellows' charge, the paper took on a scholarly, rather than scientific caste.

Sometime in the late 1830's, Fellows made the acquaintance of the young Walt Whitman who remembered his old friend by the title of Colonel Fellows, an honorary appellation awarded him by virtue of his age, moral character, and intellectual integrity.

In his seventies, the now whitehaired, venerable free thinker was

still valiantly assailing the strongholds of orthodox Christianity and planning to publish an attack on the book of Revelation. The work never appeared in print and seems to have disappeared.

During his last years, he worked as a constable in the New York city courts, and it is in this capacity that Whitman remembered him. On January 4th, 1844, Fellows died, and The New York Tribune, the following day, ran this notice:

Colonel John Fellows, a relic of "the times that try men's souls," died yesterday in our city aged 84. He was the companion and friend of Tom Paine and we believe also of Thomas Jefferson. The funeral is on Saturday at three o'clock at his residence.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dexter, op. cit., IV, 265.
2. Boston, 1896-1908, p. 595.
3. Unpublished letter in the Military Records Division, National Archives, Washington, D. C.
4. New York Beacon, January 13, 1844.
5. New York, 1901, II, 429, 440, III, 24.
6. New York, 1942, II, 27.
7. Unpublished letter, October 26, 1793, New-York Historical Society.
8. Rare Books Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.
9. New York, 1915-1928, V, listed under May 22 and July 16 of 1809.
10. May 22, 1809; May 31, 1809; July 16, 1809; July 28, 1809.
11. "Precise History of the Theophilanthropists," The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York, 1945), II, 746.
12. Francis B. Heitman, The Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army (Washington, D. C., 1908), p. 416.
13. Military Records Division, National Archives.

CHAPTER III

DEISM IN COLONIAL AMERICA

Before considering Fellows in relation to the intellectual currents of his age and his close associations with Paine and Palmer, it will be necessary to examine briefly the general complex of ideas and values operating in revolutionary America with particular reference to deism, the current of philosophical thought which dominated Fellows' mind.

In the transition from medieval to modern, many movements, philosophic and scientific, developed to accommodate the expanding areas of human interest. One of these, predominantly theological and moral in connotation, has been called deism.

Deism constituted the religious phase of the struggle of human reason against traditional authority. The deist, enlightened by new horizons of learning, condemned the intolerance of Christianity and the barbarousness of its history. He reacted against the inhuman concept of exclusive salvation and special revelation.

The clearest delineation of the nature of deism can be found in the work of Arthur O. Lovejoy. Lovejoy finds the basis of deism to consist in a complex of ideas and attitudes which underlies all ideological phases of the Enlightenment.

The fundamental principle of this underlying philosophy of the Enlightenment was the uniformity of the reasoning faculty. The power to reason was presumed to operate in a simple and identical fashion among all men at all times.

Lovejoy gives the name uniformitarianism to:

the first and fundamental principle of this general and pervasive philosophy of the Enlightenment. The reason, it is assumed to be evident, is identical in all men; and the life of reason therefore, it is tacitly or explicitly inferred, must admit no diversity.¹

From this it followed that all difference and divergence in opinion on important subjects must be in error. Those beliefs and convictions particular to one nation or culture, tradition or epoch, were by virtue of their uniqueness, suspect. The universality of an idea was taken as evidence of its veracity. Logically enough, historical traditions came to be regarded as corruptions of the original truth of things; for it had been through these avenues that the superstitious and the unique elements had been introduced into human institutions. The task of the religious reformer of the Enlightenment is clear; he must bring mankind to an appreciation of those fundamental and reasonable elements which comprise the universal experience of mankind.

Consequently, there must be one church and one creed acceptable to all. In this attitude the deist came close to the Catholic concept of Christianity. Christianity, however, contained many notions and dogmas which were peculiar to the culture and history of Europe; and furthermore, many of these were miraculous and mysterious in nature, and not at all subject to rational demonstration. Finally the deists regarded Christianity as contrary to the ideal of uniform rationality because its revelation and promised salvation were limited to a narrow segment of mankind.

It was these special, revealed aspects to which the deists objected, and consequently the struggle between the rationalistic and orthodox factions turned on the question of which was the road to truth, reason or revelation.

The fundamental epistemological concept implicit in all deistic thought was that the human reason could arrive at ultimate truth by a process involving common sense and rational observation of the operation of nature. "The essence of deism consists in the view that the existence and sovereignty of the divine being may be discovered by man's reason unassisted by revelation."²

As has been suggested, the eighteenth-century predilection toward the general or universal, coupled with its multiple contacts with other cultures, tended to sophisticate the European mind. Men had become aware of the general nature of religious experience, and this resulted in a new tolerance and understanding which in turn produced efforts to create a philosophical system which would include all religious conceptions. From Lord Herbert of Cherbury to Thomas Paine, we see the expression of this need to couple reason with the experience of all men. Though deism had many motifs, its basic theme is the rejection of the esoteric and special.

This attitude was a logical, if not inevitable product of the Renaissance, with its reforming and humanistic tendencies, and of the economic and geographical expansion of Europe. The Protestant Reformation with its freedom of conscience contributed to the development of the new rationalism, for as the Protestant writers attacked the Roman Catholic tradition, they found it necessary to resort to arguments based on

reason. This practice Leslie Stephen described as:

forging the weapons which were soon to be used against themselves. The assumptions which were common to them and to their antagonists naturally escaped any strict scrutiny, though it was presently to appear that they were equally assailable by the methods employed against assumptions actually disputed.⁵

The Protestant emphasis on reason over authority in matters of ceremony and organization was eventually transferred to all aspects of the Christian religion. On one hand, it produced numerous radical sects whose theology stopped little short of madness: the Antinomian, the Diggers, the Ranters and others; on the other hand, it ushered in a new age of scepticism. Collins, the deist, aptly summed up the ironical result of this theological rationalism when he remarked that no one doubted the existence of the Deity until the Boyle lecturers had undertaken to prove it.

Newton in his science and Locke in his psychology unwittingly introduced other conceptions which we now recognize as fundamental to eighteenth-century rationalism. Locke's contribution to this philosophy is contained in his Essay on the Human Understanding, which is a powerful defense of reason against the usurpations of authority. Locke's epistemology made knowledge dependent on sense experience and undermined the Platonic doctrine of innate ideas. Subsequent thinkers distrusted those affective intuitions which had previously comprised the basis of deductive philosophy, and the spiritual and esthetic aspects of the human soul were divorced from the reason and fell into disrepute.

But if Locke had demonstrated that the spiritual faculties were not necessary to an understanding of man's nature, then Newton was to do the

same for the world; for the new physics depicted the universe as a self-operating machine not needing divine intervention to function. Thus Newton complimented the work of Locke in separating God from the world. A rather remarkable illustration of this new philosophy is contained in a contemporary comment:

"I perceive", said the Countess, "Philosophy is now become very Mechanical." "So mechanical", said I, "that I fear we shall quickly be asham'd of it; they will have the World to be in great, what a watch is little; which is very regular, & depends only upon the just disposing of the several parts of the movement. But pray tell me Madam, had you not formerly a more sublime idea of the Universe?"⁴

Both Newton and Locke professed more or less orthodox Anglicanism; they did not abandon religion but merely relegated God to the role of ultimate causality. They saw the world as material and mechanical in its operation and tried to explain it in terms of objective relationships rather than spiritual metaphors or metaphysical paradoxes.

Basil Willey shows the manner in which a "scientific" explanation replaced a theological one:

The spots on the moon's surface might be due, theologically, to the fact that it was God's will they should be there; scientifically they might be "explained" as the craters of extinct volcanoes. The newer explanation may be said, not so much to contain "more" truth than the older, as to supply the kind of truth which was not demanded.⁵

It is important to recognize that this new attitude resulted from a shifting of values as well as from an increase in knowledge. The values of the medieval world were not exploded so much as ignored. There was a new world on the horizon of man's vision and the old one was dying.

Many men looked longingly back to the order and perfection of the old order and felt that the new science called all in doubt.

For the world's beauty is decay'd or gone--
 Beauty, that's color and proportion.
 We think the heavens enjoy their spherical,
 Their round proportion, embracing all;
 But yet their various and perplexed course,
 Observ'd in divers ages, doth enforce
 Men to find out so many eccentric parts,
 Such divers downright lines, such overthwarts,
 As disproportion that pure form. It tears
 The firmament in eight and forty shires,
 And in those constellations then arise
 New stars, and old do vanish from our eyes,
 As though heav'n suff'ered earthquakes, peace or war,
 When new towers rise and old demolish'd are.⁶

Out of this general confusion of old and new, deism emerges as basically an attempt to reconcile the two orders. The problem of the deist was how to hold on to the basic values of religion in a world operated by mechanical principles and not spiritual ones. No deist from Herbert to Paine ever considered himself an enemy of true religion; for, to the early deists particularly, it was a matter not of attacking Christianity but of saving it. They regarded themselves as staunch defenders of true religion by attacking superstition. The compromise they worked out retained God as a first cause but denied the validity of revelation, miracles and providence. In a sense, they made the supernatural supernatural, and placed God outside of the universe, which operated independently after the original act of the prime mover.⁷

This compromise reserving the Deity, man's free will, and immortal soul satisfied liberal thinkers until the nineteenth century when the study of biology revealed disturbing affinities between all forms of life, and a new dynamic conception of life in transition emerged. But by this time deism had ceased to be an active element in man's intellectual

development.

Even though our sketch of deism is by necessity highly condensed, we must distinguish two principal types. Although all deists established the existence of God through reason, some arrived at the ultimate principle by consulting the nature of the universe and others reached the same conclusion by a consideration of the nature of man. The first approach was developed by Newton and his followers and the second by Shaftesbury and subsequent thinkers. Neither view is mutually exclusive, varying in emphasis rather than conception.

Two major forms in the eighteenth century may be designated as scientific deism and humanistic deism. The former, which derives from the scientific method and discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton, professes to discover God through the signs of order and contrivance in the physical universe; the latter, which derives from Shaftesbury's moral-philosophical speculation, professes to discover God through the moral nature of man.⁸

Shaftesbury perceived a logical order of things evinced by the moral perfectibility of mankind.

Shaftesbury's identical end of supporting faith in the divine order was based on arguments from a contrary direction. His declared purpose was to lead his readers "into such an Apprehension of the Constitution of Mankind and of human Affairs, as might form in 'em a notion of Order in Things, and draw hence an Acknowledgment of that Wisdom, Goodness, and Beauty, which is supreme." The glimpse of the divine being which the Newtonians sought in the natural universe, Shaftesbury discovered in man.⁹

With this general background, deism developed in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In its early forms, it found expression in the works of Shaftesbury, Samuel Clark, William Wollaston and others.

In the work of such a man as Clark, the question is one of demonstrating the existence of God from the natural order of things as a complement to revelation; with Wollaston, it becomes a question of rejecting revelation altogether and recognizing only proofs accessible to human reason.

There was, moreover, a general tendency on the part of these English thinkers to identify the evils and oppressions of human society in the Gothic ages with the ascendancy of religious superstition over truth and science. For these men, salvation was to be achieved by the elevation of reason at the expense of authoritarian traditions. Human perfectibility, as evinced in Godwin, Paine and Elihu Palmer, was largely a question of overcoming the evil influence of the Clergy and allowing the beneficent power of human reason free play.

All of these intellectual currents and unspoken assumptions were alive and formative in the evolution of the philosophic consciousness underlying the American Revolution.

From the earliest days, the diversity of colonizing ethnic groups and the absence of any integrated and organized aristocracy supporting a single theological view has tended to encourage a freedom of conscience in the American Colonies. In a land with a diversity of creeds, it was necessary to find a middle path which would accommodate all. This effort to compromise, created conditions in which the most radical speculation might be tolerated.

