

# Chapter 1

## Inventing Social Ethics

Francis Greenwood Peabody, William Jewett Tucker,  
and Graham Taylor

The social gospelers who founded social ethics were not the ones whom history remembered. The social gospelers history remembered were bracing personalities with a missionary spirit who reached the general public: Washington Gladden, Richard Ely, Josiah Strong, George Herron, and Walter Rauschenbusch. Another renowned social gospel, Shailer Mathews, was a half-exception by virtue of playing several roles simultaneously, but he operated primarily in the public square. All the renowned social gospelers came to be renowned by preaching the social gospel as a form of public homiletics.

The founders of social ethics also spoke to the general public, but as social ethicists they were absorbed by a cause that belonged to the academy: making a home for Christian ethics as a self-standing discipline of ethically grounded social science. They urged that society is a whole that includes an ethical dimension; thus, there needed to be something like social ethics. This discipline would be a central feature of liberal arts and seminary education. It would succeed the old moral philosophy, replacing an outmoded Scottish commonsense realism with a socially oriented idealism.

Intellectually the founders of social ethics belonged to the American generation that reconciled Christianity to Darwinism, accepted the historical critical approach to the Bible, and discovered the power of social ideas. As first generation social gospelers they believed that modern scholarship had rediscovered the social meaning of Christianity in the kingdom-centered faith of the historical Jesus. As early advocates of sociology, they also believed in the disciplinary unity of social science and its ethical character.

Francis Greenwood Peabody, a longtime professor at Harvard University, was the first to teach social ethics as an academic discipline, in 1880. William Jewett Tucker, an Andover Seminary professor who later achieved distinction as president of Dartmouth College, taught courses in the 1880s on “social economics.” Graham Taylor, an indefatigable social activist and colleague of Jane Addams, chaired the first department of Christian Sociology, at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS). These pioneers of social-ethical analysis were publicly prominent in their time, and did not belong wholly to the academy. But because they fought primarily in the academy, with limited success, they were not remembered as major social gospelers.

Peabody, Tucker, and Taylor proposed to study social conditions with a Christian ethical view toward what might be done about them. They shared Ely’s concern that the emerging discipline of sociology needed to be informed by the ethical conscience

of progressive religion. They updated the liberal third way between authoritarian orthodoxy and secular disbelief. They resisted an ascending social Darwinism in the social sciences and an ascending radicalism in the Socialist and labor movements. They were advocates of liberal reform, good government, cooperation, the common good, and the social gospel Jesus. Believing that social science had a great future in the academy and modern society, they did not want it to be lost to Christianity, or Christianity to it. Earnestly they sought to show that Christianity was descriptively and normatively relevant to modern society.

The founders of social ethics, to their regret, lived to witness the fragmentation of social science, the academic denial of its ethical character, and the marginalization of their intellectual enterprise. Having started something new, they lost the battle for social ethics as a university discipline, but won a place for it in theological education, establishing a theological discipline that outlived much of its social gospel basis. Social ethics survived, albeit on the fringe of the academy, because it was rooted in the nineteenth-century discovery that there is such a thing as social structure and that redemption always has a social dimension.

### **Becoming Francis Greenwood Peabody**

Most of the early social gospellers came from evangelical backgrounds, but the first social ethicist, Francis Greenwood Peabody, was born into liberal Christianity as the son of a prominent Unitarian pastor, Ephraim Peabody, and a privileged Unitarian mother, Mary Ellen Derby. Ephraim Peabody spent his early pastoral career as a Unitarian missionary to the western United States (Cincinnati) and his later career as minister of King's Chapel in Boston. Highly regarded as a spiritual leader, he preached often on character development and personality, and was known for his dedication to the poor, organizing poor-relief projects. In 1856, when his son Francis was 9 years old, Ephraim Peabody died of tuberculosis; Francis later recalled that he was "nearly seven" at the time. Elsewhere he recalled, with stronger reliability, that his parents had contrasting but complementary personalities. His father was imbued with a radiant holiness and unworldly simplicity that made him a beloved pastor, while his mother, the granddaughter of America's first millionaire (Salem merchant Elias Haskett Derby), was a cultivated, worldly, impressive woman of confident charm. Peabody viewed his parents' happy marriage as a symbol of the two traditions of New England coming together: "the idealism of the hills and the commercialism of the cities."<sup>1</sup>

As a widow, Mary Ellen Peabody resolved to raise her four children in the spiritual seriousness of their departed father. "All was for his sake; each decision of school or play was as he would have desired," Peabody later recalled. The ebullient, "luxury-loving" mother became a disciplinarian, dispensing religion with a more rigorous hand than Peabody recalled as being in the nature of his father's gentle spirit. For many years the family did not celebrate Thanksgiving because Ephraim Peabody had died on Thanksgiving. Thrown into economic hardship by his death, the family continued to live in Boston's wealthy Beacon Hill, where, Peabody claimed, he felt no envy of privileged neighbors. Gradually he forgot his father's appearance and maxims, but another kind of paternal memory was instilled in him, one that stayed in his psyche and worldview.<sup>2</sup>

Peabody wrote affectionate recollections of his parents for the rest of his life, in addition to character portraits of the many friends and relatives who made up New England's close-knit circle of Unitarian leaders. His father's former congregation paid for his education, which Peabody took at Harvard College and Harvard Divinity School, graduating respectively in 1869 and 1872. In his telling, his schooling was unremittingly desultory. As a youth it had seemed to him that Harvard professors were remarkably insular and uninteresting. Huddled in a small, secluded world of texts and each other's company, they seemed to prize their detachment from the real world of politics, commerce, and Boston as though it were a virtue. Sadly, they did not improve after Peabody enrolled at the college. He allowed that Harvard professors were distinguished intellectually, dwelling high above others, where "the air was pure"; philosopher Francis Bowen, an able proponent of Scottish commonsense moralism, taught there, as did botanist Asa Gray, mathematician Benjamin Peirce, and rhetoric scholar Francis J. Child, all respected scholars with much to offer. But in Peabody's experience of them, Harvard professors took little interest in anything besides themselves and their subjects. They bored their students with deadly recitations and barely acknowledged that a school must have students. Peabody compared them to a monastic order.<sup>3</sup>

The Divinity School proved to be equally depressing. Peabody called his three years of divinity training "a disheartening experience of uninspiring study and retarded thought." In theory Harvard Divinity School was nondenominational, not Unitarian, but in reality, a fuddy-duddy brand of Unitarian orthodoxy prevailed. Formally the school contended that it sought the truth, rather than declaring it, in matters of divinity; in reality it remained so deeply attached to the embattled Unitarian orthodoxy of the National Conference of Unitarian Churches that university officials periodically debated a divorce from the Divinity School. During Peabody's years there historical criticism was practiced sparingly, philosophical idealism was spurned, classroom lectures seemed purposely dull, and theology and ethics were taught, in his phrase, as "subjects of ecclesiastical erudition and doctrinal desiccation." Reaching for the strongest way of conveying a bad memory, Peabody declared: "The fresh breeze of modern thought rarely penetrated the lecture-rooms . . . I cannot remember attaining in seven years of Harvard classrooms anything that could be fairly described as an idea."<sup>4</sup>

That was slightly hyperbolic. Harvard Divinity School declined steeply from 1840 to 1880, averaging four faculty members and 20 students. It reached its nadir in the year 1868–9, when dean Oliver Stearns was its only full-time, able-bodied professor in residence. But the school was always liberal by virtue of being Unitarian; in the 1850s, despite being neglected by the university, it had three able teachers (Convers Francis, George Rapall Noyes, and Frederic Henry Hedge) and one bad one (George E. Ellis). Moreover, the Divinity School's upward turn began in 1869, just as Peabody arrived, when Harvard's new president, Charles William Eliot, declared that a revamped Divinity School had a vital role to play in creating a model research university at Harvard. Three new faculty appointments were made: Charles Carroll Everett, the first Bussey Professor of Theology, who became a distinguished dean at the Divinity School; Ezra Abbott, the first Bussey Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation, who achieved scholarly distinction; and Edward James Young, Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament, who flopped as a scholar and teacher and was forced to resign in 1880, ostensibly to make room for a non-Unitarian.<sup>5</sup>

These teachers schooled Peabody in German names, labels, and oracles. Despite his complaints that he heard no modern thoughts, Peabody also complained that his

teachers idolized German scholars, settling disputed points with a word from a German authority. This species of reverence drove him straight to Germany. He later explained, "It seemed essential to peace of mind that one should determine whether the gods of German theology were infallible, or whether they might sometimes nod." Peabody owed his German education to his Harvard teachers, and his subsequent career would not have been possible without the changes that occurred at Harvard during his student days.<sup>6</sup>

In Germany he journeyed first to Heidelberg, which he didn't like for its arid rationalism, then to Leipzig, which was worse for its backward-looking orthodoxy. He found a brief reward in Halle, where, like many American students before him, notably Charles Briggs and Egbert Smyth, he luxuriated in the lectures and friendship of Friedrich August Tholuck. A legendary pietist scholar and theologian, equally renowned for his kindly manner, Tholuck welcomed Americans into his classroom and home. As a theologian he stressed religious experience in the fashion of Friedrich Schleiermacher while avoiding the radical aspects of Schleiermacher's thought. Tholuck taught that evangelical faith and historical criticism were natural allies because good scholarship construed biblical meaning within the circle of faith: "It must be remembered that the scientific apprehension of religious doctrines presupposes a religious experience. Without this moral qualification, it is impossible to obtain a true insight into theological dogmas."<sup>7</sup>

Peabody heard Tholuck lecture on historical and modern theology, and Tholuck offered to meet with him privately to study Schleiermacher's *Discourses on Religion*. But upon descending the stairway in his home to greet Peabody for their first session, Tholuck either stumbled or had a seizure, falling down the stairs. His health deteriorated rapidly afterwards. Though Tholuck lectured for seven more years until his death in 1877, Peabody and his wife Cora Weld were the last Americans to experience the Tholuck effect. For Peabody, Tholuck was the ideal: a rigorous scholar with a devout Christian spirit. Years later Peabody put it stronger, recalling that Tholuck showed him "that the career of a scholar might be consistent with the character of a saint." In Tholuck's classroom Peabody began his long association with German thought and his career as an American interpreter of German theology.<sup>8</sup>

His first idea came to him in a German bookshop in 1872. Perusing Otto Pfeleiderer's book *Die Religion, ihr Wesen und ihre Geschichte* (1869) (*Religion, Its Nature and Its History*) it occurred to Peabody that he might spend his life doing the sort of thing that Pfeleiderer did: validating a religious philosophy by its history. Instead of beginning with an a priori doctrine or tradition, one might derive a religious outlook from an inductive study of human nature and ethical activity. Peabody reasoned that if he studied religion inductively, through its historical development, he should be able to defend it in a way that rescued religion from provincialism.<sup>9</sup>

That was the seed of social ethics – at least, in his case. Peabody expected to write about such things as a pastor. After a brief stint as a chaplain at Antioch College in Ohio he came home to Boston as minister of the First Parish (Unitarian) in Cambridge. Peabody gave six years to parish ministry, although in practice, as he admitted, it was more like three. He aspired to a long career at Cambridge's flagship Unitarian parish, but was ill most of the time. Nineteenth-century New Englanders believed that long, arduous trips to California and Europe were the best remedy for chronic illnesses, so Peabody took two of them. His father had died of tuberculosis at the age of 49; many of Peabody's devoted parishioners feared that he was destined to a similar fate. In 1880,

after returning from a second prolonged absence still in poor health, he resigned himself to a lower, less important, less taxing vocation: lecturer at Harvard Divinity School. To Peabody, giving up the ministry for the work of a seminary instructor seemed “a calamity.” He consoled himself that perhaps he could teach seminarians “the lessons of my own defeat.” Instead he found an unexpected calling at the take-off of the social gospel, the American liberal theology movement, and Harvard’s drive to become a modern research university.<sup>10</sup>

## Philosophies of Moral Philosophy

The social gospel happened for a confluence of reasons that impacted on each other. It was fed by the wellsprings of eighteenth-century Enlightenment humanitarianism and the postmillennialist passion for social redemption that fueled the evangelical anti-slavery movements. It took root as a response to the corruption and oppressive conditions of the Gilded Age, goaded by writers such as Edward Bellamy, Stephen Colwell, Richard Ely, and Henry Demarest Lloyd. It took inspiration from the existence of a Christian Socialist movement in England, and rode on the back of a rising sociological consciousness and literature.<sup>11</sup>

Above all, the social gospel was a response to a burgeoning labor movement. Union leaders blasted the churches for doing nothing for poor and working-class people. Liberal Christian leaders realized it was pointless to defend Christianity if the churches were indefensible on this issue. Defending Christianity and improving its social conscience went together.

Thus the first attempts by seminaries to link Christian ethics with social problems usually folded the enterprise into apologetics. Christianity had to be defended against the new challenges to Christian belief. In 1851 the earliest forerunner of the social gospel, Stephen Colwell, admonished Protestant ministers not to deride the stirrings of the poor for social justice. A Philadelphia manufacturer and trustee of Princeton Theological Seminary, Colwell had a prescient social conscience. His book *New Themes for the Protestant Clergy* (1851) urged that it was natural and a good thing for the working class to revolt against a predatory economic system. Colwell wanted American Protestantism to be known for speaking to the working class “in tones of kindness and encouragement.” Instead of defending “selfishness to its highest limits” in the economic order Protestant ministers should demand an economy consistent with the teachings of Jesus: “This idea of considering men as mere machines for the purpose of creating and distributing wealth, may do well to round off the periods, syllogisms, and statements of political economists; but the whole notion is totally and irreconcilably at variance with Christianity.”<sup>12</sup>

Colwell was an advocate of sharing and community, not socialism, but he credited Socialists for championing social justice: “We look upon the whole socialist movement as one of the greatest events of this age.” He shook his head at ministers who attacked socialism as an enemy of Christianity, imploring them to stop embarrassing Christianity with such nonsense. Besides making a show of their ignorance, he admonished, the clergy betrayed “a stubborn and wicked conservatism which is rooted to one spot in this world of evil.”<sup>13</sup>

Colwell was a lonely voice in Protestant polite society of the 1850s and 1860s, but in 1871 he became the principal founder of a chair in Christian ethics at Princeton

Theological Seminary, the first of its kind in the United States. Eventually named the Stephen Colwell Chair of Christian Ethics, it was originally called the chair of Christian Ethics and Apologetics. The seminary announced that its purpose was to explore “Christian ethics, theoretically, historically, and in living connection with various branches of the social sciences.” That was an early definition of social ethics, although the chair’s first occupant, Charles A. Aiken, emphasized apologetics and philosophical ethics, not the social sciences. He took a brief and apologetic pass at labor, assured that Christianity gave labor a new dignity, and stressed the history of philosophical ethics. Aiken’s model was the old moral philosophy, not social ethics.<sup>14</sup>

The founders of social ethics conceived their invention as the successor to a fading, venerable, still-important moral philosophy. Nearly every American college put moral philosophy at the center of its required curriculum, usually as a capstone course taught by a clergyman college president. In most colleges theology was esteemed and daily chapel was compulsory. The unifying center of the curriculum, however, was a vaguely religious course in moral philosophy consisting of four parts. The first part expounded the method of a favored philosophy; the second part offered an account of human nature and its drives; the third part developed a general ethical system; and the fourth part applied moral principles to institutional and social concerns. Moral philosophy was a remarkably uniform enterprise in American schools because one school of philosophy dominated American education: Scottish commonsense realism.<sup>15</sup>

Until the late seventeenth century, the right philosophy in Western higher education was Aristotelianism. Harvard, founded in 1636, was colonial America’s only school of higher education in the seventeenth century. It taught the classical *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and logic and the *quadrivium* of arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. Critics protested that a Puritan college should put Calvinist theology at the center of its curriculum, but Harvard conducted classes in Latin, featured Aristotle in physics and metaphysics, and stuck with the pagan texts and forms of the Great Tradition. In the manner of medieval universities, Harvard surrounded and supplemented its classical curriculum with Christian texts (especially Puritan theologian William Ames’ *Medulla Theologica*), a few recent authors, and a strongly Christian environment. School officials stressed that Puritan thought was fully compatible with natural science, which was called “natural philosophy.” Reformed theology taught that creation could be known through reason; thus, Harvard’s Puritan heritage had nothing to fear from the scientific study of creation.<sup>16</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century, however, a more modern idea of natural philosophy had pushed Aristotle aside. Aristotle taught that objects acquire impetus or gravity, and virtue is an acquired skill that one develops through practice. The former notion, to Christian interpreters, left the universe open to supernatural agency, while Aristotle’s open-ended concept of the moral life was amenable to Christian appropriation. Modern science, to the contrary, epitomized in Isaac Newton’s physics, taught that the universe is a closed system with universal physical laws. Newton (1642–1727) discovered the generalized binomial theorem, the law of gravitation, and the principle of the composition of light, and invented calculus (though he did not publish until after Leibniz, decades later). Newton’s masterwork, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687), modeled on Euclidean geometry, demonstrated its propositions mathematically from definitions and mathematical axioms. He taught that the world consists of material bodies that interact according to three laws of motion concerning the uniformity of motion, change of motion, and mutuality of action. Newton

described the ultimate conditions of his system – absolute time, space, place, and motion – as independent quantities constituting an absolute framework for measure. His belief in God rested chiefly on his admiration for the mathematical order of creation. The *Principia* was hailed immediately as a revolutionary leap forward in understanding, making Newton famous. In the late seventeenth century “the new natural philosophy,” as it was called at Harvard, was Newton’s picture of nature as a universal system of mathematical order.<sup>17</sup>

