

VIEWS OF THE FUTURE STATE:
AFTERLIFE BELIEFS IN THE DEEP SOUTH, 1820–1865

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of History
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2014

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines shifting conceptions of the afterlife among white literate inhabitants of the Deep South between 1820 and 1865, as the challenges of scientific study, universalism, and otherworldly mysticism encouraged questioning. In 1820, ideas of what lay beyond death were relatively static and limited in scope, holding closely to the few images available in the King James Bible. Attempts to squelch superstition in the early nineteenth century had stifled the magical and mystical in the literate southern worldview, further dampening imagination in the contemplation of the world beyond death. Debates over heaven and hell centered on who would get there and how—not on what they would find there. As the published work of scientists around the world—increasingly available by the late 1820s—began to call into question biblical references to such things as the age of the earth, and raised speculation about life on other planets, doubt surfaced also as to the trustworthiness of scriptural translation. Within this environment of skepticism, universalism gained adherents. A growing number found compelling evidence within the flood of exegetical studies questioning whether the scribes of Holy Writ had ever intended to suggest an eternal punishment when they used the words interpreted as “hell” in modern translations of Scripture. As traditional views began to gray at the edges, and skepticism became fashionable, new waves of mysticism—particularly those of Mesmerism and Spiritualism—found curious audiences and committed practitioners. These ideas were never institutionalized to the degree they were in the North, but the impact of this broader thinking reveals itself in the markedly changed reading habits of the South by the

advent of the Civil War. Hell had softened, though the terrifying images of old were resurrected by clergy when soldiers faced battle unconverted. The personal writing during the war reflected a very vibrant view of heaven—one that went beyond Scripture to suggest an environment like home, only better. With it came an expanded freedom to question and to imagine.

DEDICATION

I present this dissertation in honor of my mother, Elaine Harrell Cox, who taught us to love learning and books; in memory of my father, Billy Joe Cox, who made college a priority and modelled selfless hard work for his four daughters; and in dedication to my husband, Mason McDaniel Baker Jr., who loved and supported me through the tough climb.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgment of support must begin with George Rable, who had the patience to stick by me for more than the average number of years, as I finished this dissertation while continuing a career. I thank him for believing I could. I am grateful for his forbearance, as I continually reshaped the vision. And I count myself incredibly lucky to have chosen a dissertation chairman who also happens to be a spectacular editor.

I am grateful to the remaining members of my committee, each of whom has had a hand in teaching me the craft, as the years have passed. Margaret Abruzzo, John Giggie, Charles Israel, and Joshua Rothman offered wise counsel for this document and for the future project that may emerge from it. I appreciate the hours invested, the honest critique, and the encouragement. I also owe a debt to several staff members of the history department who supported the professors and helped me along the way: Kay Branyon and Fay Wheat, now retired, and Ellen Pledger, who got me through the red tape to this day.

I could not have managed a dissertation and a demanding career, had it not been for the advances in the library sciences that make it possible to do substantial research remotely. So I must thank ProQuest, EBSCO, Readex/NewsBank, and all the universities who have developed remote resources and who sent me material through interlibrary loan. I thank Dean Louis Pitschmann for heading up the University of Alabama Libraries with such vision, and for hiring staff like Brett Spencer, who can find anything, anywhere—and is the historian's best friend at UA.

I gladly acknowledge the friends and colleagues who helped to carry my load, when the dissertation took over in the last months and pushed career to the back burner. Many thanks to my boss, Hank Lazer, who negotiated extra time with the graduate school, cheered me on, and insisted I finish. Dan Waterman at the University of Alabama Press was a lifesaver in keeping my book projects moving down the pipeline. The entire team at *Alabama Heritage* magazine filled in the gaps and made sure the magazine kept rolling out the doors despite a very sporadic editor-in-chief. Sara Martin, Cindy Sanford, and Rebecca Minder were, as always, can-do professionals. Thanks to the excellent work of Susan Reynolds, no one could tell I was missing. I was able to finish because they all freed me from worry, and I am grateful. I am eternally grateful to the University of Alabama, my employer, for the funding and flexibility that made this possible.

I thank my family for putting up with all the events I missed over the years, and with my distracted state when I did show up. Most of all, I thank my husband for unconditional love.

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INTRODUCTION

“It is a long time since you have seen death. Strange that people will not see it as it is. . . .
Life is but the germ of Death, and death the development of a higher Life.”

“Higher in the sense of heavenly immortality?”

“You may call it heavenly if you choose.”

—Doctor Hartwell to Beulah Benton in
Augusta Evans, *Beulah*

As Augusta Evans put the finishing touches on her novel *Beulah*, she hoped it would address the spiritual questioning that, in her view, permeated southern society—a skepticism she later called “the Upas-tree [poison] of the age.”¹ In the character of Beulah Benton—who eagerly pursued then discarded one philosophy after another, seeking something to fill the void created by her anger at the God who let her sister die—Evans offered a glimpse into her similar crisis of faith.² Any literate person with access to books, magazines, and newspapers in the antebellum South was bound to encounter new layers of questions about the fate of souls. While the South stood at a peripheral vantage point—generally not at the source—of the unconventional thinking that emerged in the antebellum period, these ideas rippled through the region and altered it. Even for those who never seriously contemplated the sciences or the set of ideas cynically called the “isms”—universalism, Spiritualism, mesmerism, and others—the questions they raised penetrated the boundaries of orthodoxy. They broadened and colored the perceptions of heaven, softened the fear of hell, and elevated the thirst for first-hand experience of the spiritual realms.

¹ Augusta J. Evans, *Inez: A Tale of the Alamo* (New York: W. I. Pooley, 1864), 166.

² Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Introduction,” in *Beulah*, by Augusta Jane Evans (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), xviii, xix.

In his preface to *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*, Laurence Moore offered a brilliant essay regarding the essential need of historians to look at religious history from the outside in, as much as the inside out, to get a truer perspective.³ His appeal to stop measuring the importance of a subject by the size or persistent presence of a group or idea, seeking rather its impact, influenced my own desire to look at the difficult so-called “fringes.” Along with Catherine Albanese and Sydney Ahlstrom, I would question whether ideas with the power to affect long-held traditional views can be called “fringe” at all—even if they never created broad-based national church organizations.⁴ In looking at the impact of science and the “isms” on afterlife beliefs in the Deep South, this project deals with the outer peripheries in several layers.

The concept of an afterlife forms the core of the Christian religion, being the reward or punishment lying at the end of life’s journey. But it has been treated as peripheral, if treated at all, by most histories of American Christianity, which tend to focus much more on the rise and fall of institutions and their founders and builders than on the impact of ideas. Perhaps this occurs because of the difficulty in quantifying “belief,” the misconception that afterlife beliefs were universal or static, or in some cases the personal conviction of scholars that the afterlife does not exist, therefore is not worthy of attention. Difficult as it may be, though, to bring definition to a concept like “afterlife beliefs,” the failure to do it is a failure to understand the people of the Old South. Beneath many a choice lay the hope of heaven and the fear of hell.

³ R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), vii–xv.

⁴ Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 3; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 488–490, 1019–1047.

The concept of the afterlife among Christian southerners might seem at first glance a relatively simple dualism—a rewarding heaven and a punishing hell—but becomes substantially nuanced and complicated when considering the layers of denomination, race, gender, age, locality, literacy, class, and cultural change. This study, therefore, makes no pretension to comprehensiveness of scope. It is a pragmatic beginning—a basis upon which future research can be built. It looks at the beliefs of literate, white Protestants, who tended to be the opinion shapers and left written records. The research begins in 1820, as the interior regions of the Deep South were filling with new residents, the fires of the Second Great Awakening were cooling, and the debates leading to the Missouri Compromise spotlighted a growing sectional consciousness. In an effort to focus on the region most likely to see itself as distinct from the North, the antebellum chapters look exclusively at the Deep South states of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana. As the discussion turns to the Civil War years in chapter five, the study looks at afterlife beliefs of inhabitants of the Confederate states.

Individually and privately, afterlife beliefs could vary greatly, even wildly, but this study attempts to give shape to the afterlife beliefs of southerners by outlining the edges—the places where ideas strained the bounds of acceptability and encountered conflict. The emphasis is therefore on reactions to new waves of unconventional or unorthodox thought, as expressed in publications intended for a broad audience and available in the South. Though the concept of “orthodoxy” is nebulous, for our purposes here, it will mean the doctrines considered most mainstream in the South during the antebellum period: those of the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and any group considered Christian by these groups.

It begins with a baseline of beliefs, as expressed, shaped, and reinforced around the year 1820. It then looks at the effects of the rise of the sciences and the twilight of “superstition,” the influx of the “isms,” the effects of sectional animosities, and the culmination: afterlife beliefs as altered and expressed in the days leading up to and during the Civil War. The changes reveal the power of the ripple effect of waves of thought originating in Europe, Boston, New York, and other northern locales. Most interestingly, they reveal an element in southern society—questioners, like Beulah Benton—that cannot be counted or measured. Many such people were regularly attending orthodox church services, but were devouring the material of writers who were pondering questions quite out of the mainstream. In observing orthodoxy’s battle with these ideas, we can gauge the extent to which southerners were exploring seemingly “dangerous” philosophies.

There was little to raise alarm in the afterlife concepts circulating in the South in 1820. The typical literate family possessed a Bible and might, if well off, be able to buy other books that were in most cases from European authors—often written decades, if not a century or more, before. They might own a copy of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. John Bunyan’s allegory reinforced the sermons, apologetics, or other religious forms of the time: it described the arduous path to heaven, offering little of a final destination. The heaven of 1820 was an amorphous idea—vaguely wonderful, but hardly a place that the typical southerner could envision living for eternity. Southerners held an image that could best be depicted in a painting—a static view of angels and the souls of humankind, circling the throne of God, singing praises. Glorious mansions, streets of gold, pearly gates, and a crystal lake completed the scriptural picture. Most depictions would not go beyond what the Bible offered, and it said little about the nature of

heaven. Nor did it offer much detail about hell, beyond what could be depicted in a static image of fire and torment.

Heaven was the desired goal; hell was the fate to avoid at all costs. The shapers of southern minds—teachers, preachers, parents, writers, civil leaders, among others—devoted their energies to guiding others to the decisions and ways of living that would get them to the desired goal. The message often emphasized the imminence of death and the danger of putting off the commitment that would seal a place in heaven. Children learned this from a very early age, and the message was reinforced at every stage of life.

As literate southerners sought to educate their children and themselves, the burgeoning sciences were a priority and seemed to have a marked spiritual purpose. Christians felt certain that science—the exercise of reason toward understanding nature—would end backward superstitions and would provide tangible evidence of the truth of Scripture. During the antebellum period, ideas deemed “superstitious” were treated either as exotic or foreign, to be observed as cultural artifacts or as ludicrous and antiquated, meriting ridicule. Superstition marked a people as backward or heathen and was to be rooted out of respectable southern society. Southerners read articles and books that tied morality and character to the study of nature in natural philosophy, moral philosophy, and natural theology. They studied nature itself, in geology, botany, and astronomy. With news of discoveries by scientists, people hoped they were on the cusp of a new age of faith, backed up by evidence.

Science brought disturbing ideas, however, as the antebellum period progressed. Geologists were calling into question the age of the earth, suggesting that the “Mosaic Age” of Scripture was incorrect, and the earth was substantially older than the supposed six thousand years. While the age of the earth did not make a substantial difference to afterlife beliefs, this

questioning of Scripture did. Astronomers complicated things further by building better and better telescopes, discovering a vaster universe than suggested by a traditional cosmology. The Bible talked of heaven and earth—of the one Son of God who came to earth to save its inhabitants from their sins. What, then, was the story for all those other astronomical orbs? Did they have inhabitants, and were they also fallen from grace? Some could easily accept that certain aspects of Scripture were not technically accurate or fully complete. Others maintained that certain aspects of Scripture should not be taken literally. A significant number simply believed that the scientists had to be wrong, or Christianity was at risk. And then there were those, like Beulah Benton, who watched and wondered, weighing ideas that seemed heretical or worse. One thing was certain for all: the idea of the afterlife was not as simple as it had once seemed.

One “superstition” seemingly squelched in the late eighteenth century, animal magnetism or mesmerism, resurrected itself as a “science” in the late 1830s. Reports that a mesmerized patient could undergo painless surgery first propelled the practice back to popular acceptability. Surely it must be a science, if a woman could sit without a whimper while her cancerous breast was removed?⁵ But mesmerism had a side-effect that drew crowds, while making the orthodox nervous: some mesmerized subjects displayed clairvoyance, even appeared to communicate with the dead. For the southerners drawn to this phenomenon, mesmerism restored a bit of what had been taken from them in the purging of superstition: the seers were back, but now it was called “science,” and for a brief moment was almost respectable. The finest people were buying tickets to see the spectacles, when mesmerists came to town, and some were taking classes to learn the

⁵ “Extirpation of the Mamma of a Female in the Mesmeric Sleep without Any Evidence of Sensibility during the Operation,” *Pensacola Gazette*, March 29, 1845.

techniques themselves. Mesmerism promised to open a door to the afterlife, allowing a glimpse that was immediate and maybe even first-hand. It offered the possibility of seeing for one's self—or of talking to someone else who had seen—what was on the other side of the veil separating the living from the dead.

By the 1850s, mesmerism had become associated with abolition—as would most “isms”—and its popularity in the South began to fade. It did not disappear, however. It became more subdued with practitioners keeping quiet about their involvement. The public commentary in turn became cynical and snide—marking mesmerism as outside the realm of the acceptable. If southerners were engaging in mesmerism by the late 1850s, they were most often doing it in secret.

Another “ism” typically embraced quietly, if not secretly, was universalism—the belief that all would eventually enter heaven.⁶ Most of what we know about people of this persuasion comes from those who chose *not* to be quiet or secretive—a handful of itinerant ministers of the Universalist Church. They described a situation in which many people who tended to accept the universalist idea were actually members, or at least active attendees, of orthodox Christian churches. The sermons and articles by orthodox ministers of the time—and their public debates with Universalist ministers—suggest a battle being waged for the souls of various congregations. While it is safe to say that the majority of southerners continued to accept the orthodox view of hell, a sufficient number questioned it to make some ministers nervous, and the idea of hell appears to have been somewhat softened by these challenges.

⁶ In this dissertation, the words “universalism” or “universalist” (lower case) are used to connote the general idea of universal salvation, while the title case Universalism or Universalist represent the creed and membership of the Universalist Church.

Universalists were not ignoring the references to hell in Scripture; they were questioning the translations of Scripture that had rendered words like *Tartarus*, *Gehenna*, *Sheol*, and *Hades* from the ancient Greek and Hebrew as “hell.” The original intent of these “hell words” had not been eternal punishment, according to Universalist scholars. The debates Universalists raised over scriptural translation were quite effective in complicating simple views of the afterlife and in causing laypeople to wonder whether they could trust their conceptions of God and the afterlife to scholars who never seemed to agree on what the Bible said or meant. Curious and concerned onlookers packed into meeting houses for the debates. Usually well trained in the exegesis of the “hell words,” Universalist ministers often declared themselves victorious in their confrontations with the orthodox ministers, who were generally ignorant of Hebrew or Greek. The audiences—also not schooled in the ancient languages—were unsure in whom to trust.

The Universalist Church made little institutional headway in the South before the Civil War, but the concept of universal salvation created an enduring effect in the region. If Scripture might be mistranslated, and ministers might be inadequately educated, and hell might not exist or might be temporary, the onus for correct decisions about life and death fell more and more to the individual and less and less to the authoritative institutions who had once controlled discussions of the subject.

Lacking a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, or a certainty that the text of the Bible had been properly transcribed—and with the signs and wonders that had once guided humans now deemed “superstitious”—antebellum southerners by the 1850s were thirsting for mystical experiences of their own. They found themselves drawn to the writings of Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, and some became avid followers of his Church of the New Jerusalem. From Swedenborg, a detailed depiction of heaven and hell emerged, with information about the

structures of heavenly societies, conjugal love, and daily activities. Swedenborg's hells were dismal, but he diminished their awfulness by saying that people gravitated to the region of heaven or hell where they would be most comfortable. Those in the dismal regions were there, in other words, because it suited them. Many southerners also read the works of Thomas De Quincey whose opium-inspired dream reveries included stories of transport to heaven. Southern papers publicized accounts of heavenly journeys in what we now call "near-death experiences," and vicariously fed the thirst for mystical experiences.

When news began to circulate that average people—even teenagers—were communicating with the dead in New York and vicinity, such accounts carried an appeal that many could not resist. The emerging practice called "Spiritualism" promised knowledge of departed family members. In addition, it offered the possibility of asking people in heaven—trusted friends and family—about the age-old questions, without eighteen hundred years, ancient language barriers, and creedal turf wars to muddy the message. Almost from the beginning, though, Spiritualism held ties to abolition, rendering it a suspect commodity in the South. Still it found a following. "Spirit circles" formed to attempt contact with loved ones, guides, or the illustrious dead and often met regularly over long periods. Even ministers of orthodox churches were among those experimenting with "spirit communion."

From 1853 to 1854, Spiritualism enjoyed a brief heyday in the South. Afterward, like mesmerism, it tended to go underground. People persisted in the study and practice quietly, or in secret with the attendant guilt and fear of discovery. Southern bookstores continued to sell books that reported conversations with spirits, each one offering new details of life in heaven and most dismissing or tempering the idea of a permanent, tormenting hell. The increasingly vitriolic

ridicule directed against Spiritualism by some southern newspapers in the late 1850s revealed apprehension about its influence in the region.

By 1859 and 1860, available literature reveals that southerners had an altered perspective of the afterlife from what their grandparents had known. Whereas books claiming to be about heaven in 1820 were about *getting* to heaven, those written four decades later offered vivid descriptions of the heavenly environment. Even manuals of orthodox thought now painted more tangible images, seeming to address the speculations raised by Swedenborg and Spiritualism regarding such things as a soul's occupation in heaven. Novels took liberty envisioning the spiritual realm without apology for stepping beyond Scripture. It was also in 1859 that Augusta Evans's *Beulah* appeared, reflecting an element of spiritual angst after thinking southerners had weathered decades of increasingly complicated, fascinating, and potentially dangerous questions.

As the region plunged into war, questions of the afterlife took on an unprecedented urgency. Death was everywhere. As each person contemplated the afterlife, there were fresh new faces to envision populating heaven with heartrending regularity. Survivors poured out their feelings in journals and letters, offering a rich record of this experience of bereavement. The four decades of increasingly rich depictions of heaven appeared in the words they chose. But also, with death looming so imminently over soldiers, the writings of the time indicate a passionate concern that those dying should be ready for heaven. The tracts given to soldiers returned to the older, more frightening language of the permanent hell of torments. At least for the duration of the war, the softened hell disappeared and soldiers were converted to Christianity as they faced battle.

* * *

North and South alike had their share of spiritual questioners. They were equally drawn to the alluring ideas of the scientists, universalists, mystics and eventually the communicative dead who had something intriguing to say about life after death. Very little distinguished the curiosity of northern and southern explorers of afterlife ideas but the fact that most of the ideas originated in the North about the same time that northern ideas became politically unpopular in the South. For the questioners in the South, though, curiosity about life after death might have been less than comfortable at times, but it was apparently too enticing to be squelched by politics. Such people found a way to explore, and their discoveries were infectious.

CHAPTER I.
PERCEPTIONS OF AFTERLIFE, CIRCA 1820

The path of Christianity is neither all sunshine nor all shadow, checkered certainly, but leading to a final abode of unimaginable bliss, and with the Bible to guide her, the orphan walked fearlessly on, discharging her duties, and looking unto God and his Christ to aid her.

—Augusta Evans, *Beulah*

At the dawn of the antebellum period, the population of the Deep South was in flux. Families on the eastern coasts of South Carolina and Georgia had begun to feel crowded on landholdings that had once seemed more than adequate. Their grown children, seeking land to support their families, were moving westward.¹ Lands opened by the Treaty of Fort Jackson in 1814 beckoned the ambitious and the desperate, rapidly drawing white settlers and their slaves into the new states of Mississippi and Alabama, with some beginning to populate the Florida region. The Indian nations remained in the central lands of the Deep South, though pressed into ever-smaller areas and divided over whether to cooperate with or resist attempts by the newcomers to “civilize” them. Whether in the settled towns or the rowdy frontiers, in fact, literate white inhabitants found themselves in a perpetual state of “civilizing” others—parents of children, ministers of congregations, teachers of students, Christians of “heathens.” Religion

¹ Susan B. Carter et al., *Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition Online* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), <http://hsus.cambridge.org/>. The state of South Carolina had 16.49 non-Indian persons per square mile in 1820, while Mississippi had only 1.63. For a compact study of the migration of branches of southern seaboard families to the frontier interior to the west, examining motivations for moving and the transfer and modification of certain values (though not religion particularly), see Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

stood at the core of any attempt to civilize a world, in their minds. And at the core of religion stood the belief in an afterlife. In 1820 the inhabitants of the Deep South found any number of religious points upon which to disagree and even, in some cases, upon which to *divide*. On questions regarding the nature of the afterlife, however, Protestants tended to be comparatively harmonious.

For white inhabitants of the Deep South—whether in settled or frontier regions, whether young or old—the concept of an afterlife was continually reinforced. As children, they learned at home, school, and church. As they matured, they saw it as a duty to reinforce the training by their reading and worship, and to train others, including their own children, slaves, and the native population. Ideas were further shaped unconsciously by the stories they read in newspapers, magazines, and novels. In 1820, “right thinking” on the nature of heaven and hell—at least among the white Protestant population—consisted of a fairly simple and vague dualism: a blissful fate for the “saved” and a terrible one for all others. The idea was rarely challenged and perpetually reinforced. *Who* would be “saved,” however, was a matter of contention. The key point of interest in 1820, therefore, was not on what heaven was like, but on how to get there.

VAGUE OUTCOMES IN AGREEMENT

Lewis Saum has quite accurately described pre-Civil War America as fatalistic—“a society saturated in death.”² Inhabitants of the Deep South consciously cultivated a recognition of death as ever-imminent and all-important; death brought the reckoning of the life lived and determined one’s eternal state. Indicative of this culture, an essay lauding “The New Year,”

² Lewis O. Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America,” *American Quarterly* 26, no. 5 (December 1, 1974): 477, 484.

appearing in multiple southern papers, rather than encouraging revelry or even resolutions, ominously reminded readers, “We are, all of us, one point nearer to that dark and narrow boundary—that sacred and reverential strip of earth, which separates Time from Eternity!”³ These secular papers cautioned readers to recognize that the New Year meant their days on earth had grown fewer.

Reminders about the brevity of life were everywhere. Tropical diseases regularly ravaged the southern population, taking a particularly high toll on children.⁴ Childbirth often held fatal complications for women or for their infants, and print culture reflected the associated grief.⁵ Simple travel on horseback could be life threatening.⁶ Newspapers brought frequent reminders of the power of nature over frail humanity, with stories of shipwrecks and hurricanes, fires, and

³ “The New Year,” *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, February 8, 1819.

⁴ “London,” *Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet & Plymouth Journal*, November 13, 1819; Robert S. Coffin, Esq., “Poet’s Corner: Mortality,” *Blakeley Sun*, May 25, 1819; Carter et al., *Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition Online*. Historical statistics of ratios of children under 5 to women ages 20-44 reveal 866 urban children per thousand women in Louisiana, as opposed to 1,522/1,000 in rural areas. In Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky, the numbers average 1,089/1,000 urban and 1,635/1,000 rural. In Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, and other South Atlantic states, the average was 881/1,000 urban and 1,310/1,000 rural. These numbers also likely reflect a cultural tendency to have more children to support work in rural areas, but certainly in part reveal the greater difficulty keeping a child healthy in urban settings.

⁵ “Mourning with Resignation,” *American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer*, March 1, 1819; “The Grief of Judah,” *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, March 22, 1819. “The Grief of Judah” is actually a poem about the slaughtered infants in Judah, but its choice as a poem in a frontier newspaper reflects a cultural recognition of “childless mothers,” whose “babes are hush’d in one cold grave.”

⁶ Zillah Haynie Brandon, “Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary Transcript” (Gaylesville, AL, 1855), 17, Digital, Alabama Department of Archives and History; Sarah Haynsworth Gayle, *The Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle: A Substitute for Social Intercourse* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 413.

other disasters.⁷ And if natural forces did not wreak sufficient havoc, violence bolstered the chances of dying young. In 1820, some southern men still dealt with insults through duels, and the frontier regions were plagued by highway robbers and prone to Indian troubles.⁸ Few took for granted that they would live to a ripe old age.

Death was God's will—his timing, his choice, his plan. Southerners contemplated its inevitability, seeking in each new report of death a message about the ultimate meaning of life. None would have found it unusual to read a traveler's account of the "hours of amusement" he found in observing a painting titled "Dance of Death." In it, Death dances into the grave a series of people—a "fine gentleman," a farmer, a "fine lady," a physician, a lawyer, a soldier, bishop, king, monk, and others—keeping a firm hold against any who struggled. The author praised the painting for "exhibiting an useful allegory of the dance in which we are all engaged, and what will be the result of it."⁹ Southerners, despite the continual preparation for death, did resist being "danced into the grave." They sought cures and remedies, lived cautiously, and prayed for

⁷ "Affecting Anecdote," *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, February 22, 1819; "London," *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, November 13, 1819; "[Hurricane Expected in Jamaica]," *Augusta Chronicle*, January 6, 1819; "Awful Record," *Nashville Gazette*, September 4, 1819; "Melancholy Shipwreck," *City Gazette*, February 1, 1820; "[Untitled]," *Reflector*, August 25, 1818.

⁸ "Lamentable Event," *Blakeley Sun*, March 9, 1819; "Poetry," *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, May 8, 1820; "[Legislative Acts_SC 1818]," *Camden Gazette*, January 3, 1818; "Congress. House of Representatives. Tuesday, Jan. 13," *Reflector*, February 3, 1818; "George P. Peters to Daniel Parker, 10 July 1817," in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States: Vol. XVIII: Alabama Territory: 1817–1819*, Publication No. 52-11 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1952), 119–124. The *Territorial Papers* regarding the region before statehood reveal a great deal about the recruitment, training, actions, and problems of the militia units in the various areas.

⁹ "The Dance of Death," *Blakeley Sun*, May 14, 1819.

healing.¹⁰ Ultimately, though, as death claimed loved ones, they consoled themselves with some variation of the words of Job, “The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”¹¹ They sought, as generations had since the Middle Ages, to die what they called the “Good Death”—courageous, uncomplaining, and prepared to meet judgment.¹² At times, their words revealed a frustration behind this veiled resignation. Zillah Brandon, after being orphaned, was one of the many who experienced emigration from South Carolina into the Deep South frontier—first Georgia, then Alabama—as confiscated Indian land opened during the antebellum period. Her 1855 memoir recalled the loss of her parents in 1803, saying,

I believe I was led to understand something of the providence and power of God, from the answer given to my many inquiries respecting the death of my beloved parents, which was ever before me, and I was told it was God that had taken them, and that he had a right to take them while he spared the parents of other children, it led me to fear Him and although

¹⁰ James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830–1920*, American Civilization Series (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 16–73. Farrell describes the effects of deism, evangelicalism, and scientific naturalism on what had been Puritan ways of death—seeing a growing sense of self-control over the aging and longevity of the human body.

¹¹ “Mourning with Resignation”; “Died,” *Nashville Gazette*, September 24, 1824, 3; Brandon, “Zillah Brandon Diary,” 9–10. “Died,” *Alabama Watchman*, October 6, 1820.

¹² “[Untitled],” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, October 10, 1820; A. Gregory Schneider, “The Ritual of Happy Dying among Early American Methodists,” *Church History* 56, no. 3 (1987): 348–363; Philip Doddridge, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (Boston: Timothy Bedlington, 1750, 1822), 286; Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 3–31. Faust devotes an entire chapter to the subject of “dying” in the context of the Civil War. The concept of a “Good Death” was a core value of nineteenth-century American life—a remnant of the idea of *ars moriendi*, which had been a part of Catholic teaching since at least the fifteenth century. This cultural conditioning prepared believers to battle Satan’s temptations at the moment of death, making certain that the last moments would leave bereaved family members certain of the soul’s welcome in heaven and better ready, by example, to face their own death when the time came.; Mark Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 18–19.

He had deprived me of that most desirable earthly comfort, yet from infancy I felt that a being of such power and goodness would as a father bless me also.¹³

Most antebellum Protestant southerners, while conscious that death was ever imminent, were also certain that death was not the end.¹⁴ What lay beyond, though, was hardly clear.¹⁵ The predominately Christian population agreed, for the most part, that there was either a desirable afterlife or a dreadful one for each soul. The Bible offered few tangible details on the nature of the environment, activities and inhabitants of heaven or hell, and most religious scholars were hesitant to elaborate without scriptural basis.¹⁶ So vague was this future world in the minds of most that they spent little time in sectarian disagreements over the details. On the murky abstractions, they largely agreed.

For one thing Heaven lay either geographically or figuratively upward and far away, and few disputed this. (See Fig. 1.) The idea had taken on a luster with the publication of Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* a decade earlier, describing the prospects of inhabited worlds in the vastness of space, making it even more sensible that heaven was "out there," if it was a locality.¹⁷ Poetry spoke of "realms of bliss above," "beyond

¹³ Brandon, "Zillah Brandon Diary," 9–10, 105. She later described the death of a friend's child, saying, "After suffering two days and two nights, death in obedience to the stern mandate of heaven tore him away."

¹⁴ "Death the Way to Heaven," *Religious Remembrancer*, September 16, 1820.

¹⁵ Saum, "Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America," 494–495.

¹⁶ Anonymous, *The Vision of Hades, or the Region Inhabited by the Departed Spirits of the Blessed: With Cursory Notes, Theological and Metaphysical: To Which Is Now Added The Vision of Noös* (London: Printed for G.B. Whittaker, 1825), ix; Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1650, 1833), 18.

¹⁷ Bernard Le Bovier, M. de Fontenelle, *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (London: Lackington Allen, 1809).

the starry sky,” “sublime above the globe,” and beyond hearing the cries of earth.¹⁸ Some spoke of “a distant shore,” though for those who thought of the afterlife as a geographic location, they likely saw this shore as a haven on the other side of space, rather than sea.¹⁹ Few expressed alarm if a slightly altered vision emerged. John Wesley—whose writings remained in perpetual circulation—described his contemplations about the life that waited, seeing himself “just hovering over the great gulf; till a few moments hence, I am no more seen! I drop into an unchangeable eternity!”²⁰ A writer for the *Augusta Chronicle*, identified only as “M,” described his vision of the spiritual realms during “contemplation,” in which “systems of worlds burst on my view.”²¹ So long as writers described heaven as a nebulous place at some distance, no one seemed interested in disputing these vague notions.