Though the conditions were favorable, the seed of scepticism had to be imported from the mother country. In the early part of the eighteenth century, many liberal, theological works had been circulating among the clergy and educated men in the north and among the landed

aristocracy in the south. These radical tendencies did not assume threatening proportions, however, until the period of the French and Indian War. Deism, which had started in the seventeenth century as an intellectual movement restricted to the aristocracy and educated clergy, by the middle of the eighteenth century had become popular with the common man:

The history of the 18th century with respect to deism is the story of its gradual filtration from the philosopher to the common man. In Europe this process was already advanced and as the second half of the century established increased contacts between the two hemispheres, the common man in America was brought into contact with its principles.¹⁰

Swift seeing this general drift away from the "system of the Gospels" or revealed religion, as early as 1708 had commented ironically:

The system of the Gospels, after fate of other systems, is generally antiquated and exploded; and the mass or body of the common people, among whom it seems to have had its latest credit, are now grown as much ashamed of it as their betters; opinions, like fashions, always descending from those of quality to the middle sort, and thence to the vulgar, where at length they are dropped and vanish.¹¹

Though both Locke and Newton were being read in the Colonies as early as 1714, it remained for the British troops in America during the French and Indian War to introduce deism as a significant factor in the intellectual consciousness of the Colonies. Ezra Stiles, writing in 1759, thought this to be the case:

I imagine the American Morals & Religion were never in so much danger as from our Concern with the Europeans in the present War. They put on indeed in their public Conduct the Mark of public Virtue-and the officers endeavor to restrain the vices of the private Soldiery while on Duty. But I take it the Religion of the Army

is Infidelity & Gratification of the appetites.... They propagate in a genteel & insensible Manner the most corrupting and debauching Principles of Behavior. It is doubted by many Officers if in fact the Soul survives the Body -- but if it does, they ridicule the notion of moral accountableness, Rewards & Punishments in another life.... I look upon it that our Officers are in danger of being corrupted with vicious principles, & many of them I doubt not will in the End of the War come home minute philosophers initiated in the polite Mysteries & vitiated morals of Deism.¹²

After the Peace of Paris in 1763, a new influence in the form of French immigration became increasingly evident. "Upon the conclusion of the peace in 1763, numerous French soldiers of fortune, hair-dressers, dancing masters, adventurers, and ne'er-do-wells came to the New World."¹³

This occasioned an interest in the French language and French thought. The works of Voltaire, Rousseau and other radical French thinkers were read. From the middle of the eighteenth century on, deism became increasingly popular in the Colonies. Franklin, an early convert to deism, writes in his autobiography:

I was scarce fifteen when, after doubting by turns of several points, as I found them disputed in the different books I read, I began to doubt Revelation itself. Some books against Deism fell into my hands; they were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle's Lectures. It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, I soon became a thorough Deist.¹⁴

It is important to note however that this sceptical disposition was pretty well limited to middle class intellectuals and well educated aristocrats. There was little missionary zeal among the ranks of the enlightened. The revolutionary social implications of deistic speculation

was not congenial to the ruling classes in the Colonies. As a correspondent pointed out in Palmer's Temple of Reason:

Very few rich men; or, at least men in the higher grades of society, and who receive a liberal education, care anything about the Christian religion. They cast off the yoke of superstition themselves; yet, for the sake of finding obedient servants, they would continue to impose it on the poor.¹⁵

This conservative quality was characteristic of the early development of deism in the Colonies. It was not until post-revolutionary times that an effort was made to introduce its doctrines into the popular mind. In New England, liberal theology was in part a reaction against the enthusiasm of the Puritan divines. Franklin and others found in it, the antidote for the excesses of the Puritan ethic. In the South, the Anglican clergy, lax in its own convictions, did nothing to combat the growing scepticism. In both the North and South the general acceleration of deistic speculation was stimulated by the Revolution. The alliance with France brought American soldiers into contact with free-thinkers and rationalists more radical than the English officers of the 1750's.

A veneer of culture seems to have been a standard weapon of the deists:

As men of some learning and of an insinuating polished address, they were skillful proselytizers, answering arguments with a sneering smile or effective shrug. Thus, American officers imbibed the ideas of the continental philosophers without necessarily intimately knowing at first hand their writings.¹⁶

Furthermore in an effort to justify their break with the mother country and their rebellion against a lawful king, the leaders of the

revolution were forced to turn to the philosophers of natural rather than legal rights. The authors of the Declaration believed that justice and human rights were a part of the order of nature and not a product of traditional human institutions. From a rejection of traditional authority in political matters, it is a short step to a similar rejection in spiritual ones.

A discreet deist was Thomas Jefferson who fell from grace through reading Bolingbroke in his early twenties. In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson expressed the naturalism and optimism of the Enlightenment in his references to the "Laws of Nature," "Nature's God" and human equality.¹⁷

By the close of the war, deism had gained a foothold in the traditionally conservative, educational institutions of New England. Lyman Beecher who had attended Yale in 1793 wrote:

The college church was almost extinct. Most of the students were skeptical, and rowdies were plenty.... That was the day of the infidelity of the Tom Paine School. Boys that dressed flax in the barn, as I used to, read Tom Paine and believed him; I read, and fought him all the way. Never had any propensity to infidelity. But most of the class before me were infidels, and called each other Voltaire, Rousseau, D'Alembert, etc., etc.¹⁸

Conditions were similar at Princeton; the Reverend Dr. Johnston wrote: "there were only three or four who made any pretensions to piety and prayer were attended by none except the tutors and three or four students."¹⁹

Around this time, appeared the first openly anti-Christian book published in America. It was written jointly by Ethan Allen, the war hero, and Thomas Young, an itinerant physician, and was called, Reason,

the Only Oracle of Man, or a Compenduous System of Natural Religion.²⁰

The work was published with Allen as author, but John Pell, in his biography of Allen, maintains that it was based largely on the notes of Young who had died.²¹

Although the work was poorly written and never gained a wide audience, it does serve to characterize the sort of thinking common to this period; and ten years later when Paine's Age of Reason was published, the latter immediately enjoyed a tremendous vogue, sounding the challenge to orthodox theology that preluded a struggle to the death between the freethinkers and the faithful.

All over the country in town and rural districts, deistic societies and publications sprang into existence. Receiving impetus from the early liberal enthusiasms of the French Revolution, these radical forces seemed to threaten the very existence of Christianity.

FOOTNOTES

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3. History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1949), I, 79.
4. Fontenelle, Plurality of Worlds, 1686, as quoted by Basil Willey, Seventeenth Century Background (New York, 1953), p. 11.
5. Willey, op. cit., p. 13.
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7. Samuel Leslie Bethell, The Cultural Revolution of the Seventeenth Century (London, 1951), p. 57.
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9. Ibid, p. 299.
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11. Jonathan Swift, An Argument to Prove that the Abolishing of Christianity in England May, As Things now Stand, Be Attended with Some Inconveniencies in The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, ed. Temple Scott (London, 1909), III, 6.
12. Letter, September 24, 1759, quoted in I. Woodbridge Riley, American Philosophy, the Early Schools (New York, 1907), p. 217.
13. Howard M. Jones, America and French Culture, 1750-1848 (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1947), p. 124.
14. The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, ed, A. H. Smyth (New York, 1905-1907), I, 295.

15. New York, November 8, 1800.
16. Richard J. Purcell, Connecticut in Transition, 1775-1818 (Washington 1918), p. 9.
17. Albert Post, Popular Freethought in America, 1825-1850 (New York, 1943), pp. 17-18.
18. Lyman Beecher, Autobiography, ed, Charles Beecher (New York, 1864), 1, 43.
19. The Autobiography and Ministerial Life of the Rev. John Johnston, D. D., ed. James Carnahan (New York 1856), p. 31.
20. Ethan Allen, Reason the Only Oracle of Man (State of Vermont, 1784).
21. John Pell, Ethan Allen (Boston, 1929), p. 9.

CHAPTER IV

FELLOWS AND ELIHU PALMER

Against this background of intellectual turmoil and contention, Fellows established a bookstore in New York, a hotbed of deistic activity. He at once associated himself with the radical elements which were supporting the French Revolution and Jeffersonian Democracy on one hand, and attacking Christian ideology and the clergy, on the other.

Fellows' espousal of the deistic cause is not surprising when one considers that the period of his education coincides with the rise of sceptical philosophy in New England, and that he had an early, close association with Joel Barlow. As we have seen, he continued to correspond with Barlow and published his books in this country, along with the works of other radical thinkers.

In 1794, Elihu Palmer stopped in New York while on a trip from Georgia to Connecticut and stayed to form one of the most controversial organizations in American intellectual history. At the time he arrived in New York, there was a political club with deistical sympathies already in existence called the Tammany Society or Columbian Order.

This group had been started around 1785, and by the time Palmer arrived, it had become associated with the Democratic Clubs that were active during Genet's stay in the United States. Although Genet's un-diplomatic actions had impaired the popularity of the French Revolution, a number of political and philosophical radicals continued to support the ideals of natural religion and were already equipped to provide an

organization for a man of Palmer's talents.

One of these was John Fellows, who indeed has left the best account of Palmer's life and activities in the form of a memoir sent to Richard Carlile, the London publisher, around 1823. The letter to Carlile reads in part:

I am informed by Mr. Carver of this city, that you are desirous of obtaining for publication any writings of our deceased friend, Elihu Palmer, which he may have left unpublished; and also such notices of his life as may be thought worth recording. My respect for the memory of Mr. Palmer as well as for the cause in which you are engaged, are sufficient inducements for me, as far as it lies in my power, to comply with your wishes. I accordingly send you a manuscript composed by him, which was never printed, entitled the "Political World."¹

According to the Fellows' memoir, Palmer was born in 1764, in Connecticut. He attended Dartmouth and graduated in 1787. Then he studied divinity and became a minister. Early in his career he preached a sermon at Sheffield, the hometown of Fellows.

Instead of expatiating upon the horrid and awful conditions of mankind in consequence of the lapse of Adam and his wife, he exhorted his hearers to spend the day joyfully in innocent festivity, and to render themselves as happy as possible.²

The tenor of this advice, Fellows concludes, suggests that Palmer was ill adapted for a pulpit.

After a number of unsuccessful attempts to establish himself as a minister, he studied law in Philadelphia and was admitted to the bar. However during the same year an epidemic of the Yellow Plague took his sight and compelled him to abandon this profession.

He was now left blind, and without resources to aid him to grope his way in the darkness; with little sympathy or disposition in the sectarians of any denomination to lend a helping hand to sooth his misfortune. Indeed, some did not scruple to pronounce it a judgment of God for his unbelief.³

In these desperate circumstances, he arrived in New York and found an organized body of deists ready for his leadership. Fellows, a member of this group, notes that they asked Palmer to lecture to them:

which he assented to without hesitation; and a large assembly room being obtained for the purpose, he commenced the following Sunday. A small society was formed to aid his exertions; which assumed, without disguise, the name of Deistical Society. This appellation was advocated by Mr. Palmer, although some others were in favor of that of Theophilanthropist, as being less frightful to fanatics, not many of whom would understand the term.⁴

Fellows lists the eleven principles upon which the society was founded:

1. That the universe proclaims the existence of one supreme Deity, worthy the adoration of intelligent beings.
2. That man is possessed of moral and intellectual faculties sufficient for the improvement of his nature, and the acquisition of happiness.
3. That the religion of nature is the only universal religion; that it grows out of the moral relations of intelligent beings, and that it stands connected with the progressive improvement and common welfare of the human race.
4. That it is essential to the true interest of man, that he love truth and practise virtue.
5. That vice is every where ruinous and destructive to the happiness of the individual and of society.
6. That a benevolent disposition, and beneficent actions, are fundamental duties of rational beings.

7. That a religion mingled with persecution and malice cannot be of divine origin.
8. That education and science are essential to the happiness of man.
9. That civil and religious liberty is equally essential to his true interests.
10. That there can be no human authority to which man ought to be amenable for his religious opinions.
11. That science and truth, virtue and happiness, are the great objects to which the activity and energy of the human faculties ought to be directed.⁵

It is of some interest to compare Palmer's deistic tenents with those of America's most distinguished deist, Benjamin Franklin. In his autobiography, Franklin proposed the creation of a society based on principles of natural religion somewhat reminiscent of Palmer's. Though both men had a similar starting point in their avowed adherence to deistical ideas, there are differences which indicate the more radical position of the later thinker. Franklin's thought is characteristic of early eighteenth-century English speculation, while Palmer's, coming later, reveals the influence of Voltaire, Volney, Paine and others. Writing in 1731, Franklin proposed to raise:

a United Party for Virtue, by forming the virtuous and good men of all nations into a regular body, to be govern'd by suitable good and wise rules, which good and wise men may probably be more unanimous in their obedience to, than common people are to common laws.⁶

Then Franklin listed his principles, and though they agree with Palmer's on one or two important points, they are significantly different on others.

That there is one God, who made all things.
That he governs the world by his providence.

That he ought to be worshiped by adoration, prayer
and thanksgiving.
But that the most acceptable service of God is doing
good to man.
That the soul is immortal.
And that God will certainly reward virtue and punish
vice either here or hereafter.⁷

Franklin writing in this earlier period clearly recognizes the immortality of the soul, Divine providence, and the possibility of rewards and punishments in the hereafter. These three traditional, religious conceptions do not appear on Palmer's list. Deists like Palmer and Fellows rejected providence and hell, and regarded the question of immortality as a matter of great doubt.

Although Palmer's thought is more radical, both men viewed religion as a social institution which should limit itself to the direction of men in moral matters. The creed of belief should be simple and accessible to all men, and it should not concern itself with involved metaphysical and cosmological questions, but rather encourage virtuous living. On this point Franklin remarked that:

Tho' my scheme was not wholly without religion, there was in it no mark of any of the distinguishing tenets of any particular sect. I had purposely avoided them; for, being fully persuaded that the utility and excellency of my method, and that it might be serviceable to people in all religions, and intending some time or other to publish it, I would not have any thing in it that should prejudice any, of any sect, against it.⁸

In general it might be said the ideas of Palmer are a more radical elaboration of the basic deistic principles held by Franklin.

Despite its auspicious beginnings, the Deistical Society of New York was never very successful. The primary reason seems to have been a lack of financial support. Although the upper classes were sceptical

enough in the privacy of their own homes, when it came to lending support to a radical organization aiming at an intellectual re-evaluation of man's spiritual and social existence, they were not at all anxious to contribute. Contemporary property relations, then as now, would not bear too close scrutiny.

Fellows noted that the failure of the society to achieve financial solvency: "...there were not many who were disposed to contribute for the support of the principles and those for the most part, limited in means."⁹

In 1794, Fellows was active in the publishing business and published some of Palmer's works: An Enquiry relative to the Moral & Political Improvement of the Human Species, which was an oration delivered in the city of New York on the twenty-first anniversary of American Independence, and The Examiners Examined: Being a Defense of the Age of Reason.