Harvard president Increase Mather, fighting off a liberal surge, commended Newtonian students in a commencement address for savoring “a liberal mode of philosophizing.” Since Aristotle was wrong about creation, resurrection, and the immortality of the soul, Mather allowed, it was not a bad thing to put Aristotle in his place. But the ideal was the true liberal one of seeking the truth through the old and new ways: “You who are wont to philosophize in a liberal spirit, are pledged to no particular master, yet I would have you hold fast to that one truly golden saying of Aristotle: *Find a friend in Plato, a friend in Socrates* (and I would say a friend in Aristotle), *but above all find a friend in Truth.*” That diplomatic maneuvering was not enough to prevent Mather’s factional rivals from replacing him as Harvard’s president in 1701, the same year that Connecticut Congregational clergy founded Yale. Connecticut pastors charged that Harvard was obviously backsliding from Puritan orthodoxy. In 1711, Harvard president John Leverett confirmed that Harvard had moved away from Aristotle, if not orthodoxy: “In philosophical matters, Harvardians philosophize in a sane and liberal manner, according to the manner of the century.” Natural philosophy was the system in which true explanations about natural things were provided, he explained: “Without any manner of doubt whatever, all humane matters must be tested by Philosophy. But the same license is not permissible to Theologians.”<sup>18</sup>

At Harvard, Newtonian physics defined “the manner of the century” in natural philosophy, while the works of Newton’s friend and Royal Society colleague John Locke (1632–1704) acquired canonical status in epistemology, political philosophy, moral philosophy, and method. In Book 1 of his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1689), Locke argued that the mind has no innate ideas. In Book 2 he argued that all ideas are products of sensory experience or reflection on experience. In Book 3 he discussed how language gets in the way of the attempt to lay hold of reality. In Book 4 he described the empirical method of analyzing and making judgments about evidence. Locke argued that the mind works on its ideas of sensation and reflection through the operations of combination, division, generalization, and abstraction. On ideas he was an empiricist, seeming to argue that ideas are mental objects, though he inspired rival schools of interpretation on this point. On knowledge he was a rationalist, arguing that knowledge is a product of reason working out the connections between ideas, not something produced directly by our senses. On substance he seemed to believe that things possess a substratum that support their properties, though interpretations varied here as well. On matters religious he was a Puritan Enlightenment defender of the reasonableness of Christianity and the divine commands of God. Locke distinguished between belief and knowledge, arguing that something can be rationally believed as true, but not rightly counted as knowledge, if it is established without direct observation or reasoned deduction. A bare authority claim is never an adequate basis for knowledge, but revelation has its place in theology if it does not contradict reason. God’s existence is knowable because it is a condition of human existence, but matters of revelation can be rational beliefs at most, not knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

These ideas had a vast influence in Western philosophy; following Locke, philosophers conceived epistemology as theorizing about the elements, combinations, and associations of experience, or differently, how perceptions are filtered through the mind's innate capacities that arrange them into ideas. Immanuel Kant, Frances Hutcheson, and James Mill philosophized in the Lockean mode, as did George Berkeley, the next great British philosopher after Locke, who set his extreme idealism against the ostensibly skeptical and atheistic implications of Locke's thought. In the colonial and postcolonial United States Locke was revered as a defender of private property and theorist of the "nightwatchman state." It helped that he was a public intellectual, not a university professor, and that in his later life he was perhaps the most famous intellectual in Europe.

But despite the great respect that Locke commanded in the USA, his thought was not the basis of American moral philosophy. Harvard gave pride of place to Locke, but in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries many newly founded church-related colleges did not. Colonial and postcolonial American educators looked to Great Britain for guidance in philosophy, but Locke was too skeptical to inspire confidence, and it was a dismal period for Oxford and Cambridge. Locke's denial of innate ideas, his thin theory of the self, his rationalistic reserve, and his non-Trinitarianism were cited against him by nervous American religious leaders and educators, who got their philosophical bearings from the Scottish Enlightenment.

Unitarian leader William Ellery Channing was a notable example of a religious leader who embraced Scottish moralism after turning from Locke. In the 1790s, when Channing was a student at Harvard, Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* was a pillar of the Harvard curriculum. But Channing was appalled by Locke's denial of innate ideas. If human beings had a spiritual nature, it could not be that all ideas were products of sensory experience or reflection on experience; Channing smelled the materialism in Locke's sensationalist epistemology. Hollis professor David Tappan advised Channing that Frances Hutcheson was worth reading, at least outside class. By then American colleges were already turning to the Scottish moralists for philosophical guidance, a trend begun and maintained by the College of Philadelphia since its founding in 1755. Hutcheson contended that the soul has an innate capacity for altruism, which supported Channing's faith that human beings possess an innate spiritual nature and moral sense. On that basis Scottish commonsense philosophy captured the field of American moral philosophy and much of the Unitarian movement before it finally overtook Harvard too.<sup>20</sup>

The Scottish Enlightenment philosophers who mattered to American educators were not the ones who grew famous, David Hume and Adam Smith. The really significant Scottish thinkers, to Americans, were the commonsense realists: Francis Hutcheson (1694–1747), Adam Ferguson (1723–1816), Thomas Reid (1710–96), and Welsh intuitionist Richard Price (1723–91). These thinkers combined epistemological realism, intuitionism, moral idealism, and an appeal to commonsense universalism. They taught that the fundamental principles of reason and morals are self-evident intuitions. Even Locke, despite his denial of innate ideas, conceded the reality of one intuitive belief: self-consciousness of one's existence. To the commonsense moralists, that put into play the basis of a better philosophy than Lockean empiricism.<sup>21</sup>

They argued that self-consciousness contains fundamental principles that are prior to and independent of experience, such as substance, extension, mass, and the moral sense. All discoveries of reason are grounded on these innate principles. Scottish



commonsense was not a monolith: Reid and Price judged that Hutcheson's ethical sentimentalism was too subjective; Price held that Hutcheson shortchanged the free agency of the self in making moral choices; against Hutcheson, Reid and Price held that the moral sense is educable. But all contended that virtue and vice belong to the nature of things. The fundamental principles of reason cannot be denied without self-contradiction, they argued; nobody seriously denies the reality of causality or an external world. In the same way, the very ideas of moral right and wrong are inherent in the process of reasoning. The way forward in philosophy was to affirm the verdict of common sense that sensation automatically causes true belief in external objects.

The greatest commonsense thinker, Reid, stressed that every ideal system eventually conflicts with the innate principles of conception and belief by which the mind works. Descartes, seeking an ideal system, launched philosophy down a blind alley; those that followed came to doubt that they knew anything for sure. Some denied the reality of mind and some denied matter; Hume even denied that he had a self. Reid urged deep thinkers to return to the mind's given furniture, which they took for granted in their everyday living. However many fundamental principles there may have been – Reid never developed a systematic account – they were divinely given and the answer to modern philosophy's embarrassing confusions: "They make up what is called *the common sense of mankind*; and, what is manifestly contrary to any of those first principles, is what we call *absurd*."<sup>22</sup>

Commonsense intuitionism was an alternative to religious dogmatism and the empiricist stricture that evidence about the things of sense is all that we have. It inferred universal moral laws from the common experience of conscience. It offered a unifying language and philosophy of virtue. It serviced the need of a broad moral philosophy that was not owned exclusively by any theological or ideological party. And it provided a basis for conceiving morality as an autonomous science.

The career of commonsense realism at Princeton was a bellwether of its success elsewhere. In the late 1750s, while Francis Bowen taught a commonsense blend of natural religion, moral philosophy, political economy, and civil polity at Harvard as the Alford Professor, Princeton president Jonathan Edwards contended that commonsense was too optimistic. Hutcheson's theory of a universal moral sense wrongly minimized original sin, Edwards argued; thus it wrongly supposed that human beings possessed the free ability to choose the good.

But even at Princeton commonsense was soon claimed for Calvinist orthodoxy. In 1768 John Witherspoon – the only cleric to sign the Declaration of Independence – became president of Princeton. To Witherspoon it was terribly important to establish ethics as a self-standing science. Hutcheson had shown how to do so, even if his theology fell short of robust orthodoxy. Human consciousness was a source of scientific data, and scientific examination disclosed the existence of a moral sense, from which the principles of a universal ethic could be derived. On that basis Witherspoon re-established moral philosophy at Princeton and later helped to organize the new American government along with his protégé, James Madison. For Witherspoon, as for hundreds of American clergy who served as college presidents and taught the required course on moral philosophy, the new science of morality served the cause of building up the new Republic. Religion and morality supported each other, but theologies were many, while morality was a common inheritance. That rendering of moral truth had a long career in the American academy.<sup>23</sup>

## **Beyond Moral Philosophy: Social Ethics**

Moral philosophy was about nurturing moral values and serving the good of the Republic, vaguely in the name of religion. But the schoolmaster ethos of moral philosophy did not wear well in the Gilded Age. American colleges, having been founded to produce an educated clergy, tried to accommodate the needs of an expanding constituency by adding modern subjects to the classical model. By the mid-1860s the needs outstripped the model. American colleges and the growing number of universities had to change the model to give engineers, business executives, and scientists the education they needed. The universities, especially, gave higher priority to science. Brown University president Francis Wayland was a pioneer of the university model, under which inductive science grew stronger in the academy. Philosophical idealism also grew stronger in the American academy, reflecting, like the rise of science, the admiration of American educators for German universities. University of Michigan chancellor Henry P. Tappan was a leading advocate of fashioning American universities on the German model.<sup>24</sup>

To an academy that increasingly prized scientific induction as the golden road to truth, moral philosophy appeared quaint, and science no longer took a back seat to philosophy or theology. Universities changed to accommodate the needs of an industrial society and the increasing prestige of science. In the 1870s moral philosophy fell off its pedestal, derided for its emphasis on deductive reasoning. It was not yet out of a job, because American educational leaders still believed that knowledge had little worth if virtue decreased. Some discipline had to speak for the moral basis of the social order and the academy's search for truth. But the climate had changed, as the founders of social ethics perceived. If the unifying, moral, and spiritual efficacy of the old moral philosophy was to be recovered, it had to speak the language of science. The founders of social ethics also judged, however, that the new moral philosophy had to be more Christian than the old one.

The social gospellers who proposed to replace moral philosophy with social ethics made a shrewdly pious, though sincere, claim: their approach was more explicitly Christian than the old one, because it recovered the kingdom faith of Jesus for modern Christianity. It was the same argument they employed to defend biblical criticism. Moral philosophy, like historic Christianity, obscured the gospel with dubious accretions and traditions, but liberal Protestant scholarship stripped away the inventions of human mediators to regain the religion of Jesus.

In 1877, Union Theological Seminary took a step in the direction of social ethics, establishing a course in Christian ethics taught by George L. Prentiss. The idea that Christian ethics might be taught more or less on its own was gaining traction. Union and Princeton seminaries kept a wary eye on each other; thus Union noticed Princeton's precedent in establishing an ethics chair. At the college level Christian ethics was absorbed by moral philosophy; in seminaries it was a branch in the tree of systematic theology, usually called moral philosophy or "moral science." Years later Prentiss reflected that the crucial difference between the old moral philosophy and the new Christian ethics was the explicitly Christian character of the latter. Moral philosophy "had little to do with Christianity," he recalled, exaggerating to make a point. "Manuals and elementary treatises were based almost wholly upon the simple teaching of reason and conscience, irrespective of revelation or the Bible." To Prentiss the new

Christian ethics was better because it had a sharper theological identity, it offered a stronger apologetic, and it was more relevant socially: “Both Christian apology and Christian Ethics seem to me specially fitted to aid in the solution of some of the hardest present day problems concerning truth and duty, whether in the social, political or commercial sphere.” In the academy, the apostle of that proposition was Peabody.<sup>25</sup>

Peabody recognized that his timing was highly fortunate, having come along when something really new was possible. By his reckoning, he got to play a leading role in three academic revolutions. The first was the transformation of a denominational seminary into a nondenominational, university school of theology. The second was the invention of social ethics. The third was the abolition of Harvard’s chapel requirement. At Harvard, none of these “revolutions” would have occurred without president Charles Eliot’s strong support of the Divinity School and his insistence that it outgrow its sectarian past. In each case, a strong-minded lesser player carried out the change. The agent of the Divinity School’s transformation was Charles Carroll Everett, who served as dean from 1879 to 1900. The founder of social ethics was Peabody, though he gave the credit to his patron, New York philanthropist Alfred Tredway White. Peabody was also the one who alleviated Harvard students of compulsory chapel, but he gave the credit to legendary Episcopal rector and Harvard trustee Phillips Brooks.<sup>26</sup>

When Peabody began his teaching career, Harvard Divinity School was not much more than a training school for Unitarian pastors. All American seminaries were denominational training schools, while theology, being based in the seminaries, was only slightly less parochial. Peabody later recalled: “Theology as a science, correlated with law or medicine, with the same method of free research and the same spirit of singleminded devotion to truth, had practically no recognition among American seminaries.” In 1879, just before he joined the faculty, he told Harvard’s Board of Overseers that the Divinity School should aspire to be a thoroughly academic, “unsectarian school” modeled on the great German universities. Years later Peabody took pride that Unitarian Harvard was the first institution to set theology free from the church, by setting the Divinity School free from monolithic Unitarian influence. Formally at least, Harvard opted for university theology, which he called “the higher Unitarianism.”<sup>27</sup>

Under Everett’s leadership, the new Divinity School claimed to stand for objective theological scholarship, not a party interest. Hebrew was demoted to an elective, instruction in “social service” was added, an elective system was adopted, and the faculty made diversity hires. In 1880, Crawford Howell Toy, a Southern Baptist biblical scholar, replaced Edward Young in the Hancock chair, and Peabody was appointed lecturer in ethics and homiletics. The following year Peabody was appointed as Parkman Professor of Theology; David Gordon Lyon, a Southern Baptist protégé of Toy’s, took the Hollis chair; and a lay Congregationalist with little religious background, Ephraim Emerton, took the Winn chair in church history. In 1883 the elective system was formally introduced and another Congregationalist, Joseph Henry Thayer, joined the faculty and subsequently gained the Bussey chair in New Testament Criticism. These six scholars, counting Everett, worked together at Harvard to the end of the century. All of them except Thayer had studied in Germany, and all believed in the ideal of objective scholarship – specifically, the practice of critical, genetic interpretation – which they called the scientific method.<sup>28</sup>

From the beginning of his career Peabody was keenly aware of, and troubled about, William Graham Sumner at Yale, who used Herbert Spencer's *Study of Sociology* as a textbook. Peabody also knew that the American Social Science Association was trying to hold together the vision of a unified scientific study of society. Both were public matters that helped to shape Peabody's sense of his enterprise. An optimistic, vaguely religious version of social Darwinism with a strong progress-motif was popular in American culture; libertarians and early Progressivists alike assured that American society was evolving in a good direction. Sumner, however, had a darker view of where social evolution was headed, and he played up the anti-theistic aspects of social Darwinism, which offended religious leaders.

In the 1860s Sumner had studied biblical criticism at Göttingen, which attracted him to social and historical analysis, but which ended his plans to become an Episcopal priest. In 1870 he read Spencer's essays, later collected as *The Study of Sociology*, which converted him to social Darwinism. Two years later he joined the Yale faculty to teach political and social science. An eccentric figure, riveting in the classroom, Sumner gave cheeky, opinionated lectures that propagandized for social Darwinism in the name of "the science of society," a phrase he preferred to sociology. He refused to teach women, railed against government, and exhorted his well-born male students to resist all schemes to lift up the poor and weak. His aggressive teaching sparked a public controversy over the boundaries of the new social science. Religious leaders deplored Sumner's bias against Christian ethics; his defenders replied that he studied society empirically and inductively just like nature. Sociology would not get anywhere as a science if it had to defer to religious objections.<sup>29</sup>

A few social Darwinists equivocated on whether social Darwinism and the scientific understanding of society were the same thing. Sumner replied that upholding a doctrine, even one as sound as social Darwinism, was not really the point. That was why he preferred not to speak of sociology, which sounded like a bundle of ideas or doctrines. What mattered was the disinterested, scientific pursuit of truth. On the other hand, he assured, the truth disclosed by science was Spencer's picture of a brutal struggle for survival, which made a mockery of fashionable sentimental humanism. Social evolution was about the competition of life for the limited resources of nature. Culture was the cultivation of physical and psycho-social traits that advanced the struggle for life.

Moralists, Sumner observed, spoke on behalf of "the weak" and "the poor," claiming that government existed "in some especial sense, for the sake of the classes so designated, and that the same classes (whoever they are) have some especial claim on the interest and attention of the economist and social philosopher." Some moralists even measured the moral health of society by how it treated its most vulnerable members. That was utter nonsense, Sumner replied; it was perverse to suppose that "the training of men is the only branch of human effort in which the labor and care should be spent, not on the best specimens but on the poorest." There was such a thing as progress in civilization, Sumner allowed; he was not a reactionary who believed in turning back the clock on universal (male) suffrage or education for the masses. But progress was extremely slow and slight, it always had a dark side, and it was easily wrecked by indulgent sentimentality toward the poor: "Under our so-called progress evil only alters its forms, and we must esteem it a grand advance if we can believe that, on the whole, and over a wide view of human affairs, good has gained a hair's breadth over evil in a century."<sup>30</sup>

This was a major voice in the contest to define the meaning of the new social science for American politics and society. Sumner's blend of *laissez-faire* economics and Darwinian natural selection made a strong bid to set sociology against the biblical and humanitarian command to remember the poor. In 1885 a small group of social gospels led by Richard Ely and Washington Gladden founded the American Economics Association to oppose the ascending idea that survival of the fittest was the last word in social science. The group declared in its platform:

We hold that the doctrine of *laissez-faire* is unsafe in politics and unsound in morals; and that it suggests an inadequate explanation of the relations between the state and the citizens . . . We hold that the conflict of labor and capital has brought to the front a vast number of social problems whose solution is impossible without the united efforts of the church, state and science.

