

Religion and Reform in 19th Century America

An Online Professional Development Seminar

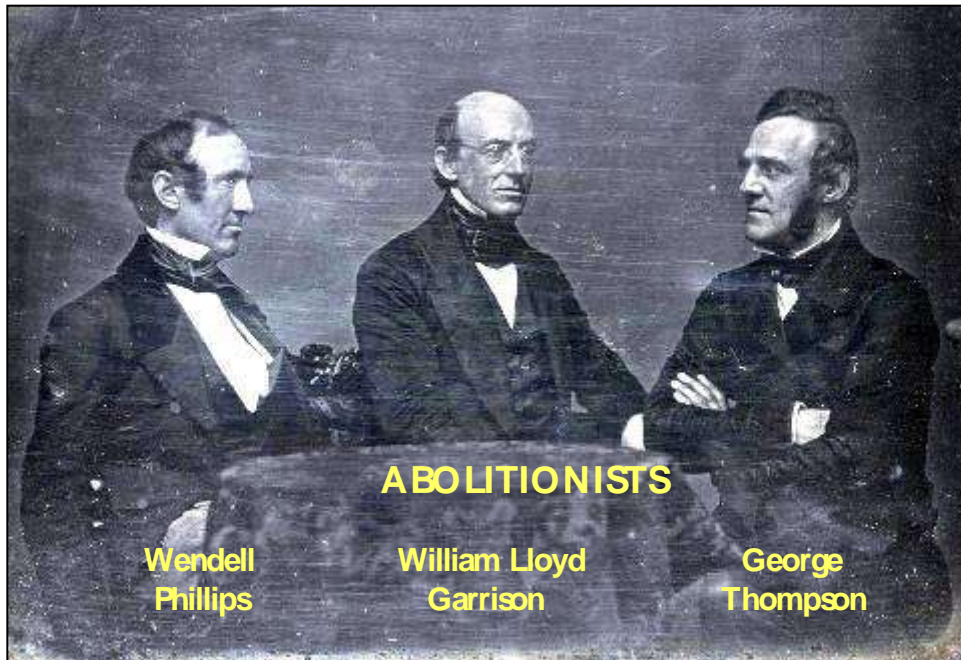
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We will begin promptly on the hour.

The silence you hear is normal.

If you do not hear anything when the images change, e-mail Caryn Koplik
ckoplik@nationalhumanitiescenter.org
for assistance.

GOALS

- To deepen your understanding of connections between religion and reform in nineteenth century America
- To provide fresh material to strengthen your teaching

FROM THE FORUM

Challenges, Issues, Questions

- How can we teach students that religions change over time?
- How are reforms like utopianism, educational reform, temperance, abolition, etc. related to each other?
- How critical was the Second Great Awakening to the reforms of the 19th century? Would the reform movements of this period have progressed as they did without the influence of religion?
- How does Roman Catholicism figure into American reform movements of the 19th century?
- How does the 1st Amendment relate to 19th century reform movements?
- How does the civil rights movement of the 1960s compare with 19th century reform movements?

Framing Questions

- How do we best understand the word “religion” when we deal with it historically?
- What is reform in the American context?
- How does the introduction of religion as a motivating factor transform our understanding of reform?
- Why is one or another social, cultural, political, or economic reality highlighted as crucial to change at certain moments in history?
- What has the role of religion been in the creation and shaping of American reform agendas?
- How can we best analyze that role in specific ways that don't lead to unsupportable or misleading generalizations?



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Rollo May and the American Search for Meaning
(Forthcomng)

*America Views the Holocaust, 1933-1945: A Brief
Documentary History*, 1999

*Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious
Imagination*, 1994

*Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation
of Nazi Concentration Camps*, 1985

*Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the
Dilemma of Reform*, 1980