Two years later Fellows published his own first important commentary on Christianity; The Character and Doctrines of Jesus Christ, from the Author's Manuscript (New York, 1796). The heart of Jesus' teachings, according to Fellows, is to be found in the concept of philanthropy and a simple worship of God as a first cause in nature.

Despite his best efforts, Palmer was unable to make a going thing of the New-York Society of Deists. By 1798, he was making excursions to other cities to augment his financial resources; and in that year, we find Fellows writing to Horatio Gates asking help for Palmer:

I take the liberty of enclosing you an oration delivered in this city last July by Elihu Palmer, by which you will be able to appreciate his merits. His peculiar misfortune I presume you are not unacquainted with. He has been labouring in this city for upwards of two years without a prospect of

emoliment amidst the reproaches of civil and religious bigotry, for the amelioration of mankind, by the destruction of the greatest enemy of his felicity, that of the tyrant, prejudice. He has not met with that support which his talent existing under the banner of superstition and Aristocracy would have insured him. He proposes leaving this city the last of this or the beginning of next week for the interior of Pennsylvania, provided he can free himself from pressing embarrassments, and procure the means necessary for the journey. As the offices of humanity are equally binding upon all, this address in my opinion needs no apology. From the bigot and the enemies of civil improvement no aid in this case could be expected; but from the friend of liberty Mr. Palmer ought to expect aid and encouragement. To such is this letter addressed.¹⁰

It was natural that Fellows should address such a request to Horatio Gates. Like his friend Jefferson, Gates was openly democratic in politics and privately deistic in religious sentiments. He was an opponent of the Federalists and a consistent supporter of the French Revolution even in its darkest days, an attitude which cost him many of his oldest friends.

In 1790, he sold his plantation in Virginia, freed and provided for his slaves and moved to Rose Hill farm outside of New York city. It was here that Gates was living, now in his sixties, when Fellows wrote on behalf of Palmer.

The success of the Republicans in 1800 changed the course of events for a time. Jefferson in office gave new life to the waning enthusiasm of the Deistic Society, and some of the members initiated a weekly newspaper called The Temple of Reason. Dennis Driscoll, a renegade Jesuit from Ireland, was the editor. Palmer still lectured, and the paper supported his sermons by advertising and discussing them. The articles in the paper are largely unsigned, but their sympathies are clearly those of Paine, Volney, Godwin, and Palmer. Palmer's lectures were delivered at different places in the city. In 1800, The Temple of Reason ran a

general notice on these lectures for some months:

Mr. Palmer, still continues to deliver public discourses every Sunday evening at six o'clock, at Lovett's long room in Broadway. The object of these discourses, is to disclose and mark with discriminating precision, moral principles by which human existence ought to be governed -- To prove that God is immutable, and that the working of miracles is inconsistent with the nature of the character of God.¹¹

John Francis, the well-known nineteenth-century American physician, in his book New York, 1807-1857, recalled Palmer and his lecturers as being held for a time at the Union Hotel in William Street. He also recalled Fellows and Palmer as associates and friends: "Palmer's strongest personal friends were John Fellowes an author of some volumes; Rose and unfortunate lawyer; Taylor, a philanthropist; and Charles Christian."¹²

In 1801, The Temple of Reason was moved by Driscoll to Philadelphia as a result of a squabble over money between himself and the Deistical Society or the Columbian Illuminati, as they were also called. The society still remained active, but all its efforts to expand seemed doomed to fail.

The meetings of the society were held in secret and consequently little is known about the details of their activities. However John Wood, an orthodox critic, in 1802, published an expose of the infidel society, and its political relationships to DeWitt Clinton. Wood is rather prejudiced as a critic, and he described the meetings as consisting in:

Metaphysical discussions, and decisions of questions proposed by the President, or some of the members. These questions were, with some few exceptions, no otherwise criminal than as being opposed to the divine revelation, and calculated to throw an appearance of ridicule on every thing christian. Those questions which were of a more serious nature, and a deeper and

blacker complexion were reserved to the meetings of the individual grades, which met separately at Palmer's house.... Palmer's Principles of Nature, was the text book to all members.¹³

Wood describes these meetings as "riotous and obscene" and records an incident at one meeting as proof:

A bald headed Caledonian, once an orator in the Edinburgh convention, though now in America, forced to stroll about, to teach wh--s to dance and negroes to fiddle, rose with majestic gravity, in order to argue with David Denniston, the impropriety of having a president or superior in their midst. In the depth of his argument, an unlucky spider, like Pindar's louse, dropped "with legs sprawling" on the infidel's head. -- The young attorney in eager anxiety to rescue his brother, from the insect's venom, snatched the staff of authority which Palmer held, but not being a skilful marksman, in place of destroying the little tenant of the loom, he knocked the fiddler down--The confusion which ensued, may be easier conceived than described.¹⁴

The David Denniston mentioned in the episode was DeWitt Clinton's cousin and editor of the Clintonian paper, The American Citizen and Watchtower. The deists were supporters of Clinton and it seems clear some kind of connection existed between the Clintonian faction and Palmer's organization. Wood makes this charge and says that the deistic society received DeWitt Clinton's patronage.

But this harmony between the politicians and the freethinkers was shortlived. So long as the liberal speculators were upperclass, arm-chair philosophers toying with deism as an intellectual game, the clergy and their supporters felt no alarm; but when deism, under the stimulus of Palmer, Paine and other propagandists, became militant and threatened to undermine the position of Christianity, then the champions of orthodoxy collected themselves and rallied to the defense of their faith. Deism rapidly became unpopular, and the more circumspect members of the

Deistic organizations began to return to the fold. The Republican political leaders sensed the trend and quickly broke their ties with the radical philosophers. Dr. Francis described this change:

Public opinion, as I have already intimated, had become somewhat doubtful as to the wisdom which marked the French revolution. Many, once seemingly secure in the light of nature alone, now felt themselves led into a delusion, the results of which threatened more temporal inconvenience.... Few were so blind as not to see that infidelity, wrapt in the mantle of the sovereign rights of the people, indulged the hope of her triumphant establishment, and the downfall of the strongest pillars of the Christian faith.¹⁵

In 1802, The Temple of Reason at Philadelphia failed, and Palmer started a new journal in New York called the Prospect, or View of the Moral World. Palmer had married in that year, and his wife helped him with the paper. Fellows has described Mrs. Palmer as "a woman of good sense, and fine moral feelings, and possessed as strong an interest as her husband in promoting the cause of truth."¹⁶

With the aid of his wife, Palmer now took up the work of the defunct Temple of Reason in the Prospect. The purpose of the paper, like its predecessors, was to consider religious and moral principles in the light of reason in order to arrive at truth. Palmer, like Godwin and so many other nineteenth century philosophers, believed the truth to be invincible. Truth must emerge supreme in any contest with error or superstition. All that was necessary was an expression of this divine truth to assure its triumph: "Whatever is divine is true, and will pass safely the intellectual ordeal of individuals, nations, and ages. It should be presumed then that the friends of Christianity would rejoice in a periodical publication of this kind."¹⁷ But the paper was not to be

limited to religion alone: "But it is not to the examination of religious subjects alone that this paper will be confined; it opens itself also to the reception of all moral, philosophical, and literary productions, useful to society, and calculated to augment the science and happiness of human life."¹⁸

Affairs seemed to prosper for a time, and Palmer continued to publish the Prospect and to give his weekly lectures. These were of course advertised in the paper: "Public Discourses, moral and Philosophical subjects, will be delivered by the Editor every Sunday evening, at 6 o'clock at Snow's Long room no. 89 Broad-Way."¹⁹

By August 1804, Palmer was trying to raise enough money to build a "Temple of Nature."

A plan is now under consideration, in this city, for the purchase of a lot, and the erection of a building intended to be used for the worship of One God Supreme and Benevolent Creator of the world; and for other purposes of a literary kind. To facilitate an object so important, a meeting of the friends to Natural Religion will be convened on Monday evening next, at seven o'clock, at Snow's, no. 89, Broadway; at which time and place all persons who wish to encourage this plan, are respectfully invited to attend.²⁰

Paine, in America at this time was also involved in this project, as well as Fellows as will be demonstrated by a letter quoted later in this paper.²¹

Several meetings were held, but not enough money was obtained, and nothing more came of the project. Once more, the problem of money had undermined the efforts of the deists. Nor was the Prospect solvent; several notices appeared asking the subscribers to pay their debts. Finally in March of 1804, Palmer announced to his patrons:

The Editor, therefore, informs his subscribers, that the publication of the Prospect will be suspended for four weeks, and he earnestly solicits all the subscribers to make payment during that time, by which he will be enabled to proceed with regularity, and without embarrassment.²²

But the journal never reappeared; the Prospect had met the same fate as the earlier deistic journalistic efforts.

This was the end for Palmer; a year later he was dead. Blinded and embittered, he had finished his days a poverty-stricken failure. His principles, like those of Paine were too radical to win the support of the upper middle class, and his bid for popular support was crushed by the reaction among the common people against that intellectual liberalism which had characterized the revolutionary period.

Another deistic thinker, whom Fellows had close association with, was the eccentric, English philosopher and adventurer, John (Walking) Stewart. Stewart is perhaps one of the most unique figures in this period. The facts of his life are so romantic that in a work of fiction they would pass belief.

At sixteen he went to India to work as a clerk. This however did not suit the imaginative young Stewart, and he soon gained employment as an interpreter for an Indian Nabob. Subsequently he was made a General in the Army of the Indian ruler and lived through many remarkable experiences. He left India a rich man and traveled through Persia and Turkey on foot, thus earning the title "Walking Stewart."

In 1796, he came to the United States and was active in Philadelphia and New York, lecturing and writing. Around this time he published a work of Poetry and philosophy; The Revelation of Nature, and The Prophecy of Reason. The unusual personality of this man is very

apparent in the prospectus of one of his lectures:

A series of Lectures, or a New Practical System of Human Reason, calculated to discharge the mind from a great mass of error, and to facilitate its labor in the approximation of moral truth, divested of all metaphysical perplexities and nullities; Accommodated to the Most Ordinary Capacities, in a Simple Method, which dispenses equally with the study of the college or the lecture of musty libraries.²³

During this period, Stewart and Fellows became acquainted and lived together for one winter in the same room. Years later, Fellows described their friendship in a letter to Julius Ames:

I have received through Mr. Vale your valuable present of six copies of the Bible of Nature, for which I return my thanks. It contains a complete body of Philosophical Divinity, or of a Divine philosophy, selected with great judgement. He who peruses it, with as much attention as religionists generally do the stupid Jew Scriptures, will acquire all the knowledge necessary to his well being and happiness. He can then throw to the wind the frightful stories which priestcraft has portrayed of the misery to be endured in another life, and enjoy the present in doing good to his fellowmen, free from the dread of eternal torments on account of his opinions, whether correct or otherwise.

I perceive you have drawn freely from the writings of my old friend, John Stewart. He and myself were inmates, in New York, during one winter, occupying the same room. He kept one window of our chamber a little down from the top, and sometimes rose from his bed in the night and took a few turns across the room, which he called bathing in air. He rose in the morning at daylight, and walked several miles out of the city, returning generally before I had quit my morning bed, bringing a mutton chop and a sixpenny loaf of bread for his breakfast. Mutton was the only meat he ate at this time, considering it the most innocent animal used for food.

Mr. Stewart, when he returned from the East, wore the Hindoo costume, and adopted the diet of that country. Mr. Paine related an amusing anecdote of him in this respect. The first animal food he partook of after his return, says Mr. Paine, was oysters, which he addressed as follows. -- "I will change your predicament for the better; I will make you a part of John Stewart." Mr. S. told me, that, when traveling in India, he was impressed into the service

of one of its Nabobs, (which I do not recollect) who was carrying on a war with one of the other powers. The Nabob observed that being an Englishman he must understand warfare, and directed him to take charge of a company of his people. Stewart was cut down with a saber blow upon his head. This misfortune contributed, I apprehend, to his excentricity. He was a very pleasant companion -- was never offended at having any of his opinions controverted but on the contrary expressed his approbation of it, saying that was the right way to elicit truth.

He lost by purchasing an annuity in the French governmental funds, being in the end paid the interest thereof in Assignats of little value. This somewhat lessened his confidence in popular governments. He told Pitt, he observed, to keep the people down, and he would couch them; but if they are let loose, they will murder me. He had a suit in chancery for twenty years against the East-India company, for services as interpreter with, I believe, the Nabob of Arcot, and finally recovered fifteen thousand pounds sterling, on which he retired as mentioned in your sketch of his life. (I have just finished writing and compiling a small volume, the prospectus of which I inclose. The object of it is to expose the blunders and falsities contained in Col. Humphrey's life of General Putnam, and to award honor to those to whom it is due, in our revolutionary war. Putnam has been vastly over-rated.) As our publishers are extremely cautious at this time undertaking any work, the reputation of which is not well established, I require a very imposing subscription list. I shall be much obliged to you to increase it as far as you conveniently can, return the subscribed within a few weeks.²⁴

FOOTNOTES

1. New York Beacon, October 23, 1841.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. A. H. Smyth, op. cit., 1, 340.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 1, 336.
9. New York Beacon, October 23, 1841.
10. Unpublished letter, July 11, 1798, New-York Historical Society.
11. The Temple of Reason, New York, December 6, 1800.
12. Old New York: or, Reminiscences of the Past Sixty Years (New York, 1866), p. 92.
13. A Full Exposition of the Clintonian Faction, and the Society of the Columbian Illuminati (Newark, 1802), p. 100.
14. Ibid., p. 102.
15. Francis, op. cit., p. 104.
16. New York Beacon, October 23, 1841.
17. Prospect, New York, December 10, 1803.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., August 18, 1804.
21. See page 51.