At the founding conference of the Association in Saratoga, New York, Ely implored that good social science went hand in hand with good religion:

We who have resolved to form an American Economics Association hope to do something toward the developing of a system of social ethics. We wish to accomplish certain practical results in the social and financial world, and believing that our work lies in the direction of practical Christianity, we appeal to the church, the chief of the social forces in this country, to help us, to support us, and to make our work a complete success, which it can by no possibility be without her assistance.

Good social science had an ethical conscience that opposed the predatory anarchy of unregulated capitalism, but it could not win the struggle for social influence in the USA without the active support of the churches.<sup>31</sup>

Peabody shared that conviction with a rising movement for "Applied Christianity," although he was ambivalent about the American Economics Association, since he also believed in the dream of a unified social science. In 1865 the American Social Science Association had been founded to promote social scientific analysis and solutions to social problems. Frank Sanborn, secretary of the group, noted that theology and "ecclesiastical polemics" were being overtaken by a better kind of literature consisting of "systems, essays, manuals, and illustrations of Social Science, which have little to do with heaven or hell, but aim to make this pitiful little globe of ours a better place for us while we inhabit its crust." Twenty years later Sanborn reaffirmed that good social science had a powerful ethical aim. To positivists, good social science dealt with facts, not with values. To social Darwinists, the ideal was a marriage of Darwinian natural selection to a rigorous Protestant work ethic. To traditional religionists, dogma trumped science. To Sanborn, the ideal was a unified social science that analyzed society and helped to solve its problems: "Methinks this expresses very well what our association has been doing in its broader field and with more miscellaneous activity, for the last twenty years. To learn patiently what *is* – and to promote diligently what *should* be – this is the double duty of all the social sciences."<sup>32</sup>

The founders of social ethics believed in that double duty. The crucial thing was to hold together the *is* and the *ought*. On the other hand, social scientists had very little social agency besides writing books. To make a real impact on American society, the social sciences and Christian ethics had to be fused together, mobilizing the churches to promote progressive social change.

That was the idea that Peabody took to his early classes at Harvard. In 1881 he was appointed to the Parkman chair and began teaching a course titled “Practical Ethics” at the Divinity School. Two years later he opened the course to undergraduates under the title, “Ethical Theories and Moral Reform.” The title changed several times over the years, from “Philosophy 5” to “Ethical Theories and Social Reforms” to “The Practical Ethics of Social Reforms” to “The Ethics of the Social Question.” Finally, after 20 years of name changes, Peabody’s friend and colleague William James asked “Why not call it ‘Social Ethics?’” That settled the name of this enterprise at Harvard. The topics, however, changed very little over the years; Peabody had a clear method from the beginning, and he divided his time between the Divinity School and the College. In 1886 he was appointed Plummer Professor of Christian Morals, a chair that better reflected his role at Harvard. Meanwhile the enrollments kept climbing. In 1883 he had eight students; by 1902 he had 112; in 1906 he topped out with 146 undergraduates. A faculty colleague jocularly dubbed the course “Drainage and Divorce,” which morphed into the students’ tag, rendered with a mixture of affection and whimsy: “Peabo’s drainage, drunkenness, and divorce.”<sup>33</sup>

In 1895 Peabody added a second course, “Sociological Seminars,” for divinity and other graduate students, which focused variously on the idea of a Christian social order, the ethics of Jesus and the New Testament, religion and society, Christian ethics and modern life, and the history of social ethics; in 1905 he changed the title to “Social Ethics Seminars.” By then the original course was an institution at Harvard. Until 1905 it was offered, at the College, in the Philosophy department, but in 1906 social ethics became a self-standing department funded by Alfred Tredway White. Peabody’s dream for social ethics appeared to be coming true, at least at Harvard. After his friend Everett retired in 1901 – Peabody called him “both father-confessor and delightful companion” – Peabody served as dean of the Divinity School for five years, and when he retired in 1913, the Department of Social Ethics featured seven courses and several research seminars.<sup>34</sup>

From the beginning Peabody approached ethics inductively as the study of social movements addressing major social problems. Temperance and divorce were high on the list, befitting his connection to moral philosophy and the usual concerns of theological ethics, but he also featured the labor movement, “the Indian problem,” and philanthropy. He stressed that from a social scientific standpoint, the principles of ethics had to be derived from the study of social problems and the movements to correct them. In 1886 Peabody explained to Sanborn

I was led to my subject by a somewhat different road from most of those who deal with it. As a teacher of ethics I became aware of the chasm which exists between such abstract study and the practical application of moral ideals; and it seemed to me possible to approach the theory of ethics inductively, through the analyses of great moral movements, which could be easily characterized and from which principles could be deduced.<sup>35</sup>

In the footsteps of moral philosophy he began the course with a detailed outline of his method, but Peabody cautioned that the old moral philosophy was deductive and focused on the individual; the new Christian ethics was inductive and emphasized social problems. Moral philosophy was good at abstracting inferences from the common experience of conscience, but it was too removed from specific social problems to deal with them effectively. Emphasizing psychology and deduction, the moral

philosophers “dissected and tabulated the impulses and emotions of life.” They turned ethics into a “dull study” that deadened youthful minds. What was needed was a “science of life” that started with “the data and the problems of life.” Sometimes Peabody stated explicitly that his project was to transform moral philosophy: “What moral philosophy needs is a new method of approach.” On the other hand, the social sciences were in danger of losing the language of moral value. To prevent that calamity, a scientific approach to ethics was needed that found its moral principles “through the observation and analysis of moral facts.”<sup>36</sup>

Peabody’s method had three steps: observation, generalization, and correlation. Although he waited until the end of his teaching career to publish a thorough account of it – *The Approach to the Social Question* (1909) – he taught a rudimentary version of it from the beginning. The first step was to generate data; the second was to assemble and analyze the data; the third was to discern the underlying moral unity in nature. Somewhere between the second and third steps, he taught, science passed into philosophy. The hard part was the third step work of drawing ethical principles from the data: “The various social movements, which at first appeared so distinguishable and isolated – the problems of the family, of poverty, of industry, of drink – each with its own literature, experiments, programmes, and solutions, are yet correlated expressions of the unity of the social world.” All social issues and events were interrelated. Thus, the hardest work of the social ethicist was to grasp the underlying unity of the whole, including its ethical character and principles.<sup>37</sup>

Certainly his students found it the hardest part. Peabody required them to study a philanthropic or reform organization and write a term paper that followed the social-ethical method. Most of the papers got stuck in step one. Only rarely did a student develop an ethical argument from the study and analysis of a social organization. Peabody realized that his course merely scratched the surface of what social ethics could be. Modestly he described his lectures as being merely “sound and just,” not “original or interesting.” In later life he recalled, “While many youths got little from their researches but an easy ‘C,’ here and there, I like to believe, a life was steadied or a career determined.” He did not expect his students to manage step three; that was the teacher’s role, to tease out the ethical principles and reflect on the interdependence of social forces. The course spurred many Harvard students to volunteer for social work organizations, however, and Peabody was ambitious for social ethics as a discipline, telling Sanborn: “There is in this department a new opportunity in university instruction. With us it has been quite without precedent. It summons the young men who have been imbued with the principles of political economy and of philosophy to the practical application of those studies. It ought to do what college work rarely does – bring a young man’s studies near to problems of an American’s life.”<sup>38</sup>

### **The Social Question, William Jewett Tucker, and Liberal Theology**

Peabody was in the twilight of his career at Harvard before he published his first book, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, in 1900. By then the social gospel movement was thriving, with an ample literature; Ely, Gladden, Strong, and Mathews were well-known authors; the founding social gospel organizations were established; and the Herron phenomenon had already peaked. The social gospelers were keenly aware that

their generation marked a turning point in Christian history. Peabody's first book declared that the present age had "a special work to do" because it had seized upon "the social question." Already the movement was looking backward to recount its history. Advocates explained that the social gospel was essentially a recovery of the social teachings of the Hebrew prophets and Jesus. Sometimes they interpreted it as the next phase of the anti-slavery movement or an outgrowth of English Christian socialism. Founders were identified and heralded, sometimes stretching back to Theodore Parker, Horace Bushnell, or Henry Ward Beecher.<sup>39</sup>

Walter Rauschenbusch announced that the "wreath of the pioneer" in social ethics belonged to William Jewett Tucker and Andover Theological Seminary, which set two generations of historians and commentators on a mistaken path. Tucker was not quite the first to teach what came to be called social ethics, and he left the field too soon to make anywhere near the contribution that Peabody made to it. But he was a pioneer of the field, alongside the distinction for which he was better known in his middle career, being a member of the Andover Seminary group, which endured a six-year heresy proceeding over liberal theology.<sup>40</sup>

Tucker was an 1861 graduate of Dartmouth College, to which he returned as president after the Andover Controversy finally ended, and an 1866 graduate of Andover Seminary, to which he returned after an early career as a minister. For 13 years he ministered to Congregational and Presbyterian churches in New Hampshire and New York before joining the Andover faculty in 1880. His ministerial experiences convinced him, during the same period that Washington Gladden reached similar conclusions, that the church needed a more liberal theology and a relevant social ethic. Tucker later explained, "The religion of the previous generation had become largely introspective. The proof of its reality rested in certain experiences. It sent the religious man to his closet." The old evangelicalism had a strong belief in charity, he allowed, which impelled the evangelical Christian to do good works in the world, "but it did not send him into the shop or the factory. It was not a type of religion fitted to understand or to meet the problems involved in the rise of industrialism." The old evangelicalism was outward reaching and courageous in its missionary zeal, "but it shrank from contact with the growing material power of the modern world. It saw the religious peril of materialism, but not the religious opportunity for the humanizing of material forces." In that spirit Tucker returned to his second alma mater to teach sacred rhetoric, including pastoral theology and homiletics.<sup>41</sup>

Andover Seminary was founded in 1808 as a conservative Calvinist protest against the liberal turn at Harvard, although an earlier entity on which Andover was based, Phillips Academy, had been founded in 1778. New England Congregationalism, increasingly split between a growing Unitarian faction and an orthodox party of Old School Calvinists and New Divinity "Hopkinsians," needed a seminary for its orthodox party. Andover Seminary grew into a powerhouse institution on that basis; by the mid-nineteenth century it averaged 150 students, at a time when no other seminary except Princeton enrolled more than 100. For more than 70 years, Andover protected its conservative identity by requiring faculty to sign a strict creedal statement every year. But that did not stop the denomination's showcase orthodox seminary from turning liberal, causing the Andover Controversy.

Faculty members Tucker, Egbert Smyth, J. W. Churchill, Edward Y. Hincks, and George Harris made inviting targets of themselves by editing a mildly liberal journal, *Andover Review*. In 1886 the seminary's Board of Visitors launched heresy trials against



them. *Andover Review* stood for a Christian accommodation of Darwinian theory, opposed “orthodoxy” and secular rationalism, called for a morally acceptable concept of Christ’s atonement, questioned the logic of substitutionary atonement, and held out for a universalistic “future probation” after death. While conceding that there was probably such a thing as “novelty of doctrine without progress,” the Andover theologians urged that believing in the possibility of genuine progress was part of what it meant to have faith in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. They called their perspective “progressive orthodoxy.” The Board of Visitors replied that “progressive orthodoxy” was liberalism by an evasive name, and “future probation,” in particular, was a disastrous heresy that cut the nerve of missions. The formal charges contained 16 items, beginning with biblical authority and Christology, moving on to moral atonement, a modal Trinity, and the future probation, and ending with the logical conclusion that, having taught liberal doctrines, the Andover professors had signed the Andover Creed in bad faith.<sup>42</sup>

Tucker’s middle career, the professorial one, was consumed by two questions: Was Andover to be a liberal seminary? and Would the *Andover Review* editors keep their jobs? After long dispute, both questions were answered in the affirmative. In 1890 the Supreme Court of Massachusetts declared that the proceedings against the Andover professors were faulty, and in 1892 all five were acquitted. But the enterprise for which Tucker wanted to be known was his pioneering role in establishing social ethics as a discipline. Liberal theology and social Christianity were intimately related, but not quite the same thing; for Tucker, the crucial thing was to bring them together, humanizing theology and society. A seminary was not really progressive if it humanized theology but left the social question alone. According to Tucker, two seminaries led the fight to humanize theology – Union and Andover. Union liberalized the doctrine of Scripture, and Andover liberalized the doctrine of human destiny. Harvard had strayed too far from the Protestant mainstream to count as a creative force in theology. Tucker also overlooked Harvard when he told the story of the origins of social ethics. In his telling, as in Rauschenbusch’s, social ethics as a discipline began at Andover Seminary.<sup>43</sup>

That was a slight exaggeration. In the early 1880s Tucker included social topics at the end of his courses on homiletics and pastoral theology, but he did not teach his social ethics course “Social Economics” until 1889. In the early 1880s he gave lectures on “The Church in its relation to the Indifferent and Prejudiced Classes.” Years later he remarked, “The venture of the department into the field of sociological studies was an innovation in a theological field.” That was certainly true, aside from Peabody and J. H. W. Stuckenberg. For that matter, few colleges taught sociology in 1880, although Miami University of Ohio philosopher Robert Hamilton Bishop was the first American to separate sociology from philosophy, in a course taught in 1834. Tucker stressed that American colleges and seminaries lacked the requisite scientific background to make professional use of the new knowledge in the social sciences. American churches were deeply involved in philanthropy and other charitable activities, which helped to spur interest in social science. But the central driving force behind the eruption of social consciousness and the rise of the social gospel, as Tucker recognized, was the emergence of a workers movement that demanded economic justice, not charity. A vast army of unskilled and increasingly organized laborers demanded to be treated as citizens with rights to decent wages and working conditions.<sup>44</sup>

The class struggles of 1886 comprised the nub of the story. By that year the Knights of Labor, founded in 1869, had one million members. In March 1886 the Knights

struck against Jay Gould's Missouri-Pacific railroad system, tying up 5,000 miles of track. In April President Grover Cleveland gave the first presidential address dealing with trade union and labor issues, suggesting that government serve as an arbitrator in labor-capital disputes. On May 1 the Knights joined with the Black International anarchists, the Socialist unions and other trade unions in massive demonstrations for an eight-hour day. The march of 80,000 protesters down Michigan Avenue in Chicago was the first "May Day" demonstration. Two days later an attack on strikebreaking workers at the McCormick Reaper Manufacturing Company in Chicago led to a deadly police reaction that sparked a riot in Haymarket Square. On May 10 the Supreme Court ruled that a corporation was a legal person under the Fourteenth Amendment, giving corporations the privileges of citizenship. In June eight anarchists were convicted of conspiracy to murder in the Haymarket riot, despite a weak case against them. Later that month Congress passed legal authorization for the incorporation of trade unions. In October the Supreme Court ruled that states could not regulate interstate commerce passing through their borders, annulling the legal power of states over numerous trusts, railroads, and holding companies. In December the American Federation of Labor was organized out of the former Federation of Trades and Labor Unions, comprising a major new force in unionism.<sup>45</sup>

These events inspired, goaded, and frightened middle-class Protestants to take the social gospel theologians seriously; the interest of Protestant churches in the social question was overdue. Ely's *The Labor Movement in America* (1886) counseled Americans not to dread the rising of the working class; his best-selling *Aspects of Social Christianity* (1889) encouraged readers to send money to the American Economics Association, "a real legitimate Christian institution." In 1889 he observed that at least a few seminaries had begun to give "serious attention to social science," especially Hartford and Andover. At Hartford, Graham Taylor had warmed to the social gospel. At Andover, Tucker launched his course on "Social Economics."<sup>46</sup>

On occasion the social gospelers lauded University of Wisconsin president John Bascom as a treasured ally, but his books received little attention, one reason being that Bascom was a generation older than the social gospel founders. Lutheran theologian J. H. W. Stuckenberg was another able advocate of social Christianity whose book, *Christian Sociology* (1880), foreshadowed social gospel themes and arguments. He was the first to use the term "Christian Sociology," which he noted with pride and disappointment: "This whole subject has been greatly neglected; and this must surprise every one who feels its importance." Explaining the neglect, he observed that the subject was "so vast," its number of objects was "so great," and these objects were "so diverse" that organizing them into a single field of inquiry was extremely daunting. Stuckenberg made a strong beginning, but he was so little known that even the social gospelers ignored him. It didn't help that he was a Lutheran teaching at Pennsylvania College (later Gettysburg College). American Lutheranism was not a player in progressive Christian circles, and Stuckenberg's commitment to social Christianity cut against the grain of Lutheran two-kingdoms theology. He was too isolated to make a significant impact on his own group or to be noticed beyond it. During the Civil War he kept a diary of his experience as a chaplain with the Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry; published posthumously, it was titled "I'm Surrounded by Methodists."<sup>47</sup>

Tucker, by contrast, had ready access to the rising social gospel and liberal theology movements. He titled his course "Social Economics" to make a point about what it

meant to apply theology to life under modern conditions. Social economics had approximately the same relation to the church that political economics had to the state, he argued. Just as the state had economic obligations and functions, the church had social obligations and even functions, minus political functions. Because industrialism created new social conditions and classes, the ethical meaning of the gospel had changed. The entire social economy of the West was changed by modern capitalism, including the role of the church in society. Capitalism and modernity marginalized the church *and* heaped new moral responsibilities upon it. Tucker's course began with the transition from slavery to serfdom in medieval Europe; reviewed the rise of industrialism and the factory system in England; discussed English Chartism, trade union organizing, labor legislation, and democracy; traced the history of slavery, immigration, and labor legislation in the United States; discussed wages, profits, workplace issues, and the use of leisure; and compared the American socialist movement with German and English socialism. Seniors spent six weeks doing field research on the union movement, supported by a scholarship program. Like virtually all social gospel courses and literature of the late nineteenth century, Tucker's leaned on Ely's writings. He also assigned Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, and Henry George, and subsequently gave versions of the course that focused on crime, pauperism, and disease.<sup>48</sup>

Tucker took pride that his faculty colleagues wanted Andover to teach and support social Christianity. What surprised him was the overwhelming response by pastors and congregations. He struggled to keep up with an outpouring of mail and requests, including a heavy demand for extension courses. Many pastors recognized that they needed to learn something about political economics. Finally Tucker worked out an arrangement to publish three yearly courses in monthly installments of *Andover Review*, focusing on labor issues, poverty and disease, and crime.