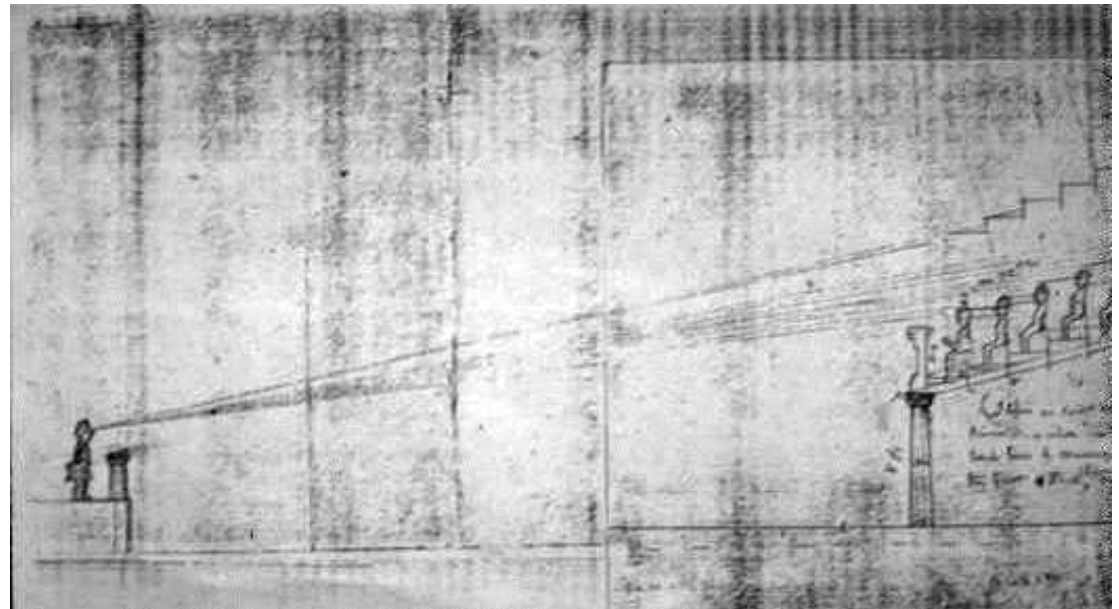
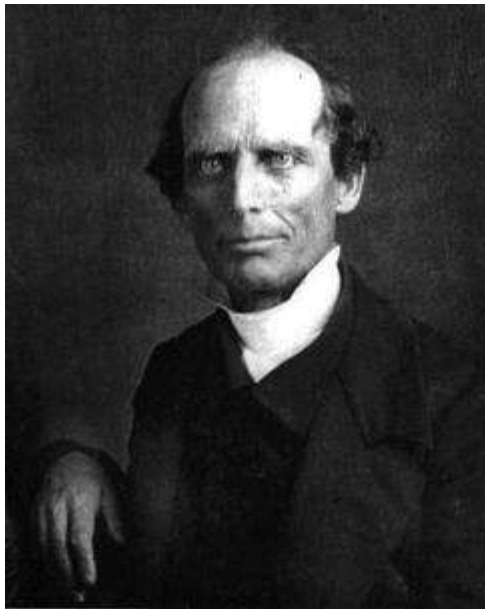
Key Terms

- Religion
- Republicanism
- Millennialism (Millenarianism)
- Physiology

Reform Movements Considered (after a detour into Spiritualism)

- Abolition
- Utopianism
- Women's Equality
- Vegetarianism
- Temperance

Evangelist and Reformer





Spiritualism

From *Death and the Afterlife* (1911)





At the battle of Fort Donelson I saw a soldier instantly killed by a cannon-ball. One arm was thrown over the high trees; a part of his brain went a great distance; other fragments were scattered about in the open field; his limbs and fingers flew among the dead and dying. Now what of this man's spiritual body? I have seen similar things many times—not deaths by cannon-balls, but analogous deaths by sudden accidents or explosions. Of this person whose body was so utterly annihilated at Fort Donelson, I saw that all the particles streamed up and met together in the air. The atmosphere was filled with those golden articles—emanations from the dead—over the whole battlefield.

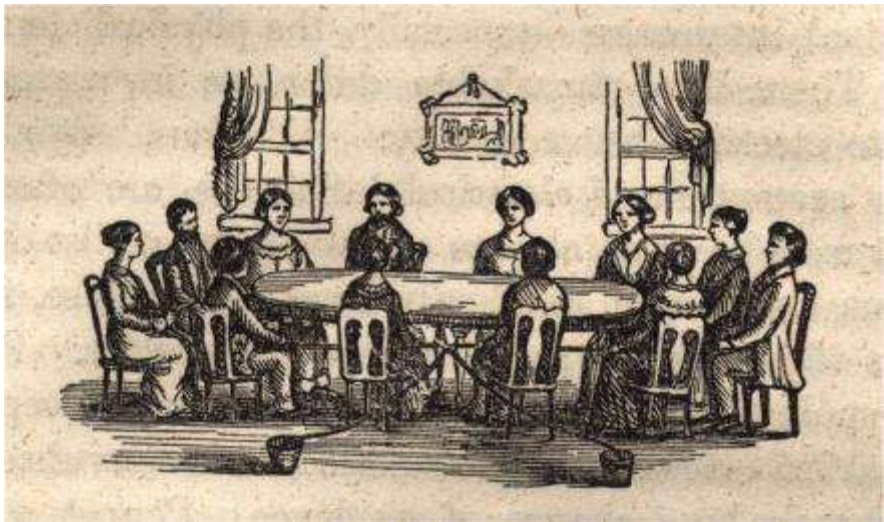
Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910)