22. Prospect, March 30, 1805.
23. As quoted by Koch, Republican Religion, pp. 149-150.
24. Unpublished letter, October 7, 1842, New-York Historical Society.

CHAPTER V

FELLOWS AND THOMAS PAINE

Fellows' most interesting relationship was his friendship with Thomas Paine. Paine, a major figure in American Political philosophy, was the guiding light and most important voice in the post-revolutionary deistic movement.

At the election of Jefferson in 1800, Paine was still in France, but it was a France under the absolute rule of Napoleon and hardly congenial to the liberal philosopher, Paine. While he was still abroad, Jefferson, now President, wrote assuring Paine that the present administration would be more hospitable to him than had been the two former.

Fellows' association with Thomas Paine began while Paine was still in France. On June 17, 1795, a 21st New York District Copyright was issued to John Fellows, Jr., for Part One of the Age of Reason, by Thomas Paine.¹ Two years later Paine wrote to Fellows about this copyright and on other matters relative to the publication of some of Paine's works:

Your friend Mr. Caritat being on the point of his departure for America, I make it the opportunity of writing to you. I received two letters from you with some pamphlets a considerable time past, in which you inform me of your entering a copyright of the first part of the Age of Reason: when I return to America we will settle for that matter....

You ask me by your letter to Mr. Caritat for a list of my several works, in order to publish a collection of them. This is an undertaking I have always reserved for myself. It not only belongs to me of right, but nobody but myself can do it; and as every author is accountable (as least in reputation) for his works, he only is the person to do it. If he neglects it in his

life-time the case is altered. It is my intention to return to America in the course of the present year. I shall then do it by subscription, with historical notes. As this work will employ many persons in different parts of the Union, I will confer with you upon the subject, and such part of it as will suit you to undertake, will be at your choice. I have sustained so much loss, by disinterestedness and inattention to money matters, and by accidents, that I am obliged to look closer to my affairs than I have done. The printer (an Englishman) whom I employed here to print the second part of the Age of Reason made a manuscript copy of the work while he was printing it, which he sent to London and sold. It was by this means that an edition of it came out in London....²

In 1795 the Age of Reason was printed by T. and J. Swords for J. Fellows number 131 Water Street, New York City. On August 5, 1795, Paine had written to Benjamin Franklin Bache from Paris sending some tracts, Dissertations Upon First Principles of Government. He requested that extra copies be sent to John Fellows of New York city.³ In 1796 Fellows published Thomas Paine's, The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance.

Paine returned from France in October of 1802, and from then until his death in 1809, he and Fellows were close associates. In his biography of Paine, Conway writes:

Col. John Fellows, always the devoted friend of Paine, was an auctioneer, but in later life was a constable in the city courts. He has left three volumes which show considerable literary ability, industrious research; but these were unfortunately bestowed on such extinct subjects as Freemasonry, the secret of Junius, and controversy concerning General Putnam. It is much to be regretted that Colonel Fellows should not have left a volume concerning Paine, with whom he was in especial intimacy during his last years.⁴

For some months during 1804, Paine and Fellows boarded at the house of James Wilburn in Gold Street. Gilbert Vale, a personal friend of

Fellows, in his biography of Paine, makes the following remarks about this period, obviously based on Fellows' own testimony:

In 1804, Mr. Purdy having left his farm, Mr. Paine hired one Derick to cultivate it, when he and the family of the Bonneilles boarded for some time at Mr. James Wilburn's in Gold Street. At this period Mr. John Fellows, still living in New York, and respected as a good citizen, boarded at the same house, and testifies to the propriety both of Mr. Paine's and Madam Bonneville's conduct.⁵

Vale notes that during the same period, Fellows was a witness for Paine in a suit against him, instituted by James Wilburn over some debts contracted by Madame Bonneville.

On July 9th of that year Paine wrote Fellows from his farm in New Rochelle:

As the weather is now getting hot at New York, and people begin to get out of town, you may as well come up here and help me settle my accounts with the man who lives on the place. You will be able to do this better than I shall, and in the meantime I can go on with my literary works, without having my mind taken off by affairs of a different kind. I have received a packet from Governor Clinton enclosing what I wrote for. If you come up by the stage you will stop at the postoffice, and they will direct you the way to the farm. It is only a pleasant walk. I send a piece for the Prospect; if the plan mentioned in it is pursued, it will open a way to enlarge and give establishment to the deistical church; but of this and some other things we will talk when you come up, and the sooner the better.⁶

The "deistical church" mentioned here was of course Palmer's Temple of Nature, already discussed. Again on April 22, 1805, Paine wrote to Fellows from his farm at New Rochelle:

I send this by the New Rochelle boat and have desired the boatman to call on you with it. He is to bring up Bebia and Thomas and I will be obliged to you to see them safe on board. The boat will leave New York on

Friday.

I have left my pen knife at Carver's. It is, I believe, in the writing desk. It is a small French pen knife that slides into the handle. I wish Carver would look behind the chest in the bed room. I miss some papers that I suppose are fallen down there. The boys will bring up with them one pair of the blankets Mrs. Bonneville took down and also my best blanket which is at Carver's. I send enclosed three dollars for a ream of writing paper and one dollar for some letter paper, and portorage to the boat. I wish you to give the boys some good advice when you go with them, and tell them that the better they behave the better it will be for them. I am now their only dependence, and they ought to know it.⁷

From just these two letters it is apparent that Paine and Fellows were on close terms, and that Fellows is associated with Paine and his friends in their journalistic and political activities. This is further demonstrated by other correspondence between Paine and Fellows. On July 9th of the same year Paine writes to Fellows again from his farm:

I inclose you two pieces for Cheetham's paper, which I wish you to give to him yourself. He may publish one No. in one daily paper, and the other number in the next daily paper, and then both in his country paper. There has been a great deal of anonymous abuse thrown out in federal papers against Mr. Jefferson, but until some names could be got hold of it was fighting the air to take any notice of them. We have now got hold of two names, your townsman Hulbert, the hypocritical Infidel of Sheffield, and Thomas Turner of Virginia, his correspondent. I have already given Hulbert a blasting with my name to it, because he made use of my name in his speech in the Massachusetts legislature. Turner has not given me the same cause in the letter he wrote (and evidently) to Hulbert, and which Hulbert (for it could be no other person), has published in the Repertory to vindicate himself. Turner has detailed his charges against Mr. Jefferson, and I have taken them up one by one, which is the first time the opportunity has offered for doing it; for before this it was promiscuous abuse. I have not signed to either with my name or signature (Common Sense) because I found myself obliged, in order to make such scoundrels feel a little smart, to go somewhat out of my usual manner of writing, but there are some sentiments and some expressions that will be supposed

to be in my style, and I have no objection to that supposition, but I do not wish Mr. Jefferson to be obliged to know it is from me.

Since receiving your letter, which contained no direct information of anything I wrote to you about, I have written myself to Mr. Barrett accompanied with a piece for the editor of the Baltimore Evening Post, who is an acquaintance of his, but I have received no answer from Mr. B., neither has the piece been published in the Evening Post. I will be obliged to you to call on him and to inform me about it. You did not tell me if you called upon Foster; but at any rate do not delay the enclosed. I do not trouble you with any messages of compliments, for you never deliver any.⁸

July 31, 1805 Paine to Fellows from the farm:

I received yours of the 26 Inst. in answer to mine of the 19th. I see that Cheetham has left out the part respecting Hamilton and Mrs. Reynolds but for my own part I wish it had been in. Had the story never been publicly told I would not have been the first to tell it; but Hamilton has told it himself and therefore it was no secret. Buy my motive in introducing it was because it was applicable to the subject I was upon, and to show the revilers of Mr. Jefferson that while they are affecting a morality of horror at an unproved and unfounded story about Mr. Jefferson they had better look at home, and give vent to the horror, if they had any at a real case of their own Dragon and his Delilah of a thousand dollars. It was not introduced to expose Hamilton for Hamilton had exposed himself, and that from a bad motive, a disregard of private character. "I do not (said Hamilton to Mrs. Harris), "I do not care a damn about my private character. It is my public character only that I care about." The man who is a good public character from craft, and not from moral principle, if such a character can be called good, is not much to be depended on. Cheetham might as well have put the part in, as put in the reasons for which he left it out. These reasons leave people at liberty to suspect that the part suppressed related to some new discovered criminality in Hamilton, worse than the old story....⁹

The substance of these letters refers to the political struggle taking place between Jefferson and the Federalists. Paine, a strong supporter

of Jefferson, was at this time an active propagandist for the Republicans.

In 1806 when Carver presented Paine with a bill for his board amounting to some one hundred and fifty dollars, Fellows was present, and Vale records the incident:

At any rate, Mr. Paine was indignant at this charge, which he considered unjust, and proposed paying the money down at once, and having nothing more to do with him. This he was prevented from doing by Mr. John Fellows, who was present when the demand was made by Mr. Carver's boy. Mr. Fellows and Mr. Morton, the friends of Mr. Paine, considered the charge too high; and these finally settled the account upon what they considered just principles.¹⁰

The incident was settled but with much bitterness between Paine and Carver.

Paine died in July of 1809; and Fellows his close friend became one of the witnesses whose testimony later exposed the lies in Cheetham's biography. Vale in his biography repeatedly quotes Fellows to refute the lies of Paine's detractors. On a certain Mr. Morris, who had stated that Paine had been intoxicated on the night of his arrest in France, Vale quotes Fellows:

I happen to know something of the Mr. Morris mentioned above, whose testimony Mr. Barlow proves to be false. It is this, that Cheetham collected stories injurious to the character of Paine. Mr. Morris was an English speculator in France, in the time of the revolution, and was once imprisoned as a spy. His enmity to Paine and the principles for which France was contending, I am confident (from my knowledge of the man), would induce him to fabricate any story calculated to throw obloquy upon either.¹¹

On the subject of Paine's alleged drunkenness, Vale uses Fellows' testimony:

There exists, too, a note on this subject to Mr. B. Caleb Bringham, bookseller, Boston, from Mr. Lovett, now deceased, but formerly of the City hotel, New York, where Mr. Paine put up after his last return to this country. In that note Mr. Lovett declares that Mr. Paine drank less than any of his other boarders, while at his hotel: and this accords with what Mr. Jarvis and others have informed us that "he did not, and could not, drink much." Our author, for the existence of his note, is Mr. John Fellows, a gentlemen well known, and whose veracity was never doubted. The note was written to answer an inquiry, and shown to Mr. John Fellows, our informant.¹²

In the preface to the Boston edition of Paine's theological works, Fellows refuted the stories about the condition of Paine at his death, which were published by one Charles Collins and based on the testimony of a Mary Hinsdale. Fellows writes:

I cannot relinquish this subject without taking notice of one of the most vile and wicked stories that was ever engendered in the fruitful imagination of depraved mortals. It was fabricated by a woman, named Mary Hinsdale, and published by one Charles Collins, at New York, or rather, it is probable that this work was the joint production of Collins, and some other fanatics, and that they induced this stupid, ignorant woman to stand sponsor for it.

It states, in substance, that Thomas Paine, in his last illness, was in the most pitiable condition for want of the mere necessaries of life; and that the neighbors, out of sheer compassion, contributed their aid to supply him with sustenance: that he had become converted to Christianity, and lamented that all his religious works had not been burnt: that Mrs. Bonneville was in the utmost distress for having abandoned her religion, as she (M.H.) said, for that of Mr. Paine, which he now told her would not answer the purpose, &c. In all this rodomotade there is not a single, solitary ray of truth to give it a colorable pretext. It is humiliating to be under the necessity of exposing such contemptible nonsense.¹³

In his recollections, Judge Tabor, one of Fellows associates, writes about Paine's death:

Col. Fellows and Judge Hertell visited Paine throughout the whole course of his last illness. They repeatedly conversed with him on religious subjects and they declared that he died serenely, philosophically and resignedly. This information I had directly from their own lips, and their characters were so spotless, and their integrity so unquestioned, that more reliable testimony it would be impossible to find.¹⁴

Walt Whitman, in his younger days who was well acquainted with Fellows, made the following remarks to Moncure Conway about Fellows and Paine:

Colonel Fellows was a man of perfect truth and exactness; he assured me that the stories disparaging to Paine's personality were quite false. Paine was neither drunken nor filthy; he drank as other people did, and was a high minded gentle man.¹⁵

Whitman, recalling his conversations with Fellows on Paine, gives Fellows' estimate of Paine's character:

At one of our interviews he gave me a minute account of Paine's sickness and death. In short, from those talks, I was and am satisfied that my old friend, with his mark'd advantages, had mentally, morally and emotionally gauged the author of "Common Sense," and besides giving me a good portrait of his appearance and manners, had taken the true measure of his interior character. Paine's practical demeanor, and much of his theoretical belief, was a mixture of the French and English schools of a century ago, and the best of both. Like most old-fashion'd people, he drank a glass or two every day, but was no tippler, nor intemperate, let alone being a drunkard. He lived simply and economically, but quite well -- was always cheery and courteous, perhaps occasionally a little blunt, having very positive opinions upon politics, religion, and so on. That he labor'd well and wisely for the states in the trying period of their parturition, and in the seeds of their character, there seems to me no question.¹⁶

On October 3, 1825, Fellows sent a copy of Paine's Theological Works to Thomas Jefferson; and in the accompanying letter, he explained the circumstances surrounding its publication. Because of the hostility

to liberal ideas in New York at that time, the work was published with a London imprint, and thus the source of its publication was concealed. Fellows wrote to Jefferson:

The shameful abuse which has been profusely bestowed upon Thomas Paine and his writings by those who knew little or nothing of either, or were utterly regardless of truth, induced me to undertake for a bookseller to edit an edition of his Theological Works. And in order to illustrate his character and services, and to give support to his religious sentiments, at least in a degree, I considered it vastly important to introduce your name and others alike imposing, whose moral character and standing in the world would give weight to their opinions. Which I hope you will not take amiss, as my view was to do honor to yourself as well as to Mr. Paine. At any rate you will have no cause to be dissatisfied with the company to which you are associated in this volume.