Like most of the social gospelers, Tucker was a progressive reformer, not a socialist or revolutionary. He believed in clean government, graduated taxes, expanded democracy, and government as a custodian of the common good. In 1893 he returned to his collegiate alma mater, Dartmouth, to serve as its ninth president. At the time the school had a regional profile, 300 students, and a large debt. When Tucker retired in 1909 Dartmouth had a national reputation, 1,100 students, 20 new buildings, and a transformed curriculum. Grateful alumni called him "the great president" and "the president who refounded Dartmouth."<sup>49</sup>

In retirement he exulted at returning to politics and the social question. Like most progressives of his generation, Tucker voted Republican for most of his life, but by 1912 Republicans were the conservative party and many of Tucker's friends wanted the entire progressive movement to join the Progressive party, under Theodore Roosevelt's leadership. Tucker supported Roosevelt for the presidency, but was relieved when Roosevelt declined, after the election, to make a permanent home in the Progressive party. For Tucker, progressivism was the worldview and social ethic of the best Republicans, Democrats, Socialists, and independents. To identify it with a single political party was to cheapen and degrade it. He did not want all progressives to join the same party, just as he did not want all religious progressives to join the same denomination. To really believe in progressivism was to hope that it would win all the parties and denominations. For the social gospelers of Tucker's generation, that did not seem so wild a dream, at least until 1918.<sup>50</sup>

## Jesus and the Social Question

Peabody was slow to produce a book, but at the turn of the century, when he was 53 years old, he produced one of the classics of the social gospel: *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*. After that he wrote six more books. His first was an introduction to social Christianity structured as an exposition of the teaching of Jesus. The book was optimistic, idealistic, and immanentist, but it was none of these things in the sense that Niebuhrists later parodied. It stood in the tradition of the nineteenth-century liberal lives of Jesus literature, but was keenly aware of current German scholarship on the liberal Jesus and contained an intelligent response to it. It was sympathetic to the upsurge of the disinherited, but rejected socialism, radicalism, and all other isms that dismissed the necessity of cultivating virtue and moral character.

Peabody stressed that the current movements for social justice were signs of social health and vitality. The strongest movements existed in educated, comparatively prosperous nations, he noted. There were no movements for social justice in poor, repressive, dysfunctional nations like Egypt or Turkey. Putting it too strongly, partly because he could not resist a snappy aphorism, Peabody declared, “The problem of social justice does not grow out of the worst social conditions, but out of the best.” Modernity was a good thing, but it could be made better, to benefit everyone. To Peabody, the radical socialist denigration of the family, private property, and the state was repugnant; on the other hand, he praised the party of revolution for pressing the social question: “Behind all the extraordinary achievements of modern civilization, its transformations of business methods, its miracles of scientific discovery, its mighty combinations of political forces, there lies at the heart of the present time a burdening sense of social mal-adjustment which creates what we call the social question.”<sup>51</sup>

The nineteenth-century English Christian Socialists had no answer, he judged; their distinction was in facing up to the problem. Frederick Denison Maurice confessed that he could not see his way beyond the recognition that it was a lie to treat competition as the law of the universe. Christian socialism would have rested in that negation if English cooperativism had not come along to give Maurice and Charles Kingsley an answer. Peabody noted, pointedly, that the English cooperativists were humble handworkers, “without the counsel of the learned.” Early English Christian socialism – the kind of socialism that Peabody liked – was an exemplary type of opportunism: “The English opportunists gave the strength of their leadership to the cooperative movement, and found satisfaction for their Christian socialism in a practical scheme which they themselves had not devised.”<sup>52</sup>

Peabody admired common sense, as he understood it, and commended it to economists and theologians. In his view, too many prophets mistook themselves for economists or policy-makers, advocating schemes that were bound to fail: “Neither ethical passion nor rhetorical genius equip a preacher for economic judgments.” In the same way he admonished readers to use their common sense in interpreting gospel maxims. The teaching of Jesus had prophetic social content, but “however weighty it may be, the mind of the Teacher was primarily turned another way.” Contrary to otherworldly religion, the ethic of Jesus had a strong social dimension, but contrary to shallow renderings of the social gospel, the supreme concern of Jesus was not the transformation of society. Jesus was a revealer, not a reformer or revolutionary. He viewed the

world from above, not from the earth. His ultimate concern was to show the movement of God's life in human souls, not to become entangled in social problems.<sup>53</sup>

That was the pattern of Peabody's favorite kind of aphorism: this, not that. He employed it repeatedly in characterizing the message of Jesus: "He was not primarily the deviser of a social system, but the quickener of single lives. His gift is not that of form, but that of life." Peabody aphorized in other forms, too, especially on this theme: "His conversation was in heaven; therefore the world was at his feet . . . The prophets wrestled with the waves of social agitation; Jesus walked upon them . . . The work of a reformer is for his own age; that of a revealer for all ages." In Peabody's rendering, Jesus approached the social question "from within" by inspiring individuals: "It is for others to serve the world by organization; he serves it through inspiration." Sealing the point, Peabody returned to "this, not that," but turned it around: "His contribution is not one of social organization or method, but of a point of view, a way of approach, and an end to attain. His social gospel is not one of fact or doctrine, but one of spirit and aim."<sup>54</sup>

That formulation helped Peabody deal with the German apocalyptic Jesus. A great deal of social gospel preaching and theology described Jesus as the herald of an egalitarian, idealistic movement to build the kingdom of God on earth. To many social gospelers, that was the core of the gospel. In the early 1890s, however, German scholars Ernst Issel, Otto Schmoller, and Johannes Weiss began to argue that the mind and teaching of Jesus were primarily eschatological and apocalyptic, not social. Jesus was a herald of the imminent, cataclysmic end of the world by God's apocalyptic action. Weiss put it sharply: "As Jesus conceived it, the Kingdom of God is a radically superworldly entity which stands in diametric opposition to this world. This is to say that there *can* be no talk of an *innerworldly* development of the Kingdom of God in the mind of Jesus!" By the turn of the century this thesis was a powerful scholarly trend, which gave the social gospelers heartburn. A few years later Albert Schweitzer made it famous in his book *Quest of the Historical Jesus*.<sup>55</sup>

But Peabody did not claim that "thy Kingdom come" was about building a new social order; neither did he claim, like Rauschenbusch and other social gospelers, that the early church must have put its own apocalypticism into Jesus' mouth. To Peabody, the crucial datum was that Jesus spoke of the kingdom as a present spiritual reality: "the kingdom of God is within you." Whatever else was true about the kingdom sayings, it made no sense to say that the church invented the spiritual and ethical sayings, because the church was apocalyptic. Peabody liked the phrase of Matthew Arnold, "Jesus above the heads of his reporters." To Peabody, the best rule of interpretation in this area was "The more spiritual and ethical a teaching is, the more likely it is to have come from the Teacher's lips." As for the apocalyptic statements, he kept an open mind. They may have come from Jesus, or from the church, or the church may have heightened Jesus' eschatological tendency. But if they came from Jesus, Peabody contended, what mattered was that these statements had to be integrated with Jesus' more basic understanding of the kingdom as a spiritual, already present reality. The eschatological thesis began at the wrong point, at the end; the true beginning point for Jesus was the present reality of the kingdom.<sup>56</sup>

Since Peabody did not deny that Jesus might have described the kingdom in apocalyptic terms, he seemed to be left with a paradoxical Jesus who preached radically contrasting things about his central concept. But Peabody argued that if Jesus viewed the world from above, the paradox was more apparent than real. The kingdom had

already come, but it was not yet fulfilled. The present reality of the kingdom was somewhat comprehensible and expressible, but its fulfillment was beyond comprehension. The wild language of the New Testament for it was merely a marker for something that could not be expressed. The kingdom was already present in every life that welcomed God's Spirit, "and when at last that same spirit shall penetrate the whole world, then there will result a social future which language itself is hardly rich enough to describe." The key to Jesus' idea of the kingdom of God was Jesus' own religious consciousness:

He looks on human life from above, and, seeing it slowly shaped and purified by the life of God, regards the future of human society with a transcendent and unflinching hope. In the purposes of God the kingdom is already existent, and when his will is done on earth, then his kingdom, which is now spiritual and interior, will be as visible and as controlling as it is in heaven.<sup>57</sup>

Though Jesus looked on human life from above, Peabody stressed, he approached it from within, by inspiring individual souls. Thus, the kingdom was an unfolding process of social righteousness fueled by the progressive sanctification of individual souls, but at the same time, the individual was called to this better life by the kingdom ideal. Peabody's concept of social salvation was less robust and more individualistic than that of Gladden or Rauschenbusch, but he had a version of the social gospel thesis that personal salvation and social salvation were interdependent, mutually indispensable, and grew together. Like all religious liberals of his time, he used the idealist language of personality to explicate this idea: the social order was produced by the creative spiritual power of personality, and personality was fulfilled only in the collective quest for social righteousness. In Peabody's telling, that was the social teaching of Jesus expressed in modern language: "The world of social ethics, then, lies in the mind of Jesus like an island in the larger sea of the religious life; but the same principle of service controls one, whether he tills the field of his island or puts forth to the larger adventure of the sea." For Jesus there was no conflict between the spiritual life and the social good, for he conceived personal religion as the means to the end of social religion. Jesus viewed the social question from above, in the light of his spiritual vision; he approached the social question from within, through the development of every person's spiritual character or personality; he made judgments about social matters in accordance with their contribution to the kingdom of God.<sup>58</sup>

Although Peabody's beloved Unitarian tradition was increasingly post-Christian, he championed its Christian stream. Although he found certain trends in American life distressing he tried to be optimistic that it was headed in the right direction. Out of every 1,000 marriages 60 ended in divorce, which was awful, he acknowledged. But it was good to remember, while socialist garbage about the obsolescence of the family filled the air, that 940 marriages out of every 1,000 sustained "some degree of unity and love." Relatedly, a good deal of modern literature gave the impression "that licentious imaginings and adulterous joys have displaced in modern society pure romance and wholesome love." That was ominous, Peabody allowed, but it was still a marginal phenomenon in American culture: "The eddies of dirty froth which float on the surface of the stream of social life and mar its clearness are not the signs which indicate its current." Mainstream American culture still prized the Christian virtues: "Beneath these signs of domestic restlessness the main body of social life is yet

untainted, and the teaching of Jesus concerning unselfishness and unworldliness is practically verified in multitudes of unobserved and unpolluted homes.”<sup>59</sup>

On the moral problem of wealth, Peabody cautioned against simplistic proof-texting, as in camels going through the eye of a needle. Jesus was a “spiritual seer,” not a social demagogue. He elevated social ideals rather than leveling social classes. He cared about how one lived, not about the extent of one’s wealth. To Peabody, the relevant maxim was “A man does not own his wealth, he owes it.” Jesus taught that all of one’s gains were owed to the kingdom of God. As long as one did not acquire wealth by immoral means, or make an idol of moneymaking, it was possible for the “ministry of wealth” to serve the kingdom of God. Because wealth was notoriously corrupting, Peabody acknowledged, “the Christian man of wealth knows that it is hard for him to enter the kingdom of God.” To avoid being corrupted, the wealthy Christian male administered his affairs “with watchfulness over himself and with hands clean of malice, oppression, or deceit.” He did not use charity to atone for ill gains; he was not one person in business and someone else on Sunday, but the same morally responsible self at all times: “His business is a part of his religion, and his philanthropy is a part of his business.” Rich Christian women had special moral challenges and virtues, too. They spurned “foolishness and vanity,” maintaining homes of “simplicity and good sense.” They were equally at ease among rich and poor persons. And they kept their hearts clean “from the temptations of self-indulgence.”<sup>60</sup>

Peabody favored cooperative ownership in the industrial sector, because cooperatives subordinated profit to personality. Unlike unregulated capitalism and the soulless economism of the radical socialists, the cooperative approach passed the moral test of Jesus, the flourishing of personality. It recognized, at least implicitly, that the root of the industrial problem lay in character, not structural arrangements. On the other hand, Peabody argued, because the cooperative approach had the highest moral standing, it was also the most demanding morally, requiring special virtues. Cooperative workers had to be patient, self-sacrificing, and honorable, otherwise their enterprises failed. That was not a fault of the cooperative system, which he called “a striking illustration of the teaching of Jesus.” From a Christian point of view, what was needed in the economic order was precisely the lifting of industrial life to the level of a moral opportunity. Peabody explained the connection between the Christian gospel and cooperative economics:

A few plain people associate themselves in a cooperative enterprise, quite unconscious that they are in any degree bearing witness to the social principles of the gospel; they apply themselves to the simple problem of conducting a shop or factory with fidelity, self-sacrifice, and patience; and as their work expands they seem to themselves to have made a good commercial venture, while in fact, in one corner of the great industrial world they are illustrating the principle of the Christian religion, that industrial progress begins from within.<sup>61</sup>

*Jesus Christ and the Social Question* contained effusions about optimism on which a later generation pounced. In Peabody’s telling, Jesus was “the most unfaltering of optimists,” every step of his ministry “was guided by an unconquerable optimism,” and despite the bigotry, stupidity, meanness, and hypocrisy that constantly confronted him, he remained a “consistent optimist, confident that the world about him is ready for his message.” Optimism was transforming because it sustained hope for the world, Peabody urged. Socialism painted a bleak picture to heighten the contrast with its

economic ideal, it robbed persons of their hope, and it did nothing to nurture the virtues of unselfishness, magnanimity, and simplicity of character. By contrast, "Jesus illuminates the real world and makes it the instrument of his ideal."<sup>62</sup>

In his closing pages Peabody briefly applied his version of the social gospel to his nation's recent foray into imperialism. In 1898 the United States took the Philippine Islands and formally annexed the Hawaiian Islands; the following year it partitioned the Samoan Islands; in 1900 it helped to suppress the Boxer Rebellion in China. Some Protestant leaders protested that imperialism was a bad thing even when the United States did it; they included Graham Taylor, George Herron, Henry van Dyke, Leonard Bacon, Henry C. Potter, and Charles R. Brown. Others contended that imperialism could be a good thing if the invader had benevolent intentions, especially if the conqueror in question was the USA. Gladden, Mathews, Josiah Strong, Lyman Abbott, and W. H. P. Faunce pressed the latter argument; Peabody lined up with them: "It is the moral quality of the conquest itself, and not that which may happen after the conquest, which represents the Christian energy of the conquering nation; and it is the motives which prompt and direct the original approach to a heathen civilization which are likely either to bring heathen to Christ or to repel them from him."<sup>63</sup>

*Jesus Christ and the Social Question* was lauded immediately as a major statement of the rising social gospel, and was soon translated into German, French, and Swedish. It might have won Peabody a high place in the remembered social gospel if Rauschenbusch had not come along. Besides lacking Rauschenbusch's blazing style, however, Peabody was too fixated on spiritualized ideals to compete with him for movement influence. Peabody stressed that social ideals were expressions of inward spirituality (personality), but that was no match for Rauschenbusch's prophetic language of social justice and solidarity. Peabody never quite absorbed the fact that the social gospel, to meet the challenge of the socialist and trade union movements, had to meet these movements on their level of historical struggle; workers and the disinherited were not looking for a more educated pietism. For them, Peabody-style social ethics was not much of an answer to the social problem.

It was ideally suited, however, for the generational task of finding a social scientific alternative to moral philosophy. Peabody interpreted modern industrial strife as a sign of progress indicating a rising idealism among American workers. Morally, his idealism prized the governing of one's actions by ideals; epistemologically and metaphysically, it held that mind was prior and superior to the things of sense; ontologically it believed in an evolutionary progress toward eventual perfection. Behind the egotism, hatred, greed, and violence of history there was a divine will that forged good from evil appearances. The world was redeemed by the interaction of divine will and human will pulling history forward. Thus, the central business of social ethics was to study reform movements that struggled for and expressed the progress of personality.

### **Up from Slavery: The Race Problem in the Social Question**

Peabody judged that in the field of racial justice, the vehicle of progress was education. In this belief he had a great deal of social gospel company, though Northern white social gospels disagreed over the priority that Peabody and Lyman Abbott gave to vocational education.



For the most part the social gospel was not outspoken on the dignity and rights of black Americans. Southern social gospellers Thomas Dixon Jr, Alexander McKelway and Edgar Gardner Murphy were outright racists in the precise sense of the term, believing that blacks were biologically inferior, as was Northern social gospeller Charles H. Parkhurst.<sup>64</sup> Dixon's writings on race consciousness and the necessity of segregation outsold the books of any Northern social gospeller. Closer to the mainstream of the Northern social gospel, Josiah Strong and Lyman Abbott were right-leaning cultural chauvinists, pressing strongly for black assimilation to an Anglo-Saxonist ideal. They lionized Booker T. Washington as a black American symbol of the ideal. Another mainstream group, the Left-leaning assimilationists, also lionized Washington and the educational path to black progress, but with a stronger recognition of the rights of blacks; they included Joseph Cook, Quincey Ewing, Benjamin Orange Flower, William Channing Gannett, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Henry Demarest Lloyd, and William Hayes Ward. A small group, siding with the W. E. B. Du Bois side of the argument, was outspoken on the subjects of black dignity and rights; they included Algernon Sidney Crapsey, Herbert Seeley Bigelow, Harlan Paul Douglass, Newell Dwight Hillis, and Charles Spahr.<sup>65</sup>

In 1910 nearly 90 percent of American blacks still lived in the South. Most social gospel leaders had little acquaintance with African Americans; they felt awkward about addressing a problem that was remote from their experience; and only the bravest of them publicly repudiated the prevalent American assumption of black inferiority. Many social gospellers believed in the redeemer mission of their nation, which usually led to the belief that Anglo-Saxons were the leaders and saviors of the world. Moreover, evolutionary science was supposedly on their side; Darwinism was said to be a secular explanation of the Anglo-Saxonist mission to civilize the world.