¹⁸ “Poet’s Corner,” *Blakeley Sun*, February 2, 1819; Minna, “The Moon,” *Augusta Chronicle*, June 14, 1823; “Heaven Anticipated,” *Religious Remembrancer*, October 7, 1820; “Died,” *Alabama Watchman*, October 6, 1820; For a discussion of the persistence of this conception of heaven as “upward,” into the antebellum period, see Thomas Chalmers, *Discourses on the Christian Revelation, Viewed in Connection with the Modern Astronomy*, vol. 7 (New York: R. Carter, 1842), 300–303; Zachariah Cox, *A Defence of the Christian Religion, Supported from the Laws of God, the Law of Universal Order, Enlightened Reason and Experience, All Corresponding with the Holy Scriptures* (Washington, DC: [s.n.], 1824), 4, 10–11.

¹⁹ “Poetry. Heaven,” *Florida Gazette*, October 20, 1821.

²⁰ John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, vol. I, 6th ed. (London: Caxton Press, n.d.), 7. “Wesley’s Sermons” appear in southern bookstore ads regularly.

²¹ M., “Untitled,” *Augusta Chronicle*, April 17, 1824.

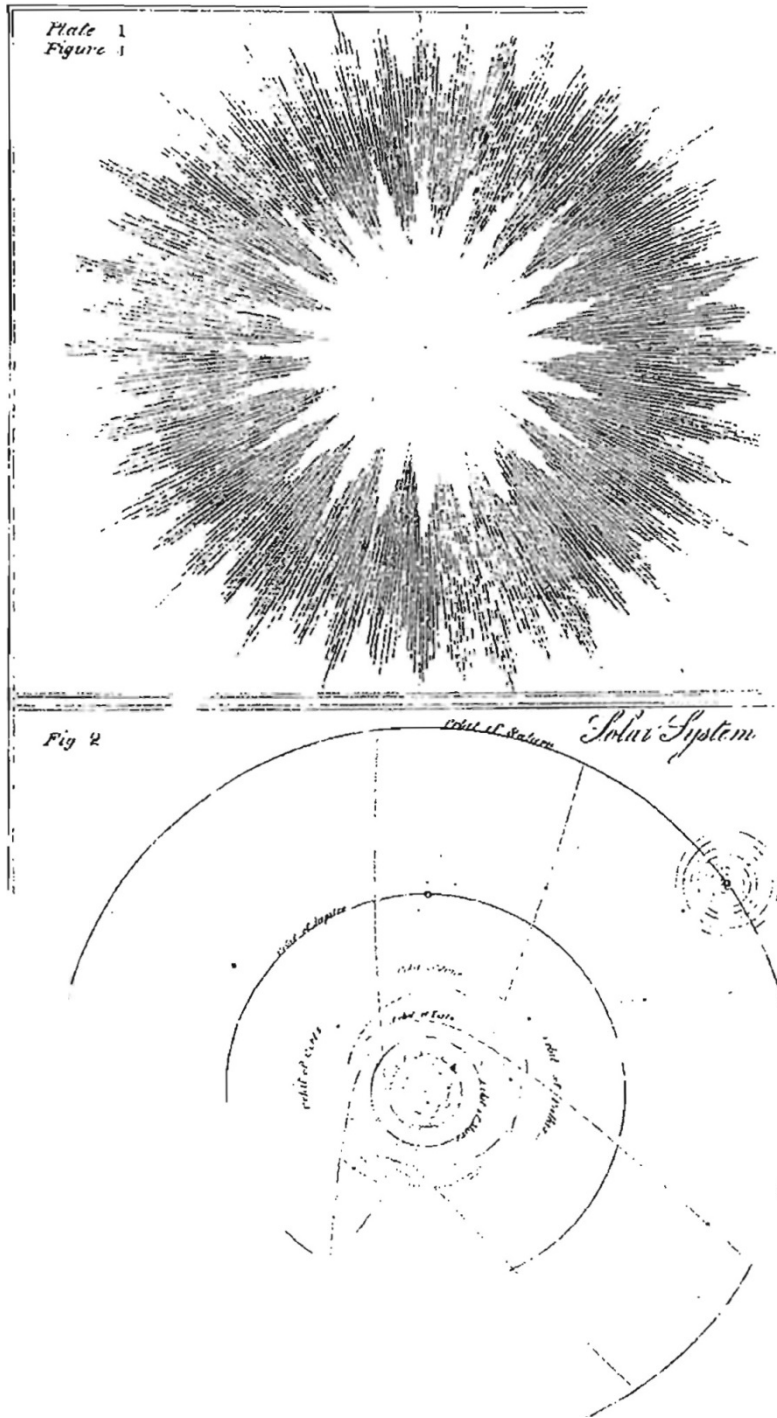


Figure 1. The Solar System

Zachariah Cox converted to Christianity from Deism after his demise as part of the Yazoo Land Scandal. He began his 1824 tract *A Defence of the Christian Religion, Supported from the Laws of God, the Law of Universal Order, Enlightened Reason and Experience, All Corresponding with the Holy Scriptures*, with a diagram of the solar system. The sun, he viewed as the “governing celestial orb” placed by God “at the center of the heavens.”

Certainly, southerners agreed broadly that the “place” called heaven was a better reality “than this inferior state of existence,” the current state being inadequate for “a Christian in the maturity of his character.”²² Scripture offered glimpses of the realm, and around these hazy scriptural elements—much of it drawn from an apocalyptic vision that became the biblical book of Revelation—a relatively harmonious consensus emerged. Led to the holy city of God by “angelic envoys,” the deserving dead would “walk the streets of gold,” hearing “with transport the hosts celestial sing.”²³ Inhabitants would enjoy bliss, joy, and “uninterrupted tranquility” in “blest mansions,” experiencing a gratitude that elicited perpetual praise.²⁴ And, in a world where most people were required to do exhausting manual labor to survive, much more than the walking and the singing, antebellum southerners looked forward to the “everlasting rest.”²⁵

Yet the thing most cherished in the anticipation of heaven was the company. Southerners were eager to see “glowing seraphim on wings of fire,” to be surrounded by saints (“without one

²² “The Christian’s Rest,” *Religious Remembrancer*, December 30, 1820, 73.

²³ Robert Foster, *Hymns, Original and Selected, for the Use of Christians* (Portsmouth, NH: Printed and sold at the office of the Christian Herald, 1828), 112–113; Brandon, “Zillah Brandon Diary,” 245.

²⁴ “Poetry. Heaven”; “My Native Vale,” *Louisianian*, January 8, 1820; “A Fragment,” *Blakeley Sun*, February 5, 1819; Foster, *Hymns, Original and Selected, for the Use of Christians*, 88.

²⁵ “Mourning with Resignation”; “On Viewing the Dead Body of an Infant,” *Tennessee Weekly Chronicle*, January 27, 1819; “The Seasons,” *Winyaw Intelligencer*, June 2, 1819; The term “everlasting rest” would have been familiar to most southerners, due to the popularity of Richard Baxter’s book, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, a 1650 title that continued in new editions and frequently appeared in bookstore ads in southern newspapers. See Baxter, *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*.

sinner”), and certainly to see the face of Jesus.²⁶ They spoke with much more fervor, though, of the desire to see departed loved ones again—and nothing drew them to the contemplation of heaven with more urgency than the death of someone close. In his hymnbook Robert Foster captured what, above all, made heaven a “better place”:

‘Tis almost done, ‘tis almost o’er;
We’re following those who’re gone before;
We soon shall reach the blissful shore,
There we shall meet to part no more.²⁷

Largely unified on their vague idea of this “better place,” most southerners agreed that heaven was not the destiny of all—perhaps not even the destiny of *most*. Aside from a smattering here and there of small communities with universalist leanings—most of them pragmatically quiet about this creed in 1820—the bulk of southerners believed there was a place for those God had not chosen or who had not earned heaven by faith or works. On the subject of hell, they tended to be even more nebulous than they were about heaven, typically. Camp meetings were a noted exception, where vivid descriptions of sinners burning in torment could elevate the number confessing faith.²⁸ A tract aptly titled “The Warning Voice,” distributed in the South by the New England Tract Society warned, “Have we not rather awful reason to fear that we shall sink down

²⁶ “Poetry. Heaven”; “Evangelicana: Crucifixion to the World,” *Religious Remembrancer*, May 20, 1820; “Mourning with Resignation.”

²⁷ Foster, *Hymns, Original and Selected, for the Use of Christians*, 90.

²⁸ Noah Worcester, “What Is the Character of the Methodists Camp Meetings, and How Do You Account for the Effects There Produced?” *Christian Disciple and Theological Review*, 1823, 175; John Milton, Elijah Fenton, and Samuel Johnson, *Paradise Lost* (London: John Bumpus, 1821, 1667), 5.

into hell, and there lift up our eyes in everlasting torments?”²⁹ Depictions of hell, often drawn from literature and the spiritual classics, tended to contradict each other—hell being icy cold and dark on the one hand, burning and fiery on the other.³⁰ Some depictions portrayed hell as “torment and utter darkness,” others imagining its terror being relative to the sinner’s degree of depravity—worse in some parts of hell than others.³¹ Contradictory descriptions rendered hell even less distinctive in the southern mind.³² But even in hazy abstraction, hell was unquestionably a dreadful condition—a situation to be avoided by all means.

Southerners in 1820 considered a belief in heaven and hell—or “eternal rewards and punishments,” as they often termed it—essential to both personal and communal well-being. The eternal security of the individual was only one of several reasons the shapers of young southern minds felt keenly the responsibility to instill a hope of heaven and dread of hell. Certainly this was the most compelling reason for a person to contemplate the prospect—but did not necessarily create an urgency to do it *immediately*. In addressing, and in some cases fomenting,

²⁹ New England Tract Society, *Publications of the American Tract Society, Vol. I* (Printed by Flagg and Gould, 1814), 77.

³⁰ New England Tract Society, *Publications of the New England Tract Society, Vol III* (Boston: Printed by Flagg and Gould, 1820); Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe: A Romance*, vol. 1, 1st ed. (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1820), 225; William Shakespeare, *The Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Richard Farmer et al. (Printed for J. Walker, G. Offor, and Sharpe, 1820), 118; Bishop Lavington, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Considered*, ed. Rev. R. Polwhele (London: Wittaker, Sherwood, 1820), 356.

³¹ Joseph [D.D.] Belcher, *Religious Denominations in the United States: Their History, Doctrine, Government and Statistics. With a Preliminary Sketch of Judaism, Paganism and Mohammedanism* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, 1855), 145; Baxter, *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 4.

³² Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 58. Heyrman describes the residual beliefs in a visible Devil in the decades after the American Revolution and the studied ambivalence ministers took to questions on the subject—finding a value in the fear of such a creature, but not being quite willing to say it was so.

the fear that there might be no tomorrow, evangelicals were able to make the questions of eternity pressing.³³ One religious newspaper cautioned, “As death is usually an object of terror, it is certainly of importance to enquire by what means these terrors are lessened or removed. . . . It is in religion alone, and through faith in God, that those consolations arise, which are sufficient to do away all the fears which usually haunt the mind on the confines of the grave.”³⁴ Quality of life depended, therefore, upon the assurance that the worries and grief of this life—particularly the grief of losing loved ones—were only temporary.³⁵ Southerners were fond of the century-old *Evidences of the Christian Religion* by Joseph Addison, who declared, “The prospect of a future state is the secret comfort and refreshment of my soul—it is that which makes nature look cheerful above me; it doubles all my pleasures, and supports me under all my afflictions. I can look at disappointments and misfortunes, pain and sickness, death itself, with indifference, so long as I keep in view the pleasures of eternity, and the state of being, in which there will be no fears or apprehensions, pains or sorrows.”³⁶ The quality of this life depended on the preparation for the next. “What is this life but a school of misery,” one poet wrote, “a state of probation. . .

³³ “Hope of Heaven,” *Zion’s Herald*, February 18, 1824, 4; “The Hope of Heaven,” *Macon Telegraph*, May 21, 1827.

³⁴ “Consolation to the Saints: Against the Fear of Death,” *Religious Remembrancer*, September 8, 1821.

³⁵ Brandon, “Zillah Brandon Diary,” 6–7; Theodore Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches and Recollections, during a Thirty-Five Years’ Residence in New Orleans*, 4th ed. (Boston: Tompkins, 1857, 1863), 143.

³⁶ “Joseph Addison,” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, October 10, 1820.

But ah! to the guilty he comes the king of terrors indeed; while to the child of virtue, he dresses himself in an angel's form."³⁷

Contemplation of the afterlife served a social as well as personal imperative. Though the moral philosophy popular at the time encouraged a belief that morality could stand without the threat of eternal rewards or punishments, most southerners had difficulty trusting a moral system that did not have at its end the promise of reward or threat of punishment. Of "the certain road to heaven," one poet wrote:

'Tis this ennobles [sic] human kind;
'Tis architecture in the mind,
And prompts the generous heart,
To square each thought, each word and act;
All conscious errors to retract,
And take a brother's part.³⁸

Much as they respected civic systems of justice, there was the broad recognition that some of the worst transgressions would never be punished on earth—the murderer who was not caught, the seducer who ruined a woman's life, the slanderer who destroyed his victim without repercussions.³⁹ They held onto the hope that those with a tendency to wrongdoing and the ability to thwart earthly justice might be deterred by the knowledge of a judgment beyond the grave. Subscribers to the *Louisiana Advertiser*, reading of the suicide of a murderer awaiting execution, were informed that he had refused to see a minister, and "avowed that he had never

³⁷ "Life and Death," *Blakeley Sun*, February 16, 1819.

³⁸ "Poet's Corner: Free Masonry," *Blakeley Sun*, January 19, 1819.

³⁹ "On Seduction," *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, March 7, 1820; "Slander," *Blakeley Sun*, May 14, 1819; Mountain Bard, "Slander," *Alabama Watchman*, August 8, 1820.

entertained any idea of a future state.”⁴⁰ To most, the absence of his belief in a “future state” would have explained the man’s fate. And what about a lazy man who offered nothing to his community? In southern society, he could hardly fail to get the message: “And Heav’n requires a strict account//For ev’ry mis-pent [sic] hour.”⁴¹ A favorite and widely advertised devotional book was James Hervey’s *Meditations Among the Tombs*, which had gone through numerous editions since 1746. Hervey’s subtitle explained why one might be encouraged to meditate among the tombs: “Tending to Reform the Vices of the Age, and to Promote Evangelical Holiness.”⁴² Most southerners would have agreed that society’s ills could be lessened considerably by the widespread contemplation that death came without fail and sometimes came early and without warning.

For Protestant inhabitants of the Deep South around 1820, it was socially and personally important to maintain a perpetual consciousness of judgment to come and consequences to follow. Beyond that, though, most were rather content with hazy outlines of the world to come. Little time was apparently given to the contemplation of what a heavenly mansion might look like or how a heavenly day might be spent. They were not pondering how the relationships of earth would be reconfigured in heaven, how souls might look, and whether the souls of children would age. They accepted that death brought either a good end or a dreadful one and set their sights on the path to the best end.

⁴⁰ “Self-Execution,” *Louisiana Advertiser*, March 9, 1827.

⁴¹ “On a Watch,” *Blakeley Sun*, March 26, 1819.

⁴² James Hervey, *Meditations Among the Tombs: Tending to Reform the Vices of the Age, and to Promote Evangelical Holiness*, New Edition (Exeter, England: Gerrish & Tyler for Abel Brown, 1750, 1824).

DISPUTES OVER PATHS AND PROTOCOLS

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, therefore, southerners found little over which to disagree regarding the nature of the afterlife or its importance to the living. Their disputes centered, instead, on their ideas about *getting there*. Who would enter heaven and why? These were the questions that sparked debates, split congregations, and honed doctrine. Did heaven depend upon the election of God or the choices of his creatures? If by human choice, was it the choice to believe or the choice to live a godly life that ensured heaven? Was baptism required, and if so, baptism by sprinkling or immersion? Was there a life-altering moment of salvation, apart from which a person's soul was not safe, or was salvation the work of a lifetime? In endless variations these questions occupied the minds of the devout.

In *Sermons on Several Occasions*, still popular and in print fifty years after its initial publication, John Wesley declared his intent: "I want to know one thing, the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end he came from heaven."⁴³ The sermons, one after another, spoke to the question of the path to heaven—not to what waited there. "Salvation by Faith," "Justification by Faith," "The Way to the Kingdom," "The Great Assize," "The Scripture Way of Salvation," are followed by numerous sermons on battling imperfection and sin in this life—all with the intent of earning the next.⁴⁴

Not everyone shared Wesley's conviction that a person's works factored into their future state. This disagreement represented what a religious expert of the time called the "fundamental

⁴³ Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, I:7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I:iii–iv.

divider” in thought over the path to heaven: Arminianism versus Calvinism.⁴⁵ Calvinism, which originated with the teachings of John Calvin in the sixteenth century, had prevailed as the dominant belief in early New England and much of the rest of the colonies.⁴⁶ John Bellamy described this doctrine in his *History of All Religions*: “Calvin taught that God predestinated a certain number to eternal life before the foundation of the world, independently of any merit in themselves. That his grace which operates in them irresistibly, against the power of their own will, forces them to accept the terms of salvation by Christ; this they call irresistible grace.”⁴⁷ Presbyterians still held firmly to these ideas, while Methodists were most associated with Arminianism, drawn from the ideas of Jacobus Arminius, a sixteenth-century Dutch Reformed thinker who posited that a person’s faith determined his election by God and that his actions in life could earn perdition.⁴⁸

The denominations active in the South by 1820 reflected the outgrowth of revivalism following the Great Revival of 1787–1805, which swept the South with a renewed religious zeal, in reaction to the “deism, materialism, and widespread indifference to religion” that had

⁴⁵ David Benedict, *A History of All Religions, as Divided into Paganism, Mahometanism, Judaism and Christianity, with an Account of Literary and Theological Institutions, and Missionary, Bible, Tract and Sunday School Societies* (Providence, RI: J. Miller, printer, 1824), 63.

⁴⁶ Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, 118.

⁴⁷ John Bellamy, *The History of All Religions: With Explanations of the Doctrines and Order of Worship, as Held and Practised by the Denominations of Professing Christians; Comprehending a Series of Researches, Explanatory of the Opinions, Customs and Representative Worship in the Churches, Which Have Been Established from the Beginning of Time to the Commencement of the Christian Dispensation, the Accomplishment of the Prophecies of the Person of Christ; Incontrovertibly Proving by the Positive Declarations of the Prophets That He Is the True Messiah*, First American Edition (Boston: Charles Ewer, 1820), 185.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 207; Benedict, *History of All Religions*, 66–69.

characterized the late eighteenth century.⁴⁹ The highly charged “camp meetings” of the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians resulted in the conversion of thousands, spawned numerous churches, and established these denominations as “orthodox” evangelical counterparts to the long-established Episcopalians. Wayne Flynt writes that revivalism “‘Arminianized’ Calvinist theology by emphasizing free will, individual choice, and salvation to all who sought it.”⁵⁰

Apart from the Presbyterians, most of the denominations active in the South in 1820 tended toward some variation of Arminian beliefs, though elements of Calvinism appeared in breakaway subsets of many major denominations.⁵¹ The running debate between and within denominations offered much for the individual to ponder—and little to feel certain about. In fact, Sydney Ahlstrom has suggested that a number of the “converts” of the time, rather than being converted from disbelief to belief were drawn from one denomination to another, as the minister of one creed cast doubt upon that of another.⁵²

The election-versus-faith argument manifested itself to a limited degree, also, in a divide over whether Christians should engage in missions. For groups that believed a person’s salvation depended upon faith, missions were an essential activity. For some who believed in salvation by God’s election, an active effort to “save” people insulted God. Though not a dominant tradition, “Antimissionism” was prevalent among some rural poor of Alabama and Mississippi—particularly those labeled “Hard-Shell Baptists,” who manifested both “anti-intellectualism and a

⁴⁹ John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787–1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1972), 60–61.

⁵⁰ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie*, Religion and American Culture (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 50.

⁵¹ Benedict, *History of All Religions*, 119, 138, 186, 213, 222.

⁵² Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, 445.

legalistic defense of old-fashioned dogma.”⁵³ Presbyterians, on the other hand, were actively engaged in missions, despite a Calvinist frame of belief. This group held that God chose “the elect” for salvation, but its adherents also believed he used the Christian church as his tool for bringing the elect to saving grace. Evangelicalism was, therefore, a requirement of the Christian life, though it would never determine who was saved.⁵⁴

Among those of the Arminian persuasion, another doctrinal issue consumed much energy: the question of the importance of works, or a person’s merit—as opposed to pure faith in God’s grace—in earning a place in heaven. Some believed a place in heaven required a blend of both—faith supported by works, faith proven by works, or some other variation. Hannah More, a popular English moralist and religious writer, sounded the warning against a belief in salvation by grace alone, writing, “Instead of humbling the sinner, it confirms him in sin; instead of purifying, it corrupts; instead of sobering, it inebriates; and lands him on a daring and presumptuous confidence. Instead of promoting the cause of God, as it processes, it advances that of Satan.”⁵⁵ While More and John Wesley were in agreement on much of Methodist doctrine, Wesley preached, “Wherewithal then shall a sinful man atone for any of the least of his

⁵³ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture,” *Journal of Southern History* 36, no. 4 (November 1, 1970): 503; Nathan O Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 177.

⁵⁴ Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A, *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: Containing the Confession of Faith, the Catechisms, and the Directory for the Worship of God, Together with the Plan of Government and Discipline, as Amended and Ratified by the General Assembly, at Their Sessions in May, 1821* (Philadelphia: Towar & Hogan, 1827).

⁵⁵ Hannah More, *Moral Sketches of Prevailing Opinions and Manners, Foreign and Domestic: With Reflections on Prayer* (T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1819), 364.

sins? With his own works? No.”⁵⁶ French Huguenot theologian Jacques Saurin, familiar to most literate southerners, reconciled the two by suggesting that God offers a small bit of grace at a time. A person’s efforts to embrace it determined if the next bit of grace would be offered.⁵⁷ Thinkers wrestled with the question of whether a faith without works was a viable faith at all, but balanced this with a concern that people would depend upon good works for future security, failing to have truly entered into a state of faith.

Denominations wrangled over the technicalities of the faith-versus-works question perpetually, leaving parishioners perplexed over the best path to take in raising their children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).⁵⁸ It seemed safest to assume that works would not hinder the heavenly journey, if resting on faith. They set to work building in themselves and others a consciousness of the afterlife that honed faith, inspired works, and insured the best result.

PLANTING THE AFTERLIFE CONSCIOUSNESS

Southern opinion shapers—mothers, ministers, teachers, and others—felt keenly the duty to train their charges about what awaited them after death. This idea permeated antebellum southern society, though the writings of the time expressed a concern that people did not take the reality of eternal punishment and rewards seriously enough. An 1819 article in the *Blakeley Sun* offered this observation: “We treat sensible and present things as realities, and future and eternal

⁵⁶ Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, I:1.

⁵⁷ Jacques Saurin, *Sermons*, trans. Joseph Sutcliffe, vol. 8, First American Edition (Schenectady, NY: Riggs & Stevens, 1731, 1816), 262, 273.

⁵⁸ The King James Version will be used in quoting Scripture throughout this dissertation, being the version in most common use in the antebellum period.

things as fables; whereas the reverse should be our habit.”⁵⁹ Efforts to change this way of thinking went on continuously, affecting all ages and those in all social stations. A tract of the American Tract Society provided a catechism for children under the age of six:

- Q. Why should you be so earnest in praying for an interest in Christ, a new heart, and the pardon of your sins?
A. That I may live always in readiness for death.
Q. Is your life short, frail, and uncertain?
A. It is; perhaps I may die the next moment.
Q. What will become of you if you die in your sins?
A. I must go to hell with the wicked.
Q. What kind of a place is hell?
A. A place of endless torment, where the fire is never quenched.
Q. Who are the wicked, that go into hell at death?
A. Such as refuse Christ, neglect to read God’s word and pray to him; or such as lie, steal, curse, swear, profane the sabbath, and disobey their parents.⁶⁰

Churches played a key role in teaching about the afterlife, focusing much energy on the question of how to live in order to gain heaven. The degree to which a churchgoer might feel the push toward committing to a heaven-bound life was connected to the culture, personality and philosophy of the minister—and not every minister was as talented at winning converts as the next. One newspaper took a tongue-in-cheek shot at preachers who were more clever than effective, equating “divines” with “dry vines.”⁶¹ And while established, proper, well-to-do congregations in Charleston or Natchez might demand a “clever” (i.e., educated) minister, education was not a requirement of many pulpits in the hinterlands—and was actually an

⁵⁹ “Remark,” *Blakeley Sun*, February 2, 1819.

⁶⁰ New England Tract Society, *Publications of the New England Tract Society, Vol III*, 18.

⁶¹ “[untitled],” *Blakeley Sun*, March 30, 1819.

undesirable ministerial qualification in some locales.⁶² When it came to breaking the bad news about hell, though, something Richard Baxter had noted in 1650 remained true in many communities in 1820: “This kind of preaching or writing is the ready way to be hated; and the desire of applause is so natural, that few delight in such a displeasing way.”⁶³ The degree to which any one community focused on the question of eternity depended a great deal on the type of ministers that community supported.

A thread of reticence runs through the writings of many clerics when describing hell or heaven with any vividness of detail; most living in 1820 or before had expressed a fear of going beyond Scripture in any way. As John Bellamy prepared his 1820 *History of All Religions*, he indemnified himself with the words, “In presuming to speak of the state in Paradise, I have not advanced any new theory, but have confirmed those views, consistently with what is said by the inspired penman on that subject.” Richard Baxter attempted to indemnify himself directly to God in the introduction to his volume on “everlasting rest,” writing, “Alas! my fearful heart scarce dares proceed. Methinks I hear the Almighty’s voice saying to me, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? But pardon my servant, O Lord, I have not pried into

⁶² Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 24–28. It is worthy of note that the educated clergy likely as not received their training in northern schools and were indoctrinated by the same spiritual literature as northern ministers. In 1820, there is little to distinguish the afterlife beliefs of the South from those of the North among literate white populations.

⁶³ Baxter, *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 86; “A Discourse on Future Punishment,” *Methodist Magazine*, June 1823, 202. The Rev. Timothy Merritt, preaching before the New-England Conference in Bath, Maine, in 1822, cautioned the ministers against trying to keep peace with their congregations by avoiding the subject of hell. “We must, therefore, insist on the penalties, as well as on every other part of the gospel,” he wrote.

unrevealed things.”⁶⁴ This resistance to adding “one jot or one tittle” (Matt. 5:18) to the word of God served reasonably well for the time, in keeping with southerners’ seeming contentment with vague descriptions of a future state.

While the churches within any given community tended to be the institutions from which all others drew their guidance, churches placed the greatest responsibility on the parents for the indoctrination of a child in the lessons of the spiritual life. Archibald Alison, whose sermons were widely circulated in the South, wrote: “It is not here, in truth, my brethren, that the great task of religious education can be fully accomplished. It is under your own roofs, under your own eyes, and in the sacred retirement of your own homes.”⁶⁵ He acknowledged the great burden it was: “There is something, undoubtedly, very solemn in the task of religious education. The subjects to be taught are so great, and the consequences of error appear so infinite, that many a conscientious parent trembles at the difficulty.”⁶⁶ Fathers, as heads of households, felt an accountability to teach their children.⁶⁷ But the burden of instilling piety in the household—including in husbands and children—fell predominately to the women.

Mothers who had the means to send their children to school were not sending them into secular environments, no matter what sort of school was chosen. Both schoolchildren and those educated at home generally used Dilworth’s *A New Guide to the English Tongue* as an early reader. Known widely as “Dilworth’s speller,” “Dilworth’s spelling book,” or even simply

⁶⁴ Baxter, *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 17.

⁶⁵ Archibald Alison, *Sermons*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Printed by George Ramsay and Company, for Archibald Constable and Company; London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1815), 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:7.

⁶⁷ Cumberland, “Poet’s Corner,” *Blakeley Sun*, May 14, 1819.

“Dilworth’s,” it had been in use since 1747 and had become something of a metaphor for literacy.⁶⁸ Born in 1801 and growing up in South Carolina, Zillah Brandon remembered, “My first book was an old worn Dilworth spelling book where as soon as I learned the alphabet I was put to reading, and after going through, I commenced in the New Testament.”⁶⁹ In Dilworth’s speller, young children embracing their first steps toward literacy immediately were introduced to a number of new words, which were then put to use in readings—material filled with religious cautions and moral lessons. The first lesson begins with this text:

No man may put off the law of God.
The way of God is no ill way.
My joy is in God all the day.
A bad man is a foe to God.⁷⁰

Only twenty-three pages into the primer, Dilworth warns students: “Turn your selves from all your sins, else God will whet his sword and bend his bow,” and “The day of Christ is at hand; and he will judge the world, both the quick and the dead.”⁷¹ Though the very young students were offered some hopeful messages, like, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy work,” they found much more of the dismal. “Think no scorn of me, lest, if thou make as though thou didst not hear, I be made like them that go down into the pit,” and “Thou has rebuked the heathen; and destroyed the ungodly; thou hast put out their

⁶⁸ “[Untitled],” *City Gazette*, June 30, 1820; “Reading Room,” *Louisiana Advertiser*, May 13, 1820; “Literary Intelligence,” *Louisiana Advertiser*, June 23, 1820; Raoul N. Smith, “The Interest in Language and Languages in Colonial and Federal America,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 123, no. 1 (February 20, 1979): 36.

⁶⁹ Brandon, “Zillah Brandon Diary,” 7, in transcript. Diary, p. 12.

⁷⁰ Thomas Dilworth, *A New Guide to the English Tongue: In Five Parts* (Published for E. Duyckinck, D.D. Smith, W.B. Gilley, and G. Long, 1820), 10.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

names for ever and ever.”⁷² Therefore, even elementary-level students had to grapple with ideas about eternal rewards and punishments at an early age and found the messages repeated for maximal absorption.⁷³

The literacy of children was intricately linked to their morality in the early antebellum southern mind. An Alabama frontier town newspaper reprinted a substantial text “On Ignorance,” reporting, “Ignorance is the greatest of all evils, because it tends to augment and perpetuate every other evil, by precluding the possible entrance of all good. . . . it is only in the early stages of life, that it is capable of being trained by the patient process of education, to habits of intelligence.”⁷⁴ And morality was tied to heaven, making the education of children a sacred duty.