About three-quarters of a mile above, the smoke of the battlefield—above all the “clouds that lowered” upon the hills and forests of black discord, there was visible the beautiful accumulation from the fingers and toes and heart and brain of that suddenly killed soldier. There stood the new spiritual body three-quarters of a mile above all the discord and din and havoc of the furious battle! And the bodies of many others were coming up from other directions at the same time; so that from half a mile to three and; five miles in the clear, tranquil air, I could see spiritual organisms forming and departing thence in all directions. First the face, then the head, then the neck, then the shoulders and arms—the whole smaller than the natural body, but almost exactly like it—so that you could instantly recognize the form and features of your old friend, only you would say, “Why, James, how improved you are! You look brighter and more beautiful, don't you? Your countenance has more quiet and love in it.” So entirely natural is the “spiritual body” which the good God has wisely planned and caused to rise out this terrestrial filth and corporeal corruption!

Spiritualism and the Vision of Andrew Jackson Davis

			
No. 1. The Ordinary State. SEPARATE PERSONAL SPHERES. The above represents the operator and subject beginning the magnetic process.	No. 2. The Psychological State. PARTIAL BLENDING OF SPHERES. The above condition is favorable to sympathetic and transitional phenomena.	No. 3. The Somnambule State. COMPLETE BLENDING OF SPHERES. The above state brings out excursive, examining, and medical clairvoyance.	No. 4. The Superior Condition. MENTAL SPHERES SEPARATED. The above state leads to independent clairvoyance and intuitional wisdom.



FORMATION OF THE SPIRITUAL BODY.