Only rarely did a social gospel leader publicly question the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling that "separate but equal" segregation was consistent with the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law. The social gospellers had a conscience about the evils of slavery and white supremacy in America, and some of them fought rearguard battles against the restriction of black suffrage in the South; but for the most part their efforts to do something specific for racial justice were restricted to educational programs, such as those of the American Missionary Society. Peabody was a prominent example of that strategy, giving many years of service to the Hampton Institute, while speaking for glacial slowness on justice for blacks.

His father had opposed slavery and assisted fugitive slaves, including Frederick Douglass and a frequent visitor to the Peabody home who braved the communion rail at King's Church. But Ephraim Peabody did not roar against slavery like Theodore Parker or William Ellery Channing. He cautioned that some things were worse than slavery and worried that abolition might turn the slaves into "idle and sensual savages." Thus he believed in African colonization, which upheld the rule of law and had a chance of being acceptable to Southerners. His son later judged that the Civil War refuted the conservative temporizers and radical abolitionists alike, working out the divine will to free the slaves and save the Union simultaneously.<sup>66</sup>

Francis Greenwood Peabody had little acquaintance with blacks before 1890 when Robert Ogden, a trustee of Hampton Institute in Washington, DC, asked him to join Hampton's board of trustees. Founded in 1868 by a former lieutenant-colonel of the ninth US Colored Troops regiment of the Union army, Samuel Chapman

Armstrong, the Hampton Institute was a vocational school for blacks (and, by 1878, Native Americans) that stressed “hand, head, and heart” (vocation, academics, and faith). In the morning students attended academic classes and chapel; in the afternoon they were trained in blacksmithing, carpentry, cooking, dressmaking, farming, laundering, sewing, or shoemaking. Peabody fell in love with the school, believing it was exactly what blacks needed to become self-reliant and productive: “Hampton Institute is essentially a spiritual enterprise, conceived as a form of missionary service, perpetuated as a school of character, and maintained by a long series of self-sacrificing teachers.” He liked the saying of Tuskegee principal Booker T. Washington, a Hampton graduate: “A country which was not safe with ignorant slaves cannot be safe with ignorant freemen.”<sup>67</sup>

American liberal Protestantism played a large role in making Washington famous. In 1899 Lyman Abbott, editor of the *Outlook*, invited Washington to tell his personal story; the result, composed by Washington, Abbott, and ghostwriter Max Bennett Thrasher, became a classic of American autobiography: *Up from Slavery*. The book was serialized to the *Outlook's* 100,000 subscribers and established the model of a black leader for much of black and white America. *The Outlook* praised Washington effusively for years afterward, and took strong exception when Du Bois criticized him for selling out the rights of blacks to higher education and equal standing before the law.<sup>68</sup>

The key to the controversy, Abbott explained in the *Outlook*, was that Du Bois was ashamed of his race. Du Bois made the white man the standard, but Washington looked for a standard in the ideals of his own race. Du Bois sought social equality for blacks, but Washington was too self-respecting for that. Du Bois was university-oriented, but Washington emphasized industrial schools. Du Bois wanted blacks to read the Ten Commandments in Hebrew; Washington wanted blacks to obey them in English. Du Bois tried to push his race into a higher place; Washington sought to make the race stronger. Du Bois demanded the right to vote; Washington sought to make blacks competent for the duties of citizenship.<sup>69</sup>

Peabody was too gentlemanly to put it that stridently, but he stood with Abbott, Washington, and Hampton: the crucial task was to train “a backward race for citizenship.” His many years of sincere effort on behalf of African-American advancement did not curtail his patronizing attitude toward black Americans. Peabody wrote that Americans of African descent were instilled with so much docility as to be easily exploited and a danger to themselves: “The habits of slavery had discouraged self-reliance, persistency, and initiative; false notions of liberty had encouraged the childlike impression that freedom meant freedom from work.” In brief, black Americans suffered from debilitating “native and inbred deficiencies.” Yet they also demonstrated “racial qualities” on which a “firm civilization” could be built, albeit very slowly: “Teachableness, gratitude, absence of resentment and animosity, a rare gift of playfulness and humor, and above all a dominant strain of genuine, even if emotional, religion – these were traits which had in them great possibilities both of character and of capacity.” Peabody recalled that many slaves, remarkably, fought for the Confederacy. A race that remained loyal even to slave-owners “might be trusted to exhibit similar loyalty to teachers and friends.” A race that was brave enough to make good soldiers “might be willing to wrestle with the rudiments of education.” And a race that showed religious feeling “might be led to develop an unstable and intermittent piety into a rational and ethical faith.”<sup>70</sup>

Peabody was willing to offend his white audiences when they denied that blacks were educable, or when they fantasized about colonizing African Americans in a

“Negro state” (Texas was the usual candidate). He could speak with feeling about the humanity of blacks, but always with a whiff of white supremacy and a stream of stereotypes. To him it was obvious that the justice issues pressed by Du Bois were distracting luxuries. Training for a trade was the overwhelming need: “There is but one way out of what is called the Negro Problem – it is the way that leads up.” Peabody assured readers that he was against repression, which never ensured anyone’s safety. The chief threats to American civilization were “those created either by a prevailing illiteracy or by an unassimilated culture.” America needed to abolish black illiteracy without lurching to “top-heavy education,” which was equally terrible in this case: “If a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, then a pretence of knowledge is, to the fertile imagination and ready tongue of the Negro, hardly less dangerous.”<sup>71</sup>

### **Retreating to the Seminaries**

Meanwhile at the citadels of top-heavy education, social science broke into a plethora of professions and scientific disciplines that went their own way. Instead of a unified social science operating on behalf of ethical reforms, the disciplines staked out their professional or scientific turf, usually with no ethics. In 1870 the National Prison Association broke away; in 1874 the National Conference of Charities and Corrections followed suit; in 1884 the American Historical Society declared its independence as a science; in 1885 the American Economic Association affirmed Ely’s reform orientation at its founding, but, by the turn of the century, it had dropped ethics and reform. In 1888 the American Statistical Association was founded. The next year the American Academy of Social and Political Science was founded. In 1903 the American Sociological Society was founded. Two years later the American Sociological Association was launched, finishing off the American Social Science Association, which went out of business in 1909. All the new disciplines declared that they possessed the method, boundaries, and status of a science; thus they took leave of squishy ethical concerns. The phase in which the social sciences had a social philosophy was over; if sociology was really a science, it did not need a philosophy, even a moral one.<sup>72</sup>

This turn of events proved to be devastating for the original idea of social ethics, but at Harvard the social ethics idea seemed to be winning nonetheless. Peabody’s courses were popular, by 1903 he had a wealthy benefactor, and by 1905 he had a department and a sprawling “Social Museum” of his own. His benefactor, Alfred Tredway White, owned innovative low-cost housing projects in Brooklyn, which provided 2,000 tenants with dwellings of unusually high quality. Peabody arranged a meeting with White after hearing of his work. He later recalled, “It was on my part a case of love at first sight, and on his part the beginning of forty years of devoted friendship.” Peabody found a soulmate in the rich, gentlemanly, pious, Unitarian, philanthropic White:

There were few incidents in my own religious life so appealing and tranquilizing as the family worship shared in his home before the busy day’s work began. He was blessed with a most lovely and devoted wife, of the same rational faith and the same complete dedication to generous thoughts and deeds, and his home life has been to many a guest a lesson in the simplicity which is in Christ. Indeed, it was more than once a matter of playful discussion among friends whether Mr. or Mrs. White was the more perfect in character – a debate which never reached a conclusive decision.<sup>73</sup>

White was so humble and quiet that it took Peabody several years to realize “his vigor of thought or strength of will.” That was the period in which White gave nearly \$300,000 to Harvard. One morning in 1905, sitting by the fire after breakfast in White’s home, White asked Peabody what he could do to help college students become stewards of the public good. Peabody replied that Harvard needed \$50,000 to build Emerson Hall for the philosophy department, and if White provided the money, he could demand *pro rata* space for Peabody’s enterprise. A few days later Harvard had the money, to the astonishment of the philosophy department. Successive gifts endowed the Social Ethics Department and Peabody’s Social Museum, which contained charts, maps, photographs, and models illustrating social conditions and reform efforts in Europe and the USA. Housed on the second floor of Emerson Hall, the museum had a library of over 3,000 books when Peabody retired in 1913; by 1920 it held over 10,000 artifacts. Peabody’s purpose in building the museum was to promote scientific understanding and ethical idealism, exemplifying social ethics. He explained: “To interpret nature one must, first of all, see, touch, scrutinize, and analyze. The laboratory, the dissecting table, the clinic, the microscope, the museum, are the instruments of sound learning.” But mere knowledge was a mere beginning; inspiration leading to ethical commitment was also needed. Peabody hoped the museum would instill a sense of “companionship” and “sympathy” in students, verifying “the faith of ethical idealists.”<sup>74</sup>

Some of Peabody’s faculty colleagues, although grateful for Emerson Hall, found its second floor an embarrassment. Philosophy chair Hugo Münsterberg, an occupant of the ground floor, was anxious not to be linked with Peabody’s “special department” above. To Münsterberg, social ethics and its museum were a waste of academic space; moreover, he disliked the flow of visitors to the museum, which disrupted the solitude of the philosophers. With as much tact as he could muster, he told Peabody that social ethics stood on the “periphery” of Harvard’s real business, and that he worried that it gave “too much the real stamp to the whole building.” Harvard economist Frank Taussig had similar misgivings. A bitter opponent of historical economics, which replaced the deductive classicism of David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill with inductive studies of how economies actually worked, Taussig contended that if economics was a science it had to have abstract laws of supply and demand, rent, wages, and value (although he allowed for marginalist corrections of classical theory). In departmental politics he lamented that Peabody’s strange field held back the development of sociology at Harvard. For 40 years Harvard’s only sociology course was taught in the economics department; Harvard had no sociology department until 1931. Taussig pointed to the “hortatory flavor” of social ethics, which undermined the “cold dry atmosphere of science.” Because social ethics was so influential, Harvard was slow to develop a real discipline of sociology.<sup>75</sup>

There was also the fact that social ethics was Christian and theological. Peabody’s signature work was an exposition of the teaching of Jesus, and his seminars bore such titles as “The Ethics of Jesus Christ,” “The Ethical Teaching of the New Testament,” and “Christian Ethics and Modern Life.” *The Harvard Bulletin*, announcing White’s major gift in 1905, noted gently that the Christian content of Peabody’s teaching and scholarship was not universally admired on Harvard’s faculty. For his part, Peabody made no apology for holding back the “cold dry” variety of sociology at Harvard. In *The Approach to the Social Question* he compared sociology to “dirigible ballooning,” which, though attractive to inventive minds, still grappled confusedly with “great difficulties of balance and steering, and remains for the present very much in air.”<sup>76</sup>

Eliot told White that his support of Peabody's work would make social ethics "permanent at Harvard University." Peabody trusted that was true. But permanence was a tall order, especially for an enterprise that grated on faculty colleagues. In his later career Peabody guided the social ethics department to emphasize professional social work, and when he retired he chose two specialists on social work and legislative reform, Robert F. Foerster and James Ford, to be his successors. From 1913 to 1920 the department of social ethics taught courses on welfare administration, housing, rural development, race and immigration, and temperance, in addition to Peabody's introductory course. All had a decidedly professional bent, including the introductory course. The program focused on the college; its approach to divorce and temperance dropped Peabody's Christian framework; the Christian origin of social ethics faded from view; even the ethical considerations were minimized. In the introductory course, ethics shrank to a single text by John Dewey and James Tufts.<sup>77</sup>

Harvard president A. Lawrence Lowell probably would have shipped the entire operation to the Divinity School if White had not insisted that college students needed ethical instruction. But if that was the point, the new social ethicists were failing to do their job. In 1918 Lowell took a half-step by splitting social ethics between the Divinity School and the college. The following year he appointed Harvard's charismatic professor of clinical medicine, Richard Clarke Cabot, to teach ethics to college students. In 1920 Cabot reorganized the department to restore its emphasis on the ethical *ought*. Cabot had recently returned from active duty in World War I, during which he had resolved that an education with no moral foundation was not a blessing. With enthusiasm he took over the social ethics department, pledging to restore its no longer fashionable mission to nurture moral feeling in Harvard undergraduates. Cabot invited overcomers to class who told their stories of triumph over adversity. He had students read biographies of heroic figures to inspire their own moral idealism. In 1927 Peabody enthused that Cabot's "fertile genius" revived the social ethics program and regained its emphasis on moral idealism, although Peabody surely understood that Cabot lacked his academic ambitions for the discipline. Peabody conceived social ethics as an inductive enterprise of ethical reflection within the organic processes of social evolution, but Cabot was an Emersonian individualist. Peabody taught his students an ethical system, but Cabot moved straight to concrete ethical challenges, assuming the existence of right and wrong.<sup>78</sup>

That approach regained some of the department's former popularity among Harvard undergraduates, but it was not a way to build a discipline of social ethics. Realizing that he was getting nowhere professionally, Foerster moved to Princeton in 1922 to teach economics, and Ford spent most of his time in Washington DC, directing Better Homes in America. Cabot attracted promising instructors, notably psychologist Gordon Allport, but they departed too. Cabot's success was personal, not academic, and in 1927 the faculty established a concentration in sociology and social ethics, stripping social ethics of its independence. Three years later Harvard hired a formidable sociologist, Pitirim Sorokin, to chair the committee on the sociology/social ethics concentration, who quickly disposed of social ethics. In 1930 the program still had a few faculty supporters: Cabot, Ford, Allport (who had joined the psychology department), and philosopher Ralph Barton Perry. The Divinity School looked the other way. Allport tried to persuade Sorokin that the Peabody tradition at Harvard had special value and charms, but Sorokin had no interest in sharing his department with it. Social ethics could go its own way or be absorbed by a new department, sociology. In 1931 the

faculty opted for absorption, creating a self-standing sociology department. Some of the old social ethics courses hung on for a few years, but the social ethics department was no more, and soon the courses were gone too.<sup>79</sup>

### Getting Peabody Right

The failure of Peabody's disciplinary dream and the flaws of his late Victorian, sometimes patronizing voice of privilege conspired against him after the social gospel era. Though he was an important and in many ways admirable champion of the social gospel, he received little mention when the social gospel was recalled. When his chief achievement was remembered, it was usually construed wrongly. Aaron I. Abell contended that social ethics was merely the faith of the social gospel in academic dress. Gladys Bryson contended that it was merely an extension of moral philosophy with a social scientific gloss. David Potts, in an otherwise valuable study of Peabody's career, extended Bryson's argument that Peabody merely renewed, not replaced, moral philosophy. The social sciences were out to discover new truths, Potts explained, but Peabody used these disciplines "to reaffirm traditional ethical and religious truths." That is, he used induction not to discover ethics, but to serve ethical beliefs that he assumed from the outset.<sup>80</sup>

Robert L. Church agreed that Peabody was a showcase example of the tendency to use social scientific rhetoric as a disguise for one's inability or refusal to take science seriously. Church took for granted that science was a disinterested, objective use of empirical method. By that standard, Peabody exemplified the confusion that many nineteenth-century academics found in switching from deductive to inductive reasoning. Church explained that "despite his use of the word 'inductive' and his introduction of 'scientific' methods, Francis G. Peabody sought no new principles from the facts he and his students examined but merely used the facts to reaffirm traditional *a priori* principles." In Church's telling, Peabody was significant as a prominent example of the confused, idealistic, not really academic social thought that "permeated student life in most American universities in the eighties and nineties." The social gospel skillfully captured and reflected the Progressive era. But yearning for a better society and understanding society were two different things; Church admonished, "Peabody's mixture of Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians with the recent findings of social science merely exaggerated the kind of balance of old and new, of past and future, of realism and utopianism that existed in the minds of many progressives and in the Progressive Movement as a whole." The new sciences offered something new, an objective understanding of social relations, not a mixture of new and old ideas. Social ethics failed to win academic standing because it was short on "intellectual discipline" and the "new modes of thinking" that did prevail in the academy.<sup>81</sup>

Potts and Church wrote in the mid-1960s, when the layer-cake understanding of science still prevailed among historians. Illusions about scientific objectivity notwithstanding, they were not fair to Peabody's idea, or even his execution of it. James Dombrowski, writing in 1936, got it right, although Dombrowski immediately let his Marxism get in the way of fairly assessing what came of Peabody's method. Dombrowski observed that Peabody used the inductive method to develop general moral principles, not to isolate practical problems and solutions. Peabody did not assume his moral principles on a priori grounds; he worked seriously at finding them.