For your answer, on being asked if you had invited Mr. Paine to this country, mentioned in page 23, I have the authority of Mr. Matthew L. Davis of this city, who says the conversation took place in your house at Monticello. Your conduct towards Mr. Paine has been highly approved by all who were friendly to his political opinions that I have heard speak on the subject, whether they agreed with him in religion or not.

The work was printed in this city in the current year, and not in London as it purports to be. The dread of superstition among the booksellers induces them to resort to such expedients. The edition consists of 2000 copies, and the sale has very much exceeded expectation. The spirit of inquiry into the abuses of religion under which mankind have so long suffered appear to be excited at this time to an unusual degree in many parts of the United States, as well as in Great Britian. God grant that it may become universal!

The extract of your letter to Major Cartwright, inserted at page 187, had gone through several Newspaper editions before it came into my hands; and as I thought it probable that mistakes had occurred in the printing of the old Norman French, I took it to counsellor Tompson (whose name appears in the same note with the extract) for correction if required. He made some alterations, but without referring to a printed record of Presot's opinion, which I since find varies from this edition. He also through inadvertence translated en ancien scripture into of the ancient scriptures, which might be supposed to allude to, what is called, the Holy Scriptures. This I have amended in the copy I send you, and the whole shall be corrected in a future edition.

With this volume I send you several pamphlets, all of which I hope will be acceptable, and that you will excuse the liberty I have taken. -- Wishing that your eventful and valuable life may be preserved many years I subscribe myself with the utmost respect and esteem your

Obt. servt. Jn. Fellows¹⁷

Jefferson replied:

Th. Jefferson returns his thanks to Mr. Fellows for the copy he has been so kind as to send him of Paine's Theological works. That the author should in his day have encountered great abuse was a thing of course. A powerful mind like his, and resolutely employed in whatever cause can never be an object of mere indifference to those to whom it is opposed. Nor has the genus vatum sic whom he bearded by these works, been found the most sparing of adversaries in the use of invective. His political labors entitle him to the gratitude of his country and to receive just testimonies of it from every man in or out of power. Th. J. with his thanks prays Mr. Fellows to accept his respectful salutations.¹⁸

A copy of the Paine work referred to in this correspondence exists in the Library of Congress bearing, as Fellows states, a London imprint and no date.

In November of 1830, Jarvis the painter wrote Fellows regarding the charges of atheism made against Paine:

I will take this occasion to add that Thomas Paine was not an atheist. Amongst a vast many wise and good men too, he rejected revelation, but he was a firm believer in natural religion, and a future state. Those who were opposed to his political opinions attacked him under cover of his religious ones; and there is no doubt that the influence and authority, which the former are so eminently to share, were very much weakened by their connection with the latter. But the truth is truth wherever it comes from, and the enemies of Thomas Paine have no more right to impeach his political opinions, because his religion was not orthodox, than the enemies of Christianity have to impeach its divine origin because Peter denied Christ, and Judas betrayed him.¹⁹

Fellows published this letter when he was editor of the Beacon in 1841. Throughout Paine's last years, Fellows had been his close associate and loyal friend; and it is not surprising that after Paine's death, Fellows should have become a defender of Paine's character and an editor of his works. From the correspondence and the published materials considered above, it is clear that Fellows was not only in a position to discharge these duties for his departed friend, but that he did so with care and attention to both the memory of Paine and the facts.

FOOTNOTES

1. Charles Evans, American Book Publishers (Chicago, 1925), IX, 196.
2. Foner, op. cit., II, 1384.
3. Ibid., p. 1377.
4. Moncure Conway, The Life of Thomas Paine (New York & London, 1892),
II, 364.
5. The Life of Thomas Paine (New York, 1841).
6. Foner, op. cit., II, 1453.
7. Ibid., II, 1467.
8. Ibid., II, 1468.
9. Ibid., II, 1469.
10. Vale, op. cit., p. 150.
11. Ibid., p. 164.
12. Ibid., p. 160.
13. As quoted by Vale, op. cit., p. 144.
14. As quoted by Vale, op. cit., p. 176.
15. As quoted by Conway, op. cit., II, 399.
16. As quoted by Conway, op. cit., II, 423.
17. Unpublished letter, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.
18. Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.
19. New York Beacon, July 10, 1841.

CHAPTER VI

THE THEOPHILANTHROPIST

By 1806, the fire had gone out of the deistic movement; the Prospect had ceased operation in March of 1805, and some months later, Palmer was dead.

The popular reaction against liberalism, republicanism, and deism, was finding expression in a new evangelicalism, which was sweeping the new United States and was rapidly depleting the ranks of the freethinkers. The violent convulsions that seized the French revolution in its later stages shocked many Americans and augmented this general reaction against those liberal elements in this country that had favored the revolutionaries. These popular attitudes coupled with evangelical fervor spelt doom for the deists. Koch wrote that the evangelical denominations were:

ideally adapted for this task for which their clergy were as to the manner born. The Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, lay and clerical alike, were "of the people, for the people, and by the people." A painful absence of this world's goods made them republicans to begin with. It divorced politics and religion as far as they were concerned. The lack of money also saved their ministers from the contamination of education and culture.... Deism was never an issue with them to be combated with reason. Convinced that it was a manifestation of the powers below, they fought it as they did all other brands of wickedness and evil by preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified.¹

Although deism had lost its original impetus, many of the hard core of faithful supporters, such as John Fellows, still maintained some kind of activity. Paine's poor health and advanced age prevented him from

devoting his fullest energies to their cause during the last years of his life. The occasion of his death in 1809 seemed to have shocked the deists into a new fervor of activity. In 1810, Fellows and the remnants of Palmer's Deistic Society attempted another journal. It was called The Theophilanthropist and contained critical, moral, theological and literary essays in monthly numbers.

The editor was Fellows. In the "Prospectus", it is announced that "The object of this publication is to present to the public such critical, moral, theological, and literary essays, as may tend to correct false opinions, promote the progress of reason and increase the sum of human happiness." According to this prospectus, written by Fellows, the principles of the journal are:

The last and consummate effort of the soul, is the religion of philosophy: whose only dogma is, that One God superintends the universe; whose ceremonials are acts of charity, benevolence, generosity, and public spirit; whose discipline and designs are to refine the sympathies, direct the passions, strengthen and enlarge the mind, and facilitate the communication of wisdom and science.²

As in the systems of Palmer, Paine and other deists, God is adored as the first great cause of all:

When he contemplates the planets as they roll; the variety, the order, the economy and the devotion, and penetrated with astonishment at the sublimity, and grandeur of the scene, and his mind is naturally elevated to contemplate the all perfect Deity, by whose wisdom the wonderful system of nature is preserved, and by whose power it was originally created.³

As the cosmological principles of the journal were expressions of standard deism, so were the ethical duties of man envisioned in the Paine, Palmer and Godwin Tradition:

His duties are in unison with the best affections of the human heart, and may be comprehended under the general titles of justice and benevolence. From his very nature, he with equal ease perceives that the duties he owes to himself, consist in the due regulation of his passions.⁴

But what course of action did this liberal publication intend? This also is made clear in the editor's introduction:

America is the only country in which "reason is left free to combat error". If we do not profit by this privilege, the fault will lie at our own door. Let us then think freely, and express our thoughts like freemen. We shall on our part endeavour to demonstrate the genial influence of true religion upon the morals and social happiness of man; and, at the same time, shall warn our readers against the baneful effects of fostering ignorance and superstition, those deadly enemies to all the joys of life; which have broken down all the barriers established by Deity, between virtue and vice, right and wrong, and not content with robbing man of the little happiness which this world might afford, insultingly threaten him with an eternity of misery in the world to come.⁵

The first article is a reprint of a "Discourse upon the festival of Sunday, delivered in the Temple of Reason by Raisin Pages." Fellows, in his capacity as editor, commented on this article:

With respect to the observance of the Sabbath, it is not highly important to know whether it be of divine origin or not, but as we fully agree with our author in regard to the origin of the Sabbath, or day of rest, that it is of human invention; we conceive it perfectly immaterial which of the days has the preference. All we should contend for, therefore, would be, that moral and scientific discourses, which would benefit mankind, should be delivered from the desk on that day, and not such useless and fanatical sermons as are now in vogue.⁶

In the same issue, commenting on the book of Genesis, Fellows wrote:

If it can be proved by philosophical deductions, that the evils which man experiences, necessarily originate from the very nature of his existence, and that those evils could not have been avoided even by omnipotent power,

without withholding from him a greater good; then the benevolence and goodness of God in the creation of the world will be fully established, and the story of the fall of man, and the consequent necessity of a redemption, will be no longer worthy of credit. What joyful tidings would not this be to the sincere enquirer after truth. If this fall of man, this millstone around the necks of mankind, acting as a dead weight upon human happiness, can be fairly got rid of, and man left accountable only for his own actions, the road to salvation and happiness would be easy and pleasant.⁷

This is a forthright statement of an attitude basic to all deistic thinking. Evil is a consequence of man's failure to understand the world in which he lives. Superstition, as promulgated by priestcraft in the form of myths, acts as a mental block frustrating man's efforts to comprehend reality in a rational and scientific manner. Free man from these priests with their superstitious mummery, and the road to human perfection would be open.

But the interests of the Theophilanthropists were not all theory or theology; they took an active interest in social reform and also in science. A committee investigating vice in the city reported:

The habit of drinking ardent spirits enervates the mind, sours the disposition, inflames the passions, renders the heart callous to the feelings of humanity, and leads to the neglect and violation of the social duties. It lays the foundations of many diseases, and makes others terminate fatally which would otherwise yield to the application of remedies. By many whose opinions deserve weight, it has been thought as destructive to the human species as the sword: and in this country, certainly, it furnished death with more victims than all the other causes of premature mortality.⁸

War was also criticised as a great social evil:

Of all the artificial evils with which civilized man is cursed war is the most afflicting. Its principles are repugnant to the best feelings of the human heart, and reason revolts at its horrors. Why is the civilized

world made an aceldama and a common charnel-house, and humanity covered with the habiliments of woe? Why is man the most inveterate enemy of man, and why do rational beings thirst for each others blood?...

The answer to this question is characteristic of all deistic definitions of evil: "Yes, the ambition of titled despots and the superstition of mitred knaves have been the cause of the calamities of war."⁹ This is a typical eighteenth century reasoning; the causes of human evils are simple and apparent: ignorance, folly and superstition. When this diagnosis with its recommended therapy of education and truth failed to achieve results, the nineteenth century turned to economic determinism as a source for evil and human suffering. But to Fellows, living before the advent of Dialectical Materialism, the problem could be conceived as a failure of the human mind to behave in a rational fashion.

In an article in the February issue the "Character of Jesus Christ" is discussed. The article disagreed with Volney's view that the existence of Jesus, the man, may be questioned; the author of the article thinks rather that Jesus was a human preacher, who lived and taught a religion of nature, and who was killed because he tried to uproot the traditional forms of religious mummery and priestcraft.

Thus the man who had humanely endeavoured to ameliorate the condition of his countryman, and to rescue them from civil despotism and religious tyranny, prematurely fell a victim to the bigotry and superstition of the age in which he lived, and became a martyr in the cause of philanthropy. His character was adorned with an assemblage of amiable virtues, and his ethics were calculated to render his fellow-creatures individually happy, and socially benevolent. Such, in our opinion, are the true characteristics of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

In accordance with the ideas of Paine and Palmer, Fellows and his associates believed the contemporary Christian religion to be the result

of a gradual accretion of pagan myth and superstition:

Several centuries after his death, interested and fanatical men founded a monstrous and impious system of religion in his name.--It is not pretended that he wrote a single line of this himself. His expositors however, to suit their own purposes, taking the heathen mythology as their guide, first deified him, and then intermixed with his rational ethics the most abominable frauds that were ever imposed upon human credulity.¹¹

Even the ethics of love, so characteristic of Christ, can be shown to be much older than Christ and to have been promulgated by other sages; Fellows quoted several well known pagan philosophers and asked:

Now, if there be any thing in religion, not contained in the foregoing extracts, we can see no possible reason for desiring to become acquainted with it; because we are convinced that it must consist in the performance of some stupid ceremony, such as baptism; or in faith in speculation, contrary to, or above the comprehension of reason, which an honest man can never assent to; consequently tending to divide mankind into parties, to cherish pride, and promote ill will and animosities, destructive to true religion, and the repose of man. Finally we confidently assert that there is not a single virtue set forth in the Christian system, that is not to be found in the writings of the ancient philosophers, even that of doing good to, if not loving, our enemies.¹²

In later issues of the journal there appeared two pieces by Thomas Paine never before printed. One of these was the omitted sections of Paine's work on Freemasonry published after his death, but deliberately cut by Paine's friend Madame Bonneville. The expurgated sections, heretical in nature, were printed in the Theophilanthropist. Also Paine's answer to "Bishop Watson's Apology for the Bible", which had been given to Mrs. Palmer by Paine before his death, was printed in the paper.