Maria Weston Chapman, 1806-1885



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Abolition

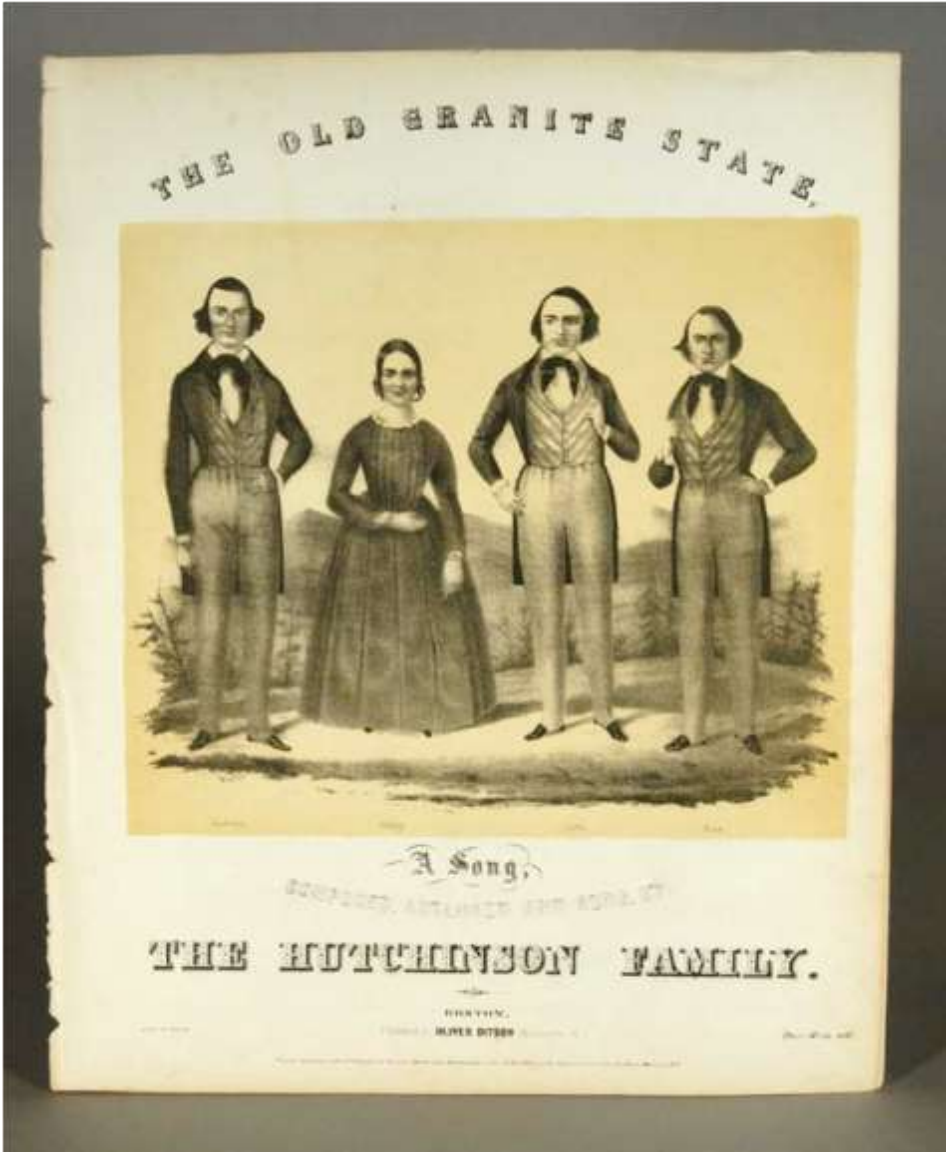


Discussion Question

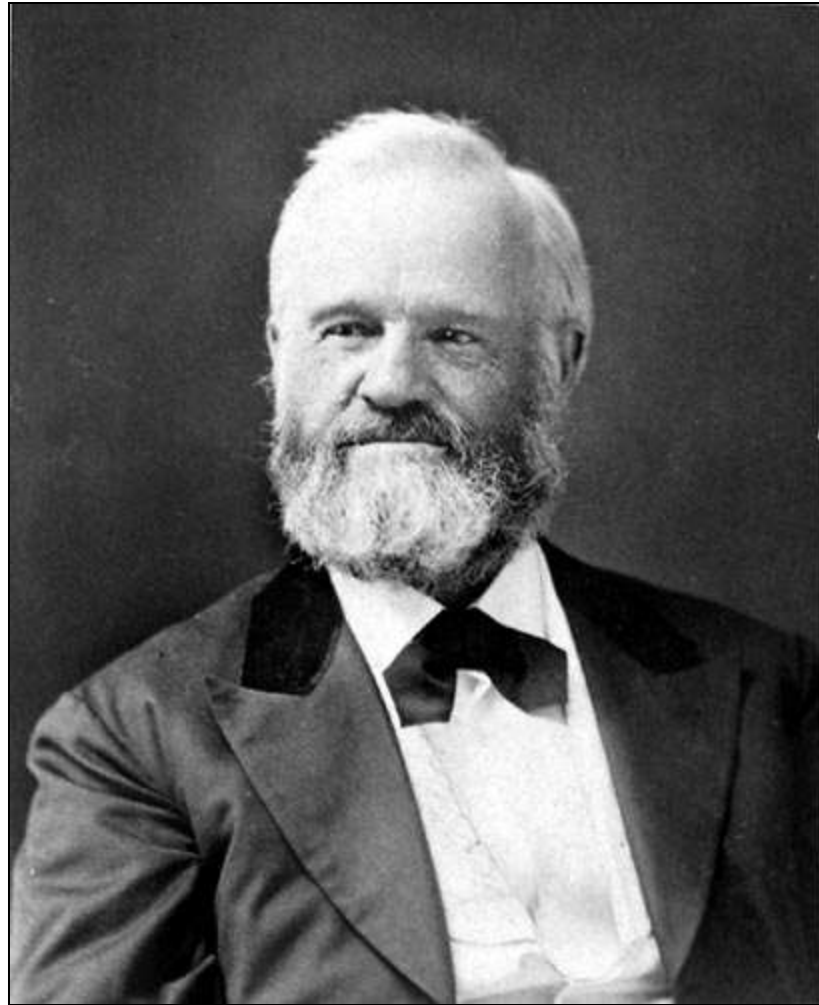
What, according to Chapman, is at stake in the antislavery struggle? In addition to freedom for the slave, what is the reward for the country and for those who take part in the crusade?

It [the antislavery cause] is “the bright consummate flower” of the Christianity of the nineteenth century. Look at those who “have not resisted the heavenly vision” it presented them of a nation overcoming its evil propensities, and doing right at all risks; ask them whether it has not saved their souls alive; ask them if it has not made them worshippers of the beauty and sublimity of high character, till they are ready to “know nothing on earth but Jesus Christ and him crucified.” For this they give all — wealth, youth, health, strength, life. Worldly success, obtained by slackening their labors against slavery, (and it is easy to have it on those terms at any moment, so placable a monster is the world.) strikes them like failure and disgrace. They have “scorned delights, and lived laborious days,” till at length they feel it no sacrifice, but the highest joy. All this the American Anti-Slavery Society demands of you. Do it! and be most grateful for the opportunity of fulfilling a work which is its own exceeding great reward. Do it, and find yourself the chosen of God, to keep alive in this nation, degraded and corrupted by slavery, the noble flame of Christian faith, the sentiment of honor and fidelity, the instinct of high-mindedness, the sense of absolute, immutable duty, the charm of chivalrous and poetic feeling, which would make of the poorest Americans the Christian gentlemen of the world.