Any perusal of southern newspapers reveals the pervasiveness of ads and notices related to “academies” of learning, usually quite small operations, run for the benefit of the children of the region's more prosperous inhabitants. In February 1819, the Jackson Academy in Alabama announced in local papers its continued operation, a curriculum that included moral philosophy.⁷⁵ The same paper had a week earlier announced the new opening of The Tennessee Academy, which like most was to be run by a minister.⁷⁶ In April of 1823, a Reverend W. T. Brantley, rector of the Richmond Academy, pleaded before the Free School Society of the City

⁷² Ibid., 32, 50, 51.

⁷³ Michael V. Belok, “The Courtesy Tradition and Early Schoolbooks,” *History of Education Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (October 1, 1968): 312.

⁷⁴ “On Ignorance,” *Blakeley Sun*, May 4, 1819; As found in John Bristed, *The Resources of the United States of America* (New York: James Eastburn & Co., 1818), 352–353.

⁷⁵ “[untitled],” *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, February 15, 1819.

⁷⁶ “[untitled],” *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, February 8, 1819.

of Augusta for the creation of a free school. “Experience only can teach how difficult it is to convey religious instruction to minds wholly uneducated,” he said, continuing, “Tell them of God, of Heaven, of Hell, of the dreadful interests of Eternity, and . . . ‘You might as well read one of Tully’s orations to a mule.’”⁷⁷

In the academies for young women that proliferated in the Deep South, education and ritual reminded them of the brevity of life. Typical of May Day ceremonies, for example, was a speech at Miss Nye’s school in Augusta in May of 1824 to the young girls, dressed in their finest, paying homage to the “Queen of the May” and her court. Miss Elizabeth Moore offered a very gloomy forecasting at the coronation of the Queen:

May we all be admonished that the pleasures of this life—nay, life itself—like these fair flowers, is fading and transitory. Now they are dripping in freshness and glowing in beauty; but yon downward sun can scarcely shed his parting evening ray, before they *fade and die!* and long before the return of another happy Coronation day, *you, our youthful Queen,* and *we, your gay attendants,* may rest beneath that lonely, silent sod, from which these lovely blossoms sprang! May this solemn reflection teach us to seek a crown, not of evanescent glory, but one that fadeth not away—eternal in the Heavens!⁷⁸

While committed to the spiritual education of their families, in the 1820s some southern slave-owners were less concerned with the religious instruction of their slaves—finding it easier not to perceive in their slaves “brothers in Christ,” with the inherent obligations.⁷⁹ But the

⁷⁷ “An Address,” *Augusta Chronicle*, April 5, 1823.

⁷⁸ “Rural Coronation,” *Augusta Chronicle*, May 8, 1824.

⁷⁹ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 164; Eugene D Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 186. Eugene Genovese has argued this post-1831 wave of religious training aimed at social control—using the Christian religion to create among slaves a culture of obedience and deference to a master.

slaves' spiritual state mattered a great deal to the more devout of southern slave-owners.⁸⁰ Some viewed the efforts of the American Colonization Society as an evangelical mission—sending Christianized slaves to Africa to spread the faith there.⁸¹ A number of itinerant ministers sought to reach the slaves of the plantations on their routes, with varying degrees of support by slave-owners. Many owners feared that Christian conversion might plant in their chattel the dangerous idea of equality in the eyes of God.⁸² White southerners, while fairly unified in their ideas about the *social* equality of black and white persons, had reached no consensus on *spiritual* equality. They did not agree on the status of black and white souls in heaven. Some refused to acknowledge the possibility that black and white souls would share the same locale in heaven. Some imagined a new iteration of the earthly arrangement—black souls subservient to white in heaven.⁸³ But some assumed there would be an equality of souls in the afterlife. Louisa Maxwell Cocke, mistress of a Virginia plantation, wrote of her slave Betsey, “I hope to train her up for heaven & then it will not be asked what colour her skin was of while upon earth.”⁸⁴ White southerners were not nearly so conscious in 1820 of the spiritual development of slaves as they would become in the decades to follow. Those who did take up the mission of introducing slaves

⁸⁰ Louis B. Gimelli, “Louisa Maxwell Cocke: An Evangelical Plantation Mistress in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 9, no. 1 (April 1, 1989): 54, 59; Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 13, 129 Sarah Gayle expressed distress as a young white woman said, in a slave woman’s presence, that “God did not make negroes.” Gayle also talked of the sermons directed to the slaves in a local sermon in 1830—before the Nat Turner Rebellion. Harriet Ann Jacobs and Mrs. [Lydia Maria] Child, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Published for the author, 1861), 15–16.

⁸¹ “American Colonization Society,” *Methodist Magazine*, September 1823, 348.

⁸² Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 98.

⁸³ Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*; Gimelli, “Louisa Maxwell Cocke.”

⁸⁴ Gimelli, “Louisa Maxwell Cocke,” 59.

to the Christian concept of heaven and hell, however, faced the challenge of markedly different backgrounds among the slave population, in terms of language, religion, time in the Americas, and willingness to accommodate to white culture.⁸⁵

Native Americans remaining in the Deep South in 1820 offered similar challenges to those seeking to plant the Christian concepts of heaven, hell, and God's mercy. Various denominations established missions in "Indian country," many of them with schools to train Indian children in Christian doctrine and other "civilizing" disciplines very early in life.⁸⁶ As with slaves, Indians had diverse beliefs before white settlers arrived, adding many variants as the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, Creeks, and other groups interacted with Catholic and Protestant whites and with slaves from various regions of Africa and the South.⁸⁷ Some syncretized Christian beliefs, some became committed wholly to Christian doctrine, and some

⁸⁵ Brandon, "Zillah Brandon Diary," 82. Zillah Brandon was a teenager when her family moved to the Georgia frontier, where she recalled, "In sixty yards of our house there lived three families of Indians, who like their whole tribe, looked as if the very shafts of desolation were hanging around them." She recalled rampant alcoholism and a time when "their tongues cursed the shrine upon which the white people knelt in prayer to God. And although there were many well-informed and religious among that tribe, yet those nearest us were not of that class, especially the males."; See Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 290–292; Lewis V. Baldwin, "'A Home in Dat Rock': Afro-American Folk Sources and Slave Visions of Heaven and Hell," *Journal of Religious Thought* 41, no. 1 (1984): 38–57; Kathryn Gin, "'The Heavenization of Earth': African American Visions and Uses of the Afterlife, 1863–1901," *Slavery & Abolition* 31, no. 2 (June 2010): 207–231. Gin describes the double meaning that slaves assigned to the ideas of heaven and hell, as metaphors for freedom and slavery.

⁸⁶ "Choctaw Mission," *Religious Remembrancer*, July 28, 1821; William Capers, *Catechism for the Use of the Methodist Missions*, Electronic Edition (Charleston, SC: General Conference, 1853), 4; "Mission at Chatahoochie," *Methodist Magazine*, September 1823, 345–346; "American Methodist Mission," *Southern Evangelical Intelligencer*, February 5, 1820, 6–7; "Creek Indians," *American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer*, May 1, 1820.

⁸⁷ T. N. Campbell, "The Choctaw Afterworld," *Journal of American Folklore* 72, no. 284 (April 1959): 147–148. The Choctaws, for example, held a tangible and indeed "landed" view of the afterlife. The afterlife was a hunting ground, separated from the living by a physical barrier. Spirits of the dead, though, could revisit the living and affect their lives.

remained steadfastly purist to native beliefs—developments watched with great interest from the armchairs of Boston, Philadelphia, and many other places from which mission efforts were being financed.⁸⁸ The fact that the native tribes appeared, in fact, to have developed a dualist cosmology—a “good hunting ground” and a bad one—long before Europeans brought the Bible to them buoyed faith in the inspired nature of God’s revelation to humanity in Scripture. Christian observers of native religious practices felt that the presence in these “savage” cultures of beliefs in a retributive afterlife validated their own religion, demonstrating that God had revealed elemental truth to the native inhabitants of North America in preparation for the purer, surer revelation Christians would bring.⁸⁹

CULTIVATING THE AFTERLIFE CONSCIOUSNESS WITHIN

Literate southern Protestants—receiving instruction on the afterlife from church, home, school, and other institutions from an early age—could not fail to recognize their own

⁸⁸ “American Board of Missions: From the Panoplist,” *Boston Recorder*, January 8, 1820, 6; “Mission at Chatahoochie”; “Revival Among the Choctaws,” *Cherokee Phoenix*, August 26, 1829. Letters from the mission field offered conflicting reports about the success of these evangelical efforts—usually reporting either a dark wilderness of hardened souls or an abundance of eager converts. Such reports undoubtedly served as a vital tool for fundraising by portraying either the desperate need for future support or the overwhelming spiritual return on a previous investment. But rhetorical extremes aside, conflicting accounts reflected the reality of those who resisted, those who embraced, and those who simply incorporated Christianity into an existing spiritual framework.

⁸⁹ Samuel F. Jarvis and New-York Historical Society, *A Discourse on the Religion of the Indian Tribes of North America: Delivered Before the New-York Historical Society, December 20, 1819* (New York: C. Wiley, 1820), 29; “Choctaw Mission”; Campbell, “The Choctaw Afterworld,” 146–154. Thomas Campbell’s description of the Choctaw conception of the afterlife offers remarkable insight into the traditions of that people. While it is an earth-bound view of the afterworld, it is a dualistic world—a dark a dreary hunting ground for those undeserving of the happy one. A mountain separates the two places, but those consigned to the dreary place can hear the joy of those on the other side—compounding their torment.

responsibility to deepen their knowledge by the literature they consumed.⁹⁰ Most devout Christians made a daily practice of reading Scripture and, if they had the means, time, and inclination, read sermons and apologetics, as well. They enjoyed inspirational literature, denominational periodicals, and cautionary tracts on any number of subjects. Ideas of the afterlife also cropped up in novels, poems, and newspaper articles.⁹¹ While their religious reading consciously shaped ideas within denominational communities, the popular reading guided southerners toward a broader social consensus, sketching the gray edges of acceptability,

⁹⁰ For a very thorough analysis of the publishing efforts of evangelicals in the period 1789 to 1880, see Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789–1880* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Brown writes that evangelical publishers viewed themselves as an “evangelical priesthood responsible for shaping American textual practices.” (50).

⁹¹ “Intelligencer. Charleston, January 8, 1820,” *Southern Evangelical Intelligencer*, January 8, 1820. Presbyterian Magazine, for example, had a regular article titled “New Publications,” making Presbyterians aware of new books of interest to those with their belief system. Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 22; “To the Inhabitants of the Alabama Territory and Others,” *Blakeley Sun*, December 22, 1818; Literate southerners had a thirst for reading material and found ways to get it, even in remote locations. Book stores regularly advertised in newspapers even in new frontier towns. Larger towns typically had subscription-supported libraries or “reading rooms” that brought in books and the newspapers and periodicals of the U.S. and Britain. In some frontier areas, newspapers could be distributed to people outside the settled area by mail, if at times for a premium price. And periodicals and newspapers often included a column devoted to “new publications,” bringing further awareness of reading material to even remote southern locations. It was customary, as well, particularly among women, for those who owned books to lend them to acquaintances, to read them aloud, and to discuss them together privately or in literary societies, expanding any given book’s impact on a community. Bookstore ads appeared in the papers of Charleston, New Orleans, Nashville, and Natchez, but also in the small, new towns of Blakeley, Cahawba, and Tuscaloosa as the land rush populated the new state of Alabama. For more information about reading in the antebellum South, see the following: Emily B. Todd, *Antebellum Libraries in Richmond and New Orleans and the Search for the Practices and Preferences of “Real” Readers*, *American Studies*, 2001, 200; Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America,” *Journal of American History* 83, no. 2 (1996): 411, 419–424.

in terms of afterlife beliefs, subtly defining where unconventional ideas became ridiculous or dangerous.⁹²

Christians had a spiritual duty to read. An article in *Methodist Magazine* began with a passage from I Timothy 4:13 that counseled believers, “Give attendance to reading.” It continued, “But while it is admitted that this advice is peculiarly binding on such as are engaged in the Christian Ministry, it may also be safely contended, that it is the duty of every private Christian conscientiously to employ some portion of his time in the same profitable exercise.” The “Sacred Volume” was the one reading exercise a Christian must never omit, but the article also encouraged the reading of “the works of pious and learned men, who have written upon experimental and practical religion, or who have ably explained and illustrated the evidences and doctrines of the Gospel.”⁹³

Christians were to draw their conceptions of the afterlife, whenever possible, directly from Scripture. Even families of limited means had a good chance of having a Bible for their homes, as the work of the American Bible Society, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel

⁹² For the past several decades, historians have been calling into question the concepts of what can be called “central” or “core” and what is the “periphery.” For some general works on the subject, see Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “The Core and Peripheries of Our National Narratives: A Response from IH-35,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 5 (December 1, 2007): 1423–1431; For the perspective of the convergence of two cultures upon a “middle ground,” see Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815*, Cambridge Studies in North American Indian History; (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1991); As noted in the introduction, commentary on peripheries or fringes, with respect to religion, can be found in Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*, xii–xv; Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*, 3; Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, 488–490, 1019–1047.

⁹³ “Duty of Christians to “Give Attendance to Reading,” *Methodist Magazine*, September 1823, 340–341.

in Foreign Parts, and local Bible societies sought to alleviate the perceived dearth of access, particularly in frontier areas.⁹⁴ “The hand of culture cannot be more distinctly traced on the face of wild and desert nature than the effect of this book on the moral condition of man,” declared the *Religious Remembrancer*.⁹⁵ In 1820, the society reported having printed 47,000 bibles and 16,250 testaments in the previous year. In the Deep South states, the society had eight auxiliaries distributing Bibles in South Carolina, three in Georgia, four in Tennessee, one in Mississippi, one in Louisiana, and two in Alabama.⁹⁶

These groups also distributed tracts through local organizations and individuals, offering many opportunities for the inhabitants to raise their consciousness of the looming afterlife in small, affordable chunks. A tract titled “Spectator of a Funeral” cautioned readers to learn from the spectacle of a body being “committed to the ground.” “Do you shudder at the darkness and worms of the grave?” it asked. “O be persuaded to trust your soul in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . In that great day, when he shall place all his sheep at his right hand, may your soul and mine be included.”⁹⁷ Tracts were filled with warnings about future judgment, but rarely went beyond it to what lay after judgment.

⁹⁴ John W. Quist, “Slaveholding Operatives of the Benevolent Empire: Bible, Tract, and Sunday School Societies in Antebellum Tuscaloosa County, Alabama,” *Journal of Southern History* 62, no. 3 (1996): 481, 486.

⁹⁵ “American Bible Society,” *Religious Remembrancer*, August 19, 1820. The *Religious Remembrancer* was a weekly Presbyterian newspaper published in Philadelphia. Southern newspapers frequently drew material from it, and the *Remembrancer* regularly published correspondence from ministers in the southern states.

⁹⁶ American Bible Society, *Annual Report of the American Bible Society* (American Bible Society, 1820), viii (unnumbered), 12, 59–61.

⁹⁷ New England Tract Society, *Publications of the American Tract Society, Vol. I*, 217–218.

Around 1820 southern bookstores were selling a wide variety of publications on apologetics—books and pamphlets emphasizing the logic and evidence for key doctrines. From these, Christians sought the defense for their faith in an afterlife, but often found conflicting views. Almost all works of apologetics began with the assumption that there was a designer of the universe—and the most popular book to lay out the evidence for the designer—British thinker William Paley’s *Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearances of Nature*—had been available in bookstores throughout the region since its first appearance in 1802. In it, Paley introduced the “Watchmaker’s Analogy,” which posited that, just as the presence of the watch proves a watchmaker, the complexity of the universe proves design by an intelligent maker. The popularity of this volume demonstrates the post-Enlightenment drive for logic and evidence to buttress the faith required for admittance to heaven (for those who believed that faith was the key to admittance).⁹⁸ Other titles in this category included David Simpson’s *A Plea for Religion and the Sacred Writings: Addressed to the Disciples of Thomas Paine, and Wavering Christians of Every Persuasion*.⁹⁹ Even as the “age of reason” waned, readers often sought rational support for a belief in the afterlife. A number of works appeared in bookstores to serve the need—most of them new editions of long-established titles.¹⁰⁰ Methodist theologian John William Fletcher’s

⁹⁸ William Paley, *Natural Theology; Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*, 12th ed. (London: Printed for J. Faulder, 1802, 1809).

⁹⁹ David Simpson, *A Plea for Religion and the Sacred Writings: Addressed to the Disciples of Thomas Paine, and Wavering Christians of Every Persuasion*, 6th ed. (London: For W. Baynes, by W. Nicholson, 1797, 1810).

¹⁰⁰ In 1820 most books in the U.S. were originally published in Europe. Many books advertised in the southern states were actually quite old European titles, having gone through multiple editions for a hundred years or more. Therefore, southerners more often read established

posthumously published *A Rational Vindication of the Catholick Faith*—“Catholick” in this case meaning “universal”—remained in print thirty-five years after he wrote it. It defended a belief in the doctrine of the trinity—at its core, the divinity of Christ—as essential to entry into heaven.¹⁰¹ A particular favorite was *Gill’s Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity Being a System of Evangelical Truths Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, originally published in 1772, which advertisements usually referred to simply as “Gill’s Divinity.” Gill devoted much attention to salvation by grace, with a substantial section titled “Of the Final State of Man,” in which he declared, “That the soul of man is immortal may be proved.”¹⁰² Some of the apologetical books encouraged ecumenical views, but most were dedicated to more sectarian doctrines. Joshua Spalding’s *The Divine Theory: A System of Divinity, Founded Wholly Upon Christ: Which, by One Principle, Offers an Explanation of All the Works of God* offered a very caustic example of this form. Spalding rejected as “an evil of great magnitude” the idea that the “divine principle” was a mere moral nature or benevolence. The divine principle was “Christ,” in multiple facets. This “System of Divinity” was the only correct one, he asserted, offering a stern warning to any who created opposing doctrines: “God will judge them and their authors, and blot their name and remembrance from the city of God.” His system declared that saving faith comes

classics than explorations of new ideas. Richard Rogers Bowker, *Copyright, Its History and Its Law: Being a Summary of the Principles and Practice of Copyright with Special Reference to the American Code of 1909 and the British Act of 1911* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 341–344.

¹⁰¹ John Fletcher, *A Rational Vindication of the Catholick Faith: Being the First Part of A Vindication of Christ’s Divinity* (London: Printed and sold at the New-Chapel, City Road, 1786, 1790), 8–9. Fletcher wrote this treatise in 1784–1785, and it was revised, finished, and published in 1788 at his widow’s request. A new edition appeared in 1818, sparking sales in southern bookstores.

¹⁰² John Gill, *Gill’s Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity Being a System of Evangelical Truths Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, ed. William Staughton, Abridged Edition (Philadelphia: Printed for Delaplaine and Hellings by B. Graves, 1772, 1810), 403, 406.

from the anticipation of future things—a contemplation that brings the recognition that the present world is polluted and evil.¹⁰³ Apologetics armed Christians to defend their faith against detraction, against Satan, and against their own moments of doubt, which threatened eternal security.

For those more interested in inspirational than intellectual or spiritually defensive fodder, bookstores offered even greater options, beginning with the classics. An old British tract titled “The Dairyman’s Daughter,” which the New England Tract Society distributed in 1814, described the reading tastes of one young woman. It laid out many of the “classics” expected of a devout Christian reader—almost every one of them related to a Christian’s path to heaven. “In addition to a Bible and Common Prayer-Book,” it said, the young woman’s library included, “‘Doddridge’s Rise and Progress,’ ‘Romaine’s Life, Walk, and Triumph of Faith,’ ‘Bunyan’s Pilgrim,’ ‘Alleine’s Alarm,’ ‘Baxter’s Saints’ Everlasting Rest,’ a hymn book, and a few tracts.”¹⁰⁴ Southern readers of the tract would have been familiar with the work of Baxter and Doddridge, along with that of John Bunyan. *Pilgrim’s Progress* by Bunyan, a staple of the Christian family library, followed a pilgrim called “Christian” in his lonely, self-sacrificing, and very dangerous trek heavenward. Cultivating in readers a shared image of heaven as a distant, difficult, and mysterious, but worthy, goal—worth giving up everything to attain—Bunyan’s heaven was for the very few who could earn it.¹⁰⁵ Philip Doddridge’s *The Rise and Progress of*

¹⁰³ Joshua Spalding, *The Divine Theory: A System of Divinity, Founded Wholly Upon Christ: Which, by One Principle, Offers an Explanation of All the Works of God*, vol. 1 (Elizabethtown, NJ: Printed by Shepard Kollock, 1798, 1808), x, 285.

¹⁰⁴ New England Tract Society, *Publications of the American Tract Society, Vol. I*, 153.

¹⁰⁵ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come* (Boston: Mass. Sabbath School Society, 1834, 1678); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D.

Religion in the Soul, first published in 1750, focused on the development of a Christian in life and the preparation for that “scene through which you must infallibly pass, which has something in it so awful, that I cannot but attempt doing a little to assist you in it; I mean the dark valley of the shadow of death.”¹⁰⁶ Richard Baxter’s classic *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest* (1650) demonstrated his Arminian leanings, warning that the state of a man’s soul at the moment of death determined eternity. There would be variations in the heavenly experience, with “the perfect endless enjoyment of God by the perfected saints” being “according to the measure of the capacity to which their souls arrive at death.”¹⁰⁷ Only in a few passages, though, did Baxter offer a sketchy description of the everlasting rest to which they were to attain. Doddridge, Baxter, Bunyan, and so many others writing about heaven at the time assumed the desire for heaven existed in their readers; none seemed to feel the need to create a thirst for it with enticing imageries.

Other inspirational books available at the time proved popular, if perhaps not quite the established classics of Bunyan, Doddridge, and Baxter. James Fisher’s *A Glimpse of Glory or, a Gospel Discovery of Emmanuel’s Land* seemed by its title to promise a discussion of heaven, but this, too, was about earth—and its specialness as the one “world” in which God chose to become

Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders’ Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 428, 435; Brown, *Word in the World*, 107. Brown indicates that numerous children’s editions of *Pilgrim’s Progress* were also published.

¹⁰⁶ Doddridge, *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, 284–288.

¹⁰⁷ Baxter, *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 3–5; For biographical background on Richard Baxter, see Neil Howard Keeble, *Richard Baxter: Puritan Man of Letters*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1982); N. H. Keeble, “Richard Baxter’s Preaching Ministry: Its History and Texts,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35 (October 1984): 539–559; N. H. Keeble, “Baxter, Richard (1615–1691),” ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Harrison, Brian, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, October 2009), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1734>.

flesh.¹⁰⁸ Methodist itinerant Lorenzo Dow's *History of Cosmopolite*, which described his own Bunyan-like journey through life, earned some popularity in the South.¹⁰⁹ Day after day, Dow punctuated his journal entries with words of distress: "I feel tried and tempted . . . my mind was much exercised . . . being greatly pressed in spirit . . . Satan pursues me from place to place . . . I am ready to sink like a drowning man."¹¹⁰ But always, Dow attached a moral message, as when he wrote, "When I was in the north country, being under strong temptations to end my life, I went down to a river to do it, but a thought of futurity darted into my mind; the value of my soul! Oh! Eternity."¹¹¹ The "inspirational" literature was not designed so much to uplift the soul to happiness as to promise happiness after a very arduous life.

Southerners also purchased sermons that dealt with heaven and hell—usually drawn from the minds of European "divines." The sermons of Archibald Alison were published for "the Young of the Congregation of the Cowgate Chapel, Edinburgh, . . . with . . . every prayer for their final happiness." It was vital that the young recognized the dire consequences of following a sinful path in life because "that spirit which was created for glory, and honour, and immortality, may be lost in the universe of existence,—may be lost to its God and to its Saviour,—may be lost to every hope and perfection for which it was originally designed,—and, banished from the sunshine of Heaven, may be doomed to wander in outer darkness, with the

¹⁰⁸ James Fisher, *A Glimpse of Glory Or, a Gospel Discovery of Emmanuel's Land*, 1st ed. (Glasgow: Printed and sold by J. and J. Robertson, 1777), 2.

¹⁰⁹ Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite: Or, the Four Volumes of Lorenzo's Journal Concentrated into One: Containing His Experience & Travels, from Childhood to 1814, Being Upwards of Thirty-Six Years*, 4 vols. (New York: Printed and sold by John C. Totten, No.9 Bowery-Lane, 1814).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25, 36.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

unblest and hopeless beings who inhabit it.”¹¹² Lest any allow secret sin to corrupt them, Alison warned, “Where the eye of man cannot reach, the eyes of Heaven are present,—that there are Minds far superior to man, who interests themselves not only in our actions, but in our thoughts.” Angels and archangels looked on. More interestingly, for those who wondered about the dead, Alison taught that the righteous of all ages “now look down with the sympathy of brethren upon the generations who succeed them, and call them ‘to follow them into their rest.’”¹¹³ But, like so many others, he went no further in describing heaven.

Newspaper references to the afterlife were less pervasive but in their own way very revealing. Newspapers helped weave together communities from seaport towns to remote villages along inland rivers. As for those in remote locations, newspapers could be had at a premium price and were not so timely as might be desired—but the news got there eventually. While southerners craved news of the outside world, newspapers served a much broader social need. Editorials, obituaries, humor pieces, and news, itself, provided a moral component—guiding readers to a sense of the boundaries of acceptable behavior and right thinking, as defined by the larger community.¹¹⁴ In their humor and angst, poems and diatribes, scandals and even mundane reports, we glimpse their ideas of heaven, hell, and the road to either.

Certainly newspapers set the reader’s mind quite continually on death and its associated rites, most often and perhaps most notably in obituaries. At the most basic level, obituaries described funerals—a social ritual few could avoid for long. Subscribers read in detail of the

¹¹² Alison, *Sermons*, 2:v, 430.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 2:431–436.

¹¹⁴ “Proposals,” *Blakeley Sun*, December 15, 1818; “Proposals,” *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, June 28, 1819; “Proposals for Publishing by Subscription,” *Camden Gazette*, January 6, 1820.

burial customs of other cultures, as well as their own.¹¹⁵ For those living in towns like Mobile with perpetually fluctuating populations, where seamen, merchants, and opportunists streamed in, only to be felled by the next strain of yellow fever, burial practices became a subject of public health interest. Newspapers described ordinances that regulated where people could be buried, how deep the grave should be, and what direction the monuments were to face.¹¹⁶ The “saturation with death” that Lewis Saum mentions was reflected throughout the pages of newspapers of all kinds.

The obituaries of the brave, famous, or devout usually filled substantial space in newspapers. Their deaths held special meaning—a greater loss to society and more deserving of rewards ahead, based on their service to mankind.¹¹⁷ Upon the death of an old veteran, a correspondent to the *Mobile Gazette* wrote, “Thus we see the brave and venerable soldiers of the Revolution, one by one, departing ‘to another and a better world’”—the implication being that their service earned them heaven.¹¹⁸ In cases where the public questioned whether a venerated hero was destined for heaven, newspapers tended to carry stories to set worried minds at ease. Due to his Deist leanings in life, for example, George Washington had died leaving devotees

¹¹⁵ “An Irish Funeral,” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, December 8, 1820.

¹¹⁶ “An Ordinance: To Regulate the Burying Grounds,” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, June 29, 1820.

¹¹⁷ “Patrick Henry,” *Alabama Watchman*, October 6, 1820; “Obituary Notice,” *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, July 15, 1820; “Washington’s Monument,” *Blakeley Sun*, April 2, 1819.

¹¹⁸ “Died,” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, April 23, 1819; Jason Shaffer, “Making ‘an Excellent Die’: Death, Mourning, and Patriotism in the Propaganda Plays of the American Revolution,” *Early American Literature* 41, no. 1 (March 2006): 1–27. Shaffer describes the use of dramatic plays during the American Revolution to build patriotism within the soldiers’ ranks and the bolster the will of the population to make the sacrifice of men.

concerned for his soul. One newspaper, commemorating his death on its twentieth anniversary, quoted his dying words:

I am not afraid to die. . . . virtue indeed is the true philosophy, and the dictates of our holy religion the surest road to fame and happiness in this life, to peace and happiness of the life to come.¹¹⁹

In reporting deaths, newspapers often offered extended descriptions of the deathbed scene, mining the act of dying for lessons for the living. Southerners were intrigued with the way prominent figures handled those last days or moments—seeking in them role models or, as the case may be, cautionary tales. Deathbed scenes of more ordinary (and perhaps at times fictional) people were reprinted far and wide, if the scene offered a moral lesson or message, reinforcing the honor of a fearless or joyous death or the terrors otherwise.¹²⁰ In April 1820, the *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser* described the dying hours of a man who was not in right fellowship with God. As the man started to die, God’s face was turned away, the newspaper said, and the man experienced torment. But as he continued to plead with God for forgiveness, he experienced relief.¹²¹ The details of death were not a private affair, if any felt the public could benefit spiritually from those last moments. The *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser* was particularly fond of cautionary death tales. When Elizabeth Bell of Mobile died in January 1821, the entire community was privy to the news that she “came to her death from intoxication by

¹¹⁹ “George Washington,” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, August 3, 1820.

¹²⁰ “[Untitled],” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*. October 10, 1820; Schneider, “Ritual of Happy Dying”; Doddridge, *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, 286.

¹²¹ “Communication,” *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, April 3, 1820; *The Methodist Review*, vol. IV (Methodist Book Concern, 1821), 55.

spirituous liquors and effects of extreme cold.”¹²² They had read some months earlier in the same paper that three hundred suicides had taken place in five months in Paris—a breeding ground for infidels.¹²³ In March 1820, the newspaper offered subscribers a letter from a convict, awaiting execution for mail robbery, in which he wrote to his wife: “May my tears, my penitence, and deep contrition, be acceptable to that Almighty Being, before whom I am shortly to appear.”¹²⁴ This newspaper editor made good use of the privilege he had—and duty he no doubt felt—of reminding his readers of the ever-looming end of life.