Although the Theophilanthropists thought that "monkish superstition is fast passing away, and all dogmas which will not bear the investigation

of reason are in a fair way of sinking into neglect and contempt",¹³ the journal was never successful; and after one year, the publication was discontinued. In his editorial commentary, Fellows suggested some reasons for the failure of the paper. For one thing, the price, twenty-five cents, was too much for the artisan class that patronized the publication; and for another, the gentlemen who had promised to supply the magazine with original material had failed to do so, and he, Fellows, had been forced to fill the pages with extracts from classic works on philosophy and science. The real cause seems to have been the shift in popular sentiment and interest which had made all forms of liberalism dangerous in the eyes of the public. Koch suggests in commenting on the demise of the Theophilanthropist: "The fact was that the principles for which they stood were those of the decade of the 1790's. The Zeitgeist of 1810 was of a different temper."¹⁴

So closed a chapter in the intellectual life of America. The era of progressive and radical thought inspired by the turmoil of the Revolution had produced a group of philosophical extremists who wished to carry the Revolution to its logical conclusion.

The Revolution had demonstrated that traditional political relations must be destroyed when they contradict natural rights. It then followed that if reason and common sense should be the guiding lights in political and economical institutions, then by the same token, spiritual institutions must be measured also by reason and common sense. Were religious orthodoxy to be found wanting it too must be abolished and replaced by more rational doctrines and practices, those which would serve to enlighten and not delude man.

The deists wanted to re-examine our cultural heritage of otherworldly

values in the light of reason and common human experience, as these were accessible to all men. But they were, in a sense, moving at a tangent from the current of history. For while they were carrying their premises straight to their logical conclusion the fundamental drift in history was toward the pole of orthodoxy and conservatism.

Whereas the political and economic revolutions had been successful, this logical extremity of the same movement found itself out of step with the general temper and eventually was crushed by the post-revolutionary evangelical enthusiasms of a people reacting against their own liberal excesses.

Fellows, typical of the men whose ideals remained revolutionary, expressed the attitude of the loyal deist toward those who succumbed to the basically conservative motion of American intellectual history. In 1824, he wrote to Richard Carlile:

I enclose the principles of the Deistical Society of the State of New York, drawn up by Mr. Palmer, which will show the purity of the motives which induced its formation. It existed some years after the death of its founder; but at length was discontinued for want of zeal in the members. Some of whom have returned to the slough of superstition, whilst others, influenced probably, by less interested motives, or who have taken a more enlarged view of the evils inflicted upon mankind by their tamely succumbing to the domination of ignorance and fanaticism, rigidly adhere to the tenets formerly promulgated by the society.¹⁵

The radical element in American political activities was not extinct, however; it was merely out of fashion. Fifteen years later the rise of the common man in the election of Jackson was to give it new life. Koch described this rebirth:

Scotched as it was by 1810, Palmer's and Paine's deistic

movement was not dead. In the 1820's a new generation which had not shared their defeat made their ideas articulate again.... On the anniversary of the birth of Thomas Paine in 1827, a toast was drunk "in solemn silence" to "The memory of Elihu Palmer, Voltaire, Hume and all those deceased philosophers who, by their writings, contributed to subvert superstition, and vindicate the rights of humanity."¹⁶

One of these philosophers -- a minor one to be sure -- was not dead. John Fellows, only fifteen at the Battle of Bunker Hill, lived on to see the birth of a new kind of democracy in the election of Jackson, a variety with which he could not sympathize. Yet he was active in the rebirth of deism and freethought occasioned by this new movement. It is ironical that Fellows lived to see some of his advanced social ideas become conservative. He had been born in a British Colony and had lived and fought to help create an agrarian democracy and survived to see the inception of an industrial-commercial economy which would destroy the old agrarian republic he had helped create.

Gilbert Vale, one of the new generation of intellectuals wrote about Fellows:

We did not regard our late friend in the light of a great, but a good man; his facts, we could rely on, but not always on his opinions or judgment. Relying on his integrity, he fearlessly avowed his sentiments, and hence he was one of our oldest Free Inquirers, while in politics he avowed himself a Jeffersonian Democrat. He once personified Tammany himself; but he left the party on the election of Jackson, whom he regarded as a soldier only, and unfit for the presidency; and in that opinion he persevered in opposition to most of his friends.¹⁷

When Vale left Fellows in charge of his newspaper, the Beacon in 1841, he discontinued its political voice, the Diamond, and commented: "The Diamond must be suspended till our return; because Mr. John Fellows is an

amiable Jeffersonian Whig, and cannot be trusted with Diamonds."¹⁸

Though politically he had outlived his time, Fellows was still active in deistic affairs, publishing and editing; but a great economical transition was taking place, one which he did not understand, and he lived on more as a relic of the past than as a vital force in a changing nation. Although he remained in contact with the radical thought of this later day, it is apparent from Vale's comment that he did not comprehend the new revolution taking place in America, a revolution not in the political structure of the nation but rather in its economic foundations. To a Jeffersonian Democrat, the Industrial Revolution was an incomprehensible phenomenon.

FOOTNOTES

1. Koch, op. cit., p. 291.
2. Theophilanthropist (New York, 1810), p. 3.
3. Ibid., p. 6.
4. Ibid., p. 6.
5. Ibid., p. 8
6. Ibid., p. 10.
7. Ibid., p. 15
8. Ibid., p. 55
9. Ibid., p. 153.
10. Ibid., p. 71.
11. Ibid., p. 71
12. Ibid., p. 183.
13. Ibid., p. 338.
14. Koch, op. cit., p. 184.
15. New York Beacon, October 23, 1841.
16. Koch, op. cit., p. 298.
17. New York Beacon, January 20, 1844.
18. New York Beacon, October 23, 1841.

CHAPTER VII

FELLOWS: WRITER AND THINKER

As a writer and thinker, Fellows was very characteristic of the period in which he lived and, as has been suggested, outlived. In mind and manner, he was the eighteenth-century man of taste, enlightened and rational in all things. He had a classical education and was widely read in contemporary literature and science. His attitudes and values were those of Addison, Chesterfield, and Jefferson: sophistication, humanism, urbanity and contempt for the vulgar enthusiasms of the popular mind.

The dominating intellectual current among men of his learning and disposition was deism, and it is not surprising to find him giving expression to this philosophy in his literary and political activities. Just as in England the Puritan fanaticism and radicalism had contributed to the eighteenth century's rejection of enthusiasms, so in New England, Fellows' home, the rigid harshness of the early Puritan fathers had bred its own opposition in the form of a reaction which produced such men as Joel Barlow, Benjamin Franklin, and John Fellows.

While both Fellows and Franklin reacted against the same tradition, there is an important difference in the quality of their reaction. Franklin rejected his Puritan heritage and embraced the current of deism as did Fellows; but then another factor must be considered, for Franklin was a genius with great creative powers and dynamic energies. To classify Franklin as just another deist would be to miss the significance of his thought. Franklin's wisdom transcends any school of philosophy; and, as

with all great minds, he must be considered as a world in himself. The same is not true of Fellows who, while intelligent and well educated, lacked that fire of creativity that distinguishes the profound from the commonplace. Fellows' work is chiefly a reflection of his reading and research. It is probably safe to assume that he was more widely read than the great Thomas Paine, and yet his books are of interest only to historians, while Paine can catch the interest of even a casual reader.

It is important to recognize this limitation in considering Fellows' literary and philosophical efforts; with John Fellows, only the pattern of composition is original; the ideas are all derived from more powerful minds. The most striking indication of this is his extensive use of the quotation throughout most of his books. A significantly large portion of his works comprises extracts, acknowledged of course, from other works. In a sense, he was less a creative writer than a scholar of ideas analyzing and organizing important contributions to the philosophy of his day and presenting them for the enlightenment of his readers. To read Fellows is to be introduced to many of the important authors and philosophers of the eighteenth century.

The quality of Fellows' deism is, of course, the most interesting aspect of his work, but a consideration of this must be joined to an analysis of his major literary efforts.

Fellows' first book was published in 1796 in New York city and was entitled, The Character and Doctrines of Jesus Christ.¹ This was about three years after he had opened his book store in that city and had first begun to engage in deistic and republican activities. This early work differs from later ones in that it does not make use of extensive quotations; yet the Character and Doctrines can in no way be considered

original; for the ideas expressed were common opinion among deists; and many of them, Fellows had heard in his college days.

During Fellows' attendance at Yale, freethinking was in vogue; and the President, Ezra Stiles, records such topics for debate among the seniors as:

Whether the Immortality of the Soul can be proved by Reason?
 Whether the historical parts of the Bible are of divine inspiration?
 Whether Virtue is founded in Opinion & human Law or in eternal Fitness & immutable natural Law?
 Whether any Thing contradictory to Reason is to be found in the Scriptures?²

Whatever conclusion the debating teams reached, it is safe to assume that Fellows and many of his companions found these debating topics raised more questions than they answered. The Yale library at this time held many works by English authors of deistic sympathies, and it is more than probable that Fellows read some of these sceptical works. Among the books available were the works of Newton and Shaftesbury.

This general background of deistic thought was an important part of Fellows' education and its influence is clear in this, his first literary expression. However the dominant influence seems to have been the recently published Age of Reason, by Thomas Paine. Two years before Fellows had copyrighted that work in New York for its author who was then in France. Though Fellows' book is in no sense a mere copy of Paine's great criticism of traditional Christianity, it does show certain similarities in attitude if not detail. In considering this book, reference to the Age of Reason will provide insight into the nature and origin of Fellows' thought.

The Character and Doctrines of Jesus Christ is a short work, not

fifty pages in length, and was included as a part of a longer work which contained essays by other deistic philosophers. The book considers the life and philosophy of Christ, particularly those aspects of it which have been perverted and exaggerated to suit the ends of priestcraft.

The first chapter is called "of the Crucifixion and Resurrection and Ascension." These three events in Christ's life constitute the heart of traditional Christianity, and upon their truth or falsity rests the basis of the religion. The Crucifixion is the act by which Christ rendered vicarious satisfaction for the original sin of Adam; and by His death on the cross, He opened the gates of heaven to an otherwise damned humanity. The Resurrection is of course the most significant manifestation of Christ's divinity, and the Ascension serves to augment this same divinity. In attacking these dogmas, Fellows was striking at the roots of the Christian concept of guilt and atonement.

Unlike Volney and others, Fellows was not doubting the existence of a man called Jesus, who preached a revolutionary philosophy and was crucified by the Romans at the insistence of the Jewish religious authorities. In this, he paralleled Paine's comment in the Age of Reason:

That such a person as Jesus Christ existed, and that he was crucified, which was the mode of execution at that day, are historical relations strictly within the limits of probability. He preached most excellent morality, and the equality of man; but he preached also against the corruptions and avarice of the Jewish priests, and this brought upon him the hatred and vengeance of the whole order of priest hood.⁵

In considering the facts of the Crucifixion, Fellows made two basic points. First of all, it was not usual for a crucified criminal to die on the cross. In most cases, according to Fellows, they had to be let hang for two or three days. Secondly they were often finally dispatched

by having their bones broken. In Christ's case there are then two significant differences; he was not allowed to remain on the cross for the usual length of time because the following day was a holiday; and his bones were not broken by the executioners. Fellows also discounts the fatal effect of the wound inflicted on Christ by the Roman soldier and suggests that when Christ was given into the hands of Joseph of Arimathea, he was not dead, and therefore his subsequent Resurrection was really only a recovery.

As to the circumstances surrounding Christ's Ascension, Fellows examines the evidence and arrives at the conclusion that enough does not exist to substantiate the event. This is similar to the conclusion reached by Paine:

The resurrection and ascension, supposing them to have taken place, admitted of public and ocular demonstration, like that of the ascension of a balloon, or the sun at noon day, to all Jerusalem at least. A thing which everybody is required to believe, requires that the proof and evidence of it should be equal to all, and universal; and as the public visibility of this last related act, was the only evidence that could give sanction to the former part, the whole of it falls to the ground, because that evidence never was given.⁴

In his second chapter Fellows examined the "Evidence of Christianity," and here again the main contention is similar to Paine's treatment of the same idea in the Age of Reason. Fellows contended that as we do not have any written document by Jesus, himself, outlining the Christian religion, there is no historical guarantee that contemporary Christianity reflects the ideas of its supposed originator. Paine wrote on the same subject: "Jesus Christ wrote no account of himself, of his birth, parentage, or anything else; not a line of what is called the New Testament is of his

own writing. The history of him is altogether the work of other people;..."⁵

Fellows goes on to point out that only two of the four Evangelists claimed to have been eyewitnesses, and that these two were superstitious and ignorant men, whose accounts of the events do not agree in detail. Even more damning in Fellows' opinion is the fact that the early church historians, such as Hegerippus, Justin, Martyr and Origin, are so unreliable that the very identity of the four evangelists can not be taken as established.