Hutchinson Family Singers



Utopianism



Noyes and the Community



Discussion Questions

- What did the Oneida Community represent to the history of Christianity?
- To what degree did notions of evolution enter into Eastlake's interpretation?

After the lapse of another 1900 years it will be easier to understand the purpose of primal Causation in the American nation of to-day, and recognising the spiritual significance of events that now appear trivial, to place in appropriate niches her prominent reformers of this period. In His own good time Christ came and sowed the seed, and many have been, and still more will be, the messengers who from time to time will supplement His work and share His experience. The truth must be presented at different epochs and in different forms that are adapted to advancing civilization and to the demands of higher developments of brain. Presentations of truth that were well calculated to impress the animal man when he was entirely under the influence of the cerebellum would now be ridiculous and puerile [simplistic], and the same principle holds at every stage of consciousness, till the appeal to the cerebrum for recognition of truth must be as different from anything that could impress the back brain as light is from darkness. Simply a token, or an image that did not rise to the dignity of "graven," satisfied the soul of the savage, and a materialistic form of worship still satisfies many minds in nineteenth century civilisation, solely because they exercise no mind in the matter, but relegate thought on spiritual subjects to a paid priesthood.

Discussion Questions

- What did the Oneida Community represent to the history of Christianity?
- To what degree did notions of evolution enter into Eastlake's interpretation?
- What do "salvation from sin" and the "kingdom of Heaven" mean in the context of Noyes and the Oneida Community?

When men begin to realise their limitations in the line of mental achievements, they will be preparing suitable conditions for the recognition of nature's demand for regeneration, in other words, for the reception of Christ and of His messengers. OF THE LATTER, JOHN H. NOYES WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT AND CENTRAL. His message was "Salvation from sin" as the necessary and most logical test of regeneration. He heralded again the kingdom of heaven, that had been declared nineteen hundred years before as being then near "at hand (in the invisible world)," to be now a present possession on earth, wherein Christ is reigning with His people in this sphere, requiring only their recognition to enable them to enter in and share with Him the joy of nature's higher evolution upon the spiritual plane. The Oneida Community marked an important era in the evolution of the Christian Church. It was "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace;" an expression of the spiritual condition of each individual member. If each member realized "The kingdom of heaven within," it can easily be seen that the consensus of their experiences constituted the kingdom of heaven that Christ predicted. The objection that the Oneida Community ceased to exist, and therefore could not have been the Christians' ideal kingdom, is not admissible, because the ideal Heaven is neither a place nor an organisation but a spiritual condition.

Women's Equality



Discussion Questions

- By what authority does Grimké revise what seemed to be the Biblically-based Christian doctrine of sex inequality?
- What does the Bible say about the sexes, in Grimké's view?

As I am unable to learn from sacred writ when woman was deprived by God of her equality with man, I shall touch upon a few points in the Scriptures, which demonstrate that no supremacy was granted to man. When God destroyed the world, except Noah and his family, by the deluge, he renewed the grant formerly made to man, and again gave him dominion upon the earth, and over all the fishes of the sea; into his hands they were delivered. But was woman, bearing the image of her God, placed under the dominion of her fellow man? Never! Jehovah could not surrender his authority to govern his own immortal creatures into the hands of a being, whom he knew, and whom his whole history proved, to be unworthy of a trust so sacred and important. God could not do it, because it is a direct contravention of his law, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" [Mt. 4:10]. If Jehovah had appointed man as the guardian, or teacher of woman, he would certainly have given some intimation of this surrender of his own prerogative. But so far from it, we find the commands of God invariably the same to man and woman; and not the slightest intimation is given in a single passage of the Bible, that God designed to point woman to man as her instructor. The tenor of his language always is, "Look unto ME, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else" [Isa. 45:22].

Discussion Questions

- By what authority does Grimké revise what seemed to be the Biblically-based Christian doctrine of sex inequality?
- How does she draw an analogy with the state of the slave?
- What does the Bible say about the sexes, in Grimké's view?