But he made no attempt to hide his apologetic intent in doing inductive research. For Peabody, Dombrowski explained rightly, the point was always to substantiate a moral interpretation of social evolution and to refute the pessimistic, degrading, reductionist view of the self of *laissez-faire* and socialist ideologies. All social facts were signs and expressions of a rational moral principle that Christianity called the divine will. Social reform movements were powered by the operation of this moral will. As a Marxist, Dombrowski rejected this idea of a grounding moral principle in the world, which smacked of “live and let live.” If things really worked out for the better on their own, Dombrowski objected, there was no reason for a social ethicist not to be a social Darwinist. In the end, both views had the same “easy unwarranted optimism.”<sup>82</sup>

But the social gospel had the gospel spirit too deeply to say that; Peabody’s commitments to reform movements, activist government, cooperative economics, and moral idealism were the antithesis of social Darwinism. Always he espoused the Christian ideal of love as the motive power operative in reform movements and good religion. He worried about relativism, admitting that the social question was “as fluid and changeful, and often as turbid and violent as a rushing stream,” but his ethical idealism was a bulwark against it. He perceived that the pragmatism of his friend William James shook the epistemological foundations of his own idealism, but contended that his emphasis on will, unlike that of James, did not lead to the poverty of mere empiricism, experimentalism, probabilism, and the denial of ideals. James, tied up in philosophical problems, stressed the will to believe and the authenticity of “first-hand” individual religion. Peabody, guided by his religious faith, stressed the will to help and the institutional character of social religion and ethical idealism.<sup>83</sup>

Though he took pride in launching social ethics and in eliminating Harvard’s chapel requirement (coerced religion was bad religion, Peabody argued), he did not like the phrase “Christian sociology.” To Peabody, “Christian sociology” cheapened both terms, in the manner of “Christian astronomy” or “Christian chemistry.” For the same reason he did not care for “Christian economics” or “Christian socialism.” But he was enormously fond of Graham Taylor, who wore “Christian sociology” as a hard-earned badge of honor. The idea that Peabody shared with Tucker and Taylor, social ethics, was a new thing. It grew out of moral philosophy and was deeply wedded to the social gospel, but it was something different from moral philosophy and it belonged to the academy, where it outlasted the social gospel.<sup>84</sup>

### **Christian Sociology: Graham Taylor**

By religious background and temperament Graham Taylor was an unlikely candidate for liberal theology or social Christianity, yet he came to epitomize, for many, the liberal social gospel. He was born in 1851 in Schenectady, New York, where his father William Taylor was a fourth generation Dutch Reformed pastor. Taylor’s mother died the following year, shortly afterward the family moved to Philadelphia, and William Taylor married his departed wife’s sister. The family moved to what Taylor would always count as his childhood home, New Brunswick, New Jersey, when he was 11 years old; six years later it moved to Newark, New Jersey.

In his telling, his father practiced a gentle version of a forbidding and repressive family religion. Taylor found most Reformed preachers severe, a bearing that even his

father assumed when mounting the pulpit. For years Taylor brooded over the contrast between his family's warm piety and the severity of its denominational theology; often he sought assurance from his father that God was a merciful father, not a wrathful judge. Thus he delayed joining the church until he was 15, when his father nudged him to affirm his infant baptism.<sup>85</sup>

Despite these youthful anxieties, which "might have repelled me from entering the ministry," Taylor never considered a different calling. Deeply bonded to his father, he followed William Taylor into the ministry and became his closest friend. Just as Jesus had come to show the Father, Taylor devoted his life to following Jesus, whom he knew through his father's preaching and example. Years later he recalled, "Thus my father became my theology, and his life and love the trellis over which the vine of mine grew upward."<sup>86</sup>

Taylor returned to New Brunswick for his college and seminary training, graduating from Rutgers College in 1870 and New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 1873. In college he studied botany indoors, chemistry with no laboratories, government with no mention of citizenship, and moral philosophy with no social dimension, all on the side; mostly he studied Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Seminary was more of the same, with the liberal arts replaced by church government, homiletics, and Reformed Church constitution. As soon as he entered the ministry he felt that something terribly important was lacking in his education. Fifteen years later, upon beginning his academic career, Taylor felt it more acutely, "especially while initiating courses of study and practice that dealt with the social antecedents, surroundings, and relationships of fellow-men." Years later he reflected, "The failure of the then-prevalent classical curriculum to put the student in vital touch with his environment I have had reason very continuously to deplore ever since I was graduated."<sup>87</sup>

His first pastorate was in Hopewell, New York, a rural community where he was ordained shortly before marrying the daughter of a seminary professor. There he began to get social ideas, and a few liberal ones, mostly from reading the *Independent* (a popular Congregational newspaper) and Horace Bushnell, though Taylor's early preaching was conventionally evangelical. He gave revival sermons modeled on Dwight Moody's evangelism, and grew fond of saying that more heresy was lived than believed. Defying local custom he refused to make social distinctions between blacks and whites, and challenged his congregation's tight-fisted lack of benevolence giving and missionary work. But Taylor was not very good at "come to Jesus" preaching. He rationalized that he lacked the time to be an effective preacher; years later he implied that he choked on the Reformed emphasis on election and total depravity; in any case, his early sermons were laced with hellfire, his misgivings notwithstanding. Many years later, writing his memoir, Taylor read a few of his early sermons and burned them out of embarrassment. The memory of preaching such "red in tooth and claw" specimens to Hopewell farmers was painful to him, he wrote. His congregation had been at home in the natural world, but he had not comprehended that the world, being the object of God's love, was the subject of redemption.<sup>88</sup>

He gave seven years to Hopewell, gradually tempering his orthodoxy. Taylor could speak the language of election and imputation to believers, but not to seekers, outsiders, or troubled insiders. In 1880 he moved to Fourth Congregational Church of Hartford, Connecticut, which was nothing like the Dutch Reformed congregations of his youth. During his seminary years Taylor had enjoyed a close friendship with Chester Hartranft, a local pastor. After Hartranft became president of Hartford



Theological Seminary, he looked for a way to bring Taylor to Hartford; Fourth Church was the answer.

Hartford was the home of Pratt and Whitney tool and machine makers, the Samuel Colt firearms plant, and the nation's top insurance companies. Half of its population of 42,000 was foreign-born and mostly poor. Fourth Congregational, located on Main Street at the center of the city, had an illustrious past. A legendary pastor, William Patton, had preached against slavery from the pulpit, and the church had a heritage of temperance and women's suffrage activism. By 1880 Fourth Church shared in the pride of local Congregationalists that Horace Bushnell's lonely, embattled, prophetic career had taken place in Hartford, at North Congregational Church. Taylor felt immediately the theological influence of Bushnell, who died in 1875. He vowed to study German, hoping to impress his cosmopolitan congregation with the latest in German biblical criticism.<sup>89</sup>

But Fourth Church had declined precipitously, partly because it had no history of welcoming or helping the lower classes of Hartford, especially recent immigrants. Like its neighboring Protestant churches, Fourth Church had a long history of assuring itself that poverty went hand in hand with laziness, weakness, and crime. Bushnell had a conscience about class snobbery, as he showed occasionally from the pulpit, but he could be quoted the other way too, validating the prejudices of Hartford's polite society. This legacy had everything to do with the crisis of Hartford Protestantism, especially Fourth Church, in the decade before Taylor arrived.

In the 1870s wealthy Protestants fled to the suburbs, avoiding the rapidly growing industrialism and the foreign-born workers who toiled in the factories. The established congregations that remained in the city usually ignored their new neighbors, or ran from them, following the well-to-do to the suburbs. One of Taylor's predecessors at Fourth Church, Nathaniel Burton, took many parishioners with him in 1870 when he moved to a new structure on the edge of Bushnell Park. At least that was still in the city, although Burton, like his prominent Congregational colleagues Edwin Pond Parker (South Congregational Church) and Joseph Twichell (Asylum Hill Congregational Church) preached the gospel of avoiding the poor and lowly.

All three of Taylor's new Congregational colleagues were thoughtful, articulate, mannered, genial, and attuned to the Gilded Age. They took for granted that Fourth Church was dying. The sanctuary, built for 1,200, typically housed less than 50 worshippers on Sundays. Inheriting a church roll of 542 names, Taylor determined that 218 were real, few of them from the church's old guard. Most of Taylor's dwindling congregation consisted of firefighters, police officers, mechanics, day laborers, and small merchants. To them, and the old guard parishioners who remained, Taylor delivered a blunt message. The church had to evangelize the vast array of "poor and delinquent people" who lived there, otherwise it would die, deservedly. Taylor banked on the church's progressive legacy, reasoning that the remaining old guarders would recognize the necessity of reinventing their congregation. The central city district in which Fourth Church was located was home to 75 percent of the city's poor. He later recalled: "Their need to be served appealed to me so much more than serving the church that I challenged it to devote itself to the people surrounding it as the only hope of saving itself."<sup>90</sup>

Taylor launched a battery of prayer groups, Bible studies, discussion groups, and outreach activities to renew Fourth Church. He preached revival, inviting noted evangelists to Hartford. In 1880 it was still possible for a celebrity preacher like Moody

to draw large crowds in Hartford; Moody conducted a successful Hartford revival in 1878. But Taylor was still a dismal revival preacher and the professionals that he brought to Hartford fared no better. Most Hartford ministers looked down on revival preaching and evangelical missions as a whole. To them it was a matter of self-respect; Hartford had outgrown “come to Jesus” religion. Undaunted, Taylor tried to forge an alliance with the City Missionary Society, a spin-off of Charles Finney’s Hartford revival of 1852 that ministered to the city’s poor. But his ambitions were too grandiose for the group’s traditional street ministry; Taylor got nowhere with the YMCA and YWCA; and he struck out with an interdenominational gathering of Hartford pastors. As a last resort he returned to the Congregational ministers, proposing a Pastor’s Mission to evangelize and serve the city’s lower classes. Parker rudely told him to get lost, but Taylor persuaded Twichell to join him, and the two engendered enough support from the Congregational Pastors’ Union to launch the mission at Fourth Church.<sup>91</sup>

Taylor later recalled, “To me the duty of the hour called for a democratic evangelism, in which my people were better prepared to follow than I was to lead. The more my preaching scaled to previous standards, the less it attracted those without.” Hiring an evangelist, Henry Gillette, who had recently conducted a thorough canvass for the Connecticut Bible Society, Taylor and Gillette waged an exhausting campaign of door-to-door evangelism, making thousands of personal calls per year. They reached out to unchurched tenement-dwellers, shopkeepers, prostitutes, police officers, fire-fighters, local prisoners, state prisoners in nearby Wethersfield, and alcoholics. Most of the work consisted of pastoral counseling and evangelism, in addition to helping people find jobs and living quarters and deal with the city court. Taylor’s hard work paid off for Fourth Church; by 1883 the congregation’s average Sunday attendance was over 400. “We went out to find the people where they were,” he recollected. He and Gillette conducted outdoor services on street corners, the local baseball stadium, and the church porch, taking pride that his stadium services rivaled local sporting events for attendance. They launched a Sunday evening service featuring personal testimonies. Reformed alcoholics, former prisoners, and ex-gamblers streamed into Fourth Church, causing appalled Hartford observers to call it “the church for ex-convicts.”<sup>92</sup>

By 1884 Taylor was eager to compare notes with other social ministry pioneers. He traveled to New York to meet with Henry Schauffler of the Congregational Home Missionary Society and William Rainsford of St George’s Episcopal Church. The following year he attended Josiah Strong’s Inter-Denominational Congress in Cincinnati, savoring speeches by Strong, Ely, Gladden, and Lyman Abbott. On the same trip he studied the Congregational and YMCA social ministries in Chicago, exulting at Dwight Moody’s Chicago Avenue Tabernacle. Back in Hartford he brought lost souls to his home, where his wife Leah Demarest Taylor cheerfully fed and clothed strangers alongside her four children. Taylor also rescued alcoholic backsliders at local saloons. Horace Bushnell’s widow, Mary Bushnell, contributed generously to Taylor’s projects and became a treasured friend; Charles E. Stowe, a Congregational pastor and son of Harriet Beecher Stowe, became another close friend. Taylor told his father that he received rather frosty treatment from polite society, and that most of his ministerial colleagues found it unseemly for a pastor to troll in the slums for members. One of his breakthrough ideas, encouraged by Chester Hartranft, was to recruit student volunteers from Hartford Seminary, which expanded the mission’s programs and inadvertently put Taylor on a new career track.<sup>93</sup>

In 1888 Hartford Seminary offered him a professorship in practical theology. Taylor later called it the greatest surprise of his life, notwithstanding that he served as a seminary trustee, his friend was the president, his congregation employed many seminarians, and he was acquiring a national reputation as a social minister. Taylor worried that he lacked the academic training to be a seminary professor; Hartranft replied that he was actually doing practical theology, which made him uniquely qualified to teach it. Taylor had additional misgivings. Theologically he was more conservative than the Hartford Congregational ministers, which made him doubt that he could be a seminary professor in liberal New England. He later recalled that Hartford liberalism “seemed to me to be destructive to the very foundations of the faith ‘once delivered.’” He had trouble even understanding liberal theology, much less accepting it. On the other hand, he was moving in that direction, he admired Horace Bushnell, Hartford Seminary had a reactionary past, and its current faculty was cool toward Taylor’s democratic evangelism. Between the Hartford ministers and Hartford Seminary there was a vast gulf, charged with bitter feeling. Taylor doubted that he was called to bridge the gulf, and he was determined not to give up his ministry or base of support at Fourth Church.<sup>94</sup>

Mary Bushnell helped him decide, paying a call that Taylor described as motherly and angelic. She told him that even though Hartford Seminary had attacked her husband for decades, she liked the thought of Taylor having an impact on Hartford seminarians. Toward that end she gave him 12 copies of Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture* to use with his students. Taylor accepted the post under the condition of being allowed to keep his pastorate; he wanted to use Fourth Church as a social ministry laboratory for his students. The Congregational ministers, however, vehemently opposed that solution, charging that Taylor lusted for power and influence. Even his colleagues in the Pastors’ Mission admonished him harshly, threatening to withdraw their financial support. That strengthened Taylor’s resolve to hold both positions, which he began in September 1888. Many years later he noted that his appointment reflected a significant turn in American Christianity, showing the rapidly growing influence of the social gospel.<sup>95</sup>

He taught courses in pastoral care, homiletics, pastoral administration, church polity, and Christian sociology, in addition to supervising the fieldwork program. In his inaugural address Taylor observed that the pulpit was “no longer the only fulcrum of the Church’s power.” Effective ministry also included religious education, evangelistic missions, temperance work, charity organizations, and other forms of social ministry: “The channel through which life is now sweeping is less individualistic than sociological in its formation. All human life and interests, industrial and political, intellectual and spiritual . . . contribute toward the pull of this social gravity.” Heredity and social environment were major factors in personal and social redemption, he stressed. To understand the causes of poverty, alcoholism, and crime, one had to make use of the new social sciences. If the church wanted social science to be Christian, not godless, “she must formulate a Christian Sociology, and train her leaders and people in it.”<sup>96</sup>

For Taylor, the essential thing was to use sociology for Christian purposes, thus advancing sociology and Christianity. The American Social Science Association’s commitment to a unified and ethical social science was beyond his purview; what mattered was to Christianize sociology for theological education. He was vaguely aware that Peabody and Tucker had preceded him, but did not know how they went about it: “No syllabi came from these seminary or any other classrooms to guide me in the

preparation of my own initial courses.” Taylor expected to use Spencer’s popular *Studies in Sociology*, which appeared in 1873, but upon reading it found that the book was “more of a foil against which to strike” than an aid to Christian sociology. Spencer was too mechanistic to be a guide to social relationality, process, and personal will, and his social Darwinism was morally repugnant.<sup>97</sup>

Fortunately, the literature of social Christianity was growing rapidly. Taylor relied on Ely’s books, especially *Social Aspects of Christianity and Other Essays* (1889), and Gladden’s books, especially *Working People and their Employers* (1876) and *Applied Christianity: The Moral Aspects of Social Questions* (1886). Gladden convinced him that one could embrace the liberal social gospel with no loss of evangelical faith. As an author, pastor, and movement leader, Gladden became Taylor’s teacher and role model; later they also became friends; still later Taylor put Gladden in the category of William Taylor and Chester Hartranft: “He became a father in God to me.” Taylor loved Gladden’s hymn, “O Master, let me walk with thee,” and he adopted Gladden’s signature theme that personal and social salvation were indispensable to each other.<sup>98</sup>

In the category of “theology for preaching,” Taylor favored Gladden, Bushnell, and Henry Ward Beecher. In his courses he assigned J. R. Seeley’s *Ecce Homo: A Survey of the Life and Work of Jesus Christ* (1866), which humanized the gospel story; J. B. Mozley’s *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages* (1877), which favored “the ancient race consciousness” over modern individualism; Josiah Strong’s *Our Country* (1885), which combined social Christianity with manifest destiny; and English Anglican William H. Fremantle’s *The World as the Subject of Redemption* (1885), which convinced Taylor that social salvation was biblical, not merely a modern viewpoint. Taylor played up Mozley’s and Fremantle’s solidaristic language of the “human race” while quietly straining out Strong’s *apologia* for world conquering Anglo-Saxonism. He embraced Fremantle’s thesis that “one soul at a time” evangelism fell short of the Christian ideal, exhorting his students to be “world-savers” like Fremantle.<sup>99</sup>

He was not a polished classroom performer, nor a careful scholar. Taylor often rushed late to class, always peppered his lectures with anecdotes from his pastoral experiences, and usually held his students’ attention with stream of consciousness comments about ministering in the real world. One student remembered of Taylor’s Hartford years that he was “the most irregular lecturer academically that I ever knew . . . but we learned something that we never could have learned in any other way.”<sup>100</sup>

In 1892 Taylor was invited to speak at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), which proved to be a set-up. A wealthy benefactor had challenged CTS to raise \$350,000, promising a \$100,000 bequest for doing so. Samuel Ives Curtis, a professor of Old Testament and the seminary’s finance committee chair, had a strategy: invite Taylor to establish the nation’s first department of Christian sociology at CTS. On his way home from the lecture, Taylor wrote in his diary, “Xtn Sociology is God’s door to all that can make the remainder of my life most effectual. Henceforth I seek that Kingdom of God first . . . But whither? E or W?” Back in Hartford, Taylor’s colleagues and parishioners were incredulous that he might choose the West. Hartford was cultured, while Chicago was crude and half-civilized. How could there be any question? Faculty friend Clark Beardslee told him it would be a calamity for Hartford Seminary if he left. Hartranft started with guilt, admonishing Taylor that he owed much of his “present elevation” to Hartford Seminary; moved to a warning, that he would become lost in the “seething and chaotic mess” of Chicago; and ended with a counter-offer, a department of Christian sociology at Hartford.<sup>101</sup>