From the first two chapters, we see that to Fellows, both the internal and external evidence of the historicity of the four Gospels is doubtful.

In the third chapter, he considered the question: "Was Jesus the Messiah?" If the New Testament's message of salvation is to harmonize with the Old Testament's conception of the fall of Adam and the coming of a redeemer, then the Messianic role of Christ is of vital consequence to Christianity. Fellows demonstrated at some length, the aspects of Jesus's character and personal history which do not agree with the Jewish conception of the Messiah.

In the first place, the Jews expected an earthly Kingdom and racial supremacy for themselves. The Messianic tradition among the Jews was the dream of the slave that one day he will become master. The Messiah was to be their great military and political leader who was to lead them to this worldly triumph. Fellows notes that none of these things came to pass; and that among the Jews, there was never any real belief that Jesus was the Messiah. He was in the eyes of the sophisticated Jew, a bastard from the most disreputable part of Jerusalem who chose to

associate with the lowest class of fishermen, farmers and even prostitutes. Christ is not nor has ever been to the Jewish theologians, the Messiah; this idea is according to Fellows, a gentile interpolation.

Fellows lays much stress on Christ's words on the cross, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me." Fellows suggests, as have many commentators, that these are hardly the words of a divine being in the moment of supreme achievement and sacrifice; a moment which has redeemed all mankind. Certainly, Fellows wrote, these are the words of a man who has reached the depths of despair.

The fourth chapter is called "Christ Considered as a Political Figure." In this section, our author considered the character of Christ in its social context. That Jesus was a good man and a humanitarian, he did not doubt. "His real character represented in its true light is that of a good man and a warm patriot desirous of restoring the liberty of his country, which had fallen under the Roman yoke."⁶

It was natural that a man born in colonial America and living through its struggles for liberty should exaggerate the concern for liberty of a subject living in a Roman colony. But Fellows' basic point is that Jesus was a humanitarian interested in improving the moral character of society. Paine developed the same notion:

He was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practiced was of the most benevolent kind; and though similar systems of morality had been preached by Confucius, and by some of the Greek philosophers, many years before; by the Quakers since; and by many good men in all ages, it has not been exceeded by any.⁷

Fellows saw in Jesus' message a plea for economic and social reform. He believed him to have been a well educated man, conversant with the

problems of his people and anxious to help them. Fellows regarded Christ's public life as a carefully planned campaign to stir up the people and to force some kind of reform. The fact that Jesus and John the Baptist were cousins, Fellows took as evidence that John's ministry preceding that of Christ's was a prearranged scheme aimed at enhancing the impact of Christ's teachings.

Though Fellows regarded Christ as a social reformer and political revolutionary, he did not think Christ intended to become King of the Jews:

I cannot think, therefore, it was the intention of Jesus to establish himself as a King. He preached a different doctrine; his instruction was that of equality; his principles were those of reason and morality. A republican spirit is evident in his speeches and actions.⁸

To illustrate this view, our author drew on the many parables and particularly the Sermon on the Mount. He further pointed out that Christ's association with the common people exclusively, and his repudiation of wealth and the clerical establishment indicate the revolutionary political nature of Christ's public teachings. "In a seditious manner Christ spoke before the people, no doubt with a design to raise an insurrection...."⁹ Again we find that Paine reached the same conclusion:

The accusation which those priests brought against him was that of sedition and conspiracy against the Roman government, to which the Jews were then subject and tributary; and it is not improbable that the Roman government might have some secret apprehensions as to the effects of his doctrine as well as the Jewish priests; neither is it improbable that Jesus Christ had in contemplation the delivery of the Jewish nation from the bondage of the Romans.¹⁰

In the fifth chapter of his book, Fellows dealt with the prophecies

and indicates, as did Paine, that they are mere phrases taken out of context and arbitrarily applied to Jesus by his followers. He devoted some time to the enigmatical prophecy Christ makes about himself in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. Christ has described in detail the end of the world and then assures his audience that they will live to see it:

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Fellows made the obvious comment that the generation did pass away, and many others after it, all waiting for the prophecy to come to pass; but, as Fellows was quick to state, it never has; nor is there any indication that it ever will.

In the last chapter entitled "On the Religion of Christ, of a God, and a Future State," Fellows gave his own version of the teachings of Christ and the general tenets of natural religion, plus some commentary on the origin of superstitious worship.

He opened his discussion by stating the fundamental precept of all deism: "To believe in a God, it is only necessary for man to open his eyes; it is only necessary to look around him; it is only necessary to view the creation."¹¹ In one form or another this statement occurs in the writings of all the deists. Paine in his Age of Reason wrote: "That the Creation we behold is the real and ever-existing word of God, in which we cannot be deceived. It proclaims his power, it demonstrates his wisdom it manifests his goodness and beneficence."¹²

The doctrine of an after life or the immortality of the soul next occupied the attention of our author; and on this question, his opinion

was again close to Paine's in the Age of Reason. Though belief in an after life was common among deists, it was by no means as universal as the belief in God as the first cause. Fellows wrote: "If a man believe in a God, he will find it very difficult not to believe in a future state. The belief of both seems to be stamped upon our very nature, however faint may be the impression."¹³ Paine on the same question commented:

I trouble not myself about the manner of future existence. I content myself with believing, even to positive conviction, that the power that gave me existence is able to continue it, in any form and manner he pleases, either with or without this body; and it appears more probable to me that I shall continue to exist hereafter than that I should have had existence, as I now have, before that existence began.¹⁴

There is an important difference in these two similar conceptions. Paine speaks of rational persuasion based on evidence and common sense, but Fellows arrives at the same conclusion in a different fashion, for he believes the idea to be, "stamped upon our very nature," or in other words, an innate idea. This suggests a basic distinction of philosophic method in these two thinkers. Paine was primarily the scientist, and his interest was drawn to the concrete and objective phenomena of the world. He arrived at deism by way of Newtonian mathematics and physics:

The Almighty Lecturer, by displaying the principles of science in the structure of the universe, has invited man to study and imitation. It is as if He had said to the inhabitants of this globe, that we call ours, "I have made an earth for man to dwell upon, and I have rendered the starry heavens visible, to teach him science and the arts."¹⁵

No such statement will be found in Fellows' work; he arrived at

truth through a rational consideration of human nature with its basically moral tendencies stamped upon it. Fellows believed that a study of man's nature will reveal his character to be fundamentally moral and good but misled and perverted by ignorance and superstition. This ethical variety of deism shows the influence of Shaftesbury and possibly Rousseau. The concept of innate ideas can be traced back through Decartes to the father of all intuitive philosophy, Plato. But it is pointless to speculate except in the most general way, on influences in the work of a man as widely read as Fellows, living in an age which was rife with ideas and philosophic controversy.

In this same section, our author speculates on the origin of religion, which he thinks arises out of a state of ignorance and fear in possession of a savage mind. These children of nature, as he called them, invest the forces of nature with personalities and the souls of departed ancestors in order to give themselves a sense of security in a strange and often hostile world. They would make overtures to those supposed powers in the same manner they did to their more powerful neighbors; they would offer tribute. Out of this act of propitiation arose the ceremonial acts of worship that underlie all religion: "Thus does the religion of the child of nature consist in external forms and ceremonies, in intreaties and in thanksgivings, in fear and worship of idols; this is the religion of ignorance and superstition."¹⁶ To this traditional variety of religion, Fellows compared the religion of nature, the religion of the deist. This is superior because it is based on simple truth, tolerance and love. "A religion of reason throws aside all these useless trappings of superstition and consideres all devotions as the daughter of ignorance."¹⁷

The true religion is based on moral good and love in the hearts of men, and no money-loving class of priests can ever be expected to bring it about. Ceremonies and other superstitious trappings are mere illusion and seriously misguide the minds of men in the natural understanding of God. The concept of damnation for sin is also barbaric, and the true motive for virtuous action should be goodness for its own sake.

Fellows believed that Christ preached a religion of nature, and that most of Christian dogma has been a later addition to the original doctrines of Jesus. He summarized his conception of Christ's life and philosophy: "He believed in one God, and in a future state, and he devoted his whole life to the practice of those principles which he taught in his doctrine."¹⁸ It is of some interest to compare this summary to Paine's famous remarks on his own beliefs:

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.

I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy.¹⁹

Throughout its contents and at its conclusion, The Character and Doctrines of Jesus Christ suggests the influence of the first part of the Age of Reason.

Many of Fellows' most revealing commentaries on religion are contained in letters or other manuscripts, parts of which were printed in Gilbert Vale's paper, the Beacon. Typical is the following extract from a letter to Richard Carlile:

Religion, which means nothing but the belief of idle and fantastic stories, owes its origin to the ignorance and fears of mankind in remote and barbarous ages. And, being

found admirably adapted to the support of despotism, has been sedulously cultivated, and rigidly enforced among nations, the enlightened part of which have long since ceased to be dupes of its extravagant vagaries. Hence, in order to continue the deception, cruel and vindictive laws have been enacted to oblige men to believe, or say they believe, what their reason contradicts. In short, it has been made a cheating, money-making business, and kings and priests, both equally useless, have divided the spoils, Kings could not exist without priests. Their trades exactly fit each other. First enslave the mind, and the slavery of the body follows as naturally as the shadow follows its object. But, after so many ages of bloodshed and every species of persecution, it is to be hoped, that the time is near at hand, when the people of those portions of the globe, which have been favored with the light of science, will arise in their might, and put an end to this nonsensical jargon and oppression.²⁰

This passage is particularly interesting as it reveals in the mind of Fellows an attitude which is perhaps the most fundamental in the system of social ethics derived from deism. Evil is caused by man's ignorance of natural phenomena, and the salvation from evil is through knowledge; that is, the attainment of truth through science. To a deist the most vital truth was usually some objective statement derived from the experience of all men in the material world, as opposed to a subjective statement of values derived from the esoteric areas of affective experience. Indeed, it is the latter which the deist regarded as responsible for the promulgation of the tyranny and oppression in human political institutions.

According to deistical thought, man, through his aesthetic and spiritual faculties, has interpreted the objective order in terms of reality. Paine expressed this idea very clearly in the Age of Reason:

As to the Christian system of faith, it appears to me as a species of atheism -- a sort of religious denial of

God. It professes to believe in a man rather than in a God. It is a compound made up chiefly of manism with but little deism, and is as near to atheism as twilight is to darkness.... The effect of this obscurity has been that of turning every thing upside down, and representing it in reverse; and among the revolutions it has thus magically produced, it has made a revolution in theology. That which is now called natural philosophy, embracing the whole circle of science, of which astronomy occupies the chief place, is the study of the works of God, and of the power and wisdom of God in his works, and is the true theology.²¹

For Paine and the other deists, the road to religious truth was not through mysticism or prophecy but rather through mathematical science. Mythology had turned spiritual truth upside down, and it was the task of natural philosophy to reverse this and interpret the subjective in terms of the objective.

Religion, as the chief guardian of this mythological tradition of esoteric and metaphysical ideas, was regarded as the arch opponent of human enlightenment, happiness, and progress. Destroy the myths and you will have undermined the power of the clergy, whom the deists regarded as using these superstitions to dominate society and halt progress. Remove the priests and their myths, allow truth and science free reign, and the problems of humanity will be solved; for man will naturally advance by attaining mastery over his natural environment.

No wonder this is an age of optimism, for only one barrier remains before the millennium can be achieved. Man need only to free himself from the errors of superstition, and the perfection of human society will follow immediately. Fellows in speaking of these superstitions wrote:

If this Fall of man, this millstone around the necks of mankind, acting as a dead weight upon human happiness can fairly be got rid of, and man left accountable only

for his own actions, the road to salvation and happiness would be easy and pleasant.²²

Because of his early exposure to the Calvinistic theology of New England, it would be logical to expect that Fellows might reject the idea of original sin and the consequent corruption and guilt of all men. In an article printed in the Beacon he expressed his views on this subject:

Some forty years since, I made up my mind conclusively on the cause of natural evils to which the human race are subjected; since which I have been perfectly reconciled to the undeviating and inevitable course of nature; fully convinced that no mystery, no enigma, had the least connection with the subject; that evils were not sent down from heaven enclosed in a beautiful box, borne by a beautiful woman called Pandora, nor communicated in a similar manner, through the instrumentality of another woman, by means of a fruit pleasing to the eye.... A belief in what is called original sin, the fall of the progenitors of the human race from a state of perfect rectitude, by eating a fruit that they were forbidden not to eat, and thereby causing the displeasure of the Creator against all their posterity by which they run the hazard of everlasting punishment, is a dead weight upon human happiness, occasioning constant forebodings on the mind of man of future misery, that ends only with death.²³

Fellows regarded the whole story as a pagan fable deliberately incorporated into the body of the Old Testament at some early date. What particularly occupied his attention was the open and apparent injustice of damning mankind for the sin of two people.