The lust of dominion was probably the first effect of the fall; and as there was no other intelligent being over whom to exercise it, woman was the first victim of this unhallowed passion. We afterwards see it exhibited by Cain in the murder of his brother, by Nimrod in his becoming a mighty hunter of men, and setting up a kingdom over which to reign. Here we see the origin of that Upas [poisonous or harmful influence] of slavery, which sprang up immediately after the fall, and has spread its pestilential branches over the whole face of the known world. All history attests that man has subjected woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasures, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind; and now he looks triumphantly on the ruin he has wrought, and says, the being he has thus deeply injured is his inferior.

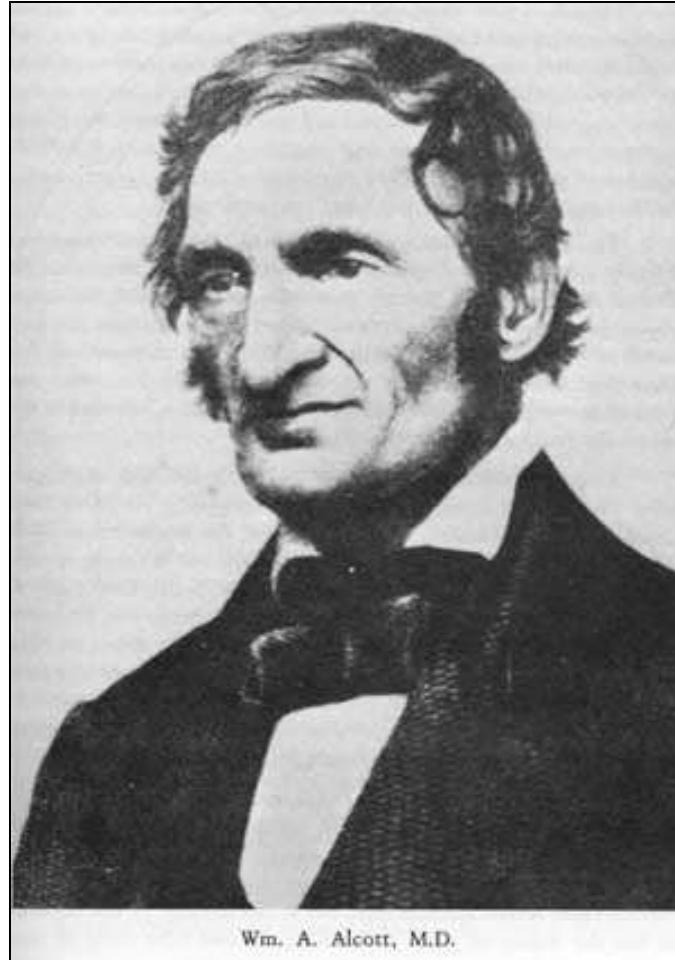
Woman has been placed by John Quincy Adams, side by side with the slave, whilst he was contending for the right side of petition. I thank him for ranking us with the oppressed; for I shall not find it difficult to show, that in all ages and countries, not even excepting enlightened republican America, woman has more or less been made a means to promote the welfare of man, without due regard to her own happiness, and the glory of God as the end of her creation.

Discussion Questions

- How does she draw an analogy with the state of the slave?

During the patriarchal ages, we find men and women engaged in the same employments. Abraham and Sarah both assisted in preparing the food which was to be set before the three men, who visited them in the plains of Mamre [Gen. 18]; but although their occupations were similar, Sarah was not permitted to enjoy the society of the holy visitant; and as we learn from Peter, that she "obeyed Abraham, calling his Lord" [1 Peter 3:6], we may presume he exercised dominion over her. We shall pass on now to Rebecca [Gen. 24]. In her history, we find another striking illustration of the low estimation in which woman was held. Eleazur is sent to seek a wife for Isaac. He finds Rebecca going down to the well to fill her pitcher. He accosts her; and she replies with all humility, "Drink, my lord." How does he endeavor to gain her favor and confidence? Does he approach her as a dignified creature, whom he was about to invite to fill an important station in his master's family, as the wife of his only son? No. He offered incense to her vanity, and "he took a golden ear-ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold," and gave them to Rebecca.

Vegetarianism



Discussion Questions

- What religious narrative does Alcott seem to be reenacting?
- How might we interpret his interweaving of the physical and spiritual?
- How might we fit this narrative and the work of Alcott into an understanding of Protestantism in America?

On the top of a considerable eminence, in the very midst of a mountain range, one of the most delightful in all New England, only a few miles from the place of my lodging, was a tower some sixty or seventy feet high, which commanded a view of the surrounding country. I had often wished to enjoy the prospect which this tower afforded. Was there now an opportunity? I had the leisure, had I the needful strength? Could I possibly reach it? And by what means?