Southerners also relished stories of those who died worthy deaths characterized by peace and fearlessness.¹²⁵ One newspaper, in October 1820, celebrated the release of a woman from the burdens of life: “Religion mourns her early fall. Her whole life was marked for Christian purity, and her enjoyment of the Divine precepts, a prelibation of the happiness of futurity.” It encouraged readers to rejoice that the caring mother and wife was now beyond the reach of her grieving children and husband, “whence their plaintive groans, and deep-toned sighs can never recall her.”¹²⁶ The deaths of local ministers usually merited lengthy descriptions of lives well lived and deaths well met.¹²⁷ The serene deaths of the saved served as a positive message to all

¹²² “Coroner’s Report,” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, January 26, 1821.

¹²³ “Latest from England,” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, September 1, 1819.

¹²⁴ “A Letter,” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, March 15, 1820.

¹²⁵ “[Untitled]” *Mobile Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, October 10, 1820.

¹²⁶ “Died,” *Alabama Watchman*, October 6, 1820.

¹²⁷ “Obituary [Rev. Edmund Botsford],” *City Gazette*, January 7, 1820; “Obituary,” *Southern Evangelical Intelligencer*, February 5, 1820.

those who were uncertain of their eternal security—an enticement to earn the security and die the “Good Death.”

The popular poetry found in the start-up newspapers of frontier environments in Alabama and Mississippi illuminates the volatile region’s consciousness of death as a looming reality. While many poems were wholly about death, others used death as a device. Poems about love, for example, tended to end in the death of the loved one to elevate the emotional impact of the piece.¹²⁸ Poems about immoral activities used death and judgment to create a moral message.¹²⁹ Poems about the changing seasons were metaphors for the stages of life, inevitably stressing the final fading of the flower or withering of the leaf.¹³⁰ Poems lauded the valor of dead soldiers and memorialized idyllic yesteryears as life waned.¹³¹

Southern frontier newspapers perpetually reminded readers of the fate of all humans. While keeping the future state always in view, they rarely offered subscribers a descriptive picture of heaven or hell. A piece simply titled “Heaven” in the *Florida Gazette* in October 1821, though more expressive than most, demonstrates the meager attention to details about heaven. It describes “skies unclouded,” a place where “happy souls unite their fervent days//And sound the peal of gratitude and praise.” There, “Bliss reigns secure.” Only in one way does it suggest creative thinking beyond tradition regarding the state of the soul in heaven. It declares, “celestial

¹²⁸ Cumberland, “Poet’s Corner,” *Blakeley Sun*, May 14, 1819; “Poet’s Corner,” *Blakeley Sun*, February 2, 1819; “The Grief of Judah.”

¹²⁹ Mountain Bard, “Slander”; “Poetry. For the Watchman. Slander,” *Alabama Watchman*, August 8, 1820; “On a Watch.”

¹³⁰ “Poet’s Corner: Spring,” *Blakeley Sun*, April 2, 1819; “Selected Poetry: The Leaf,” *Louisianian*, March 11, 1820.

¹³¹ “Poetry,” *Halcyon and Tombekbe Public Advertiser*, May 8, 1820; “My Native Vale.”

praise and joy//The soul's progressive faculties employ," suggesting that the soul advances or develops in some way after death."¹³² The idea of the soul's "employment" after death would become a question of great interest in the coming decades.

The most creative ideas about the prospects of life after death were being offered to southerners almost subliminally, as threads running through new novels and stories coming from a group of British writers: ghost stories from Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley; a vampire story by John William Polidori; and *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley. These were mere glimmers on the horizon of fiction in 1820, however. Novels and short stories had gained some degree of respectability by this time, though they continued to be classified dismissively as a weakness of women, as described in a poem vilifying the printers who supplied them:

Who gives that useless Book, the Novel,
O'er which so many *fair ones* grovel,
In Parlour, Kitchen, Cot and Hovel?
The Printer!¹³³

Such novels, however, often sought to build moral wisdom and etiquette—having begun to replace the nonfiction titles that had filled this need decades earlier.¹³⁴ For women living in the Deep South, the works of British writer Hannah More were widely accessible. Long known for her nonfiction moralistic writings, More designed her fictional works for the same purpose—

¹³² "Poetry. Heaven."

¹³³ "Poetry: The Printer (From the New-Hampshire Centinel)," *Camden Gazette*, June 6, 1818.

¹³⁴ Catherine Kerrison, "The Novel as Teacher: Learning to Be Female in the Early American South," *Journal of Southern History* 69, no. 3 (2003): 514; For a discussion of the way the modern British ghost story (as transformed by Sir Walter Scott) used the ghost as a voice of conscience for the past, see Simon John Hay, *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 28–56.

to guide readers in moral and spiritual choices. More filled her stories with cautionary tales. Her story “The Two Shoemakers,” for example, spent many pages describing the death of a drunkard, in whose “frightful countenance” was “displayed the dreadful picture of sin and death.” Gathered around him were the crew of young men he had corrupted with drink, and he cried out to them: “Take warning, oh take warning by my miserable end. . . . It is too late, too late for me—but you have still time. . . . Death is dreadful to the wicked—O the sting of death to a guilty conscience.”¹³⁵ And the sinner met the fate he had earned—a message Hannah More drove home in many stories.

While More and others were serving the literary needs of women, men were drawn to stories of adventure. Mark Twain would later blame Sir Walter Scott’s romantic depictions of knights and ladies faire for the rise in the honor code that eventually took the South into the Civil War.¹³⁶ Like women, though, men also had their favorite moral tales. Daniel Defoe’s tale of Robinson Crusoe continued in publication in 1820, more than a century after it first appeared. A very masculine tale of rugged individualism and survival, it was also a tale of Christian conversion. Crusoe found God from Scripture without benefit of a church or clergyman, an idea that held an appeal for southern men, who had tended to see church as the woman’s domain.¹³⁷ In Crusoe, Defoe offered a path to heaven without the constraints of church—but the message

¹³⁵ More, *Moral Sketches of Prevailing Opinions and Manners, Foreign and Domestic*, 94–96.

¹³⁶ Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Harper, 1883), 327–8.

¹³⁷ Daniel Defoe, *The Wonderful Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London: William Darnton, 1819); Heyrman, *Southern Cross*; Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 410.

was also clear that God followed Crusoe even to this remote island. The decision for or against heaven was not an optional one.

Poetry and fiction had the power to shape ideas about the afterlife in more subtle ways than the overtly religious literature southerners also read. These literary forms could set the limits of acceptable thought by creating characters that made choices and experienced the rewards or ramifications. They could stretch limits by injecting ghosts and goblins, rogues and scoundrels—guilty pleasures justified by the license of fiction. Only here did the first hints appear that southerners were straining against the blandness of the afterlife as presented in its “acceptable” forms in 1820.

* * *

As the 1820s dawned, then, for the literate southern population, there was little creativity expended in the conception of heaven. Certainly it was the desired end—the end hoped and often worked for. Few wrestled with the question, “What is heaven”? They generally agreed that this faraway kingdom was a place of singing, rest, reunion, and worship of God—blissfully happy, the domain of the righteous.

But who were the “righteous”? Who deserved this better end? The intellectual and spiritual wrangling centered on the path to “futuraity,” and the actions and choices that would determine it. Heaven itself was the lighted place behind a thick veil and no one dared peek. Fewer still contemplated the nature of hell, except as an evangelical device. It seemed sufficient to paint it as a dreadful place—its horrors beyond human comprehension—since questioning the truth (or adequacy) of the Bible on the subject might endanger one’s soul, bringing about the very thing being questioned. The early antebellum southern mind, therefore, focused on scaling an arduous, upward path to a very obscure place called heaven.

CHAPTER II.
SUPERSTITION, SCIENCE, AND CHALLENGES TO REVELATION

Now, sir, you are much older; you have scaled the dizzy heights of science, and carefully explored the mines of philosophy; and if human learning will avail, then you can help me. It is impossible for you to have lived and studied so long, without arriving at some conclusions relative to these vexing questions of this and every other age.

—Augusta Evans, *Beulah*

In the 1820s, broader democracy, a pride in American growth, and greater accessibility to print materials began to gray the lines between those of fortune and formal education and the self-educated people of more limited means. The expanding “literate” population sought to shed superstitions, celebrated advances in science, educated their children, and contemplated big and bold ideas. With these endeavors came new questions and new possibilities about the nature of the afterlife for Christians. They had to contemplate how to manage these new ideas when they moved beyond or conflicted with the revelation of the Bible.

Southern Protestants optimistically joined the drive toward the pursuit of scientific knowledge as the supposed antidote to the superstitions that had blinded their ancestors to eternal truths. Advertising a new newspaper in Mississippi, the proprietors wrote: “Ignorance and bigotry, in other times and countries, have sullenly and stupidly opposed the advancement of science and the diffusion of knowledge, but in our public it is generally, if not universally, conceded, not only that there is no danger to be apprehended from the dissemination of truth, but

that happiness and the power of a community are proportionate to its intellectual progress.”¹ They felt certain that the work of scientists would prove the validity of Scripture, and the world would embrace Christianity. They expected it to bolster their hope of heaven and perhaps even to offer greater understanding of the spiritual realm. But emerging discoveries began to cast doubt on points of sacred revelation in the minds of more than a few and, in an odd way, to revive belief in once-discarded superstitions. The discoveries opened doors of possibility that were exciting and liberating for some, frightening for some who preferred the comfort of defined creeds, and disillusioning for those who saw in the debates a reason to be skeptical of it all. For the curious and the questioners of the Southern Protestant population, though, the permutations of superstition and scientific knowledge rendered the afterlife a far more nuanced prospect through the antebellum decades.

THE SHEDDING OF SUPERSTITION

Literate antebellum southerners took pride in how far they had advanced beyond the folk myths of their ancestors.² They enjoyed reading about the so-called superstitions of exotic foreigners and those they deemed “inferior,” usually presented with a degree of superciliousness.

¹ “Prospectus of ‘The Rights of the People,’ To Be Published in the Town of Monticello, Pearl River,” *Mississippi State Gazette*, November 25, 1820.

² For a fine study of the supernatural “worlds of wonder” of seventeenth-century Americans, see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), chapter 2; See also Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*, Studies in Cultural History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Jonathan M. Butler, *Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling: Heaven and Hell in American Revivalism, 1870–1920*, Chicago Studies in the History of American Religion: V. 3 (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1991); Jonathan M. Butler, “Magic, Astrology, and the Early American Religious Heritage, 1600–1760,” *American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (April 1, 1979): 317–346.

Though frequently used, the term “superstition” was a very slippery concept to define. Webster’s *Dictionary of the English Language* of 1831 defined it as “excessive rigor in religion,” but few would have considered excessive rigor in religion wrong, unless it was in service of the *wrong* religion.³ “Exactly in proportion as *real* religion raises the tone of moral feeling, and stimulates the desire after intellectual attainment,” said one author on the subject, “superstition degrades the former and destroys the latter.”⁴ Yet even a term so seemingly firm as “real” raised questions. Superstition, whatever it might be, was blamed for suicides, murders, wars, fear, nervousness, naivety, and that most despicable of antebellum excesses, “enthusiasm.”

For those who viewed themselves as the educated elite of southern society, “superstitious” would have been a perjorative label.⁵ A person wishing to avoid the label had to take particular care in the realm of afterlife beliefs, where superstition flourished. In 1829, the *Christian Observer* devoted an entire year to the subject, presenting a series of articles titled “Religious Communications. Essays on Superstition.”⁶ The author, W. Newnham, who

³ Noah Webster, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (White, Gallaher, & White, 1831), 471.

⁴ “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 1 of 12],” *Christian Observer*, January 1829, 8. (Italics mine.).

⁵ “By Magnetic Telegraph,” *Daily Morning News*, June 23, 1852; “Byron’s Superstition,” *Floridian*, May 20, 1848; “Joseph Addison.”

⁶ “Essays on Superstition, Part 1”; “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 2 of 12],” *Christian Observer*, February 1829; “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 3 of 12],” *Christian Observer*, March 1829; “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 4 of 12],” *Christian Observer*, April 1829; “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 5 of 12],” *Christian Observer*, May 1829; “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 6 of 12],” *Christian Observer*, June 1829; “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 7 of 12],” *Christian Observer*, July 1829; “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 8 of 12],” *Christian Observer*, August 1829; “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 9 of 12],”

identified himself only by the label “Therapeutics” (rendered in Greek letter) at the time, offered lengthy discussions each month on various beliefs considered superstitious, taking his first shots at Roman Catholics, “Mohammedans,” “Hindoos,” and North American Indians—the systems of thought the readers of the *Christian Observer* would likely see as safely foreign to themselves.⁷ The author directed most of the more than 140 pages, though, at the superstitions that the readers might find within their own households and circles of acquaintance, including apparitions, omens, premonitions, and symbolic or precognitive dreams. He concluded that most of such notions ultimately derived from an irritation or “morbidness” of the brain—possibly the effects of medication, but something to which women were particularly susceptible.⁸ “Superstition is the offspring, the inheritance, and the mark of a weak mind, yet it will sometimes be found to exist in men of great genius, and of enlightened intelligence,” this expert asserted.⁹ Much of the text was devoted to analyzing ghost accounts—many of them accounts of the visits of the recently dead to the bereaved—accounts he attributed to “a state of morbid cerebral excitement.”¹⁰ He attempted to get across the message that it was the absence of reason within one’s religion that

Christian Observer, September 1829; “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 10 of 12],” *Christian Observer*, October 1829; “Religious Communications: Essays on Superstition [Part 11 of 12],” *Christian Observer*, November 1829; “Essays on Superstition, Part 1.”

⁷ “Essays on Superstition, Part 1,” 1–2 The author only identified himself as “Therapeutics,” as rendered in Greek letters, in the original article. His actual identity was revealed when the series of articles appeared in book form the following year under his actual name, W. Newnham. William Newnham, *Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry Into the Effects of Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other Supernatural Appearances* (J. Hatchard and Son, 187, Piccadilly, 1830).

⁸ “Essays on Superstition, Part 2,” 66; “Essays on Superstition, Part 9,” 528–529.

⁹ “Essays on Superstition, Part 2,” 66.

¹⁰ “Essays on Superstition, Part 10,” 594. Much of the ninth and tenth installments of this serial article are about ghosts.

led one to superstitious beliefs.¹¹ Attempting to shed this sort of “unreasonable” superstition, though, rendered the afterlife more remote to people. It made the walls between the living and the dead more solid, without the hope that a dream or ghostly visit might permeate them and connect a living soul to the world of spirits.

Southerners enhanced their sense of removal from the superstitious past by reading about the persisting afterlife superstitions of Eastern Europeans, Arabians, Asians, Africans, and in some cases, in the monarchical states of the western world. “It is to the unrestricted circulation of facts and opinions, and to the latitude and frequency of religious and political discussion among us, that we ultimately owe our emancipation from the thralldom [sic] of superstition and tyranny—that we are indebted for our pre-eminent internal prosperity—and for that external consideration which we have extorted from sceptered sceptics and rival states,” one publication boasted.¹² Readers of southern newspapers and magazines eagerly learned about the death rituals of other countries, and articles on the subject ran quite long and detailed. South Carolinians read that the ticking of scarabs in Northumbria augur death. In Ireland, it was the presence of a particular bird or of a tall woman in white—an apparition shrieking in the house—that foretold death.¹³ The *Southern Literary Messenger* reported that the Celts of the Black Mountain between the Cevennes and the Pyrenees, among other things, never drew a corpse to the cemetery using horses and oxen, believing that the animals would die the following day.¹⁴ At the extreme of

¹¹ “Essays on Superstition, Part 2,” 65.

¹² “Prospectus of ‘The Rights of the People.’”

¹³ “Popular Antiquities: Death-Watch,” *Columbia Telescope*, September 24, 1816.

¹⁴ “Usages, Customs, and Superstitions of the Inhabitants of the Black Mountain,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, November 1840, 728.

death rituals, another paper reported that thirty-six widows had been burned alive with their dead husbands outside Calcutta the previous year.¹⁵ Beliefs and practices ranging from spookily captivating to repulsively horrifying were entertaining, while effectively drawing boundaries between acceptable afterlife beliefs and backward superstitious ones.¹⁶

Protestant papers and periodicals presented “superstitious” beliefs of the non-Western world most often with pity for the heathen souls destined for hell or with triumph when a soul was rescued. The American Bible Society pleaded for Bibles to distribute in foreign lands: “The hand of culture cannot be more distinctly traced on the face of wild and desert nature than the effect of this book on the moral condition of man. Look at man without it.”¹⁷ A short piece in the *Christian Herald* tells of the death of “Spadilie,” who had been converted to Christianity from “Mahomedanism”—having been “wonderfully brought . . . to renounce the errors of the false

¹⁵ “Immolation,” *Blakeley Sun*, May 4, 1819.

¹⁶ Some writers, however, suggested more legitimate fascination than horror. A traveler in Egypt sent home a description of a death caravan, marveling at the pomp and symbolism. Still, the language established clearly the inferiority of the customs, this “strange mixture of savageness and magnificence, that we find not infrequent among the nobler barbarians of the East and South.” See “Arabic Death Song,” *Alabama Watchman*, August 8, 1820. The “nobler barbarians” of the Muslim world held particular fascination for southern audiences. Hundreds of articles mention “Musselmen (Muslims), Mahomet (Mohammed), and Turkish life in Deep South newspapers in the antebellum years. To demonstrate the level of fascination that southerners had with Islamic cultures, a search of the “America’s Historical Newspapers” database on 1/20/2013, with the terms ‘musselmen OR mahomet* OR Turkish’ and the dates 1826 to 1829 in the Deep South states under study yielded 550 results.” George Sale’s translation of the Koran or “Alcoran of Mohammed,” which had originally appeared in 1734, was reprinted at least six times between 1800 and 1860 and was advertised regularly in the region’s papers. See George Sale, *The Koran: Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mohammed: Translated into English Immediately from the Original Arabic, with Explanatory Notes* (London: T. Tegg, 1844); The grand depictions of knights in the Holy Crusades in the novel *Ivanhoe* may have spurred some of this interest—southerners being voracious consumers of Sir Walter Scott’s novels. See Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, 327–328.

¹⁷ “American Bible Society.”

prophet. . . . He died triumphantly at the age of about 78.”¹⁸ Christian publications expressed pity for those holding a conflicting belief system when they had no fear that the belief system would infect American souls. In the expression of pity for the poor superstitious souls, these publications helped to shape the boundaries between acceptable beliefs and pitiable superstitions for Protestants.

Protestant southerners tended to view Catholicism as a superstitious belief system, but they were also conditioned to work cooperatively with the Catholics in their communities. Andrew Stern has argued that Catholics and Protestants in the South got along reasonably well with one another because of their shared commitment to slavery, which might further explain why southern newspaper editors directed most of their barbs toward *foreign* Catholics.¹⁹ Polite southern publications were far more likely to insult American Catholics obliquely or by association. Daniel Defoe’s *The History of the Devil, as Well Ancient as Modern*, first published in 1726, was reprinted frequently throughout the antebellum period. As he examined the myths of the Devil, Defoe had angry words for many throughout history—but no group took his blistering rhetoric with more heat than “Papists,” and particularly popes. The attacks, from cover to cover, found their way into many southern Protestant homes.²⁰ Southern newspapers fueled anti-Catholic sentiment with stories like one about Swiss priests performing an exorcism of 303 devils from a woman.²¹ Late in 1835, in the midst of the Texas revolution, references to

¹⁸ “Death of an Aged Mahomedan Convert,” *Christian Herald*, February 6, 1819.

¹⁹ Andrew Stern, “Southern Harmony: Catholic-Protestant Relations in the Antebellum South,” *Religion and American Culture* 17, no. 2 (July 1, 2007): 165–190.

²⁰ Daniel Defoe, *The History of the Devil: Ancient and Modern* (G. Walker, 1822).

²¹ “A Revolutionary Expedition,” *Blakeley Sun*, January 26, 1819.

superstitious Catholics frequently were directed toward Mexico whose “superstitious inhabitants” needed to be freed.²² A New Orleans paper regretted having to dispel the rumor that a revolution had begun in Spain—having hoped the people there would be freed from the “barbarous superstitions” of the Catholic ministers.”²³ Alternatively, southern Protestants could indict *early* American Catholics for superstition and maintain some degree of politeness. In 1829, for example, the *Columbia Telescope* quoted a speech of “Lieut. Hammond” that thanked God that the actual settlers of America had not been the same sort who had discovered it—the ambitious and superstitious adventurers, under the “rapacious” ambition and cruel direction of the “Most Catholic” Ferdinand.²⁴ There were also among them the overtly intolerant, like Presbyterian minister James Henley Thornwell of South Carolina, who wrote that “Popery” was a part of a “comprehensive plan of darkness, conceived by a mastermind for the purpose of destroying the kingdom of light and perpetuating the reign of death.”²⁵ Augusta Evans’s first

²² [untitled], *New-Orleans Commercial Bulletin* (New Orleans, LA, October 26, 1835); “To an Impartial World,” *New-Orleans Commercial Bulletin* (New Orleans, LA, January 6, 1836); “In U.S. Senate,” *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* (Natchez, MS, June 17, 1836); “Miscellaneous Mexico Waddy Thompson,” *The Floridian* (Tallahassee, FL, June 13, 1846).

²³ “The Rumour of a Revolution in Spain Was Too Good to Be True,” *Orleans Gazette*, April 20, 1819; By setting his stories in the medieval past, Sir Walter Scott was able to mock the rituals of the nuns, abbots, and other Catholics who peopled his stories, without directly attacking the Catholics in his own world. See Walter Scott, *The Monastery; a Romance*, vol. 1, 3 vols., 1st ed. (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1820); Sir Walter Scott, *The Abbot*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and John Ballantyne, 1820).

²⁴ “Extracts from Lieut. Hammond’s Oration,” *Columbia Telescope*, July 17, 1829.

²⁵ Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810–1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1128; James Henley Thornwell, *The Arguments of Romanists from the Infallibility of the Church and the Testimony of the Fathers in Behalf of the Apocrypha, Discussed and Refuted* (New York: Leavitt, Trow, 1845), 15.

novel, *Inez: A Tale of the Alamo* was markedly anti-Catholic—a prejudice spawned by her childhood walks with her mother through the ruins of the Alamo. She later came to regret the attitude she had expressed, following her own crisis of faith.²⁶ The message of these published pieces, whether veiled or openly vicious, could not fail to make the point that Catholicism was superstitious, while Protestant Christianity was truth.

In the 1824 edition of *A History of All Religions*, compiler David Benedict professed an intention to treat each thought system fairly, drawing the creeds and doctrines from ministers within each group. Benedict gave much attention to the explanations of Calvinism, Arminianism, and other concepts that Protestants would find of interest. But there was almost an apologetic tone as he hurriedly described Catholics, saying of their creed simply: “The doctrines of purgatory and transubstantiation, they admit in the sense in which they are commonly understood by others.” He did not attempt to explain the concept of purgatory at all.²⁷ Though Protestant and Catholic conceptions of the final fate of souls were remarkably similar, Protestants were uncomfortable with the notion of purgatory. This doctrine held that there was an intermediate place holding the souls still burdened with sin, undergoing final purification—a confinement that could be reduced by the prayers and intervention of the living.²⁸ Protestants found it dangerous to suppose that any amelioration for sin could be accomplished after death, and tended to push this idea to the unacceptable fringe by calling it “superstitious.”

²⁶ Evans, *Inez: A Tale of the Alamo*; William Perry Fidler, *Augusta Evans Wilson, 1835-1909: A Biography* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1951), 42.

²⁷ Benedict, *History of All Religions*, 90.

²⁸ *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), s. v. “Purgatory.”

Reading material available to the southern Protestant population shaped attitudes toward the concept of purgatory. John Wesley's sermons spoke of the "vain hope" of a "mystic purgatory," where fire could burn away the effects of sin.²⁹ Of the "crosses" borne in life, Catharine Talbot wrote, "All these we must look upon, as parts of that penalty, justly inflicted on our first parents; and heartily thank him, that he does not, according to the terrifying notions of popery, either expect us to inflict them on ourselves, or give us the dreadful alternative of a purgatory after death." Methodist itinerant minister Lorenzo Dow employed another rather popular method of attacking American Catholicism obliquely, by making it un-American. He wrote, "Therefore, as we must get rid of the last of sin, either here or hereafter, and as but few in America allow of purgatory, I suppose it must be here."³⁰ While admittedly, Protestants collectively outnumbered Catholics in the antebellum U.S., Catholics made up the largest Christian denomination nationwide in the 1850s.³¹ The denomination was a small percentage of the southern religious population, though, and Dow's dismissiveness was typical.³² Catholicism was present, nevertheless, in any community of moderate size and was approached with fear rather than compassion by Protestants.

²⁹ Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, I:535.

³⁰ Lorenzo Dow, *Chain of Reason, Consisting of Five Links, Two Hooks & a Swivel Flattery, Atheism, Deism, Universalism, Predestination, Perseverance, Because, Despair* (Cobourg [Ont.]: Webster & Leonard, 1845), 50.

³¹ Belcher, *Religious Denominations in the United States: Their History, Doctrine, Government and Statistics. With a Preliminary Sketch of Judaism, Paganism and Mohammedanism*; "General Summary of the Religious Denominations," *Cherokee Phoenix*, September 3, 1828. The summary here actually numbers the Quakers as the largest denomination in 1828, but this is clearly a typographical error.

³² James M. Woods, *A History of the Catholic Church in the American South: 1513-1900* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011), 260–261.

Native Americans living in the Deep South in the early antebellum period were another group frequently characterized as superstitious—and whether it was a superstition to be pitied or feared depended upon who contemplated it.³³ Before “Indian Removal” in the 1830s, white Americans living in established eastern communities tended to view Indian superstition as a spiritual malady to be remedied by Christianity; they felt pity.³⁴ On the other hand, people attempting to settle in or near the Indian lands were more likely to view Indian superstition as an infectious disease in need of removal. A missionary stationed in the Choctaw nation expressed great frustration in attempting to lead these “children of the forest” to salvation, seeing the aggressive desires of whites to remove them as a major deterrent.³⁵ White inhabitants commented on the “superstitious efficacy” the natives attached to drinking what whites simply called the *black drink*—an emetic made in part of Yupon leaves.³⁶ The *Cherokee Phoenix*, a native-run newspaper in New Echota, Georgia, worked intently toward the assimilation of Cherokees into white civilization, seeing it as the best path to survival for the nation. The paper featured lengthy articles about the Christian faith and in 1833 proudly announced a decline in polygamy among Cherokees, though they continued to “conjure.”³⁷ Native lay preachers were active in seeking converts among their own people and assisted missionaries but could not stave

³³ For a concise summary of the view of Indians by the slave-owning class, see Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 188–193.

³⁴ “Extract from the Speech of Mr. Wilde, on the Bill for Removing the Indians,” *Augusta Chronicle*, August 4, 1830.

³⁵ “Letter from the Choctaw Mission,” *Cherokee Phoenix*, October 1, 1828.

³⁶ “[First Annual Report; Missionary Society],” *Southern Evangelical Intelligencer*, December 16, 1820.

³⁷ “Indians,” *Cherokee Phoenix and Indian Advocate*, August 24, 1833.

off the efforts to remove the tribes to the west, removing this one “superstition” problem from the heart of the Deep South.³⁸

Once the United States government removed the various native groups from the Deep South, talk of their intolerable superstitions tended to disappear, as well. South Carolina writer William Gilmore Simms even published a nostalgic poem in 1841, cherishing the memory of the Biloxi tribe and their quaint beliefs.³⁹ Joseph G. Baldwin’s *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi*, published in 1853, demonstrated far more respect for the memory of the local Choctaws than it did for the memory of local lawyers—this, nearly a generation after most Choctaws had departed.⁴⁰ Negative depictions of native cultures resurfaced now and again as trouble brewed with the Seminoles, who had not been easy to displace, but the displaced southern tribes otherwise seldom appeared in the region’s publications any more—their superstitions no longer of interest.⁴¹

White southerners could not remedy the problem of slave “superstitions” so easily—nor was a remedy necessarily desirable. Most slaves held on to African beliefs, syncretizing the variations among them, and incorporating elements of native and Christian religions.⁴² Recent archaeological studies of the remains of antebellum plantation kitchens reveal that kitchen slaves

³⁸ “Revival Among the Choctaws.”

³⁹ William Gilmore Simms, “The Last Song of the Biloxi: A Tradition of the South,” *Magnolia; or Southern Monthly*, May 1841, 237.

⁴⁰ J[oseph] G[lover] Baldwin, *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi: A Series of Sketches* (New York: D. Appleton, 1854), 133, 141.

⁴¹ “By Telegraph for Carolinian,” *Daily South Carolinian* (Columbia, SC, October 26, 1853).

⁴² Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 87–92.

throughout the region were practicing the art of “conjure,” likely against their owners. Conjure was the continuing tradition of medicinal magic from Africa; spells and incantations by experts in the craft were believed to protect or promote the interests of those who sought the help.⁴³ Leaving a certain combination of elements beneath hearths and sills, they sought to control the spirits of the dead to shape the future.⁴⁴ Slave superstitions served a useful purpose, as the southern white population became increasingly defensive about the institution of slavery. Whites pointed to these superstitions as evidence of a fallen state, and slavery as the environment that could redeem the lost captives.⁴⁵ As the tenuous relationship between the North and South frayed in 1856, *DeBow’s Review*—a popular southern publication—asked why God had permitted the black race to come to America. “To crown the whole,” it said, “he might be weaned from his degrading superstitions, and led to embrace a purer faith and higher morals.”⁴⁶

As white southerners talked of delivering enslaved African Americans from superstition, they were not so willing to acknowledge their own fondness for the mysterious and magical—a fondness often fostered by the nursery tales and folklore absorbed as children, sometimes at the knee of an enslaved nurse. A contributor to the *Richmond Dispatch* wrote candidly of this love of

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁴ Mark P. Leone and Gladys-Marie Fry, “Conjuring in the Big House Kitchen: An Interpretation of African American Belief Systems Based on the Uses of Archaeology and Folklore Sources,” *Journal of American Folklore* 112, no. 445 (July 1, 1999): 372–373.

⁴⁵ “The Religious Condition of Africans Improved by Their Removal to the United States,” *Gospel Messenger and Protestant Episcopal*, August 1835.