When he reread these letters 38 years later, Taylor marveled that his heart yielded to his head, after months of wavering. During the wavering Ives journeyed to Hartford to press the case for CTS, presenting over 100 pages of reasons why Taylor should choose the greater freedom, opportunity, and challenge of Chicago. Later he sent a telegram that pushed Taylor over the edge: "The Kingdom is one. God knows neither East nor West. The decisive question is where one can be most useful."<sup>102</sup>

Hartford Seminary was hampered by its reactionary heritage and conservative aftermath. Because the seminary's financial constituency was mostly conservative, it could move only so far in a liberal direction. Taylor chose the "unrestricted liberty" of Chicago, joining a vast surge of old and new Americans in moving there. The great fire of 1871 had destroyed the heart of the city and a large section of its north side, but by 1880 Chicago was roaring again. Streams of Slovaks, Poles, Italians and Russian Jews came to Chicago to compete with German and Irish settlers for jobs, compounding the city's volatile labor problems; by 1890 its population exceeded 1,000,000. Taylor arrived in 1892, witnessing the construction of buildings for the World's Fair and the launching of the University of Chicago, which established the world's first department of sociology. The gray Gothic towers of William Rainey Harper's university were erected on the same land – the Midway Plaisance – that housed the gigantic Ferris wheel and other attractions of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Although Taylor was eager to immerse himself in the city, he spent his first year on the fund-raising trail, raising the \$350,000 that the seminary needed to get the \$100,000 that would pay for his new department.<sup>103</sup>

For 12 months he spoke in churches, state associations, and colleges across the USA, explaining why American Protestantism needed seminary departments of Christian sociology. The church could not build the kingdom of God if its pastors were not trained in Christian sociology, he implored. The emergence of Christian sociology reflected "the rise of a mighty social movement within the churches, which, while quiet, unrecognized, and hardly conscious of its own existence as yet, is deep, pervasive, intensely practical, eager to learn, and destined to prevail." Taylor vowed that if he were allowed to lead such a department at CTS, his primary texts would be "the street, the shop, the school, the mission." He also expected to establish a settlement house where seminarians would live among working-class people and understand the industrial revolution from their perspective. Within a year he had exceeded the fund-raising goal for his department, and he dreamed of establishing many settlement houses.<sup>104</sup>

Taylor had read about the first settlement house experiment (Toynbee Hall in England, founded in 1884) and probably knew that Stanton Coit, after living in Toynbee Hall, had founded the first American settlement house in the USA (Neighborhood Guild in New York) in 1886. Coit's subsequent book *Neighborhood Guilds: An Instrument of Social Reform* (1891) became a personal favorite of Taylor's. Upon moving to Chicago Taylor became friends with Jane Addams, who had founded Hull House in 1889 after visiting Toynbee Hall. He judged that she had the settlement idea exactly right: "In the personality of Jane Addams, living on the corner of Polk and Halsted streets, I found a personification of spiritual and social ideals, dwelling in simple, natural, neighborly, human relations with her cosmopolitan neighbors, and exerting far-flung influences over the more privileged classes." Addams was generous and idealistic, Taylor later recalled: "When I was a stranger she took me in, stranger though I was to her except in the fellowship of kindred faith. And I have never since

gone out beyond the reach of her friendly counsel, or beyond the range of her varied experience and world-wide sympathies." But Addams was also tough-minded, strong, and realistic. She understood that Hull House struck its neighbors as a strange undertaking, and sometimes a threatening one. She worked diligently to overcome both impressions without allowing herself or her fellow residents to be bullied. She practiced cooperation, avoided using her class privileges to get her way, and called her neighbors "neighbors," not "the poor." That was the model that Taylor had in mind for CTS's settlement house.<sup>105</sup>

The seminary's trustees, however, told Taylor that he would have to wait for one, pleading lack of money. Taylor could not stand to wait, especially in the depression of 1893 and the desperate aftermath of the World's Fair. Huge numbers of homeless, hungry men and women, many of them former construction workers at the fair grounds, slept in the parks and begged for food, shivering from the freezing winds blowing off Lake Michigan. Taylor walked the streets and gazed at the haunting faces of poverty and neglect:

I found them sleeping on the bare floors of miserable lodging-houses and barrel-house saloons, in the corridors of police-station cell rooms, on the stone floors and stairways of the old City Hall, as well as wandering about the streets begging for a dime, as the last chance to get under shelter for the night. Then for the first time I imagined what an inconceivable experience it must be not to have, or know how to find, a place to sleep through the night already darkening down upon one.<sup>106</sup>

In that mood he bought a settlement house of his own, declaring that he was determined to teach Christian sociology "from the ground up and not from the clouds down." Taylor decided that the house had to be large enough to accommodate a dozen residents, including his four children, and neighborhood gatherings. He settled on a run-down brick house in Chicago's Seventeenth Ward, a working-class district of congested tenements, unpaved alleys, and sporadically collected garbage. Located at the corner of Union Street and Milwaukee Avenue, the house was neighbored by boarding houses and small factories, in a district crowded with German, Irish, and Scandinavian immigrants. In the company of four seminary students, Taylor and his family moved into the house in October 1894. He later recalled that he took a missionary attitude, taking on "what missionaries' families had never failed to do in following the cross to any land or people. There we gathered successive groups of resident workers around our family circle to constitute a living link which might help relate more closely the classes so widely separated by the social cleavage."<sup>107</sup>

At first the house and community had no name, while CTS demanded one for its public relations. Taylor fumbled with variations on "commonwealth," the idea of "sharing what each can be to all and what all can be to each." In one of his versions of what happened, a business acquaintance named Edward Cragin blurted out to him in an elevator, on the day of CTS's deadline for a name, "Call it Chicago Commons!" In Taylor's other version, Cragin provided "commons" and Curtiss insisted on putting "Chicago" in the name. For Taylor the Chicago Commons was a personal sociological laboratory that, for 44 years, grounded his social Christian activism: teaching social ethics, establishing a training school for social workers, writing articles and a weekly column, winning the trust of puzzled neighbors in the Seventeenth Ward, arbitrating labor disputes, preaching progressive religion, and advocating civic reforms.<sup>108</sup>

By 1910 there were approximately 400 settlements in the USA, nearly a third of them in Chicago. For liberals seeking an alternative to bitter class politics, the settlement example of Addams and Taylor offered a compelling model. From 1896 to 1905 Taylor published a monthly magazine of settlement movement news and opinion, *The Commons*. In 1905 it merged with *Charities*, published by the New York Charity Organization Society, to form *Charities and The Commons*, for which Taylor served as associate editor. In 1909 the magazine evolved into a weekly, *The Survey*, for which Taylor served as Chicago director, associate editor, and frequent contributor. In addition, from 1902 to 1938 Taylor wrote a weekly column for the *Chicago Daily News*, dispensing his views on civic reform, politics, neighborhood issues, labor unions, and the rights of immigrants. In 1895 he founded the School of Social Economics, housed at the Chicago Commons, which offered the nation's first course offerings in social work. In 1903 this program evolved into the Social Science Center for Practical Training in Philanthropic and Social Work, the nation's first yearlong social work educational program, which trained young women and men for positions in settlements and social agencies. In 1908 Taylor changed the school's name to the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, which was absorbed by the University of Chicago in 1920 and renamed the School of Social Service Administration. Taylor was also actively involved in the Chicago Civic Federation, the Municipal Voters' League, the Chicago Plan Commission, and the Vice Commission, as well as the Federal Council of Churches, the National Congregational Council, the International Congregational Council, the Chautauqua Society, the Men and Religion Forward Movement, the National Federation of Churches and Christian Workers, and the short-lived American Institute of Christian Sociology.<sup>109</sup>

### **The Social Gospel in the Classroom and Public Square**

Taylor had begun moving toward social gospel theology when he started his academic career at Hartford; by the time that he arrived in Chicago he was a liberal social gospelier through and through. His two inaugural addresses showed the difference. At Hartford he stressed the distinctive importance of the church as a redemptive force in society; at CTS he stressed that all social, civic, political, and economic institutions were essentially religious, being charged with building the kingdom on earth. At Hartford he stressed building up the church out of the community and defended the supernatural authority of scripture; at CTS he stressed the building of redeemed communities and embraced biblical criticism.<sup>110</sup>

In the classroom Taylor taught students to study social conditions, classify and analyze the relevant facts, and draw their own conclusions. His chief theme was the interdependence of family, church, business, government, and civil society. Besides directing CTS's fieldwork program, he taught a first-year course on "Biblical Sociology," a second-year course on "Economics of the Kingdom," and a third-year course in sociology. He also taught elective courses on social institutions, dependency, ethical aspects of industry, municipal reform, and crime; in 1905 he changed the name of his department to Social Economics.

His concept of Christian sociology had five parts. In the opening section of *Biblical Sociology*, Taylor expounded the social-ethical method of observation, classification and analysis, and synthesis. In his second section he traced the development of the

kingdom idea and social institutions in Hebrew scripture. His third section described the social ideals of Jesus; the fourth section described the social ideals of early Christianity; and the final section applied the social concepts of the Bible to modern life, correlating the kingdom of God to the five spheres of modern existence: family, neighborhood, economics, politics, and religion. To Taylor, the kingdom of God was “the progressive realization in human experience and history of the divine ideal of relationship between man and God and man and man” within the five spheres.<sup>111</sup>

His reading lists kept up with a burgeoning social gospel movement, notably Peabody’s *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, Mathews’ *Social Teaching of Jesus* (1897), and George Herron’s *The New Redemption* (1893) and *The Christian State* (1895). Taylor exulted at the publication of W. D. P. Bliss’ *Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (1897), the first work of its kind in the USA, and he continued to assign Gladden, Ely, Fremantle, and Seeley. After Rauschenbusch electrified the field with *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907), Taylor had a new favorite, without converting to Rauschenbusch’s radical politics. Taylor began every class with whatever caught his attention on the way from the Commons to the seminary, and he ended with a comment on society or the cosmos as a system. He explained,

I tried to start each course on some common ground shared by my students. Usually it was the Christian “burden of the soul,” which I interpreted as a personal concern for the whole self of each man, woman, and child. Gradually we worked back into the antecedents and out into the social conditions which relate many others to every one of us. This led us farther afield than the parish and its more or less arbitrarily organized societies and agencies.<sup>112</sup>

He was a popular teacher whom students called “Doc” and admired for his humor, generosity, buoyant spirit, and, above all, living what he taught. One student observed,

He starts like a Ford on a cold morning – on one cylinder – he halts and feels around for words, but after about ten minutes he is hitting on all four and runs like a Packard Twelve with intellect, will, emotion, and body in action. He is a torrent and a whirlwind, a great soul always driving on to a big destiny.<sup>113</sup>

William Rainey Harper found it strange that the world’s first department of sociology did not make use of Taylor’s expertise despite his proximity. In 1902 he asked Taylor to join the sociology department at Chicago as a full-time lecturer, promising a professorship in two years. Taylor’s seminary colleagues warned that the religious character of his work would be lost if he joined the “businessmen” at Harper’s university. For three years Taylor split the difference, teaching half-time at the seminary and half-time at the university, where his sociology colleagues were Albion Small, Charles Henderson, and Charles Zueblin. Small founded the department after a distinguished career as a political scientist and college president at Colby College. Taylor taught courses in philanthropy, the labor movement, and civic reformism, but after three years he judged that the university was not a good fit for him. Harper’s death in 1906 may have sealed Taylor’s decision not to continue there.<sup>114</sup>

Christian sociology at a liberal Christian seminary was his academic calling, though Taylor lamented that even at CTS he spent most of his time counteracting the individualism of his students. Routinely, he had to assure students that his subjects



belonged in a seminary curriculum. Taylor later recalled that getting the students to read Gladden and Ely helped to overcome their “conventionally individualistic, if not otherworldly” idea of religion, but what really worked was sending them into Chicago’s jails, police stations, courts, hospitals, and asylums. Best of all, every year he initiated a handful of students into the world of the urban poor at Chicago Commons, where “my students met submerged classes of people with whose individuals they should deal.”<sup>115</sup>

CTS stood by Taylor when reactionaries charged, inevitably, that “Christian sociology” was a euphemism for socialism, excusing criminal behavior, and destroying the moral fiber of society. Chicago’s leading financial journal, the *Chicago Chronicle*, labored this theme for years, as did a right-wing Republican paper, *Inter-Ocean*. At CTS chapel services the seminary’s president, Franklin W. Fisk, prayed for Taylor’s protection. CTS struggled financially through these years, and Taylor realized that it paid a financial price for harboring a nettlesome do-gooder and reformer. The price became more personal after Fisk retired in 1906. Reeling from a financial crisis, the seminary implored Taylor to accept the presidency. Repeatedly he refused, though he served as acting president in 1907–8. Taylor told friends that reactionary criticism rolled off him, but not his captivity to administrative tasks. His work was teaching, writing, and activism, not running a seminary.<sup>116</sup>

*Daily News* editor and publisher Victor Lawson agreed heartily. In 1902, during an especially bad spate of attacks on Taylor’s reformism, Lawson hired him as a weekly columnist. The following year he paid Taylor’s entire salary at the seminary, telling Fisk to inform conservative alumni that Taylor cost the seminary nothing that year. For three decades Taylor and Lawson had an unlikely, mutually admiring, deeply bonded relationship. Lawson was politically and theologically conservative, but he ran an open shop journalistically and greatly respected Taylor. Only after the publisher died in 1925 did Taylor learn that Lawson had been the mystery benefactor whose gift brought him to Chicago. Every week, unfailingly, for 23 years Taylor sent a weekly column to Lawson, sometimes from afar, always making sense of current debates over economic policies, politics, public schools and libraries, relief and correctional institutions, and reform movements.<sup>117</sup>

Though he wrote constantly for publication, Taylor told Addams that he did not aspire to book writing. After Addams published her memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, in 1910, Taylor’s friends urged him to do the same; for many years he declined. His first book, *Religion in Social Action* (1913), was a collection of *Survey* articles that Taylor published only because the magazine’s editorial board wanted to offer something to new subscribers. In her introduction to the book Addams described Taylor as “an ‘expert’ adviser in the best sense of the term,” one whose expertise was based on “his long familiarity with the men who are ‘down and out,’ both the vagrant and the criminal.”<sup>118</sup>

Modestly Taylor protested that he wrote journalistic commentary, not books. *Religion in Social Action*, however, won an appreciative audience for its message that religion and life were “one and the same.” Religion and human life were essentially alike in being mostly about relationships, he explained. The Bible was the story of the relationships between God and the human race; it was the book of life because it gave life through its narration of living relationships. In the Bible, especially John, faith was the “verb of action,” the doing of the truth through which the nations were saved. To Taylor, the Bible and Christianity sanctioned various theologies, but a single ideal,

Godly life, which was “always and everywhere the same.” Good religion was always about the flourishing of life in community: “It is short-sighted to ask whether you should work for the individual or for his surroundings and relationships. You cannot work for one without working for the other. You are not shut up to such a dilemma. You ought to work both ends of the line at once if you expect to meet the real man in the middle.”<sup>119</sup>

Taylor stressed that love involved caring about the life of the beloved. To love him was to care whether his wife had the opportunity to stay at home to care for their children, whether the children had good schooling, whether the family had a decent house to live in, and whether the local environment was free of corruption, offering a wholesome influence on his children. Like all liberals of his generation, Taylor stressed the importance of “personality,” the self as a unified center of spiritual consciousness. But he played up the social character of the self. Personality was not just the divinity-inspired soul of romanticism, transcendentalism, or idealism, for “even our self-consciousness is due in such part to others that it cannot be accounted for apart from them.” Personality consisted in that which one shared with others. Just as there was no self-educated person, the “self-made” person of American mythology was an idolatrous illusion: “Those who think they have made themselves generally worship their maker.” The appropriate response to being educated and nurtured by others was to serve others.<sup>120</sup>

Taylor decried the prevalence of dualistic religion, “trying to be religious individually while collectively we are pagan.” Each person lived one life, not two, he urged. It was ridiculous to assign religion to private piety lacking any bearing on taxes, education, immigration, the family, or war: “This awful dualism is the ethical tragedy of the age.” Taylor had a favorite story on this theme. At a speaking engagement he tried to win over a group of radical workers by explaining what religion was really about. Religion was the expression of a person’s ideals, he contended; therefore, every person was religious. The workers wailed in protest; they were not religious and had never heard such a “reasonable definition” of religion. Taylor allowed that the church usually did not describe religion reasonably; nonetheless, what mattered was that good religion was about the flourishing of life in relationship. One did not have to be a Christian to be religious, but Christianity, rightly understood, was the religion of the ideals of Jesus. In Taylor’s telling, “this humanized definition of religion so overcame their objection that some of these very men offered to organize and join a church, ‘if it could be called by another name.’” Christianity had ruined the word “Christian” for these workers, but not the ideals of Jesus.<sup>121</sup>

Persistently he preached that salvation was personal and social, “you cannot work for one without working for the other.” The social interpretation of religious feeling and action was not new, he assured; it was as old as “Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself.” He did not worry about social religion eroding religious feeling, for every sphere of life was charged with the sacred. Religion was essential to *all* life. Putting it with a flourish that sounded like Rauschenbusch, Taylor declared, “The gospel of the kingdom is sociology with God left in it, with the Messianic spirit as the bond of unity, with the new birth of the individual for the regeneration of society, and the dynamic spirit of religion as the only power adequate to fulfill its social ideals.” There was still time to reclaim the Christian inspiration of sociology, he urged. Just as Christians were wrong to leave the struggle for social justice to secular socialists, they were wrong to let secular sociologists own sociology. The study of social relations got

its birthright from Judaism and Christianity; rightly understood, sociology was “the science of the kingdom.” Taylor wanted the modern church to use sociology to help fulfill “the covenants of promise in both testaments.”<sup>122</sup>