In 1835, Fellows published an important work in which he analyzed religion in an historical context. The work is entitled, An Exposition of the Mysteries; or Religious Doctrines and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians, Pythagoreans and Druids, Origin, History and Purport of Free Masonry.²⁴

In this book Fellows, availing himself of extensive quotations from the

works of Abbe Pluche and Bishop Warburton, wrote a history of the Freemasons. Actually, while ostensibly tracing the origins of Freemasonry, the book also reveals the source of the Jewish and Christian religions. Relying heavily on the work of other antiquarians, Fellows showed that the Greek, Jewish, and Christian theologies are allegorically based on the Egyptian religious-astronomical mythology.

In a review of this book Gilbert Vale commented:

The Egyptian tales of Isis and Osiris, and the classic fables of Mount Olympus, as well as the mysteries of the ancient Pagans, are all traced by this deep and luminous writer to the allegories of the ancient astronomers -- the well from which also came the Hindoo fictions of Brama, the Jewish legends of Jehovah, and the Christian chronicles of Christ. He demonstrates that Egypt was the cradle of these various systems of superstition, and that while the credulous vulgar received these fabulous narratives as literally true the priests and learned men understood their true significance and laughed at the folly of the people.²⁵

The book is an indirect attack on the validity of Christian theology. By equating the Christian and Pagan mythologies and tracing both to the common ancestry of Egyptian religion, Fellows undermined the divine nature of the Christian religion and placed it on a par with all other forms of superstitious theology.

In one interesting section, Fellows suggested a relationship between the Hindoo Chistna, Sunworship and the Christian Christ.

From the Hindoo Chistna has undoubtedly arisen the application of Christ to the second person of the Christian trinity; Jesus, the Christ, is the scripture expression, that is, he is the true Chistna, the creator of the world, which some professors of Christianity, in accordance with the opinion of St. John, still believe to be the fact. John says, "In the beginning was the word (logos) and the word was with God, and the word was God.

All things were made by; and without him was not anything made, that was made." The rays of light depicted as issuing from the head of Jesus prove clearly that Christianity originally had reference to Sun worship.²⁶

The last part of the book is a justification of the activities of the Illuminati of Germany against the aspersions that had been cast upon them by John Robison, Jedidiah Morse and others. In this same section, he defended the French Revolution and attacked the lies that the clergy and their allies have disseminated about this liberal revolution. He attempted to prove that the so called atrocities committed by the revolutionists were insignificant compared to the inhuman behavior of the British Army during the American Revolution.

The appendix of the book contains a letter from John Q. Adams to Fellows. In the letter, Adams congratulated Fellows on his scholarship and erudition and expressed sympathy with the ideas contained in the work. From the letter itself, it is clear Adams thought the book to be an historic expose of many of the less attractive rites and rituals of the Freemasons. The ex-President could hardly have read the book with care for the anti-Christian sentiments completely escaped his notice.

Like most of his freethinking contemporaries, Fellows dealt at some length with the Christian interpretation of hell. And as did Paine, Volney, Palmer and others, he rejected the idea of eternal damnation as contradictory to the notion of divine justice and beneficence.

Among his papers there is an interesting account of the Catholic concept of Limbo. The following humorous extract was printed in the New York Beacon after Fellows' death:

According to the Catholic faith, the souls of Children who die too young to be capable of entertaining true conceptions of the atonement, go to Limbo, a region

bordering upon hell, where they remain insensible till the Resurrection. This place, says Mr. Voltaire, "was found out by Peter Chrysologus, in the fifth century; it was the abode of the patriarchs before Christ's descent; and ever since it has been the current opinion that Jesus Christ descended into Limbo, and not into hell itself."

Although Limbo was discovered in the fifth century, it is not probable that many Protestant divines are aware even at this day, of its existence owing to their prejudices against Roman Catholic books. What is now wanted is a correct map of the infernal regions, including Limbo and the surrounding country; and it is to be hoped that, ere long some learned Catholic priest will turn his attention to this subject.²⁷

Characteristically enough the last few years of his life found Fellows planning to publish another work on religion. This time the subject was to be the Book of Revelation. A prospectus of the work appeared in the New York Beacon:

The Apocalypse, as it has been generally interpreted, placed the Deity in an attitude toward the human family, that cannot be contemplated with out amazement and horror. Humanity shudders at the relation of acts of vindictive cruelty, said to have been already committed, and of others still more terrible, hereafter to be inflicted, by a merciful God on the beings whom he has created.

But I propose to show that the Apocalypse is an astronomical allegory, copied chiefly from the mythology of the ancients, especially from the exhibitions of their mysteries; which the author has most absurdly, endeavoured to incorporate with Christianity.

I shall show that the writer has deduced his theory from scenical representations of the physical operations of nature, having no moral relations to man whatever; and therefore, that the predictions supposed to be contained in the work, never have been, nor ever will be fulfilled.²⁸

The book never appeared in print, and the manuscript itself has been lost with the bulk of Fellows' papers.

These remarks on the book of Revelation, like much of Fellows' theological commentary, are historical and scholarly in nature. His liberal religious views reveal an extensive acquaintance with comparative studies

of religion. Some of his work, the book on Freemasonry for instance, indicates exhaustive research in these fields. Gilbert Vale, the editor of the Beacon, did not possess the same scholarly proclivities. Occasionally we find Vale, the newspaperman, being corrected by Fellows, the scholar. One such incident is recorded in the Beacon; it takes the form of a letter from Fellows to Vale:

I perceive, by your excellent article of the White Bear, that you suppose "the sabbath is peculiar to Christians and Jews." In this you are mistaken: the festival of the sabbath was instituted by the Egyptians, long before the Jews existed as a nation. The name is derived from the Egyptian word sabbot, signifying to rest. Seven is a cabalistical number, and is deemed perfect, as comprehending the entire of physical or material, and spiritual nature. The former is included in the number four, consisting of a point, a line, a superficies, and a solid, the definition of geometry; which was in a manner worshipped by the Egyptians. The number three includes the spiritual nature, or the trinity of the ancients. These two numbers united formed a superlatively perfect number. This is the cause of the seventh day's being fixed on as a festival, and not in consequence of God's having worked six days, and rested on the seventh.²⁹

There remain only three literary endeavors of John Fellows which warrant comment, and these constitute aspects of his work which for the modern reader do not contain much of interest.

The Knickerbocker Magazine for August of 1841 published an article by John Fellows in which he attacked the veracity of David Humphrey's Life of General Putnam. The article was entitled "Old Put at the Bar."³⁰ Two years later a book appeared by Fellows on the same subject, The Veil Removed; or, Reflections on David Humphrey's Life of General Putnam.³¹ In both the article and book, Fellows attempted to explode the legends which had accumulated around the career of that General.

The last work considered here deals with a controversy which, though

still unsolved, has long since ceased to occupy the attention of literary scholars and historians. In 1829 Fellows compiled a work called, Junius, Pseudonym, Author of the Letters, the Posthumous Works of Junius to which is prefixed an Inquiry respecting the Author, also a Sketch of the Life of John Horne Tooke.³² In his introduction Fellows gives his reasons for believing that Junius was J. H. Tooke.

FOOTNOTES

1. New York, 1796.
2. Ezra Stiles, Literary Diary, III, 167.
3. Foner, op. cit., I, 469.
4. Ibid., I, 468.
5. Ibid., I, 468.
6. Fellows., op. cit., p. 20.
7. Foner, op., cit., I, 469.
8. Fellows, op. cit., p. 22.
9. Ibid., p. 26.
10. Foner, op. cit., I, 469.
11. Fellows, op. cit., p. 40.
12. Foner, op. cit., I, 512.
13. Fellows, op. cit., p. 40.
14. Foner, op. cit., I, 512.
15. Ibid., I, 490.
16. Fellows, op. cit., p. 41.
17. Ibid., p. 42.
18. Ibid., p. 35.
19. Foner, op. cit., I, 464.
20. New York Beacon, October 23, 1841.
21. Foner, op. cit., I, 486.
22. Theophilanthropist, p. 15.
23. New York Beacon, May 30, 1846.
24. New York, 1835.

FOOTNOTES

25. New York Beacon, January 14, 1836.
26. An Exposition of the Mysteries, p. 146.
27. New York Beacon, January 20, 1844.
28. Ibid., March 3, 1843.
29. Ibid., August 29, 1840.
30. Pp. 91-107.
31. New York, 1843.
32. New York, 1829.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Having considered at some length the life, philosophy and literary accomplishments of John Fellows, we shall conclude our study with some mention of his character. As I have stated before, Fellows was essentially an eighteenth-century American who outlived his age. In his personality can be seen the qualities of the gentleman-scholar. Honor, veracity, integrity, literacy, sophistication, urbanity, and above all rationality were the ideals which he pursued during his life. As Vale suggested, he had a greater affinity with Jefferson than with Jackson, and this generalization summarizes a host of historical oppositions.

The spirit of Chesterfield and Steele, the aristocratic demeanour and temper, disappeared with the advent of the bourgeoisie as the dominant social class. In New York as well as London, the Industrial Revolution was destroying the old order and giving birth to a new dichotomy of economic forces; and there was no place for the eighteenth-century liberal in this new world of the proletariat and bourgeoisie. In neither group could the virtues of the preceding century find expression, and consequently they passed out of fashion.

The most arresting evidence of the nature of Fellows' character, with its anachronistic qualities, comes from the writings of the new generation. Through the eyes of three nineteenth-century Americans of some note, we have excellent descriptions of him. Gilbert Vale, Judge Tabor, and Walt Whitman, all sensed something unique about the character of the man Fellows and have left concrete expressions of their impressions.

Gilbert Vale, in an obituary article, described the qualities of his old friend:

The prominent features in the character of the late Col. Fellows, were integrity, (honesty of purpose) and benevolence, amiable qualities which made and kept him poor. To these qualities were added a respectable portion of learning, a graduate of one of the colleges, suavity of manners, and social habits. His age, habits and standing in society, made him acquainted with many of the distinguished characters of the Revolution. He knew Jefferson, was the companion of Paine and boarded with him nearly a year. He lived in the same house with Volney and Stewart, when those gentlemen visited the United States. He was full, not of anecdote, but of facts; his stubborn integrity forbid his improving a story, and therefore his anecdotes were not quite so rich as those who do embellish facts; but his authority was of importance. When Harpers, the large publishers, asked of us, what new facts in relation to the life of Paine we could bring or on what authority we relied for contradicting the received statements of Cheetham, we replied, "on the authority of Col. Fellows for one;" they answered, "that was enough" and we were relieved from furnishing other evidence. We did not regard our late friend in the light of a great, but a good man;... Relying on his integrity, he fearlessly avowed his sentiments, and hence he was one of our oldest Free Inquirers, While in politics he avowed himself a Jeffersonian Democrat.¹

Judge Tabor, who worked with Fellows on the Beacon, noted similar traits:

I was an associate editor of the New York Beacon, with Col. John Fellows, then (1836), advanced in years, but retaining all the vigor and fire of his manhood. He was a ripe scholar, a most agreeable companion, and had been the correspondent and friend of Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and John Quincy Adams, under all of whom he held a responsible office.² One of his productions was dedicated, by permission, to Adams, and was republished and favorably received in England.³ Col. Fellows was the soul of honor and inflexible in his adherence to truth.⁴

Walt Whitman, who met Fellows at Tammany Hall, has left the most artistic verbal portrait:

Some thirty-five years ago, in New York city, at Tammany hall, of which place I was then a frequenter, I happen'd to become quite well acquainted with Thomas Paine's perhaps most intimate chum, and certainly his later years' very frequent companion, a remarkably fine old man, Col. Fellows, who may yet be remember'd by some stray relics of that period and spot. If you will allow me, I will first give a description of the Colonel himself. He was tall, of military bearing, aged about 78, I should think, hair white as snow, clean-shaved on the face, dress'd very neatly, a tail coat of blue cloth with metal buttons, buff vest, pantaloons of drab color, and his neck, breast and wrists showing the whitest of linen. Under all circumstances, fine manners; a good but not profuse talker, his wits still fully about him, balanced and live and undimm'd as ever. He kept pretty fair health, though so old. For employment -- for he was poor -- he had a post as constable of some of the upper courts. I used to think him very picturesque on the fringe of a crowd holding a tall staff, with his erect form, and his superb, bare, thick-hair'd, closely-cropt white head. The judges and young lawyers, with whom he was ever a favorite, and the subject of respect used to call him Aristides. It was the general opinion among them that if manly rectitude and the instincts of absolute justice remain'd vital anywhere about New York City Hall, or Tammany they were to be found in Col Fellows.⁵

In closing this biographical study of John Fellows, it is worth noting again that he was not an important force in his age, and the modest achievements of his life can in no way be regarded as formative in American history. His literary and intellectual accomplishments merely gave expression to the dominating trends operating in his age. For the original impetus of these currents, we must look to Paine, Franklin, and Jefferson; however, it must be remembered, that in examining these minds, we see only the extraordinary and the exceptional; we miss the substance and body of the age.

To come to grips with the totality of any period, we must also have insight into its humbler components. Here then is the value of this study.

To understand the ideology of an historic period, we must know the

thought of its intellectual leaders, but to comprehend the social and human forces that transformed theories into realities, we must know such men as John Fellows.

FOOTNOTES

1. New York Beacon, January 13, 1844.
2. I have found no record of correspondence between Fellows and Madison or Monroe.
3. See page 88.
4. As quoted by Moncure Conway, op. cit., II, 398.
5. Walt Whitman, Speciman Days in The Complete Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman (New York, 1948), II, 90.

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