⁴⁶ “The Black Race in North America; Why Was Their Introduction Permitted?” *DeBow’s Review*, February 1856, 202; John Franklin Kvach, “The First New South: J. D. B. De Bow’s Promotion of a Modern Economy in the Old South” (Ph.D., History, 2008), 6, Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. Kvach identifies DeBow’s publication as “the most successful monthly journal in the antebellum South.”

the marvelous in a piece titled “Superstition” in 1861, saying, “A desire to pry into the mysteries of the invisible world is natural to us all, and where desire is very strong, belief comes very readily. Our reason tells us that there are no such creatures as witches and fairies. Yet, let our reason be as powerful as it may, it never completely gains the mastery over the impressions left upon our minds by the tales of the nursery.”⁴⁷ Writer and moralist Hannah More pointed out the dangers of this persisting culture in the story of “Tawney Rachel; or, The Fortune Teller; with Some Account of Dreams, Omens, and Conjurers” in a very popular collection of tales. Tawney Rachel, a quite clever slave, went from house to house, convincing young girls that she could tell them of their future husbands and persuading farmwives that she could bring them fortune. Tawney Rachel had no gift for seeing the future, but she knew how to make people believe she did. In 1847, the *Greenville Mountaineer* lectured nurses against telling children “of witches, ghosts and goblins; such superstitions, impressed upon young minds, are rarely gotten rid of.”⁴⁸ Some tried, though. *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* mocked the names “Ferrier and Hibbert,” the pair of doctors who had forced them to bid “a sorrowful farewell to all our faith in ghosts” by offering physical explanations for case after case in a very famous book.⁴⁹ Newspapers would offer a tantalizing headline about a ghost experience, weaving a fascinating yarn, only to wrap up with a logical explanation, poking fun at anyone who had been

⁴⁷ “Superstition,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 22, 1861.

⁴⁸ “Three Faults of Nurses,” *Greenville Mountaineer*, January 22, 1847.

⁴⁹ “Animal Magnetism and Ghost-Seeing,” *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, January 1846, 66; Samuel Hibbert, *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions: Or, An Attempt To Trace Such Illusions To Their Physical Causes*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1825).

credulous.⁵⁰ Despite the pressure to abandon everything deemed superstitious, many southerners did not want to lose the “love of the marvellous [sic].”⁵¹ Ghost stories, dream interpretation, signs and omens were never thoroughly washed from southern consciousness, despite ridicule and condescension from editors, ministers, and educators.⁵²

The word “superstition” found new uses as the sectional rift widened between North and South in the antebellum period. Southerners began to use the term—which both sections equated with inferior, foreign, and uneducated—to attack political opponents. During the tariff crisis in 1832, the *Mobile Register* said, “The protectionists consider our doctrine as a new heresy; we know theirs to be an old superstition.”⁵³ In 1850 and 1851, as southerners began to argue among themselves about the relationship of the states to the union, some sneered at those who had a “superstitious veneration” for the union or attached “superstitious importance” to the founders.⁵⁴

The educated classes believed that the health of a people depended upon the eradication of superstition, even if the definition of the word kept changing. Distinguishing the “superstitious” from “acceptable” beliefs and practices could be a very imprecise exercise,

⁵⁰ “A Well Authenticated Ghost Story,” *Augusta Chronicle*, January 16, 1823; “The Squeaking Ghost,” *Blakeley Sun*, March 23, 1819; “A Ghost Story,” *Macon Telegraph*, December 5, 1829.

⁵¹ “Ghosts of the Old and New School,” *Littell’s Living Age*, August 14, 1858, 483, 487.

⁵² “A Night in a Haunted House,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, June 1855, 374–380; The belief that a bird flying into a room or a dream of something white augured death persisted in Appalachian culture. See James K. Crissman, *Death and Dying in Central Appalachia: Changing Attitudes and Practices* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 19.

⁵³ “The Tariff,” *Mobile Commercial Register*, July 15, 1832.

⁵⁴ “Letter from Gen. James Hamilton to the People of South Carolina,” *Pensacola Gazette* (Pensacola, FL, December 14, 1850); “Speech of O. M. Dantzler Delivered before the St. Matthew’s Troop, on the 25th October, 1851,” *Daily South Carolinian* (Columbia, SC, November 18, 1851).

though. The continual flow of material emphasizing the backwardness of one system of thought or another subtly honed this corpus of the “acceptable” from a broad social standpoint. The acceptable within a given church body or family might be more restrictive—or occasionally less—than the social standard. But there was hope that the pursuit of scientific knowledge would make clearer the true religion from the manmade.⁵⁵

SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY, AND “VEXING QUESTIONS”

In the early antebellum period, devout Christians looked with hope to the emerging “natural sciences” and the philosophies of the natural world to offer proof at last for their religious beliefs, finally putting to rest any doubts that their own beliefs could be tarred with the label “superstition.”⁵⁶ Just as the word “superstition” evoked backwardness and naiveté, the word “science” created an exhilarating sense of progress, and at least 229 new scientific journals were launched in the United States in the 1830s and 1840s—35 of them in southern states.⁵⁷ The terms “evidence,” “reason,” and “proof” proliferated in the newspapers, certain to draw a

⁵⁵ Stephen Elliott, “Scientific: An Address to the Literary and Philosophical Society of South-Carolina,” *Telescope*, September 10, 1816.

⁵⁶ James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*, New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). Turner’s study looks at the rise of agnosticism in nineteenth-century America, due in no small part to the advent of scientific advancements. It is very valuable in looking at a particular phenomenon—the undermining of belief. His research does not look closely at the effect of these ideas on southern people (beyond ministers) and is not considering those who changed their ideas of God without losing their faith in God. His fifth chapter, “Christianity Confused, 1840–1870” offers valuable parallels to the cracking of certitude I have found in southern belief systems.

⁵⁷ George H. Daniels, *American Science in the Age of Jackson*, History of American Science and Technology Series (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 229–232.

reader's attention. Antebellum Americans were committed to educating their children as democratic citizens. For most of them, religion and morals, and the requisite belief in future rewards and punishments, were an essential foundation to that goal.

Small private “academies” sprang up in towns large and small across the Deep South—wherever the money existed to fund the tuitions. As parents sought to educate the young men who would run the country and the young women who would raise the next generation of male leaders, an interesting array of courses populated the core curricula. Announcements in newspapers proudly trumpeted such courses as Natural Theology, Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy, Moral Science, Natural Science, and Natural Philosophy, Geology and Astronomy.⁵⁸ There was great optimism that the study of the natural world and the human mind offered by these courses would strengthen faith in “revealed religion,” by which they meant the religion of the Protestant Bible.⁵⁹

There arose simultaneously, though, a fear that exposing young minds to the wrong sort of intellectual discourse could destroy that faith. *Literary and Evangelical Magazine* in 1828 published an article titled “Religion in Colleges: Is it safe for a pious parent to send his son to College?” The author wrote, “It is reported too—I know not with what truth—that, in our literary

⁵⁸ [Miss Spelman's Boarding and Day School], *Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA, July 7, 1824); “From the Charleston Courier,” *Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA, March 9, 1825); “Annual Report,” *Statesman and Gazette* (Natchez, MS, January 22, 1829); [Dr. Weller's Female Seminary], *National Banner and Nashville Whig* (Nashville, TN, February 9, 1835); [Jefferson College], *Picayune* (New Orleans, LA, January 10, 1854).

⁵⁹ E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795–1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978), 72–73. Orthodox theologians in the antebellum period felt not just the desire, but the need, for nature/science to provide reason to support revelation. They never questioned that nature would provide the needed support and found endless examples of the evidence of the truth of God's revelation in the world around them—the study of which they called “Natural Theology.”

institutions, the writings of Bolingbroke, Hume, Voltaire, and Paine are much more read than Paley, Campbell, Beattie, and other works on the evidences of Christianity; and that the Bible itself is often made a subject of boyish sport, and coarse jesting.”⁶⁰ The names listed each held meaning for literate southerners.

The academies that advertised the impressive array of natural sciences often specified which authors’ work would be taught. The name “Paley” offered comforting assurance that science could bolster faith, and his *Natural Theology* was a standard text in colleges throughout the United States and England.⁶¹ During the antebellum period, academy announcements across the Deep South states listed “Paley’s Natural Theology,” “Paley’s Evidences of Christianity,” and, in some cases, “Paley’s Moral Philosophy.”⁶² By the time of his death in 1805, English theologian and moralist William Paley had earned distinction as Britain’s foremost Christian apologist. Presenting complex theological and scientific ideas in readily accessible language, Paley’s treatises were a staple in southern bookstores, and became standard texts in the junior and senior classes of southern academies. His most accessible and popular book, *Natural Theology*, went through nine editions in three years.⁶³ Much of Paley’s enduring legacy owed

⁶⁰ OLIM, “Religion in Colleges: Is It Safe for a Pious Parent to Send His Son to College?” *Literary and Evangelical Magazine*, June 1828, 303.

⁶¹ Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*, 96.

⁶² [Miss Spelman’s Boarding and Day School], *Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA, July 7, 1824); “From the Charleston Courier,” *Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA, March 9, 1825); “Annual Report,” *Statesman and Gazette* (Natchez, MS, January 22, 1829); “Jackson Female Institute,” *Daily Mississippian* (Jackson, MS, November 9, 1859).

⁶³ For biographical information about William Paley, see M L. Clarke, *Paley: Evidences for the Man* (Toronto: Univ of Toronto Press, 1974); D. L. LeMahieu, “Foreword,” in *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, by William Paley (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2002); N. Hitchin, “The Life and Thought of William Paley (1743–1805)” (Ph.D., University of

itself to his famous “Watchmaker’s Analogy.” He offered to the Christians of the Enlightenment era a simple and elegant defense for their belief in an intelligent Creator: As a watch demonstrates by its design the existence of a designer, design in nature reveals evidence of a designer.⁶⁴ Nineteenth-century Protestants saw God as more than simply the impersonal designer—believing that God was at work in the wonders that science was revealing around them on a daily basis—but Paley’s analogy offered the beginning of faith for any who questioned the existence of God.⁶⁵ This sort of “science” filled southerners with the enthusiasm for the possibilities that education and scientific exploration might offer to faith in the unseen realms, and the much-anticipated “future state.”

For those who did not have the means or situation that allowed formal schooling, a truly thirsty mind could nevertheless find sustenance. For the character Beulah Benton, the wealth lay in her guardian’s library: “On all sides, books greeted her; here was the varied lore of dead centuries; here she had held communion with the great souls entombed in these dusty pages. Here, wrestling alone with those grim puzzles, she had read out the vexed and vexing questions,

Cambridge, 2001); “Paley, William (1743–1805),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2013 2004), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21155>.

⁶⁴ Paley, *Natural Theology; Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*. Chapters I to VII contain the explication of Paley’s “argument” for design—the “Watchmaker’s Analogy.”

⁶⁵ Maura Jane Farrelly, “‘God Is the Author of Both’: Science, Religion, and the Intellectualization of American Methodism,” *Church History* 77, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 659–667. Farrelly confirms that southern Methodists shared the same interest in science as did their northern cohorts and that everyday Methodist laypeople were familiar with the concepts of science. Sermons did not need to explain the intricacies. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Ante-Bellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1977). Bozeman looks at the changing place of science in Presbyterian thought.

in this debating club of the moldering dead, and endeavored to make them solve them.”⁶⁶ *Beulah* represented the mind of her author Augusta Evans, who found herself homebound in her teen years by her own health and that of sick family members, but devoured books and then began to write her first novel by lamplight. One reviewer of *Beulah* accused Evans of mishandling the philosophic concepts she put into the mind of her characters, having apparently devoured too much philosophy without seasoned guidance—not surprising, perhaps, as it was written by a self-educated teenager.⁶⁷ Sarah Gayle—who loved to read while her politician husband was traveling—found her book borrowing privileges cut off with one friend, because she returned them “pencilled from one end to the other” in “an almost irrepressible wish of sharing with others, the delight I derived from particular passages.”⁶⁸ Women and men, formally or informally educated, sought to comprehend the writings of these philosophers and scientists.

In this optimistic vein, literate southerners absorbed the work of eighteenth-century thinkers and followed with keen interest the scientific developments of their own age. In 1819, the *Blakeley Sun* “earnestly hoped” that natural science would “become more generally a source of investigation and rational amusement.”⁶⁹ A Charleston paper exuberantly claimed, “Philosophy, as employed by Bacon, Newton, Butler, Paley and others of their class, is a handmaid to Christianity. She makes her mightiest efforts, and gains her highest honours; and

⁶⁶ Augusta J. Evans Wilson, *Beulah*, 1859, 451.

⁶⁷ “Beulah,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, April 1860, 247.

⁶⁸ Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 10.

⁶⁹ “Promotion of Natural Science,” *Blakeley Sun*, January 8, 1819.

comes and lays them all at the foot of the Cross.”⁷⁰ They were confident that true science produced by righteous scholars could only buttress Scripture.

Scottish poet and philosopher James Beattie was another name revered in the Deep South—a particularly enduring voice of Scottish Realism or Common Sense Philosophy, which had influenced American Protestantism, cultivating in its adherents the confidence that the harmony of religion and the natural world would reveal truth.⁷¹ Beattie had died before the antebellum period properly began, but his writings remained popular in the Deep South into the 1830s and beyond.⁷² Beattie’s philosophy focused on the human mind, innate morality, and reason, rather than on the earthly environment that had been Paley’s focus. Most famous in the South was Beattie’s book titled *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth: In Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (1770)—most often called simply “Beattie upon Truth” or some variant. In it, he wrote, “Destitute of the hope of immortality, and a future retribution, how contemptible, how miserable is man! And yet, did not our moral feelings, in concert with what reason discovers of the Deity, evidence the necessity of a future state, in vain should we pretend

⁷⁰ “On the Choice of Instructors of Douth,” *Southern Evangelical Intelligencer*, September 2, 1820.

⁷¹ *Dictionary of Christianity in America*. “Scottish Realism.”; Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2002), Loc. 1743, Kindle. Common Sense philosophy figures prominently in Mark Noll’s study of God in America. He refers to Beattie as the “colleague and popularizer” of the work of his mentor Thomas Reid, whose work formed a defining core of “Scottish commonsense philosophy.”

⁷² Beattie and his books are mentioned in school and bookstore advertisements all across the region beginning as early as 1815 and as late as 1857.

to judge rationally of that revelation by which life and immortality have been brought to light.”⁷³ Though many philosophers had spoken of the degree to which reason, science, and nature served and supported scriptural revelation, Beattie suggested that we could not have recognized revelation as true, except for an innate cognizance of it. He encouraged readers to make use of the writings of philosophers, “whatever impresses our minds with more enlarged and more powerful sentiments of duty, with more affecting views of God and Providence, and with greater energy of belief in the doctrines of natural religion.”⁷⁴ He cautioned though, “I fear we shall not be able to improve ourselves in any one of these respects, by reading the modern systems of scepticism [sic].”⁷⁵ In 1857, the *Macon Weekly Telegraph* published an excerpt of a letter Virginia legislator John Randolph wrote to his half-brother, in which Randolph credited “Beattie upon Truth” as having been the antidote that saved him from the atheism that David Hume’s “Essay upon Human Nature” had spawned in him.⁷⁶

In the 1820s and 1830s, those reading “natural theology” seemed especially interested in science that sought proof for immortality—evidence of an afterlife. From Beattie they learned that compelling evidence for immortality can be drawn from the fact that virtually all human

⁷³ James Beattie (LL.D.), *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth: In Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (Edinburgh: W. & J. Deas, 1770, 1807), 9–10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ “Letter of John Randolph of Roanoke,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, February 23, 1858; William Cabell Bruce, *John Randolph of Roanoke, 1773–1833: A Biography Based Largely on New Material* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1922), 515–518. Bruce’s biography of Randolph contains the bulk of the text of this letter, which Randolph sent to Henry St. George Tucker upon the death of Tucker’s son in 1826. The reference to Hume and Beattie appears on page 517. David Hume’s name is often tied to the idea of religious infidelity in the writings of southern Christians.

societies have supposed the mind to be “something different and distinct from the body” and expressed universal hope that the mind continues in a future state.⁷⁷ The writer of the year-long series of “Essays on Superstition” in the *Christian Observer* in 1829 agreed that people possess within themselves the “consciousness of continued existence.”⁷⁸ The persistence of this idea across times and cultures offered compelling support for it as a universal truth, obvious even without Scripture.

William Paley attempted to address the notable lack of detailed information about heaven in revealed Scripture. Acknowledging that “the exact nature and condition and circumstances of our future state are yet hidden from us,” he claimed that earthly minds were incapable of comprehending the world beyond. While he did not rule out the possibility that God might have transported “very extraordinary persons” on “very extraordinary occasions” to view the afterlife, he claimed that ordinary mortals should not dare attempt to view it. In his philosophy, when each person’s time comes to enter eternity, God will provide a new body and mind. With Paley’s brilliance for analogy, he used the natural phenomena of caterpillars turning into butterflies: A caterpillar cannot fly, and humans cannot comprehend heaven, but they will when they are transformed.⁷⁹ He also addressed, at least in part, two questions that would frequently arise in the antebellum period: “Will we recognize each other in heaven?” and “Will we retain our identity in heaven?” Paley said that we would be the same person, but there was not “sufficient reason to suppose, that this resemblance to our present bodies will be retained in our future bodies, or be at

⁷⁷ Beattie (LL.D.), *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*, 50–51.

⁷⁸ “Essays on Superstition, Part 1,” 5.

⁷⁹ William Paley, *Works Complete, in Five Volumes, to Which Is Prefixed a Life of the Author, Volume 5* (London: T. and J. Allman et al, 1823), 31–34.

all wanted.”⁸⁰ Recognition would be of a soul remembering a soul, not of the eyes remembering a body.

In the next generation of philosophers to follow Paley, philologist and schoolmaster Alexander Crombie published in 1829 his two-volume *Natural Theology; or, Essays on the Existence of Deity and of Providence, on the Immateriality of the Soul, and a Future State*. It was “hailed as ‘the most comprehensive view of the whole science of natural theology that has hitherto appeared’ and a significant development of the arguments of William Paley.”⁸¹ A reviewer in the *Christian Examiner and General Review* chastised those who had dismissed natural religion or the use of reason to deduce spiritual truths: “Let it not be said that we would exalt natural religion at the expense of Christianity. It is not so; we would only ask for the former its place as a handmaid to the latter, and inasmuch as it is one of the forms in which God has been pleased to convey truth to our minds, we would claim for it its due value and real use.”⁸² Crombie presented an erudite case for a benevolent Deity and the probability that such a Deity intended his creations to experience “perfect enjoyment” into immortality.⁸³ Crombie’s work offered support to those who looked to nature and reason for defenses for their faith.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 36–37.

⁸¹ For more information on Crombie, see James Gregory, *Philosophical and Literary Essays, and Letters. Vol. 3: Letters from Dr. James Gregory with Replies by the Rev. Alex. Crombie* (Bristol, U.K.: Thoemmes, 2001); Lionel Alexander Ritchie, “Crombie, Alexander,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2013–2004, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6747>. Ritchie credits simply “QR, 213” for the embedded quotation.

⁸² Alexander Crombie, *Natural Theology; Or, Essays on the Existence of Deity and of Providence, on the Immateriality of the Soul, and a Future State*, 1829, 195–198.

⁸³ Ibid., 586–593.

Southern youth were taught to defend their faith in God and heaven using the arguments of thinkers like Paley, Beattie, and Crombie. Faith was bolstered and secured by the belief that nature proved the Bible true. And there was a proud sense of progress in the idea that scientific inquiry vindicated their belief system. As they were discouraged from the superstitions of folk cultures, they were encouraged to find in nature reasonable (and therefore acceptable) evidence of God and an afterlife. Always nagging at the edges of consciousness, however, was the recognition that the natural sciences and philosophies in the hands of other thinkers were undermining rather than bolstering the claims of Scripture.

THE CHALLENGES OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY

In the early antebellum period, Christians felt confident that the discoveries of scientists and naturalists would confirm Christian truth, but the news of discoveries during the coming decades caused some to question Scripture, more to question science, and most to seek the reconciliation that must exist. While thinkers like Paley could demonstrate an apparent design in the universe and could, by extrapolating from human nature, deduce that there was a benevolent designer who must intend his most prized creations to live eternally, Christian faith rested on something more than a logical understanding of nature. It rested on the belief that Scripture was the divinely inspired, complete and perfect word of God. Antebellum southern Christians watched the advances of science with a blend of hope and carefulness as it kept raising new questions.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Holifield, *Gentlemen Theologians*, 80–81. Holifield writes that “Southern theologians maintained a careful and hopeful watch over the physical sciences, with every assurance that ‘natural philosophy’ would provide the nineteenth century’s distinctive prospectus on divine truth.”

With each new question about God, origins, and immortality, resistance arose from those who believed that revealed Scripture could not or should not be understood through the lens of science or human rationalism. Memories of eighteenth-century Deism in America and its perceived “infidelity” had many watchful of anything that might promote new infidelities.⁸⁵ A visitor to Beulah Benton in *Beulah* brought her a desired copy of Sir William Hamilton’s *Philosophy of the Conditioned* and quoted Hamilton, “The highest reach of human science is the scientific recognition of human ignorance.” He continued, “Like you, Miss Beulah, I set out to discover some system where no mysteries existed; where I should only believe what I could clearly comprehend. . . . I wandered on, until, like you, I stood in a wide waste, strewn with the wreck of beliefs.”⁸⁶

Anyone perusing the literature available in the period was likely to experience frustration if he or she sought *an answer* to any given question about the afterlife. What they inevitably would find were *multiple conflicting answers*. While Paley and Crombie advanced “arguments from nature” about how God might re-create the new body in the afterlife, for example, an 1851 sermon published in the *Augusta Chronicle*, titled “The Sea Giving Up Its Dead,” denied that

⁸⁵ Simpson, *A Plea for Religion and the Sacred Writings*, i–xvi; Samuel Moshaim Schmucker, *The Errors of Modern Infidelity: Illustrated and Refuted* (Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot, 1848), 256–303; M.A. Riddle, Joseph Esmond, *The Natural History of Infidelity and Superstition in Contrast with Christian Faith: Eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, Preached Before the University of Oxford, in the Year MDCCCLII* (Oxford, England: J. Wright, 1852); Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-Of-Thought Struggle in the Old South* (New York: Harper & Row, 1940, 1964), 31. Eaton’s book describes how the Enlightenment liberalism of southern planters was closeted, then died out, with the Revolutionary generation. He credits the demise of rationalism with the rise of fears of slave insurrections.

⁸⁶ Wilson, *Beulah*, 445.

natural religion could ever teach the resurrection of the dead.⁸⁷ Writers offered similarly conflicting points of view about the value of the sciences. Subscribers to the *Blakeley Sun* read in January 1819 of the glories of natural science. Then, only three months later in the same paper, they read the words of French writer Châteaubriand, who reported English fears that “the sciences harden the heart, deprive life of its enchantments, and lead weak minds to atheism, the sure road to all other crimes.”⁸⁸ A writer to the *American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer* excoriated infidels such as David Hume and Thomas Paine, whose arguments undermining Christianity were “blended with the elements of almost every science, and incorporated with the most finished specimens in every department of literature.”⁸⁹ Even as he sounded the alarm, however, this writer celebrated the almost complete failure of the infidels to shake the faith of Christians—being only able to draw the “young, the “dissolute,” and the “vacillating.”⁹⁰ Those who found the ambiguity too uncomfortable had the option to tie themselves comfortingly to the established creeds of the church of choice—hoping that the church would bear responsibility before God for the “truth” it taught. For those who were willing to allow their faith to have some gray areas, some unanswered questions, the debates opened doors to questioning and possibilities.

One of the great debates of the antebellum period involved the age of the earth—a subject of keen interest to the fields of geology and natural philosophy. Most professional scientists and

⁸⁷ “The Sea Giving Up Its Dead,” *Augusta Chronicle*, May 4, 1851.

⁸⁸ “Promotion of Natural Science”; “The Sciences,” *Blakeley Sun*, April 30, 1819.

⁸⁹ “On the Internal Evidences of Revelation. No. 1,” *American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer*, March 1, 1823, 43–44.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43–46.

natural philosophers, and more than a few theologians, by this time had accepted the idea that the earth could not possibly be as young as a literal reading of the Bible suggested. However, the idea carried significant repercussions for those whose Christian faith depended upon the conviction that the Bible was the complete, inerrant, and inspired word of God. To suggest that the Bible had used figurative language to describe creation was to suggest that nothing could be trusted.⁹¹ In 1830 a South Carolina newspaper writer said, matter-of-factly: “It has been proved to demonstration, that the earth must have existed thousands of years, a sterile rock of granite, before its surface produced vegetables and animals by the creative power of God; and that these successively perished, and others of different genera succeeded, and thus proceeded for many centuries before the creation of man. . . . Among the relics of innumerable animals which no longer exist, no human skeleton has ever been found.”⁹² An 1855 article in the *New Orleans Picayune*, however, challenged a recently published calculation of how many had lived on the earth. The editor found the number ridiculous, given that the “Mosaic account of the Creation, commonly received, gives 5,855 years as the present age of the inhabited world.” Admittedly, the recently published calculation of the human habitation of earth was ridiculous at

⁹¹ For a discussion of the shift of southern Christians toward “orthodox biblicism” after the Great Revival, see Boles, *Great Revival*, 194. Boles demonstrates how this literalism was entrenched by the growing need to defend slavery during the 1830s and beyond, rendering an environment in which “the southern clergy emphasized the letter of the gospel law, not its spirit.”; Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 594. The treatment of James Wesley Miles’s *Philosophic Theology*, published in 1849, demonstrated the persistent and toughening resistance to a liberal theology, in interpreting Scripture. The Genoveses provide evidence that the South had a more rigorous adherence to Scriptural literalism than the North had in the antebellum period. James Warley Miles, *Philosophic Theology: Or, Ultimate Grounds of All Religious Belief Based in Reason* (Charleston, SC: J. Russell, 1849).

⁹² “Are There More Inhabited Worlds Than Our Own?” *Southern Times*, May 22, 1830.

36,627,843,273,075,856 people.⁹³ The author’s acceptance of the earth’s age at around six thousand years, though, does call into question just how widespread was the belief that the Mosaic age of the earth had been discredited. Each voice on the subject seemed to have a different idea of what people understood, and many sought to ease fears.

Geologist James Smith in 1837 offered a possible solution to the “earth-age” conflict with revelation, suggesting that the use of the word “days” in the biblical account of creation must refer to “eras” of great length. A geologist of the southern region, Michael Tuomey, added his support to this view in a report a decade later.⁹⁴ This theory seemed to set many minds at ease, particularly ministers, but it raised the prospect of interpretation issues with Biblical translators, challenging claims to inerrancy in use at the time.

Debates brewing in scientific circles over the question of the strata of the earth in the early nineteenth century and what it said about the earth’s age became what E. Brooks Holifield has called “the first great scientific trauma of the American churches.”⁹⁵ British geologist Sir Charles Lyell became a significant voice of this debate in the 1830s. In his *Elements of Geology*, published in 1838, he denied there had been a universal flood or that the deluges that hit various places on earth happened as recently as four thousand years prior to Lyell’s time—as the Bible suggested.⁹⁶ Lyell’s book received little attention from the general southern public in its first decade in print. His name earned repute as his studies turned to the geology of the Mississippi

⁹³ “Extravagant Calculation,” *Daily Picayune*, June 3, 1855.

⁹⁴ Lester D. Stephens, “The Literary and Philosophical Society of South Carolina: A Forum for Intellectual Progress in Antebellum Charleston,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 104, no. 3 (July 1, 2003): 172.

⁹⁵ Holifield, *Gentlemen Theologians*, 85.

⁹⁶ Charles Lyell, *Elements of Geology* (London: John Murray, 1838), 9–11.

River Valley—and there seemed little interest in refuting his assertions that the Mississippi River had been flowing into the Gulf of Mexico for 100,000 years.⁹⁷ Southern publications treated his name with great deference, as a learned British scientist. He caught the attention of the general American public in the 1840s, when he began to publish his work in the United States, and in 1853, his “entirely revised” ninth edition of *Principles of Geology* was advertised heavily in southern newspapers. The disputes over his accounts of the deluge thus entered the public consciousness in the Deep South more than two decades after the book was first published. In the *Southern Literary Messenger*, a writer identified only as S. A. L. took Lyell to task for trying “to account for many of the most remarkable Geological facts, not only without any reference to the agency of a General Deluge, but on an implied denial of such an event.” The author continued, “We are only concerned, at present, to show that our Earth, as it now is, affords irrefragable evidence of one of the great facts stated in the Mosaic Records—a general Deluge; and also, that one of the most remarkable and clearly demonstrated epochs of Astronomy proves the Sacred Chronology of the world to be true.”⁹⁸ By the last 1850s, southern religious organizations were calling for vigilance in their theological seminaries to ensure that these institutions were committed to teaching religion and science in harmony with one another.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ “Geology of the Mississippi Valley,” *Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA, December 21, 1846), 1.

⁹⁸ S. A. L., “The Testimony of Geology and Astronomy to the Truth of the Hebrew Records,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, May 1855, 257.

⁹⁹ Holifield, *Gentlemen Theologians*, 84.

Liberal theologians continued to believe the two could be reconciled, placing revelation above reason, but not in violation of it.¹⁰⁰ David King's *Principles of Geology Explained, and Viewed in Their Relation to Natural and Revealed Religion* began to appear in southern bookstores around 1851. King, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, was an expert in oratory for youth. While he apparently directed this volume toward Christian laypeople at large, he wrote it with a clarity and simplicity that reflected his skill with young people. He took no specific position on the debates between revealed religion and the scientific discoveries that were calling some details of revelation into question, but he encouraged Christians to listen to the claims of science with an open mind. He offered multiple viewpoints and counter-viewpoints, demonstrating a respect for what geologists had achieved. Clearly, he saw no reason for alarm over seeming discrepancies, focusing instead on where the sides agreed—which he saw as a validation of revelation, at least of the *intent* of revelation.¹⁰¹ King said that scientists and theologians generally agreed that humans had inhabited the planet for about six thousand years. The disagreement here centered on the age of the earth.¹⁰²

Even as wonder and, for some, consternation grew regarding the study of the age of the earth, the expanding consciousness of outer space also brought excitement and questioning. While many theoretically embraced the idea of heaven as a state of consciousness and not a physical location, even these tended to look upward when referring to the abode of God and the righteous dead. For the many—perhaps the majority—who believed that heaven was a physical

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁰¹ David King, *The Principles of Geology Explained, and Viewed in Their Relation to Natural and Revealed Religion*, 1850, iii–xii, 26, 32, 45.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 45.

locality in the universe, the scientific discussions of outer space held a special layer of meaning. While the idea of a “plurality of worlds” was not new in the antebellum period, new discoveries raised the prospect that those worlds might be inhabited.¹⁰³ Newspapers in the Deep South, as in other places, trumpeted “celestial events” like the aurora borealis, comets, or meteorites.¹⁰⁴ They celebrated the wonders, but also felt the need to calm persisting superstitions at times, as in the case of a meteor shower reported in the *Augusta Chronicle* in June 1829. The author hastened to provide scientific explanations, lest observers might fear that it augured evil.¹⁰⁵ The importance of understanding “the heavens” was reflected in the emphasis placed on astronomy in the academies of the Deep South. They included astronomy as a staple of upper-level education for males and females throughout the period.¹⁰⁶ It was also a passion outside the classroom. Zillah

¹⁰³ Karl S. Guthke, “Nightmare and Utopia: Extraterrestrial Worlds from Galileo to Goethe,” *Early Science & Medicine* 8, no. 3 (2003): 175–176; Alexander Campbell, *Five Discourses on Hell! Being an Exposure and Refutation of Universalism: In Reply to the Rev. Theodore Clapp*, 1st ed. (New Orleans: Daniel Davies, 1848), 17.