I rested for the remainder of the day and the night following, at the foot of the eminence, in order to prepare myself for the excursion of the following morning. It was as much as I could do that night to take care of my irritable and irritated lungs. At length, however, I slept, and was refreshed. The only drawback upon my full renewal, was my usual night--or rather as I ought to say morning--perspiration, which was quite drenching and exhausting; though not much worse after all my fears than usual.

Discussion Questions

- What religious narrative does Alcott seem to be reenacting?
- How might we interpret his interweaving of the physical and spiritual?
- How might we fit this narrative and the work of Alcott into an understanding of Protestantism in America?

God is good, I said to myself, when I saw from my chamber window the top of the hills I wished to climb, and perceived that the first rays of the morning sun were already falling upon them. By the middle of the forenoon I was at the foot of the mountain, and prepared to ascend it. After a little rest, I wound my way to the tower, and finally to its top, when I took a survey of what seemed to me like a new world. Here I renewed my declaration of independence with regard to those earthly props on which I had so long been wont [accustomed] to lean, and of dependence on God, and on his natural and moral enactments.....

Twelve miles in the distance still was my father's house, now grown from a few patrimonial acres to full New England size; viz., a hundred acres or more, and well cultivated. My wandering abroad had given me a little strength and very much courage. Why should it not? Was it not truly encouraging that while I was making a long excursion, chiefly on foot, in the heats of midsummer, my cough and hectic and night sweats should become no worse, while my muscular strength had very much increased?

Discussion Questions

- What religious narrative does Alcott seem to be reenacting?
- How might we interpret his interweaving of the physical and spiritual?
- How might we fit this narrative and the work of Alcott into an understanding of Protestantism in America?

My mind's eye turned towards my father's house as a place of refuge. In a day or two I was in it; and in another day or two I was caparisoned [dressed] as a laborer, and in the field. It is true that I did not at first accomplish a great deal; but I held the implements of husbandry in my hands, and spent a certain number of hours every day in attempting to work. Some of the workmen laughed about me, and spoke of the vast benefits to be derived from having a ghost in the field with them; but I held on in spite of their jokes. I had been accustomed of old to the labor of a farm, which greatly facilitated my efforts.

TEMPERANCE

Discussion Questions

- Does the strategy propounded by Edwards line up with your own vision of the temperance movement?
- Does it work on the same principle as the later Prohibition movement?

About this time, as the happy results of the introduction of the principle of total abstinence from ardent spirits in a large farming establishment, (that of S. V. S. Wilder, Esq., at Bolton, Massachusetts,) came to his knowledge, he encouraged the careful collection of the facts, and embodied them in the valuable tract, "The Well-conducted Farm." In January and February, 1826, after much consultation with the worthy friends around him, he united with the Rev. Dr. Woods and fourteen others, ministers and laymen, in forming, in Boston, "The American Society for the Promotion of Temperance" . . . At first it proceeded noiselessly, employing no agent till the succeeding year, printing no report till December, 1829, and electing no corresponding secretary till May, 1831, when Dr. Edwards was appointed to that office.

Mr. T, a respected merchant of Boston, states that when Dr. Edwards and Dr. Woods visited Boston to propose this new organization, Mr. T replied, that "he had been laboring fifteen years to effect a temperance reformation by the moderate use; but he did not see that it did any good, and he was tired of 'the whole thing.'" "But," said the gentlemen who called on him, "we have a new idea. Our main object is, not to reform inebriates, but to induce all temperate people to continue temperate by practising total abstinence: the drunkards . . . will die, and the land be free." "I confess," said the merchant, "that is a new view of the subject, and worth thinking of. If you see best to call a meeting, I will attend it." He did so, and from that meeting proceeded the American Temperance Society.

Discussion Questions

- Does the strategy propounded by Edwards line up with your own vision of the temperance movement?
- Does it work on the same principle as the later Prohibition movement?