Christian sociology perceived the soul in society, beginning with the family, which Taylor called “the primary cell of the whole social organism.” Of all things human, he wrote, nothing was as close to divinity as the family, “the visible sign of all the invisible sanctities of religion.” The social gospelers were earnest late-Victorians, believing deeply in the especially sacred character of family life. One of their main arguments against capitalism was that it drove mothers into the labor market. Taylor, Rauschenbusch, and Gladden supported women’s suffrage, but cringed at mothers aspiring to professional careers. Taylor argued that because life was reproduced and the human race was perpetuated through the family, it shared “the creative prerogative of the life-giver.” Thus, the first duty of religion was to “safeguard and promote the family.” That entailed supporting the “parental instinct,” providing maternity benefits for mothers trapped in the necessity of industrial labor, teaching sex education in the churches and public schools, and promoting the active cooperation of church, government, school, and neighborhood.<sup>123</sup>

In political economy Taylor supported profit-sharing, cooperative experiments, workplace safety, the abolition of child labor, social insurance, and a minimum wage that was more than “a mere living wage.” On the labor/capital struggle he clung to Gladden’s view of the 1880s, that the church should be a mediating “honest broker,” not a partisan, although Gladden was basically pro-unionist by the 1890s. Taylor wanted the minister to be known as “a mass-man not a class-man,” standing in between the capitalist and working classes and declaring “all ye are brethren.” The job of the church was to keep the class struggle from exploding into a class war. Taylor allowed that modern churches were too divided to succeed. But that was why the social gospelers were ardent ecumenists. They viewed the reunification of the churches as an aspect of their mission to Christianize society and save the world. In 1908 they founded the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. Taylor urged that if the Federal Council united American Protestants as a social force, and the united Protestants linked arms with the Jewish and Roman Catholic faiths, the social situation would be very different. Organized religion would have the power to deal with America’s organized economic interests, although Taylor preferred to speak of cooperating “with the organized industry of the American people.” When that occurred, he asserted, the cause of peace and progress in America’s “great democracy” would make a giant leap toward the kingdom of God.<sup>124</sup>

Seventeen years later, Taylor still chuckled at the memory that his old nemesis with a superior attitude in Hartford, Edwin Pond Parker, wrote a respectful review of *Religion in Social Action*. By 1913 the social gospel was so strong that even snobs like Parker had to accommodate it. With gratitude he recalled that Rauschenbusch highlighted his agreements with Taylor instead of chiding him for timidity. Rauschenbusch reported that he filled his copy of Taylor’s book with marginal notes and signs; the book had so many apt statements “that it is hard to pass them by without some physical act of approbation.” Gladden also praised the book, noting, with a knowing suggestion of his role in the transition, that Taylor had not lost his evangelical faith in converting to the social gospel: “What happened with him was only a change of emphasis, due to the discovery that religion is not a department of life, but that it included the whole of life – man in all his relations.”<sup>125</sup>

Despite being drenched in politics and surrounded by partisan types, Taylor was not politically partisan. For most of his career he steered clear of party commitments in national politics in order to protect his influence in Chicago politics, where he took positions on a case-by-case basis. He was consistently anti *laissez-faire*, pro immigration, anti imperialist, anti corruption, and pro neighborhood, and he prized the trust that Chicago readers placed in him. On racial and religious prejudice he stressed that in any single form it nearly always led to other forms, and that white racism against blacks was especially toxic.

In 1908 hundreds of marauding white rioters in Springfield, Illinois set off a race riot that killed nine black Americans and seriously wounded 100 others. Taylor found it a “sorry comment upon American civilization” to have produced a “new race of white barbarians” which believed it had no means of protecting itself from black Americans “except the blood and fire of extermination.” There were “barbarians” on both sides of the racial divide in Springfield and America, he allowed; however, the root cause of America’s continuing racial pathology was the insistence of white Americans on isolating and holding down blacks. America’s policy of racial repression was bound to produce “a crucifixion of its justice, humanity, and religion,” such as occurred in Springfield. The Springfield rioters had to be punished, but more important, the USA had to build a civilization that eliminated white racism and civilized “our barbarians, both white and black.”<sup>126</sup>

Taylor worked with black church and community leaders during the Great Migration to forge that better civilization. In 1910 the African-American population of Chicago was just over 44,000; by 1920 it was 110,000. Taylor was amply acquainted with what he called “the scare-head alarms of the white race’s danger from ‘the rising tide of color.’” He lamented that Chicago’s experience proved “how readily partisan demagogues may array racial elements in a cosmopolitan population against each other.” Stressing that race prejudice was evil in itself, he added that it also damaged every other aspect of the social fabric. In Chicago, the “heedlessness of some citizens toward the racial self-respect of others” made them easy prey for racist demagoguery.<sup>127</sup>

World War I had a dampening effect on racist fear mongering, Taylor observed, but afterward “this primitive, elemental instinct asserted itself all over the world,” including Chicago. In July 1919 a group of white bathers threw stones at blacks whom they deemed had crowded too close to their area. A black youth drowned; gunfire erupted; rival gangs battled in a race riot that killed 38 people, wounded over 500 others, and set fire to many black dwellings. Citizens representing 48 civic, professional, and religious organizations gathered to deal with the aftermath of the riot; Taylor was appointed to the group’s “Committee of Six” that negotiated with local and state officials. A decade later he judged that Chicago made very slow, but real and continual progress in race relations, partly because the black community raised up a new generation of community leaders such as physician George C. Hall, legislator Edward Morris, lawyer Adelbert Roberts, and minister Lacy K. Williams.<sup>128</sup>

Most of Taylor’s friends were progressives, and by 1912 they were Progressives, anxious to establish a new party; Jane Addams, Charles Crane, William Kent, Charles Merriam, Mary McDowell and Raymond Robins were prominent among them. Taylor undoubtedly voted for Theodore Roosevelt in 1912, but he disliked the intense partisanship of the social worker movement. He wished that more of his social work disciples followed his example of steering independents to the best candidates. There had to be a place in politics for citizens of conscience and independence.

But the demise of the Progressives after 1912 and Woodrow Wilson's talent for idealistic oratory caused Taylor to shed some of his cautiousness about national politics. In 1916 Lawson refused to publish Taylor's endorsement of Wilson; the following year Taylor rallied to Wilson's call to war. He admired Wilson's wartime leadership, especially his idealistic pledge to "make the world safe for democracy" and create a League of Nations that put an end to war. Writing to his son, Taylor opined that Wilson would rank next to Lincoln as a great president. Years later he acknowledged that America's war fever in 1917–18 "unbalanced all of us more or less."<sup>129</sup>

Though he grieved that Wilson had mediocre successors, James M. Cox in 1920 and John W. Davis in 1924, Taylor held his nose and voted for both of them; in 1924 Republican candidate Calvin Coolidge did not bother to campaign outside his house. Like most of the social worker movement Taylor switched to Herbert Hoover in 1928, praising his humanitarian relief work during World War I and his brilliant career as Commerce Secretary in the Harding administration; the social workers also appreciated Hoover's staunch support of prohibition. Four years later Taylor clung to Hoover against Franklin Roosevelt, then supported the New Deal after Roosevelt surprised him. In 1936 he voted in his last presidential election – for Roosevelt – still calling himself "a middle-of-the-road independent."<sup>130</sup>

Taylor's moderate temperament helped him take in stride the bitter disappointments of the 1920s and 1930s, although he found the dismal choice of 1924 especially hard to take. In 1912 three of the four presidential candidates vied for the progressive vote; a dozen years later Americans chose between a Republican throwback to 1880s *laissez-faire* and a Democrat who opposed anti-lynching legislation and women's suffrage, in addition to doubting that African Americans should be allowed to vote. Taylor sympathized with the generation that came of age in such a low period. Laboring on his memoirs in the 1920s, he took six years to write a plodding 450-page tome of long, twisting sentences that zigged and zagged between autobiography and history. The book stirred little reaction and he understood why. A real autobiography would have been more interesting, but he could not just write about himself; what mattered was the expanding social frontier. A friend pleaded for clean sentences with everyday words, but Taylor loved convoluted Victorian sentences with sesquipedalian words. In any case, by 1930 nobody was interested in the social gospel generation. Liberal Victorianism was decidedly out of fashion; its rhetoric of progress, idealism, moralism, and spirit overcoming nature was a quaint echo of a lost world. The 1930s were about crisis, realism, and collapsing civilizations. Near the end of his life Taylor reflected that he should have written the book sooner, before his generation died off: "The younger generations knew little and cared less about it all."<sup>131</sup>

Louise Wade, in her fine biography of Taylor, aptly noted that he was too optimistic to be a trailblazer. Taylor was immune to disappointment; when he lost a battle he simply bounced back and tried again. Instead of leading factional groups in new directions, he tried to bring them together. He liked to say that his life had three motifs, "a democratic faith, an educational purpose, and a religious hope." His friend Percy Alden put it more functionally, observing that Taylor's activism, teaching and preaching were always about the same thing: "to educate the civic conscience, to establish better social conditions, and to make it easier for people to live the true and pure life."<sup>132</sup>

Taylor did not think of the social gospel as something that had been surpassed, or that could be. The liberal social gospel was a recovery of the very spirit and faith of

Jesus in a modern context. It made Christianity relevant and credible in ways that were not outdated, however much the new pessimists claimed otherwise. Taylor enjoyed recalling with Peabody that Christian sociology did not exist before they came along. In the same vein, he recalled that when he started teaching he tried to find an encyclopedia definition of sociology, to no avail. The 1873 edition of the *American Encyclopedia* said nothing about sociology, nor did the 1887 edition of the *Universal Encyclopedia*, though a later edition explained: “The conception of a comprehensive social science we owe to Auguste Comte, who invented for it the objectionable name Sociology.”<sup>133</sup>

To Taylor and Peabody the rise of social ethics was part of a permanent breakthrough in human consciousness. Sociology got off to a rocky and dangerous beginning, but the social ethicists created something better that deserved a permanent place in theological education. In 1899 Taylor put it bluntly in a speech to the International Congregational Council. *Laissez-faire* ideology was “the lisp of the infancy of economic science,” he remarked, but it was too repugnant to Christianity and civilization to prevail: “For even civilization means human interference in the cosmic struggle for existence. The ‘let alone theory’ of society bears the mark of Cain. Its theological definition is hell.” The church’s social mission was to recognize the divine ideal of human life, initiate movements for its realization, and transmit the Spirit’s power for social regeneration: “This is the church’s social question. Will we reform ourselves in order to conform the world to Christ?”<sup>134</sup>

In that voice social ethics entered the academy and fought for the right to stay there.

## Notes

- 1 Francis Greenwood Peabody, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), “nearly,” 1; Robert Swain Peabody and Francis Greenwood Peabody, *A New England Romance: The Story of Ephraim Peabody and Mary Jane Peabody* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920).
- 2 Peabody, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints*, 2–3.
- 3 Francis Greenwood Peabody, *A Little Boy in Little Boston: Reminiscences of Childhood* (Cambridge: n.p., 1935), 17–19; Peabody, *Harvard in the Sixties: A Boy’s Eye View* (Cambridge: n.p., 1935), “the air,” 19–20; see Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936).
- 4 Peabody, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints*, 65, 66.
- 5 See Sidney E. Ahlstrom, “The Middle Period (1840–80),” in *The Harvard Divinity School: Its Place in Harvard University and in American Culture*, ed. George Huntston Williams (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), 78–116; Robert S. Morison, “The First Half Century of the Divinity School,” *Addresses Delivered at the Observance of the 100th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Harvard Divinity School* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), 14–15.
- 6 Peabody, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints*, 68.
- 7 Friedrich August Gottreu Tholuck, “Theological Encyclopedia and Methodology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 1 (1844), 194–5.
- 8 Peabody, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints*, quote 71.
- 9 Otto Pfeleiderer, *Die Religion, ihr Wesen und ihre Geschichte : auf Grund des gegenwärtigen Standes der philosophischen und der historischen Wissenschaft* (Leipzig: Fues, 1869); Peabody, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints*, 67.

- 10 Peabody, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints*, quotes 114, 117.
- 11 See Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000–1887* (1st edn., 1888; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); Stephen Colwell, *New themes for the Protestant clergy: creeds without charity, theology without humanity, Protestantism without Christianity; with notes on the literature of charity, population, pauperism, political economy, and Protestantism* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Co., 1851); Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Wealth Against Commonwealth* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1894).
- 12 Colwell, *New themes for the Protestant clergy*, quotes 267, 240–1.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 359–60; see Stephen Colwell, *Politics for American Christians: A Word upon Our Example as a Nation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1852); James Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 31–4.
- 14 Princeton Theological Seminary Catalogue, 1872, cited in Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America*, 60; C. A. Aiken, *Christian Ethics*, ed. Princeton Theological Seminary Class of 1879 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1879).
- 15 See Gladys Bryson, “The Emergence of the Social Sciences from Moral Philosophy,” *International Journal of Ethics* 42 (April 1932), 304–7; Bryson, “Sociology Considered as Moral Philosophy,” *Sociological Review* 24 (January 1932), 26–36; Bryson, “The Comparable Interests of the Old Moral Philosophy and the Modern Social Sciences,” *Social Forces* 11 (October 1932), 19–27.
- 16 See John Van Engen, “Christianity and the University: The Medieval and Reformation Legacies,” in *Making Higher Education Christian: The History and Mission of Evangelical Colleges in America*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter and Kenneth W. Shipps (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1987), 23–34; Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 169–266; George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 33–44.
- 17 Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1689) (*Sir Isaac Newton’s Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy and his System of the World*, trans. Florian Cajori [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1934]); H. S. Thayer, “Sir Isaac Newton,” *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 529–30.
- 18 Mather and Leverett quoted in Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, 167, 168; and Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*, 49.
- 19 John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (1689; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. George W. Ewing (1695; Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1965); Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (1689; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); see J. W. Yolton, *Locke and the Compass of the Human Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); R. S. Woolhouse, “John Locke,” *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 493–6; Woolhouse, *Locke* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
- 20 *Memoir of William Ellery Channing, with Extracts from His Correspondence and Manuscripts*, 2 vols., ed. William Henry Channing (London: George Routledge & Co., 1850), 1: 47–8; see Roger L. Emerson, “Science and Moral Philosophy in the Scottish Enlightenment,” in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 32–8; Mark A. Noll, “Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought,” *American Quarterly* 37 (1985), 216–38; Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805–1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
- 21 Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the principles of Common Sense*, 3rd edn. (Dublin: R. Marchbank, 1779); abridged edition reprinted in Reid, *Inquiry and Essays*,

- ed. Ronald E. Beanblossom and Keith Lehrer (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983); Adam Ferguson, *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (Edinburgh: A. Strahan & T. Cadell, 1792); Frances Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy in three books*, 2 vols. (Glasgow: R. & A. Foulis, 1755); Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals*, 2nd edn. (London: T. Cadell, 1769).
- 22 Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, 118; see Reid, "Essay Five: Of Morals," in *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), reprinted in Reid, *Inquiry and Essays*, 351–68; see D. O. Thomas, *The Honest Mind: The Thought and Work of Richard Price* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
  - 23 See Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*, 59–64; Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768–1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jeffersons' Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 176–80.
  - 24 See Francis Wayland, *Thoughts on the Present Collegiate System of the United States* (Boston: Gould, Kendall and Lincoln, 1842); Henry P. Tappan, *University Education* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1851); Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 126–33; Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*, 99–110.
  - 25 George L. Prentiss, *The Bright Side of Life: Glimpses of It Through Fourscore Years*, 2 vols. (Asbury Park, NJ: Press of M., W., & C. Pennypacker, 1901), 2: 395; cited in Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America*, 61–2.
  - 26 Peabody, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints*, 117–18.
  - 27 Ibid., quotes 121; "Reports of Committees of the Board of Overseers, 1878–1879," 20–7, cited in Levering Reynolds, Jr, "The Later Years (1880–1953)," in *The Harvard Divinity School: Its Place in Harvard University and in American Culture*, "unsectarian school," 168.
  - 28 Reynolds, "The Later Years (1880–1953)," 166–74; see Ephraim Emerton, *Living and Learning: Academic Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921); Charles Carroll Everett, "The Divinity School as It Is," *Harvard Graduates' Magazine* 5 (June 1897), 503.
  - 29 See Robert G. McCloskey, *American Conservatism in the Age of Enterprise: A Study of William Graham Sumner, Stephen J. Field, and Andrew Carnegie* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951); Bruce Curtis, *William Graham Sumner* (Boston: Twayne, 1981); William Thomas O'Connor, *Naturalism and the Pioneers of American Sociology* (Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, 1942).
  - 30 William Graham Sumner, *Social Darwinism: Selected Essays*, ed. Albert Galloway Keller (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), quotes 94, 95; see Sumner, *The Challenge of Facts and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1914).
  - 31 *Publication of the American Economics Association* (1886), quotes 2, 18, 43; cited in Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America*, 51.
  - 32 L. L. Bernard and Jesse Bernard, *Origins of American Sociology: The Social Science Movement in the United States* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1943), quotes, 545, 559.
  - 33 David B. Potts, "Social Ethics at Harvard, 1881–1931: A Study in Academic Activism," in *Social Sciences at Harvard, 1860–1920: From Inculcation to the Open Mind*, ed. Paul Buck (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 94–6, "Peabo's," 95; Peabody, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints*, "why not" and "drainage," 136–7; Grace Cumming Long, "The Ethics of Francis Greenwood Peabody: A Century of Christian Social Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 18 (Spring 1990), 56.
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