¹⁰⁴ “Signs in the Heavens,” *Louisiana Advertiser*, October 26, 1827; “Meteoric or Falling Stones,” *Augusta Chronicle*, June 3, 1829; “Astronomical Gleanings from Lardner,” *Mississippi Free Trader*, December 2, 1845; “Comets—Their Composition, History and Movements,” *Augusta Chronicle*, September 11, 1853.

¹⁰⁵ “Meteoric or Falling Stones.”

¹⁰⁶ Anya Jabour, “‘Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated’: Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Family,” *Journal of Southern History* 64, no. 1 (February 1, 1998): 31, 42; Judith T. Bainbridge, “A ‘Nursery of Knowledge’: The Greenville Female Academy, 1819-1854,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 99, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 14, 17, 26; “Select Female School [Advertisement],” *Augusta Chronicle*, November 1, 1846; Stephen Case, “‘Insufferably Stupid or Miserably Out of Place’: F. A. P. Barnard and His Scientific Instrument Collection in the Antebellum South,” *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 39, no. 4 (November 1, 2009): 419. F. A. P. Barnard, indeed, planned to bring the world’s largest telescope to his observatory on the University of Mississippi campus, in hopes of drawing the attention of the world to Oxford as a center of astronomical study. He was not able to get what he wanted.

Brandon, in seeking to educate herself beyond the simple schooling she received in rural Alabama, borrowed astronomy books.¹⁰⁷

Publications announced advancements in astronomy with pride and wonder. The Huntsville *Southern Advocate*, in an 1832 article titled “Grandeur of Astronomical Discoveries,” reprinted a glorious description of the night sky by William Wert of Great Britain, who took his daughter to the top of their castle to discuss “the unclouded firmament that glowed and sparkled with unusual lustre from pole to pole.” He wrote, “We recalled and dwelt with delight on the rise and progress of the science of astronomy; or that series of astonishing discoveries through successive ages, which display, in so strong a light, the force and reach of the human mind; and on those bold conjectures and sublime reveries, which seem to tower even to the confines of divinity, and denote the high destiny to which mortals tend.”¹⁰⁸ The *Augusta Chronicle* reported the construction of a “mammoth telescope,” when England’s Lord Ross replaced his twenty-six-foot telescope—previously the largest in the world—with a fifty-three-foot instrument.¹⁰⁹ With each advancement in telescropy, the universe became larger, and the earth smaller in human understanding. Southerners marveled not only at the grandeur of the universe but also at the capacity of humans to study it.¹¹⁰

Like so many other scientific efforts of the age, astronomy raised questions about traditional beliefs. If God had created Earth as the habitation of the human race, for whom were

¹⁰⁷ Brandon, “Zillah Brandon Diary,” 13.

¹⁰⁸ William Wert, “Grandeur of Astronomical Discoveries,” *Southern Advocate*, July 7, 1832.

¹⁰⁹ “The Mammoth Telescope,” *Augusta Chronicle*, May 27, 1845.

¹¹⁰ “Astronomical Gleanings from Lardner.”

these other planets, stars, and suns created? Was there life out there? While it was not a new question, the growing number of astronomical bodies identified by ever-more-powerful telescopes rendered the question less and less hypothetical. In 1758, Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg published an account of his journeys in a dream state to the planets in the Earth's solar system and beyond, where he claimed to have conversed with inhabitants.¹¹¹ Southerners read the works of Swedenborg and wondered.

Many assumed that outer space was populated. As Theodore Clapp sat by the bedside of a dying atheist, he challenged the man's claims to greater reason than believers in an afterlife, asking, "Can you tell what 'varied being peoples every star'? Is your reason capable of receiving all truth?"¹¹² The Marquis de Fontenelle, also frequently mentioned in southern newspapers, in 1809, published *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*, claiming that he had proven that other planets were habitable.¹¹³ When William Wert walked with his daughter on the castle top, they had wondered that beyond their vision were "ten thousand worlds . . . peopled with myriads of intelligent beings."¹¹⁴ A Natchez newspaper offered support for the conclusion, saying:

Modern astronomy has collected together a mass of facts, connected by the positions and motions, the physical character and conditions, and the parts played in the solar system by the several globes of which that solar system is composed, which form a vast body of analogy, leading the intelligent mind to the conclusion, that the planets are worlds, fulfilling

¹¹¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Concerning the Earths in Our Solar System, Which Are Called Planets* (Boston: O. Clapp, 1758, 1839); Guthke, "Nightmare and Utopia: Extraterrestrial Worlds from Galileo to Goethe," 190.

¹¹² Clapp, *Clapp's Autobiographical Sketches*, 138.

¹¹³ Fontenelle, *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*, 54–75; "[Untitled]," *Camden Gazette*, February 3, 1819; "Notions of Our Ancestors about Matters and Things," *Augusta Chronicle*, October 29, 1821; "[Untitled]," *Ariel*, October 27, 1826; "[Lectures on the Creation]," *Daily Picayune*, April 6, 1845.

¹¹⁴ Wert, "Grandeur of Astronomical Discoveries."

in the economy of the universe the same functions, created by the same divine hand, for the same moral purposes, and with the same destinies as the earth.¹¹⁵

In fact, the ideas proved so popular that Amherst College professor Edward Hitchcock, in his introduction to William Whewell's new volume, *The Plurality of Worlds*, felt compelled to express "some fear of giving offense" as he questioned the scope of this belief, given that telescopes had revealed "no vestige of anything like a planet revolving round a fixed star." "In more recent times," he wrote, "many of the astronomical discoveries which have been made, tend to render the conjecture of the plurality of inhabited worlds improbable on physical grounds."¹¹⁶ Reviews published in Savannah and New Orleans both accepted without challenge the book's assertions that people generally believed in an inhabited outer space, including a belief in an inhabited moon.¹¹⁷

Whewell's book might have put to rest the belief that every celestial orb must be inhabited, but it hardly quashed the larger debate about life beyond earth—and the complexities it added to spiritual understanding. People who had long been content to accept very vague ideas of heaven were now asking, "Where is heaven, and who is there?" Copernicus and Galileo had claimed the sun was the center of the universe, as they knew it, relegating earth to a place in orbit, but now scientists were suggesting that the earth might be a rather ordinary rock among many worlds. This raised questions about the place of the Earth in God's esteem—its specialness

¹¹⁵ "Are the Planets Inhabited," *Natchez Semi-Weekly Courier*, August 17, 1849.

¹¹⁶ William Whewell, *The Plurality of Worlds: With an Introduction by Edward Hitchcock* (Boston: D. Lathrop, 1860), ix–x.

Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches and Recollections, During a Thirty-Five Years' Residence in New Orleans*, 138.

¹¹⁷ "Plurality of Worlds," *Daily Morning News*, May 22, 1855; "Plurality of Worlds," *Sunday Delta*, June 21, 1857.

or lack thereof—and, by extension, the eternal fate of its inhabitants.¹¹⁸ James Fisher, in *A Glimpse of Glory or, a Gospel Discovery of Emmanuel’s Land*, had found comfort in his assumption that though many worlds existed, his own planet was the one in which God chose to become flesh.¹¹⁹ In 1842, Scottish Presbyterian minister Thomas Chalmers sought to put at ease those who were associating the study of astronomy with infidelity by writing *Discourses on the Christian Revelation, Viewed in Connection with the Modern Astronomy*. Chalmers wrote that freethinkers and infidels had been using the smallness of “our world” compared to the vastness of the universe as evidence that Christianity was designed by humans. They claimed that the God of the vast universe could not have authored a religion specifically to benefit only this world. Chalmers, however, asserted that there was no reason to assume that God designed Christianity only for one world. Further, he suggested that though it was the tendency of human imagination always to think “aloft to that place of spaciousness” above, when heaven was mentioned, the kingdom of God need not be a defined place at all. It might rather be an association of the mind; those who are members of the kingdom of God do not have to relocate, but are in the kingdom by association from the moment of their membership.¹²⁰ Others found the idea of life on other planets contrary to Scripture, at least by their omission from it, and therefore not worthy of consideration. Since the findings of astronomy, in their estimation were obligated to explain rather than undermine Scripture, this category of thinkers felt certain that inhabitants of other worlds would fall from grace, as had Adam and Eve, but who would save them? There was only

¹¹⁸ “Are There More Inhabited Worlds Than Our Own[?].”

¹¹⁹ Fisher, *Glimpse of Glory*, 2.

¹²⁰ Chalmers, *Discourses on the Christian Revelation, Viewed in Connection with the Modern Astronomy*, 7:v–vi, 300–303.

one Savior, Jesus Christ. It did not make sense to them—or perhaps again was not special enough—to imagine that Jesus had been required to go to all these planets to die for sins.¹²¹

The findings of astronomy added a great deal for antebellum southerners to ponder, as they contemplated the afterlife. Despite the controversies over what the findings meant for revealed religion, southerners continued to embrace astronomy as a vital science in schools and the possibility of life on other planets as very likely. A novel titled *Future Life, or, Scenes in Another World* by George Wood, published in 1858, demonstrates the prevailing curiosity with the subject and growing comfort with contemplating a heaven beyond the limits Scripture offered. The novel traveled with its main character as he died and journeyed to the afterlife, a vast system of many planets.¹²² There, he met marvelous characters from various historical periods and from other worlds. In this depiction, earth was the only planet that fell from grace, making it a place of great interest to those who had never known such a world. These souls of the “unfallen races” would “listen with delight to the stories of the redeemed, especially of those who had come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb.”¹²³ Earth was, therefore “special” in its fallenness.

* * *

Antebellum southerners faced another potential fissure in their sense of specialness to God as conflict arose between science and revealed religion in the antebellum period over the question of human origins. Debates over the age of the earth had already eroded trust in history

¹²¹ Frederic William Cronhelm, *Thoughts on the Controversy as to a Plurality of Worlds* (London: Rivington’s, Waterloo Place, 1858), 15, 17.

¹²² George Wood, *Future Life, Or, Scenes in Another World* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1858).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 47.

as recorded in Scripture. In 1844 a new book appeared that created a further stir in the U.S. and overseas: Robert Chambers's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*.¹²⁴ Chambers—a Scottish writer, who penned the book while recuperating from exhaustion and depression—was not identified as the author and would not be until the twelfth edition, indicative of the backlash he expected.¹²⁵ God had not created the universe as a single creative act, according to this volume, which would become known as “Vestiges of Creation” or “Vestiges” in common parlance. Chambers posited that “scientific laws explained and governed not only the development of higher life forms but also the origin of life itself.”¹²⁶ He was suggesting evolution, and Americans pondered it through a decidedly theological lens in the decades to follow.¹²⁷ Deep South newspapers mentioned the book as early as May 1845, and bookstore advertising soon appeared. One advertisement, appearing in the *Augusta Chronicle* that summer, claimed that the book had already sold thirty thousand copies since it first appeared in the United

¹²⁴ Ryan Cameron MacPherson, “The Vestiges of Creation and America’s Pre-Darwinian Evolution Debates: Interpreting Theology and the Natural Sciences in Three Academic Communities” (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame, 2003), For an analysis of American academic reception, see ; For a study of British reaction, see James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹²⁵ For biographical information on Robert Chambers, see Secord, *Victorian Sensation*; Robert Chambers, *Man of Letters: The Early Life and Love Letters of Robert Chambers*, ed. C. H. Layman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990); S. M. Cooney, “Publishers for the People: W. & R. Chambers, the Early Years, 1832–1850” (Ph.D., Ohio State University, 1970); Sondra Miley Cooney, “Chambers, Robert,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2013 2004, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5079>.

¹²⁶ Cooney, “Chambers, Robert.”

¹²⁷ MacPherson, “The Vestiges of Creation and America’s Pre-Darwinian Evolution Debates”. Macpherson’s dissertation analyses the manuscripts of faculty, students, and ministers associated with Princeton, Yale, and Harvard as they reacted to the theses of Chambers.

States—a quite substantial figure.¹²⁸ Chambers was a Christian, though not a literalist on the biblical account of creation.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, the *Methodist Quarterly Review* accused him of being an atheist in disguise, the *Southern and Western Literary Messenger and Review* soundly rebuked him, and *DeBow's Commercial Review* declared him successfully refuted.¹³⁰ *DeBow's* expressed the concern that southern Christians attached to this idea, suggesting that it might even remove their faith that they would face God at Judgment: “A theory which destroys every hope and blasts all the fruits of faith, but offers nothing consoling in their place. Upon what place are we to rest? where find the elements of the sufficient faith? where the consolation which is to keep up the sinking heart? and where the lessons of warning to the oppressor, that there will be a day of reckoning?”¹³¹

* * *

Even as the established sciences continued to chip away at Christian satisfaction with revealed doctrine of the afterlife and other spiritual doctrines in the antebellum period, the resurrection of a near-forgotten “science” created more excitement than all the others combined. The eighteenth-century phenomenon called “animal magnetism” in France or “mesmerism” in England, after German physician Franz Mesmer, reportedly had been discredited around the time of the French Revolution. Mesmer theorized, and certainly to his own satisfaction *proved*, that a

¹²⁸ “Latest Works of the Season,” *Augusta Chronicle*, July 12, 1845.

¹²⁹ Cooney, “Chambers, Robert.”

¹³⁰ “Review 2—No Title,” *Methodist Quarterly Review*, July 1850; C. B. H., “A Resume of Geology,” *Southern and Western Literary Messenger and Review*, November 1846; “DeBow’s Commercial Review,” *Tri-Weekly Flag & Advertiser*, October 21, 1847.

¹³¹ “Theories of Creation and the Universe,” *DeBow’s Commercial Review*, October 1847, 193, Sabin Americana.

magnetic substance or ether in the environment could serve as a medium for the transference of energy, which, among other things, could cure illness. His demonstrations were the talk of Paris, when he established a medical practice there. Mesmer was creating such a stir that Louis XVI commissioned a panel of scientists in 1784, among them Benjamin Franklin, which came to the conclusion that no evidence supported the existence of the “magnetic fluid” that Mesmer claimed. Animal magnetism disappeared from the limelight, but continued quietly in the work of a few of Mesmer’s followers.¹³²

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, most references to “animal magnetism” in American newspapers referred either to an unintentional dazed state or to the title of a comedical farce being performed by theatrical troupes around the South.¹³³ Word that scientists were exploring the idea once again in Europe began to surface in the late 1820s.¹³⁴ An 1829 article in the *Pensacola Gazette* reported, with some skepticism, a French account of the surgical removal of a tumor from a woman’s neck while “thrown into a state of ecstasy [sic]” by animal magnetism.¹³⁵ In 1833, the English translation of a French document, the “Report on Animal

¹³² Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 3–48, 62–64; Peter McCandless, “Mesmerism and Phrenology in Antebellum Charleston: ‘Enough of the Marvellous,’” *Journal of Southern History* 58, no. 2 (May 1992): 201–202.

¹³³ “Extract of a Letter to the Editor,” *Halcyon and Tombeckbe Public Advertiser* (St. Stephens, AL, February 14, 1820); (“Theater,” *Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA, January 7, 1823).

¹³⁴ “Essays on Superstition, Part 7,” 395. While the author stated that “of late years,” the phenomena had generated a “greater degree of enthusiastic admiration,” it is important to note that the American edition of this magazine was drawn from the English edition. This is referring to a rise in interest in England. There is little indication that Americans were much aware of animal magnetism in 1829.

¹³⁵ “Ecstasy,” *Pensacola Gazette*, September 8, 1829.

Magnetism, made by a Committee of the Medical Section of the French Royal Academy of Sciences,” speculated about the potential value of the practice, at least for a certain susceptible subset of the population. The *Museum of Foreign Literature, Science and Art*, reviewed the report with a blend of skepticism and curiosity. The report indicated that the professors in France witnessed a patient able to read a book through closed eyes while in a mesmerized state, among other wondrous phenomena.¹³⁶ The author of the journal article encouraged a cautiously open mind on the subject: “Let us humbly and diligently inquire, but not decide. Fast and beneficial are the uses of deliberation in such matters. We are not at liberty to doubt when evidence is positive; and if only half of what we have read in Mr. Colquhoun’s work be founded in truth, how magnificent is the prospect of utility, in the largest sense of that word, which science, and this particular department, affords us.”¹³⁷ Attachment of the word “science” to the concept of “animal magnetism” lent it credibility, for those who wanted to believe it.

Sporadically in the early 1830s, American readers encountered mention of continued work on animal magnetism, but historians credit a tour in 1836 by Charles Poyen for bringing the subject fully back into American consciousness.¹³⁸ Poyen, a French expatriate, reported that

¹³⁶ “Animal Magnetism,” *Museum of Foreign Literature, Science and Art* 23, no. 10 (1833): 364.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 361, 367. J. C. Colquhoun translated the French report and offered a “Historical and Explanatory Introduction.”

¹³⁸ “Influence of Imagination in Creating and Curing Disease,” *Floridian*, September 19, 1835; A, “A Dialogue on Sympathies,” *Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine*, May 1836, 462–463; M. Husson, “Art. VI.—Animal Magnetism: Report on the Magnetical Experiments Made by the Commission of the Royal Academy of Medicine, of Paris, Read in the Meetings of June 21st and 28th, 1831,” *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, September 1, 1837; Ann Lee Bressler, *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770–1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 104; Russ Castronovo, “The Antislavery Unconscious: Mesmerism, Vodun, and

planters in the West Indies were experimenting with animal magnetism on their slaves.¹³⁹

Inhabitants of the Deep South, though, heard little of Poyen, whose tour kept him in New England. Readers of the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* learned perhaps more than others when the newspaper ran one simple line, “Ch. Poyen, with his somnambulist, is endeavoring to humbug the people of New Hampshire.”¹⁴⁰ The *Picayune* had little success discouraging interest in animal magnetism, though its editors worked at it persistently.

New books and stories appearing in regional newspapers about verifiable scientific experiments lent the phenomena its real credibility and power. Chauncy Hare Townshend’s *Facts in Mesmerism*, published in London in 1840 with an American edition in 1841, became a subject of discussion in the Deep South late that year. The book offered support for investigations into mesmerism and appears to have been the impetus for the glut of material that surfaced afterward in southern bookstores and newspapers.¹⁴¹ The *Southern Literary Messenger* applauded Townshend’s search for truth despite the prevailing prejudices, and encouraged all, especially the medical profession, to take note of his conclusions “that mesmerism is possessed

‘Equality,’” *Mississippi Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2000 1999): 44; McCandless, “Mesmerism and Phrenology in Antebellum Charleston,” 203.

¹³⁹ Castronovo, “The Antislavery Unconscious: Mesmerism, Vodun, and ‘Equality,’” 44.

¹⁴⁰ “[Untitled re: Poyen],” *Daily Picayune*, August 22, 1838. Somnambulism, the term for “sleepwalking,” became synonymous with animal magnetism.

“Facts in Mesmerism, or Animal Magnetism.,” *Christian Examiner and General Review (1829-1844)*, November 1841.

¹⁴¹ Chauncy Hare Townshend, *Facts in Mesmerism: With Reasons for a Dispassionate Inquiry into It* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1840).

of medicinal tendencies and sanative effects.”¹⁴² Southerners received further encouragement in a favorable review in the *Christian Examiner and General Review* in November 1841.¹⁴³

In the following years, books on “animal magnetism” (the term “mesmerism” coming into regular use by 1844) and news articles began to appear with regularity—often tied to public lectures and demonstrations. In January 1842, the *Macon Weekly Telegraph* reprinted a Liverpool article describing the public experiments performed successfully by an “eminent” Manchester surgeon, who placed audience members into “a state of somnolency” without coming into contact with them, even operating from a separate room.¹⁴⁴ In August and September of 1843, the *Augusta Chronicle* advertised John Elliotson’s *Numerous Cases of Surgical Operations Without Pain in the Mesmeric State, with Remarks Upon the Opposition ... to the Perception of the Inestimable Blessings of Mesmerism*.¹⁴⁵ That same year William Lang’s *Mesmerism; Its History, Phenomena, and Practice: With Reports of Cases Developed in Scotland* was published, and an enhanced edition, with a supplement by Chauncey Townshend, appeared in southern bookstores as early as April 1844.¹⁴⁶ These works preceded a stream of others by Karl Reichenbach, William Gregory, James Esdaile, and John Bovee Dods, whose *Six*

¹⁴² “Facts in Mesmerism,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, November 1841, 808.

¹⁴³ “Facts in Mesmerism, or Animal Magnetism,” *Christian Examiner and General Review*, November 1841.

¹⁴⁴ “The Mystery of Mesmerism and Somnambulism Explained,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, January 11, 1842.

¹⁴⁵ John Elliotson, *Numerous Cases of Surgical Operations without Pain in the Mesmeric State, with Remarks upon the Opposition ... to the Perception of the Inestimable Blessings of Mesmerism* (London: H. Baillière, 1843).

¹⁴⁶ William Lang, *Mesmerism: Its History, Phenomena, and Practice, with Reports of Cases Developed in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Fraser and Company, 1843); “[Untitled],” *Daily Picayune*, April 2, 1844.

Lectures on the Philosophy of Mesmerism sold three thousand of its first edition within a month.¹⁴⁷ Along with the terms “mesmerism,” “animal magnetism,” and “somnambulism,” new terms such as “neurology,” “electrical psychology,” “phreno-magnetism,” and “hypnotism” emerged to add further nuance and scientific stature to the field.¹⁴⁸

In opening the door to mesmerism as a tool of science, antebellum society also reopened a passageway to the mystical. For a society that had been shamed into putting away its superstitions, mesmerism allowed some of these beliefs back into respectability—at least for a subset of the American population that included well-respected ministers and academicians. The *Pensacola Gazette* in 1841 described a woman who, in a mesmerized state, could foretell imminent death.¹⁴⁹ Justinus Kerner’s *The Seeress of Prevorst; Being Revelations Concerning the Inner-Life of Man, and the Inter-Diffusion of a World of Spirits in the One We Inhabit*, which described numerous interactions with ghosts by a woman in a state of somnambulism, was

¹⁴⁷ Karl Reichenbach, *Physico-Physiological Researches on the Dynamics of Magnetism, Electricity, Heat, Light, Crystallization, and Chemism in Their Relations to Vital Force* (London: H. Bailliere, 1850); William Gregory, *Letters to a Candid Inquirer, on Animal Magnetism* (Blanchard and Lea, 1851); James Esdaile, *Mesmerism in India, and Its Practical Application in Surgery and Medicine* (Hartford, CT: Andrus and Son, 1851); John Bovee Dods, *Six Lectures on the Philosophy of Mesmerism*, 10th Thousand (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1849), v; John Bovee Dods and J. S. Grimes, *Electrical-Psychology of the Electrical Philosophy of Mental Impression*, ed. H. G. Darling, 1851.

¹⁴⁸ “Animal Magnetism, Neurology and Phreno-Magnetism,” *Daily Picayune*, April 25, 1844; “Jonas Bartlett,” *Daily Picayune*, January 7, 1842; J. W., “Art. VI—Animal Magnetism,” *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany*, November 1851, 417; McCandless, “Mesmerism and Phrenology in Antebellum Charleston,” 202; For an analysis of the psychological dimensions of the mesmerism phenomenon, see David Schmit, “Re-Visioning Antebellum American Psychology: The Dissemination of Mesmerism, 1836–1854,” *History of Psychology* 8, no. 4 (November 2005): 403–434.

¹⁴⁹ “The Power of Foretelling Death,” *Pensacola Gazette*, October 16, 1841.

widely read in the Deep South after an English-language edition appeared in 1845.¹⁵⁰ Andrew Jackson Davis's *Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind* (1847), often called "Mesmeric Revelations," and Louis Cahagnet's *The Celestial Telegraph, or, Secrets of the Life to Come Revealed Through Magnetism* (1851) both offered detailed descriptions of the life beyond death. Cahagnet's information came from the questions posed to "thirty-six deceased persons" through "eight somnambulists" and promised readers to show the existence, the form, and the occupations of the soul, after its separation from the body."¹⁵¹

Davis, known as "the Poughkeepsie Seer" for his exhibitions of clairvoyance while in a trance, created a sensation with his "Mesmeric Revelations." Like the disciples of Natural Theology who had preceded him, Davis believed that "the office of the mind is to investigate, search, and explore, the principles of Nature, and trace physical manifestations in their many and varied ramifications."¹⁵² He blamed mainstream Christianity and its "sectarianism" for the "ignorance, superstition, and bigotry" that, in his estimation, "wielded a tyrannical sceptre" over humanity.¹⁵³ For *Principles of Nature*, Davis went into a trance and dictated to others the details of his journey through the process of death and the "higher spheres." He described a number of "Societies," each befitting the souls that lived there, depending upon their spiritual attunement.

¹⁵⁰ Justinus Andreas Christian Kerner, *The Seeress of Prevorst; Being Revelations Concerning the Inner-Life of Man, and the Inter-Diffusion of a World of Spirits in the One We Inhabit*, trans. Catherine Crowe (London: J.C. Moore, 1845).

¹⁵¹ Louis Alphonse Cahagnet, *The Celestial Telegraph, or, Secrets of the Life to Come Revealed Through Magnetism* (London, England: Geo. Peirce, 310 Strand, 1851); "Art. XII.—Critical Notices," *The Southern Quarterly Review*, January 1852, 231.

¹⁵² Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind* (Boston: Colby & Rich, 1847), 5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

These spheres were places of progressive development, where inhabitants communicated by thoughts, rather than vocal sounds and engaged in “industry.” The spiritual realms corresponded to the earthly realm and spiritual beings were engaged in guiding the thoughts of souls still on earth.¹⁵⁴ Davis was one of many mesmerists sparking controversy (and drawing crowds) with claims of connecting the living with the dead.

Mesmerism began to be sensationalized in fictional works that reached a popular southern audience. Isabella Romer’s *Sturmer, a Tale of Mesmerism. To Which Are Added Other Sketches from Life*, which appeared in southern bookstores soon after its publication in 1841, dramatized the perceived dangers of the patient under the power of a mesmeriser with evil intent. The morally corrupt Dr. Sturmer used the power of the imposed stupor to remove the inhibitions of his married patient, allowing her to exercise her passions for the doctor and to forget it all upon awaking.¹⁵⁵ A critique in the March 1842 edition of *Magnolia: or Southern Monthly* acknowledged the ridiculousness of Romer’s story, but cautioned readers that they should not discount the power of animal magnetism. The editors declared mesmerism dangerous to religion in its attempts to know things beyond the grave, as had been attempted in the novel.¹⁵⁶ Edgar Allen Poe—whose ghostly tales were very popular in the region—liked to add the edge of scientific realism to his fictional stories.¹⁵⁷ In 1845, readers of *The American Review: A Whig*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 644–675.

¹⁵⁵ Isabella Frances Romer, *Sturmer, a Tale of Mesmerism. To Which Are Added Other Sketches from Life*, 1841; “New Books,” *Augusta Chronicle*, December 23, 1841.

¹⁵⁶ “Mesmerism: Animal Magnetism,” *Magnolia; or Southern Monthly*, March 1842.

¹⁵⁷ Naomi Miyazawa, “Edgar Allan Poe and Popular Culture in the Age of Journalism: Balloon Hoaxes, Mesmerism, and Phrenology” (Ph.D., English, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2010), 92.

Journal enjoyed a Poe story called “The Facts in M. Valdemar’s Case,” a story of mesmerism inspired by an account of surgery performed using mesmerism.¹⁵⁸ Poe wrote of attempts to use mesmerism to stave off encroaching death, leaving readers to speculate whether his depiction was truth or fiction. The macabre story proved popular enough to be published under various titles in different journals at home and abroad. Thanks to Poe and many others, mesmerism was bringing back to the American landscape some of the mystical and magical that had been removed by the squelching of superstition among them. It opened a door that would swing open wider in the decades to come.¹⁵⁹

For detractors, and there were many, mesmerism was at best ridiculous and at worst a threat to Christianity. Ridicule was the most common tool used to combat the spread of its popularity. The editors of the New Orleans *Picayune* mocked mesmerism at every opportunity: “It is something that partakes of the nature of an opium revery [sic], and under some such influence must the enthusiastic German [Mesmer] have been, when he conceived the fairy-like fabric of his strange romance,” it cautioned readers, declaring it “exploded forever as a science to be accredited by the intelligence of the present day.”¹⁶⁰ Other newspapers told stories of the fools tricked by so-called mesmerism.¹⁶¹ The title of Charles Radclyffe Hall’s 1845 antimesmerism

¹⁵⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, “The Facts of M. Valdemar’s Case,” *American Review* II, no. 12 (December 1845): 561–565.

¹⁵⁹ The expansion of the mystical in southern religion is explored more fully in Chapter 4, including the more spiritual side of mesmerism and the effects of Swedenborgianism, Spiritualism, and other waves of thought.

¹⁶⁰ “Animal Magnetism,” *Daily Picayune*, September 28, 1841.

¹⁶¹ “Animal Magnetism,” *Daily Picayune*, October 3, 1841; “[untitled],” *Mississippi Free Trader*, April 27, 1844; “Philosophy of Mesmerism,” *Daily Alabama Journal*, February 6, 1852; “Editorial Correspondence,” *Daily Picayune*, May 2, 1852; “Mesmerism and Spirit Rappings,”

book made clear his disdain: *Mesmerism: Its Rise, Progress, and Mysteries in All Ages and Countries: Being a Critical Inquiry Into Its Assumed Merits and History of Its Mock Marvels, Hallucinations, and Frauds*.