“My DEAR BROTHER-

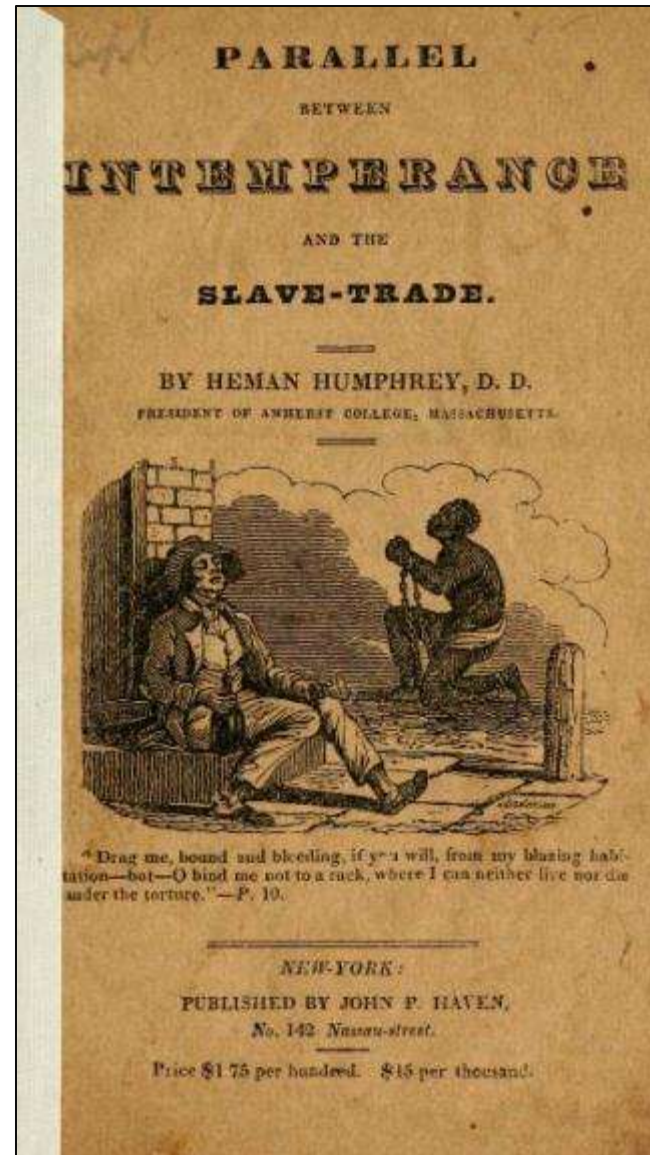
We are at present fast hold of a project for making all people in this country, and in all other countries, temperate; or rather, a plan to induce those that are now temperate to continue so. Then, as all who are intemperate will soon be dead, the earth will be eased of an amazing evil. This, you will see at once, is a great plan, and to execute it thoroughly will require great wisdom and strength. And though we are so destitute, the Lord has enough of both. 'Of his fullness' may we all receive.

ANDOVER, February 10, 1826.

Abolition and Temperance

Parallel between Intemperance and the Slave-Trade (1828)

<http://www.archive.org/details/parallelbetweeni00humpuoft>



Parallel between Intemperance and the Slave-Trade (1828)

According to Humphrey, intemperance is worse than slavery because:

➤ **It injures more people:**

According to . . . recent calculations . . . thirty-six thousand perish by the hand of this . . . destroyer, and of course it requires an equal number of fresh recruits to keep the drunkard's knell still sounding through the land. The parallel, then, as nearly as it can be ascertained, stands thus. Shipment of slaves, say in 1786, from twenty-five to thirty thousand. Brought into a worse bondage, by intemperance, in 1828, thirty-six thousand. Deaths by the slave trade, from ten to fifteen thousand — by ardent spirits, thirty-six thousand!

➤ **It harms the soul as well as the body:**

[I]ntemperance fetters the immortal mind as well as the body. It not only blisters the skin, but scorches the vitals. While it scourges the flesh, it tortures the conscience. While it cripples the wretch in every limb, and boils away his blood, and ossifies its channels, and throws every nerve into a dying tremor, it also goes down into the unsounded depths of human depravity, and not only excites all the passions to fierce insurrection against God and man, but kindles a deadly civil war in the very heart of their own empire.

Parallel between Intemperance and the Slave-Trade (1828)

According to Humphrey, intemperance is worse than slavery because:

➤ **It threatens free institutions:**

Our free institutions are more endangered by the love of ardent spirits, than they ever were by the slave-trade, or than they now are by the existing slavery of the south.

[H]ow much . . . is to be feared from two hundred thousand veterans in the army of intemperance — not confined to any particular section or district of the United States, but quartered upon every town, and village, and settlement, in the nation! We encounter these mercenaries . . . wherever we go: and the power which they wield over the destinies of the country is tremendous. They are always found at the polls, and often stand as centinels over the ballot-boxes. They choose our rulers, and are chosen themselves to govern us. They find their way not only into the inferior legislative assemblies, but into the grand council of the nation. We meet them at the bar, in the jury-box, and even on the bench. They steal into the church of the living God. . . . Do our institutions rest upon the virtue and intelligence of the people? Does every thing depend upon the purity of the elective franchise? Is almost every drunkard an elector? What, then, must the end of these things be ?

Final slide.

Thank You