Others challenged mesmerism by pointing out ways that it undermined revealed truth. “Therapeutics,” the author of the year-long series on superstition in the *Christian Observer*, suggested that those taken in by the purported miracles and new revelations of mesmerism were risking eternal damnation. Miracles and direct revelation by dreams and prophecies had “ceased with the apostolic age.” He wrote: “The canon of Revelation is so complete that a woe is denounced against those who would add to it: miracles are no longer necessary to prove the Divine power and authority of Christ.”¹⁶² The *Magnolia* declared that mesmerism, with its claims to “place even a common mortal beyond the portals of the grave, and reveal all the secrets of that dark prison house,” rendered the resurrection of Jesus only half as valuable—Jesus being the only one with power over the grave.¹⁶³ A writer for the *Methodist Quarterly* claimed that skepticism and infidelity had begun to attack Christianity by stealth. He maintained that if any of these sciences, “Phrenology, and even Mesmerism,” were found to be valid, they must be in harmony with “revealed truth.”¹⁶⁴ The *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany* acknowledged that mesmerism had convinced some people that there was, after all, a spiritual realm and a future state. “On the other hand,” the magazine cautioned, “we have the painful

Daily Morning News, November 24, 1856; “[untitled],” *Daily South Carolinian*, January 16, 1857.

¹⁶² “Essays on Superstition, Part 7,” 397–399.

¹⁶³ “Mesmerism: Animal Magnetism,” 182.

¹⁶⁴ O. S. Fowler, “Art. I—Religion: Natural and Revealed [Review],” *Methodist Quarterly Review*, April 1847, 169.

example of Miss [Harriett] Martineau, who, at a mature age, and after a life of serious reliance on the truths of religion, has, apparently as a consequence of her researches in Animal Magnetism, been brought out of the thick darkness of Christianity into the marvellous [sic] light of the baldest atheism.”¹⁶⁵ It also acknowledged that the practice had been successful in relieving pain, but cautioned that readers should not then also assume that mesmerism allowed people to see through walls or through time.¹⁶⁶

For southerners, mesmerism was further undermined in the late 1840s and 1850s by its perceived association with abolition.¹⁶⁷ Mesmerists shared the stage at many events with Spiritualists, homeopaths, clairvoyants, and advocates of Free Love, women’s rights and abolition, all of them blending together as northern “fanaticism” in southern rhetoric.¹⁶⁸ There were even reports that abolitionists in the guise of mesmerists were attempting to infiltrate the South with an antislavery message. In 1844, the *Mississippi Free Trader* warned that

¹⁶⁵ W., “Art. VI—Animal Magnetism,” 401–402.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 428.

¹⁶⁷ Eaton, *Freedom-Of-Thought Struggle*, 335–352. Clement Eaton devotes a chapter to the “Intellectual Blockade” in the South—much of which he attributes to this blocking of the “isms” from influence over southern minds. Nancy Gray Schoonmaker, “Mystery and Possibility” (PhD, University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, 2010). Schoonmaker has demonstrated that many of the leading southerners to become involved in the Spiritualism movement of the 1850s were first involved in mesmerism in the 1840s, making it a movement in need of more study in the South. For a study of the psychological associations of the occult practices of mesmerism and Spiritualism with abolition, see Castronovo, “The Antislavery Unconscious: Mesmerism, Vodun, and ‘Equality.’”

¹⁶⁸ Stephen D. Andrews, “Which Threatens to Tear Our Fabric Asunder: The Opposition to American Spiritualism, 1848–1860” (PhD, Stanford University, 2005), 24–25; W., “Art. VI—Animal Magnetism,” 427.

missionaries of abolition were slipping into the South, posing as professors and lecturers.¹⁶⁹ In 1848, the *Greenville Mountaineer* reported that a lecturer on animal magnetism, who had been touring in South Carolina “with a female of doubtful color” and often seen “talking with a number of negroes,” had been apprehended by a “Committee” and “very properly compelled to evacuate the country.” The conclusion was telling: “The vagabond hails from the North, of course.”¹⁷⁰ So, while white southerners had been willing and even eager to have the mesmerists operating in their midst for decades, despite accusations that they undermined religion, this tie to abolitionism rendered them truly dangerous. They were not afraid to face the spiritual or intellectual challenges of mesmerism, but were quite afraid of slave rebellions and willing to vanquish the one to stave off the other.

Catherine Albanese has challenged the tendency of historians of religion to classify mesmerism and other “occult sciences” as fringe ideas in the nineteenth century. While they were soundly dismissed by many, they were also enthusiastically embraced by many, including members of the intelligentsia.¹⁷¹ The frequent mention of the idea of the “transmutation of souls” or “metempsychosis”—what we today know as “reincarnation”—also calls into question the degree to which this “occult” or certainly “foreign” idea was pondered. The subject came up often in discussions of Asian cultures—all part of the attraction to the exotic.¹⁷² The idea

¹⁶⁹ “[untitled],” *Mississippi Free Trader*, April 27, 1844.

¹⁷⁰ “An Abolitionist in Barnwell,” *Greenville Mountaineer*, May 12, 1848.

¹⁷¹ Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 3-4.

¹⁷² A Traveller, “Education among the Siamese—Astronomy—Eclipses—The Stories of ‘Rahn’ and ‘Rosy Morn,’” *Southern Literary Messenger*, July 1857, 1–12; A Traveller, “Budhist Superstition,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, October 1857, 257–278; W. R. A., “Art. V—Celtic,

appears quite prominently in the novel *Beulah*. The title character, in conversation with her guardian, said, “I want to know whether I have ever lived before; whether there is not an anterior life of my soul, of which I get occasional glimpses, and the memory of which haunts and disquiets me.”¹⁷³ Evans’s use of the dialogue suggests that she had witnessed (or engaged in) such questioning herself.

As sectional tempers frayed between northern and southern states in the late 1850s, proponents of the natural sciences were also tarred with accusations of abolitionism.¹⁷⁴ In fact, almost all “isms” became associated with abolitionism in the southern mind, as relations deteriorated between the sections—adding the most fearful of qualities to ideas that were already shaking boundaries of acceptability in a number of ways. While mesmerism and natural science had not originated in New York’s “burned over district,” like a number of other isms, they fell under suspicion as dangerous and foreign ideas. The movements were becoming discredited by association, but this could not eliminate the curiosity that opened the doors to more creative ideas of heaven—nor shake the questions they had raised.

* * *

The rattling of faith in interpretations of Scripture and the hints of a truth more magical than the old superstitions had restored an urge to explore mystical ideas. Southerners were questioning the six-day creation and were open to the possibility of sharing heaven with the inhabitants of other planets. They were attending mesmerist exhibitions and attempting self-hypnosis to explore beyond the body. This showed an expansive and not always orthodox

or Druidical, Doctrine of a Future Life,” *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany*, January 1857, A90; Clapp, *Clapp’s Autobiographical Sketches*, 144.

¹⁷³ Wilson, *Beulah*, 321.

¹⁷⁴ “The Morality of Slavery Number II,” *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, August 23, 1859.

curiosity about the nature of the afterlife. They had not abandoned traditional beliefs, but the edges of the “acceptable” were expanding.

While the South of 1820 had been content for the most part to operate within the very confined limits of what the Bible said about the future state, the South of the 1850s felt an increased freedom to speculate about eternal destiny. Science, in varied forms, had opened that door—and restored to them what the death of superstition had taken away: the freedom to question and imagine what the spiritual realm might hold.

CHAPTER III.
QUESTIONING HELL AND THE TRANSLATION OF SCRIPTURE

Cornelia had not believed; was she utterly lost? Beulah asked herself this question and shrank from the answer. She did not believe: would she die as Cornelia died, without comfort? Was there but one salvation?

—Augusta Evans, *Beulah*

As her friend Cornelia died, Beulah Benton hoped there were second chances, though her friend had given up faith that anything but annihilation waited. During their acquaintance, Cornelia Graham had blamed her own descent into skepticism on the inconsistencies of creed among the clergy who had visited her sickbed over the years.¹ Indeed, a sincere seeker of truth about the afterlife might have encountered many inconsistencies of creed in antebellum America. As Nathan Hatch has so ably demonstrated, the “democratization of Christianity”—the growing power of individuals to choose or create variants of doctrine and practice—had its complications.² Further, as literate antebellum Protestant southerners sought enlightenment from Scripture on their own, moving beyond creed and intermediaries, they faced the burden of deciding which Scriptural translation could be trusted. Though a minority of the southern population, a number of people had called into question or dismissed altogether the idea of eternal punishment. Most of these wore no label to identify themselves, but they created waves in southern society more substantial than their numbers. The suggestion of an afterlife without

¹ Augusta Jane Evans, *Beulah* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859, 1860), 32, 393–394.

² Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 21, 66, 67, 114, 206–209.

hell was a radical departure for a society that had long firmly believed in the reality of eternal punishment.

As Daniel Isaac had prepared his *Doctrine of Universal Restoration Examined and Refuted* for the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1819, he predicted the consequences of the wars raging over scriptural interpretation: “Amidst all this confusion amongst pretended critics, what are the illiterates to do? It is most probable they will shut up their Bibles as containing unintelligible jargon.”³ The “literacy” to which Isaac referred was fluency in ancient Greek and Hebrew, rendering only a handful of southerners able to make sense of some of the debates over biblical meaning. Few apparently gave up their Bibles in the coming decades, but many had reason to question the trustworthiness of modern translations and the intermediaries who had culled, translated, interpreted, and filtered its messages to lay audiences over the centuries. The antebellum period offered access to a wide variety of opinions to anyone who could read and had the means to purchase or the right acquaintances to borrow reading materials. Experts published a stream of conflicting theses about the proper translation of Scripture, always with seeming intellectual backing, certitude, and gravity, creating the potential for great confusion to all who recognized the repercussions of the questions at hand, especially when applied to the matter of rewards and punishments in the afterlife.⁴

³ Daniel Isaac, *The Doctrine of Universal Restoration Examined and Refuted* (New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, 1819), 135.

⁴ “‘Rational & Liberal Christianity,’ Once More,” *Universalist Magazine*, October 16, 1819, 63; IMLAC, “Metaphors of Scripture,” *American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer*, March 1, 1821, 49–50; “Twelve Reasons for Not Being a Universalist,” *Columbian Star and Christian Index*, December 19, 1829, 387; Lewis Feuilletau Wilson Andrews, *The Two Opinions: Or, Salvation and Damnation* (Printed for the author, 1837), 7–24; “Bishop Watson on the Doctrines of Christianity,” *Augusta Chronicle*, September 10, 1822; “Essays on Superstition, Part 1,” 3; Mary Ann Owen Sims, *Private Journal of Mary Ann Owen Sims*, ed. Clifford Dale

Further conflict developed as various denominations active in the United States and Europe began to produce their own versions of Scripture, editions with marginal notes, or commentaries that guided a reader toward that particular denomination's interpretation of controversial passages. An article signed "Consistency" in an Episcopalian publication complained, "The fear of explaining the Scriptures in favour of one denomination rather than of another led them all into error."⁵ And in attempts at ecumenical joint ventures, such as the American Bible Society, the various supporting denominations tended to clash over the need for and nature of proposed content of new editions, the denominational composition and educational background of editorial boards, and perceived tainted affiliations with less acceptable denominations.⁶ In the 1830s, eighteenth-century writings about canonicity resurfaced, to raise the question once again whether texts were in the Bible that should be out, out of the Bible that should be in, or given more weight within Scripture than they merited.⁷

Competing creeds and questions without satisfying answers had disillusioned both Beulah and Cornelia in Augusta Evans's novel. In the character of Cornelia, Evans offered a

Whitman, *Private Journal of Mary Ann Owen Sims* (Fayetteville, AR: Arkansas Historical Association, 1976), 183–184. In September of 1855, Mary Ann Sims of Arkansas wrote in her diary, "I hope when a more correct version of the scriptures is completed [sic] (which work is now in progress) that we may all unite on the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles."

⁵ Consistency, "On the Bibles of Bible Institutions," *Gospel Messenger and Southern Christian Register*, April 1, 1825, 109–112.

⁶ Rev. William R. Williams, *The Bible Question Decided in a Correspondence*, 6th ed. (New York: Holman & Gray, 1852), 1–11.

⁷ T. C., "On the Canons of Evidence as to the Genuineness of Books, as Ascribed to Their Presumed Author," *Southern Literary Journal and Magazine of Arts*, April 1836, 144; T. C., "On Historical Authenticity and the Value of Human Testimony as to Facts," *Southern Literary Journal and Magazine of Arts*, May 1836, 176; Jeremiah Jones, *A New and Full Method of Settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1727, 1827); E. P., "Strictures on the Essay, 'Canons of Evidence as to the Genuineness of Books,'" *Southern Literary Journal and Magazine of Arts*, October 1836, 81.

poignant metaphor for the extreme edge of what “the democratization of Christianity” had yielded. Rather than seeing in Christianity unshakable, unbendable, *desirable* truth, Cornelia saw a meaningless, synthetic commodity, stretched to shapelessness by too many grasping hands. Beulah, however, found it nearly unbearable to watch her friend die with a resignation that nothing waited for her beyond the grave, when maybe something did: maybe something wonderful, maybe something terrible, maybe something that made those moments before death matter a great deal.

Most antebellum white southerners died in some form of orthodox faith, expecting eternal rewards or punishments; few likely died in hopeless agnosticism like Cornelia. “You know the history of my skepticism,” her character had said as she waited to die, “it is the history of hundreds in this age.”⁸ The southern population also included some—and likely quite a few more—like Beulah, who questioned whether a loving God could truly abandon a lost and desperate creature at the grave because a ritual had been unfinished or belief unattainable in life, or indeed because the person had never been introduced to the Christian message at all. Still others in the southern population were confident God would not do so. We have tended largely to leave these who challenged traditional ideas about hell out of our understanding of southern faith. They left almost nothing that allows us to track them because most of them never joined an institution tied to this belief. Some, in fact, were part of traditional institutions, while struggling with disbelief. We cannot adequately estimate numbers, beyond saying that there were more than a few and less than a great many. The evidence, however, of their presence and more importantly their *influence* exists, if the researcher looks beyond membership rolls and censuses. The evidence shows an orthodoxy that feared this questioning of hell and devoted energy to

⁸ Evans, *Beulah*, 377.

preventing the spread of the idea. The belief in hell was an essential tool of orthodox evangelicalism, and it was at risk.

THE UNIVERSALIST DENOMINATION

In seeking the members of southern society who might have been challenging the traditional ideas of hell, the declared members of the Universalist denomination offer the most visible subset. In the nineteenth-century United States, Universalists believed that the Bible taught “universal salvation”—the eventual salvation of every soul. They flourished best where committed ministers stayed planted, which in the antebellum period was predominantly in the New England area, where the denomination had its American roots. The Universalists were resistant to hardened creeds and to institution building, preferring a more natural spread of faith than a structured growth of a centralized organization. They did believe in evangelism, so missionaries made their way to the South and preachers rose up in the field, but the numbers were insufficient to create a real basis for growth until after the Civil War.⁹

Groups believing in universal salvation had immigrated into the southern colonies well before there was a denomination calling itself “Universalist” in North America, however.

Splinter groups from the English Baptists—non-Calvinist groups believing in “an eventual

⁹ Bressler, *Universalist Movement in America*, 41; Russell E. Miller, *The Larger Hope: The First Century of the Universalist Church in America, 1770–1870* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979), 740–779. Bressler’s very concise history of Universalism gives virtually no attention to the South at all. Miller’s study continues to be the only substantial study, and it was done through the available documents in northern repositories primarily, leaving Universalism’s story in the South more of a scrapbook than a history. A blog at <http://scuniversalist.blogspot.com/> has begun to collect documents from southern sources, revealing that Universalist enclaves existed in many places that have not been reflected in the scholarly histories. As these documents begin to find their way to archives, there is a strong need for a researcher to take up a proper study of southern Universalism.

general redemption” like the General and Seventh Day Baptists—had set up churches in the southern seaboard colonies in the early to mid-eighteenth century. German Baptists, including a sect called “Dunkards,” who believed in universal salvation, also immigrated into the Carolinas in the mid-eighteenth century from around Philadelphia. There were “Hell-redemptioners” in Georgia in 1795. Winthrop Sargent, the first governor of the Mississippi Territory—the land encompassing most of present-day Mississippi and Alabama—was a member of the Universalist denomination who resided in the region from 1798 to 1817. He was, in fact, the brother-in-law of John Murray—who brought Universalism to America.¹⁰ Sargent lived in Natchez, and though no formal Universalist church existed in Mississippi until after the Civil War, as many as three hundred people identifying themselves as Universalists were worshipping together in nearby New Orleans in the early 1820s.¹¹

There were also those who had come to believe in universal salvation by their own examination of Scripture, and there were individuals who had relocated to the South, already believing in universalism. A number of families, mostly originating in South Carolina and likely remnants of the German universalists, had created their own fellowships of faith, sometimes constructing their own church buildings. According to the work of Russell Miller, family names like “Grum (Croom), Pfister (Feaster), Kohlman (Coleman), Breuer (Brewer), and Somer (Summer)” appear in Universalist records throughout the region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹² Their networks expanded with the growth and emigration of the family lines—

¹⁰ Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 3–20, 770.

¹¹ “[Untitled Re: Universalists Request Courthouse Use],” *Universalist Magazine*, March 27, 1824; Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 775.

¹² Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 742.

moving into the frontier areas of Tennessee, Georgia, Mississippi, and other parts of the region. Many of these groups would eventually merge with formal Universalists as they began to form societies in the region.¹³

The most numerous and long-lasting Universalist societies in South Carolina began near the settlements of Dunkards, often called “Tunkers” in reports of the time. The state’s Presbyterian General Assembly formally condemned the doctrine in 1792.¹⁴ Despite the fact that the belief already existed in South Carolina, Universalist itinerants did not find it easy to plant churches. Had they been of virtually any other orthodox denomination, other church houses would have been open to them, as was the practice of the time.¹⁵ Itinerant Jacob Frieze reported to *Universalist Magazine* in 1827, “The degree of bigotry and superstition that the preachers of opposite doctrines have enlisted in their service against Universalism in this country is astonishing!” Word that he was coming to the Fairfield District of South Carolina had given local residents “sufficient time to ring the alarm.” Frieze could only preach from the Courthouse

¹³ Benedict, *History of All Religions*, 243; J Frieze, “Progress of Universalism in S. Carolina,” *Universalist Magazine*, September 8, 1827, 47; Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 740–742,752.

¹⁴ Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 742–751.

¹⁵ Daryl Black, “‘The Excitement of High and Holy Affections’: Baptist Revival and Cultural Creation in the Upper-Piedmont Georgia Cotton Belt, 1800–1828,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 87, no. 3/4 (October 1, 2003): 354; “Sermon: On Stability in Religious Opinions,” *Gospel Messenger and Southern Episcopal Register*, February 1832, 34; “The Daily True Delta: Ten Sketches for Sunday,” *Daily True Delta*, December 16, 1860; Rev. W. Carey Crane, “History and Principles of Baptists,” *Baptist Preacher* V, no. 8 (August 1846): 161.

or outdoors, but the encouraging news was that the crowds were too large to accommodate in private homes.¹⁶

The Universalist ministry in the South depended for its survival upon circuit riders during the entire antebellum period, and there were not nearly enough of them. Allen Fuller, a typical minister of this kind, reported riding over 800 miles in ten weeks, preaching in thirteen places in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.¹⁷ In some cases, Universalists recruited ministers with offers of land or employment, but too few ever arrived to meet the demand.¹⁸ Universalism succeeded best in rural locations, requiring itinerants to travel constantly.¹⁹ These ministers faced isolation and hardship, many of them having no colleague nearby with which to commiserate or share the workload.²⁰

Throughout the nation, Universalists claimed that converts were appearing faster than ministers could arise to serve them—and this was particularly true in the southern states. A Universalist minister in Georgia wrote to the *Religious Inquirer* in 1827 of letters he was receiving from ministers in Alabama and Georgia claiming that the “doctrine prevailed” and that ministers were needed.²¹ Growth continued steadily in Georgia, with thirteen meeting houses in

¹⁶ J. Frieze, “Progress of Universalism in South-Carolina,” *Universalist Magazine*, October 20, 1827, 71.

¹⁷ Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 747.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 767.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 758.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 771.

²¹ M. Smith, “Universalism in Alabama and Georgia,” *Universalist Magazine*, August 25, 1827.

operation in 1860.²² In 1830, a man from Courtland, Alabama, wrote to a northern paper, declaring that the “field is ripe” and could yield “many respectable societies,” should a man “qualified for the work arrive.”²³ By 1834, Universalism had in fact seen a bit of growth in Alabama, with three preachers, two meeting houses and four or five societies “numerously attended.”²⁴ A Universalist in Montgomery wrote to the *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* that many of the “once violent opposers” of Universalism in that region had since “become much more moderated.”²⁵ A minister reporting on his experiences in Alabama in 1845 said that he could not count the number of societies, but there were “quite a respectable number of good men and women.”²⁶ Of Louisiana, an 1833 report said: “Of this state we can say nothing, except that we know there are Universalists in New Orleans, and other places; but there is no organization, nor are there any preachers.”²⁷ As years passed, Louisiana reported growing societies and overtaxed ministers, who were always calling for more preachers to come to the region.²⁸ As

²² Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 757. The U.S. Historical Statistics do not include state or regional statistics for Universalist activity in the South in the antebellum period. Any official statistics that count “churches” would undercount Universalists, who built churches occasionally, but more often gathered in smaller groups in “meeting houses,” which might be homes or borrowed or rented buildings.

²³ “Progress of Truth,” *Christian Intelligencer and Eastern Chronicle*, January 15, 1830.

²⁴ G., “Universalism: In South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama,” *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, October 25, 1834, 342–343.

²⁵ “The South,” *Christian Intelligencer and Eastern Chronicle*, June 13, 1834.

²⁶ “Universalism in Alabama,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, May 24, 1845, 194.

²⁷ “Art. V. State of the Doctrine and Denominations of Universalists,” *Expositor and Universalist Review*, January 1833, 74.

²⁸ “Universalism in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama,” *Christian Intelligencer and Eastern Chronicle*, November 27, 1834.

incomplete as the available records are, it does appear that Universalism grew in the region for all states but South Carolina, where it tended to flow out with the population that emigrated to other Deep South areas.²⁹

Universalists were committed to publicizing the doctrine of universal salvation, and many southerners had access to the denomination's literature without ever meeting an actual Universalist.³⁰ Most denominations had a periodical publication wielding great influence over the denomination's membership in the antebellum period.³¹ For Universalists, this magazine was *Universalist Magazine*, which changed to *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* in 1828.³² For southern Universalists, itinerant ministers among them, this and other publications, including the southern newspapers that soon began to appear, often represented the only tangible connection to

²⁹ "Statistics of the Universalist Denomination in America in 1843," *Greenville Mountaineer*, January 19, 1844; A[aron] B[urt] Grosh, *The Universalist Companion, with an Almanac, and Register Containing the Statistics of the Denomination for 1846* (Utica: A. Walker, 1846), 57–60; Grosh, ed., *The Universalist Companion, with an Almanac, and Register Containing the Statistics of the Denomination for 1858* (Boston: E. L. Tompkins, 1858), 53–55.

³⁰ Benedict, *History of All Religions*, 245; Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 285–319.

³¹ Ferguson, *Relation of Pastor and People; Statement of Belief on Unitarianism, Universalism, and Spiritualism*, 5. After being shamed in a denominational publication for his belief in universal salvation, former Disciples of Christ minister J. B. Ferguson wrote: "A periodical, I repeat, becomes a church court, and one man, and those who may by conviction or accident accord with him, become the superintendents of churches in which they had never regularly worshipped, and with whose wants or wishes they can have no accurate acquaintance!"

³² Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 291.

the denomination. They even looked to the Boston-based *Trumpet*—which had a subscription list of 5,000 by 1838—to tell them about Universalist events in their own region.³³

Universalists attempted to establish a number of publications in the South in the 1820s—all short-lived.³⁴ By the early 1830s, the South had two notable Universalist publications. *The Southern Pioneer and Gospel Visitor* was published simultaneously out of Baltimore and Richmond and reached subscribers primarily in Maryland and Virginia from 1831 to 1837.³⁵ One of its editors, L. F. W. Andrews, saw the need for a Universalist newspaper farther south and established the *Southern Evangelist* in 1834. He published it in Montgomery, Alabama, with “an Association of Universalist Clergymen, planning distribution to the southern, western, and northern states.”³⁶ Andrews moved the paper to Macon in 1838, and it closed in 1842 under a

³³ *Ibid.*, 301,310–311; “Progress of Universalism in North and South Carolina,” *Universalist Magazine*, August 11, 1827, 30; “Universalism in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama,” 194; “Universalism in Mobile,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, March 9, 1844, 150; “A Sermon,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, July 21, 1832; “Letter from Rev. Theodore Clapp,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, July 22, 1848; “Satan and Job [From the Christian Intelligencer],” *Universalist Watchman, Repository and Chronicle*, April 7, 1832, 394a. Southerners appear in the pages of the *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* as subjects and contributors, indicating that the Boston-based magazine was in active circulation in southern states.

³⁴ Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 309–311.

³⁵ “South Carolina,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, May 19, 1832; S, “Universalist Periodicals,” *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, February 22, 1834, 62; Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 311–313.

³⁶ “Universalism in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama”; “[Untitled],” *Alabama Intelligencer and States Rights Expositor*, July 25, 1835; Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 311–312.

different name.³⁷ It is clear, also, that numerous small publications were operating in local areas, brief mentions of which appeared now and again in the larger Universalist papers of the North.³⁸

While southerners were fiercely protective of religious independence, in theory, in rhetoric, and usually in practice, many of them found their own sense of toleration strained when they contemplated offering power to anyone who did not believe in eternal punishment.³⁹ This was evident in the ongoing battles over the rights of Universalists to testify in court or to fill roles of civic responsibility requiring oaths—a problem that also revealed itself in northern states. As states formed their constitutions in the years following the American Revolution, most of them incorporated some requirements of a belief in future rewards and punishments to ensure an electorate that believed in eternal consequences for violation of an oath.⁴⁰ As Universalists became a part of that electorate, this control became problematic. A letter from “A Layman” to the *Christian Messenger* in 1821 revealed the fairly common opinion that, while religious tolerance was a very desirable trait of the country, the doctrine denying future rewards and punishments went too far. It was “calculated to undermine the foundation of society, to render nugatory all the obligations of an oath, and to break down every distinction between vice and

³⁷ “[L. F. W. Andrews],” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, March 12, 1838; Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 311.

³⁸ “Progress of Truth”; Allen Fuller, “Proceedings of the South Carolina Convention of Universalists, A.D. 1822: Order of Public Services. Circular Letter,” *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, January 5, 1833; “New Universalist Papers,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, February 11, 1843.

³⁹ Sarah Barringer Gordon, “Blasphemy and the Law of Religious Liberty in Nineteenth-Century America,” *American Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (December 2000): 682–719. Gordon’s article looks at the dilemma an earlier generation faced over the question of blasphemy and law.

⁴⁰ James Hutson, *Forgotten Features of the Founding: The Recovery of Religious Themes in the Early American Republic* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 17.

virtue.”⁴¹ A Presbyterian minister in New Orleans warned that “the denial of future punishment leaves the laws both of heaven and earth without any adequate sanction, and, therefore, loosens the bonds both of religious and civil obligation.”⁴² In the 1830s most states began to protect the rights of Universalists, though isolated challenges continued to surface.⁴³ A piece in the *Macon Weekly Telegraph* in 1855 discouraged voters from electing Garnett Andrews as the Governor of Georgia in part because as a judge he had “decided that a Universalist’s oath was not good in a Court of Justice,” given that the Universalist had no fear of facing hell for the violation of it.⁴⁴ In 1855, the North Carolina State Convention of Universalists was pursuing an appeal to higher state courts after several witnesses were deemed incompetent to testify based on their religious beliefs. The South Carolina paper that reported the story offered remarkably balanced coverage, suggesting that southerners were by no means of a single mind on the question.⁴⁵ The North Carolina Supreme Court, however, supported the lower court’s decision, which was also reported without comment in the *Charleston Mercury*—revealing that religious liberty remained unattainable for some within the region.⁴⁶ The *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel* in Augusta, Georgia, however, took a position on this case: “By this decision the Universalists of North

⁴¹ “Strange Doctrine: A Layman,” *Christian Messenger*, March 3, 1821, 123.

⁴² Campbell, *Five Discourses on Hell*, 18.

⁴³ Hutson, *Forgotten Features of the Founding: The Recovery of Religious Themes in the Early American Republic*, 20–35; “Article I: Qualification of Witnesses,” *Christian Review*, December 1836, 482–483; “A Universalist for Governor—New Hampshire Politics,” *Mississippian and State Gazette*, February 14, 1855.

⁴⁴ “Things to Be Remembered at the Polls,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, September 4, 1855.

⁴⁵ “Is a Universalist a Competent Witness,” *Greenville Mountaineer*, November 29, 1855.

⁴⁶ “Incompetent Witnesses,” *Charleston Mercury*, December 12, 1856.

Carolina are virtually outlawed, as no member of that religious denomination can collect his debts, swear to an assault, or testify before the Courts in any case, even if his wife or child should be insulted.”⁴⁷ It took many decades to rid the states and localities of all such discrimination regarding Universalists.

Even as southern legislatures, courts, and municipalities began to strengthen protections for the civil liberties of Universalists, growing sectional divisions over slavery created a new impediment to the spread of Universalism in the South. Like so many other ideas with origins or strength in abolitionist centers of the North, the image of southern Universalists tended to be tarnished by the taint of abolition, whether or not they were affiliated with the movement.⁴⁸ Universalist publications claimed that Universalism found its greatest success where slavery did not exist, believing a slaveholding society to be unable to embrace a creed that made all men equal.⁴⁹ The efforts by some southern Universalists to overcome the stigma are evident when for example Philo Brownson took over editorship of a Universalist paper in 1840 and announced that it would be “a fearless advocate for our Southern Institutions, in reference to the great question, upon which the salvation of the South depends. Our patrons will ever find an advocate for Southern Rights, and no compromise with the wreckless and unrighteous measures of those

⁴⁷ “Disabilities of Universalists,” *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel*, January 7, 1857.

⁴⁸ Boles, *Great Revival*, 189. Boles describes a growing orthodoxy in the South in the three decades following the Great Revival. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800–1860*, 259. Anne Loveland has demonstrated that Universalism, among other ideas, was tied to fanaticism, as southerners began to equate northern values with disrespect for law and authority.

⁴⁹ “The South”; Bressler, *Universalist Movement in America*, 41. Bressler has suggested that the leveling nature of Universalism, in and of itself, was a deterrent to its acceptance in the South.

fanatics, who are sapping at our hearts-blood.”⁵⁰ It was replaced a few years later with the “Messenger of Glad Tidings” at Wetumpka, Alabama. As reported by northern papers, Brownson’s paper “was obliged to stop,” having been “conducted with a very bad spirit The course which it took in regard to Slavery was altogether hostile to the spirit of Universalism; and no man who really believed and loved Universalism could approve of that course.”⁵¹ There was further dissension between northern and southern Universalists in 1845, as Georgia members of the state convention of Universalists protested northern interference in legislation hostile to slavery. The *Universalist Watchman* predicted of the South, “It will not embrace Universalism.”⁵² Southern papers regularly reported on acts by northern Universalists bodies against slavery.⁵³ The growing bitterness between the sections did not necessarily squelch the practice of Universalism among those who had committed to it in the South, but it did dampen any desire by southern Universalists to report on their activities in northern publications. This further ensured that southern Universalism would be under-reported in the 1840s and 1850s and under-represented by historians as a result.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ “Prospectus of the Southern Universalist,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, June 16, 1840.

⁵¹ “New Universalist Papers.”

⁵² “Universalism in the South,” *Universalist Watchman, Repository and Chronicle*, March 29, 1845.

⁵³ “Abolitionism Warming Up,” *Mississippi Free Trader*, June 16, 1852; “The Receiver Is as Bad as the Thief,” *Daily Picayune*, October 29, 1854; “Progress of Dissension,” *Daily Picayune*, May 26, 1857; “Universalist Convention,” *Daily Morning News*, September 30, 1858; “Miscellaneous,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, November 1, 1861.

⁵⁴ Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 769. According to Miller, southern Universalists felt that northern Universalists had already too often ignored the activities of southern groups and saw it as an act of retaliation to consciously stop sending convention reports to national publications as they had in the past. This would indicate that any historian using

For a southerner drawn to the claims of Universalism in the antebellum years but not yet committed, the decision was not so simple as following one's belief. A person had to consider the impact to self or family of attaching the label. Declaring oneself a universalist could affect social standing, marriageability, employment options, the ability to testify in court, and the simple comfort of interacting respectfully with neighbors. There was the option, however, of adopting the belief without the label.

THE UNIVERSALIST IDEA

Southerners who declared themselves members of the Universalist denomination made up only a portion of those who were actually questioning orthodox views of hell in the antebellum period. The spread of the universalist *idea*—that all souls would eventually be restored to God in heaven—presented a far greater peril in the eyes of many orthodox Protestant ministers, who considered the threat of hell a structural pillar of Christianity. Believers in the universalist idea were among those attending orthodox churches, and there were more who quietly questioned the possibility of universal salvation.⁵⁵ The evidence for the presence of unorthodox beliefs or questioning of the afterlife lies in sermons directed to orthodox congregations that undermined universalist ideas without mentioning Universalism. It lies in the packed houses for nights on end when a debate was announced between a Universalist and an orthodox minister on the question of universal salvation or some related topic. It lies in the

northern sources would not have adequate access to southern information normally and would have almost none after this boycott of sorts was enacted, unless able to retrieve the southern publications.

⁵⁵ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 208–209. Heyrman describes the resistance evangelical ministers encountered as they attempted to draw the master class into the church in the early antebellum period—finding many plantation masters eager to debate the claims of Universalism and deism.

accounts of Universalist ministers whose congregants migrated to and from orthodox churches when the itinerant was too long away from the flock. C. F. R. Shehane, a former Campbellite minister who had recently converted to Universalism, described his two-hundred-mile preaching circuit through North Alabama in 1845, where he found a good number “who reject the heathen dogma of endless wo [sic],” among them many still-active Campbellites. He also “found Universalists, who still hold their membership, some in the Baptist, and others in the Methodist Church.”⁵⁶

Shehane was not the only minister to declare that believers in universal salvation were among the orthodox congregations, and maybe in healthy numbers. The most famous of them, Reverend Theodore Clapp of New Orleans, had converted himself slowly to a belief in universal salvation, beginning in 1824 after reading Universalist literature, among other things. Taking up a challenge by a church member to study the Greek and Hebrew origins of the New Testament words translated in the King James Version of Scripture to mean “hell,” he eventually came to believe that the original text of the Bible had never suggested eternal damnation.⁵⁷ Dismissed from the Presbytery in 1833 for several unorthodoxies—not yet for universalism—he retained the loyalty of most of his now “independent” congregation and became a very powerful figure in

⁵⁶ “Universalism in Alabama.”

⁵⁷ Clapp, *Clapp’s Autobiographical Sketches*, 156–161; Henry Wilder Foote, *Theodore Clapp: A Discourse Delivered at the One Hundredth Anniversary of the First Unitarian Church of New Orleans, February 26, 1933* (Boston: Unitarian Historical Society, 1933), 11; Timothy F. Reilly, “Parson Clapp of New Orleans: Antebellum Social Critic, Religious Radical, and Member of the Establishment,” *Louisiana History* 16, no. 2 (1975): 171.

the region.⁵⁸ Known for exciting oratory, “Mr. Clapp’s Church” developed a reputation as a popular tourist attraction in the cooler months, and northern Universalist publications began to have correspondents mining his sermons for evidence that he was, as rumored, a Universalist.⁵⁹ Clapp eventually started to publish his sermons in the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, further expanding his influence.⁶⁰ While he quietly believed and taught universal salvation for years, his most public declaration appeared in 1848 in the *Picayune*, placing it before thousands throughout the Mississippi Valley. Within weeks of its appearance the “Rev. Mr. Clapp’s Sermon on Hell” had spread to other newspapers and was the talk of the country.⁶¹ In it, he offered an exegesis of the words in the Bible that had been reinterpreted “hell”—a place of eternal torment—in the modern translation. He offered a defense for the idea that the original authors had not had endless punishment in mind at all when writing the text. A group of supporters printed thousands of copies of Clapp’s “Discourse on Hell” and distributed them into the Mississippi River Valley ahead of his travels that summer.⁶² Clapp claimed that he continually met people in orthodox churches who had abandoned a belief in hell but were either unable or unwilling to leave their

⁵⁸ [Theodore] [Clapp], *A Report of the Trial of the Rev. Theodore Clapp, Before the Mississippi Presbytery, at Their Sessions in May and December 1832* (New Orleans: Hotchkiss, 1833), 371–371.

⁵⁹ “A Voice from New-Orleans,” *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, July 12, 1834, 221; “Universalist Statistics,” *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, February 24, 1837, 8.

⁶⁰ Reilly, “Parson Clapp of New Orleans,” 175.

⁶¹ “A Discourse on Hell,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, April 29, 1848; “Rev. Mr. Clapp’s ‘Sermon on Hell,’” *Christian Register*, April 29, 1848; “Rev. Mr. Clapp’s Sermon on Hell,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, June 2, 1848; “[Classified Ads],” *New York Herald*, April 29, 1848.

⁶² “Letter from Rev. Theodore Clapp,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, July 22, 1848.

established churches. “It is strictly true,” he wrote, “that among the hundreds whom I have conversed with, in my late tour, four persons only avowed their belief in an endless hell.”⁶³

While Theodore Clapp was known for hyperbole and confessed it about himself, it is safe to assume that he met quite a few people who expressed an interest in the doctrine of universal salvation.⁶⁴ Clapp, incidentally, never accepted the label “Universalist” for himself, though he was an active defender of the doctrine in Universalist and Unitarian publications.⁶⁵

Theodore Clapp made the acquaintance of Reverend Jesse Babcock Ferguson of Nashville, who had distanced himself, over the years, from his Church of Christ roots, bringing most of his congregation along with him as he began to abandon a belief in hell—much as Clapp

⁶³ “Letter from Rev. T. Clapp,” *Christian Register*, August 4, 1849.

⁶⁴ “Second Reply of Mr. Clapp to the Rev. J. H. Martin, on Future Punishment,” *Daily Picayune*, May 7, 1848, 4; [Clapp], *A Report of the Trial of the Rev. Theodore Clapp*, 61. Clapp admitted to his “hyperbolic style” in the days following the trial that ended his career with the Presbyterian Church. Clapp’s career is very worthy of study, but is in much need of a closer analysis than has yet been done. His autobiography, particularly, is filled with errors—some the errors of memory, age, and health, and some the product of hyperbole. Unfortunately, the errors have been repeated by historians, who have cited each other, creating layers of credibility problems in need of, and worth, unraveling.

⁶⁵ “A Discourse,” *Christian Register*, March 31, 1849. Unitarians tended to be wealthier, better educated, socially prominent, and urban dwellers, while Universalists were more often rural people of moderate means and self-educated. While Clapp appears to have been more theologically attached to Universalism, he was socially comfortable with Unitarians. “Unitarian Belief, On the Future Condition of All Men.—Tendency of Universalism,” *Christian Register*, July 28, 1849, 118; “Letter from Rev. Theo. Clapp,” *Christian Register*, June 30, 1849, 103; “Christian Register: Its Character: Opinions Concerning It: A Suggestion,” *Christian Register*, September 29, 1849, 154; John Allen Macaulay, *Unitarianism in the Antebellum South: The Other Invisible Institution*, Religion and American Culture (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama, 2001). John Macaulay’s study also looks at two cases in which Unitarian and Universalist congregations eventually became one—the bodies called “Uni/Uni”—one of which was Clapp’s church. But there was not a “Unitarian-Universalist” denomination for more than a century beyond this.

had done.⁶⁶ In 1854 he wrote a brief book, *Relation of Pastor and People*, defending his position: “It has been said of us reproachfully, that we are *Universalists*, and as such ought to be disfellowshipped.” He acknowledged that some among the congregation professed to believe “in the final holiness and happiness of the entire family of man.”⁶⁷ Of himself, he wrote, “I hesitate not to avail, most solemnly, that I believe the idea of an eternity of torture has no basis in a just interpretation of any Revelation of God.”⁶⁸ He refused, however, to accept any label for himself and his congregation. If the outside world must have a word to define his belief, he said, “Say he believes in *progression*.”⁶⁹ Universalists eagerly applied their label to him, much as they had tried to do to Theodore Clapp, creating more trouble for Ferguson, who lost his church eventually.⁷⁰ Southerners did not eagerly take up a label like “Universalism,” with all its associated burdens, but the *idea* that all would be saved could be embraced somewhat more easily.

The southerners who questioned hell or who had come to a belief in universal salvation were blending rather quietly into their communities, something we are discovering more in hindsight because it was not a state of mind to be trumpeted in the nineteenth-century Deep South. The journals kept by Sarah Haynsworth Gayle, for example, present the interior musings

⁶⁶ Schoonmaker, “Mystery and Possibility,” 172–205. Schoonmaker describes Ferguson’s quite expansive journey away from favor with Alexander Campbell and the eventual loss of his church building, though not of his popularity, in Chapter 4 of her dissertation.

⁶⁷ Alexander Campbell, “Elder J. B. Ferguson’s Relation of Pastor and People—No. I,” *Millennial Harbinger: 4th Series* 4, no. 10, Fourth Series (October 1854): 6.

⁶⁸ Ferguson, *Relation of Pastor and People*, 7.

⁶⁹ Campbell, “Elder J. B. Ferguson’s Relation of Pastor and People—No. I,” 18.

⁷⁰ Schoonmaker, “Mystery and Possibility,” 181.

of a genteel woman on the Alabama frontier, wife of a future governor, who attended church services faithfully—churches of all kinds. She invited ministers to the family table for dinner, read spiritual literature and her Bible voraciously, pondered and prayed, but never came to a sense of certainty about her own faith or any church’s creed. Her mother must have passed along a sense of her own uncertainty, for Gayle fretted frequently in her journal over the question of what had become of her mother after death. “It was impossible to beleive [sic], when the turf was placed on her bosom, that it became an eternal seal; and if it did not, my heart equally rejected the idea, that she existed in any other than a state of bliss.” She longed to meet her parents again—sometimes sure she would, sometimes worried she would not.⁷¹ Gayle never mentioned Universalism in her journals, though her reading appetites almost certainly brought her across the ideas. It is clear, though, that she did not hold the reverent fear of hell that orthodox ministers hoped to instill in their congregations. James Henry Hammond, a planter and politician from South Carolina, also expressed the desire to believe, but the inability to fully trust scriptural revelation, saying, “When so many believe & are happy why can I not do the same?” He eventually came to the conclusion that the orthodox view of God and the afterlife was for the bulk of men who needed the “hangman’s whip” of hell to keep them in order. And he kept a pew in the Episcopal Church, attended Baptist and Methodist services, and established two churches on his plantation—believing in the institution, if not, ultimately, in its message.⁷²

One method of determining the degree to which ideas like those of Hammond and Gayle were permeating society is to look at how orthodox ministers and other opinion shapers were

⁷¹ Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, xxv, 4, 26, 30, 38, 77.

⁷² Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery*, Southern Biography Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 262–263.

attempting to combat them. Much of what was written in this period to challenge the ripple effects of Universalism is offered in a veiled language, circling around the word “universalism” completely. Rarely did the authors of these verbal challenges, who are most often ministers, offer reasons for this reticence, and they might not have been particularly conscious of it. After an acrid debate, Rev. Lovick Pierce, a Methodist minister from Georgia, revealed one reason when he wrote, “It is not against *Universalists* as a whole that I speak; but against *Universalism* as a system of religion, and morals.”⁷³ He acknowledged that “a Universalist may be a gentleman of the finest grade,” and as had been shown, for the Baptist, Methodist, Church of Christ, Presbyterian, or Episcopalian minister in any southern pulpit, that Universalist “of the finest grade” might rent a pew in the minister’s own church.⁷⁴ The veiled language attacked universalism without directly condemning respected community members.

Secondly, ministers were concerned about those in their congregation who might be persuaded by the ideas of Universalism without attaching the label to themselves—that person who might think, “I, too, question whether a loving God could see eternal torment as a just punishment. But I am *not* a *Universalist*.” Therefore, this congregant might overlook sermons attacking Universalists as personally irrelevant. These were the Sarah Gayles and the Beulah Bentons. The sermons needed to attack the ideas they were contemplating—and the ideas were more subtle.

⁷³ L[ovick] Pierce and YA Pamphlet Collection (Library of Congress), *Universalism, Examined and Condemned, upon the Principles of a Common Sense Interpretation of the Bible, Being the Substance of My Replies to C.F.R. Shehane, in a Debate with Him at Americus, March, 1850* (Savannah, GA: John M. Cooper, 1851), 81.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

In seeking out evidence of the ripple effect of universalism, it is the veiled language we must look for, more than overt conversations about Universalism and hell. In the novel *Beulah*, the atheist Dr. Guy Hartwell, Beulah's future guardian and eventual husband, carried on a dialogue with his sister May, who was just the sort of empty "Christian" who had driven Beulah and Cornelia from their faith:

"May, is the doctrine of future punishments laid down as orthodox, in that elegantly gilded prayer-book you take with you in your weekly pilgrimages to church?"

"Come, come, Guy; if you have no respect for religion, yourself, don't scoff at its observances in my presence. It is very unkind, and I will not allow it." . . .

"Scoff! you wrong me. Why, verily, your religion is too formidable to suffer the thought. I tell you, sister mine, your creed is a terrible one in my eyes. . . .From such creeds! such practice! Good Lord deliver us!"⁷⁵

Dr. Hartwell used the expression "doctrine of future punishments" matter-of-factly, expecting his sister to recognize the term that was often orthodoxy's counterweight to Universalism. His questioning—in fact, sneering—that the doctrine was "laid down as orthodox" also indicated their familiarity with the debate at the time. He was baiting his sister into an argument. Augusta Evans's use of this snippet of dialogue between an agnostic and his hypocritical Christian sister in *Mobile* revealed her own frustration with the dinner-table debates of her own world—a world she believed was teetering dangerously toward skepticism on important matters, because of empty rationalism on the one extreme and empty religion on the other.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Evans, *Beulah*, 124.

⁷⁶ Augusta Evans to Rachel Lyons, October 17, 1859, in Rebecca Grant Sexton, ed., *A Southern Woman of Letters: The Correspondence of Augusta Jane Evans Wilson* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 2.

The expression “future punishment” in antebellum publications presents a probable sign that the article, sermon, lecture, event, or conversation underway is something more than a simple mention of hell; it is a defense of doctrine and most likely a ripple effect of Universalism.⁷⁷ An 1834 article subtitled “On Future Punishment” offers a typical example of how the orthodox literature of the time worked to undermine Universalist arguments without using the label at all. It began with the admonition: “Knowing *the terrors of the Lord*, his ministers must persuade men.”⁷⁸ For five pages, it countered the standard Universalist arguments for universal salvation. It deployed other terms that can be said to be part of the veiled language: the exegetical origins of “eternal,” “eternity,” “everlasting,” and of the various words interpreted “hell.” And it claimed, as either side usually did in these debates, that this interpretation of these words was the original one—the one “held by the primitive Church.”⁷⁹ Beneath the layers of this document lie a message that was being repeated from orthodox pulpits and publications throughout the antebellum period in hopes of bolstering faith in hell.

Texts often surfaced in antebellum religious literature that argued the intent behind the words interpreted “all,” “every,” “universe,” or “universal” in Scripture and dealt either plainly or subtly with the question of universal salvation. Though not original to the nineteenth century,

⁷⁷ “[Untitled],” *Daily Picayune*, April 1, 1838; “A Discourse on Future Punishment”; Walter Balfour, *Reply to Professor Stuart’s Exegetical Essays on Several Words Relating to Future Punishment* (Boston: Balfour, 1831); “Future Punishment,” *Gospel Visitant*, July 1, 1817, to July 1, 1818 (serial article); Andrew Fuller, New England Tract Society, and Flagg and Gould, *Reasons for Believing That the Future Punishment of the Wicked, Will Be Endless* (New England Tract Society, 1822); Timothy Dwight and American Tract Society, *Duration of Future Punishment* (New York: American Tract Society, 1832).

⁷⁸ “Appendix to the Apostles’ Creed Briefly Explained and Practically Considered: On Future Punishment,” *Gospel Messenger and Southern Episcopal Register*, September 1834, 267.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 267–271.

the antebellum-era fascination with these words seems to have been sparked by a challenge issued in *Universalist Magazine* by someone identified at first only as “An Inquirer After Truth” beginning in 1819—a New England-centered dispute that was being read around the country. This mysterious “Inquirer”—who was eventually revealed as Baptist minister Walter Balfour of Charlestown, Massachusetts—had been distressed by the implications of a passage he had read in Andover theologian Moses Stuart’s *Letters to the Reverend William E. Channing*. Stuart had equated the Greek word for “every” in one passage as “universe,” applying it to the passage Phil. 2:10-11:

10: That at the name of Jesus *every* knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11: And that *every* tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Stuart indicated that, by “every” meaning “universe,” this implied that the worship applied to “things in heaven, earth, and under the earth.”⁸⁰ To Balfour, this meant that Stuart’s logic supported universal salvation, an idea Balfour could not accept as a Baptist—nor should Stuart, as a scholar in a Calvinist theological seminary. Beginning in 1819 Balfour wrote a stream of letters to *Universalist Magazine* demanding that Stuart recant the interpretation. Stuart ignored the communications at first and then made excuses for ignoring them, which turned the “Inquirer” Balfour into a folk hero to readers of the magazine.⁸¹ Balfour—who was formally trained in the ancient languages as a boy in England—began to analyze the Greek and Hebrew meanings of these words in various contexts throughout Scripture and wrote of his findings,

⁸⁰ Moses Stuart, *Letters to the Rev. Wm. E. Channing Containing Remarks on His Sermon, Recently Preached and Published at Baltimore* (Andover, MA: Flagg and Gould, 1819), 100–101.

⁸¹ “For the Universalist Magazine,” *Universalist Magazine*, June 30, 1821, 1.

converting himself into a Universalist yeoman scholar within the pages of the magazine over time.⁸² He was never as effective behind the pulpit as he was with a pen, but his analysis of, first, the words “all” and “every,” then “eternal” and “forever,” and eventually many of the words perceived or misperceived to mean hell in Scripture—words like “Tartarus,” “Gehenna,” “Sheol,” and particularly “Hades”—continued to appear throughout the antebellum period.⁸³

⁸² Thomas Whittemore, *Memoir of the Rev. Walter Balfour: Author of Letters to Prof. Stuart, and Various Other Publications* (Boston: J. M. Usher, 1852), 222; “Communications: An Inquirer After Truth,” *Universalist Magazine*, January 29, 1820, 121; “Communication: To Moses Stuart,” *Universalist Magazine*, February 19, 1820, 133–134; “Communications: To Moses Stuart,” *Universalist Magazine*, March 4, 1820, 141; “Communications,” *Universalist Magazine*, January 13, 1821; “Communications: To Rev. Moses Stuart,” *Universalist Magazine*, February 3, 1821, 121–122; “Communications: To Rev. Moses Stuart,” *Universalist Magazine*, March 10, 1821, 145; “Communications: To Rev. Moses Stuart,” *Universalist Magazine*, March 24, 1821, 153–154; “Communications: To Rev. Moses Stuart,” *Universalist Magazine*, April 14, 1821, 165–166; “Communications: To Rev. Moses Stuart,” *Universalist Magazine*, May 12, 1821, 181–182; “Communications: To Rev. Moses Stuart,” *Universalist Magazine*, June 16, 1821, 201; “For the Universalist Magazine,” 1; “To Correspondents, &c.,” *Universalist Magazine*, July 21, 1821, 16; “To the Rev. Moses Stuart,” *Universalist Magazine*, August 11, 1821, 25; “To ‘An Inquirer After Truth,’” *Universalist Magazine*, September 1, 1821, 40; “[Untitled],” *Universalist Magazine*, September 15, 1821, 46–47; “Reply to ‘W,’” *Universalist Magazine*, October 6, 1821, 58; “[Untitled],” *Universalist Magazine*, October 20, 1821, 65; “Reply to R. C.,” *Universalist Magazine*, November 3, 1821, 74.

⁸³ Balfour, *Reply to Professor Stuart’s Exegetical Essays on Several Words Relating to Future Punishment*; Walter Balfour, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Import of the Words Sheol, Hades, Tartarus, and Gehenna: Translated Hell in the Common English Version* (Boston: A. Tompkins, 1854); *ibid.*; Walter Balfour, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Doctrine Concerning the Devil and Satan: And into the Extent of Duration Expressed by the Terms Olim, Aion, and Aionos, Rendered Everlasting, Forever, &c. in the Common Version, and Especially When Applied to Punishment* (Charlestown, MA: Davidson, 1827); Walter Balfour, *Three Essays: On the Intermediate State of the Dead, The Resurrection from the Dead, And on the Greek Terms Rendered Judge, Judgment, Condemned, Condemnation, Damned, Damnation, &c. in the New Testament: With Remarks on Mr. Hudson’s Letters in Vindication of a Future Retribution, Addressed to Mr. Hosea Ballou, of Boston* (Charlestown, MA: G. Davidson, 1828); Walter Balfour, *Three Inquiries on the Following Scriptural Subjects: I. The Personality of the Devil; II. The Duration of the Punishment Expressed by the Words Ever, Everlasting, Eternal, &c.; III. Demoniacal Possessions* (Boston: A. Tompkins, 1854); Campbell, *Five Discourses on Hell*, 35. Though Balfour seems often overlooked in retrospect, Alexander Campbell claimed that “Ballou had no influence before Balfour.”

This became the language of debate over universal salvation, even where the Universalist religion and the name Balfour were obscure.

Other veiled indicators that the subject of universal salvation had been raised in antebellum writings are the presence of the terms “Hades,” the “Intermediate State” or “Intermediate Place,” or in many cases, “Lazarus and the Rich Man.” For orthodox defenders of hell doctrine, the biblical story of “Lazarus and the Rich Man,” drawn from Luke 16, had often served as the ready and easy support for the traditional view of eternal punishment. The parable concerns the death of a wealthy man and of the beggar, Lazarus, who in life lay in the rich man’s gate, begging for scraps falling from the table. In the afterlife, the wealthy man, burning and thirsty in a place the King James Version of the Bible called “hell” saw Lazarus far off, resting comforted in the arms of Father Abraham. The rich man begged that Abraham send Lazarus to him with water, but to no avail, nor was Lazarus allowed to warn the man’s brothers of the fate that awaited them. For orthodox ministers, the Lazarus story was a clear indication that Scripture taught an eternal and irrevocable heaven and a hell, with one’s fate fixed.⁸⁴

Theodore Clapp welcomed a debate on the Lazarus story and the chance to talk about the original Hebrew: “In the original the word *hell* is not to be found; but the two men are represented as being in *Hades*—the intermediate state between the death of the body and the general resurrection.”⁸⁵ He claimed, “Now it is admitted, I believe, by every orthodox commentator and divine, that Hades is limited in its duration. Everywhere in the Scriptures it is spoken of as a place that is to be destroyed.” From the same article, he wrote, “It contains not a

⁸⁴ *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Eyre and Strahan, 1825). Luke 16: 23.

⁸⁵ “Second Reply of Mr. Clapp to the Rev. J. H. Martin, on Future Punishment,” 4.

syllable in favor of the idea that the state of the rich man, spoken of, will be eternal in duration.”⁸⁶

Clapp exaggerated, of course. Not every commentator agreed. But, thanks in no small part to the early nineteenth-century debates with the Universalists, the clergy of virtually every denomination also had to take up the question of the intermediate state. While they had been able to take a unified stance against Universalists on eternal punishment, however, they were unable to stand together on what happens between death and Judgment.

Universalists themselves even experienced a split, reunification, and metamorphosis during the antebellum period over the question of an intermediate place. Early Universalists believed there was no punishment after death—that God’s justice was handled in life. But a faction arose within the denomination in the early nineteenth century called “Restorationists,” who believed that those who die unprepared for heaven go to a place of punishment and refinement. This place could last for as long as 50,000 years. But in the end, all would be restored to God’s fellowship. The denomination split over this in the 1830s, but was mended over time by making room for the various interpretations.⁸⁷ According to Ann Bressler, by 1850, most Universalists had come to believe in a limited punishment after death—an intermediate place of restoration.⁸⁸

As the Restorationist interpretation grew in acceptance, there was less to distinguish Universalists from a portion of Unitarians who believed in the eventual restoration of all souls after some sort of refining period in an intermediate place, as well. In 1844, a writer for the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 111–126.

⁸⁸ Bressler, *Universalist Movement in America*, 46.

Trumpet and Universalist Magazine expressed exasperation that, after thirty years, it was still impossible to determine what Unitarians believed about the “Doctrine of Endless Punishment” because of their ambiguous and contradictory responses to the question.⁸⁹ Unitarians resisted doctrinal creeds as a matter of principle, so any delineation of beliefs would have created controversy within the denomination.

Some Unitarians believed that there was no hell, but also no heaven waiting for those who were unable to reach a state of refinement.⁹⁰ The soul unworthy of heaven would simply be annihilated.⁹¹ Some suggested that hell was of limited duration, but that the wicked would be annihilated after a certain period of time—or perhaps after Judgment Day. The idea was not new, certainly. It had been the teaching of Irenaeus of Lyons in 180 C.E. and of Tertullian of Carthage.⁹² It had been contemplated by “freethinkers” during the Enlightenment, as well.⁹³ In his diary in 1854, southern politician and planter James Henry Hammond—a man who never became committed spiritually to evangelical religion—expressed his frustration with an angry God who seemed never to mete out goodness to the good, saying: “The result of my experience

⁸⁹ “Important Question Yet Unsatisfied,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, June 22, 1844, 2.

⁹⁰ Benedict, *History of All Religions*, 246; “The Ancient History of Universalism,” *Christian Examiner and General Review*, May 1830, 261.

⁹¹ “Religious,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, August 8, 1840, 1.

⁹² Butler, *Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling: Heaven and Hell in American Revivalism, 1870–1920*, 10.

⁹³ Jean-Baptiste Massillon, *Sermons*, trans. William Dickson, vol. 1, Second American Edition (Philadelphia: M. Carey and Son & D. Allinson, 1803, 1818), 251; Christopher S McClure, “The Politics of Mortality” (Ph.D., Government, Georgetown University, 2011), 79–80.

of Life and Him is that I pant for *Annihilation*. Would it come and *easily this night*.”⁹⁴ The concept of annihilation did not surface with great frequency in southern publications, including sermons, of the time, but when it did, it usually did not require extensive explanation—indicating that it was commonly understood.⁹⁵

Orthodox Protestants also did not generally accept the attachment of a probationary idea to the discussion of an intermediate state, which raised the specter of the concept of purgatory. The *Southern Episcopal Register* addressed the question, saying, “The Scriptures speak of no other period of probation than that which is allotted to man during the present life.”⁹⁶ A war of words began in a New Orleans paper when a local Catholic priest asked people to pray for the soul of Andrew Jackson. Someone identified only as “Protestant” declared, “It is a wicked invention of the Priests, to cheat misguided men out of their money at the peril of their immortal souls.”⁹⁷ The priest responded, asking first why the Protestant felt his own opinion belonged in the paper, but the priest should never have been allowed to voice his in the first place. Then he asked the Protestant where the souls of all those who had died from the time of Adam until the ascension of Christ had gone? “The plain inference is,” he wrote, “that they were detained in a place or condition distinct from either heaven or hell, call it what you please, we think it proper

⁹⁴ Diary Entry October 3, 1854, from James Henry Hammond, *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder / Edited by Carol K. Bleser*, ed. Carol K. Rothrock Bleser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 264.

⁹⁵ “Miscellaneous. Masonic Address,” *Alabama Watchman*, October 13, 1820, 4; Mackenzie, “Religion,” *Cherokee Phoenix*, March 18, 1829; “The Martyr-Philosopher,” *Statesman and Gazette*, June 15, 1831.

⁹⁶ “Appendix to the Apostles’ Creed Briefly Explained and Practically Considered: On Future Punishment,” 269.

⁹⁷ “[Untitled],” *Jeffersonian Republican*, July 17, 1845.

to call it Purgatory. Many who affect to sneer at it, may go farther and fare worse.”⁹⁸ This question of the fate of the souls of all who died before there was a Redeemer in which to believe was an intriguing thread of the debate over the intermediate place.

Another theory held that the soul remained in the grave with the body until called up at Judgment Day.⁹⁹ A nondenominational evangelical publication entered into the discussion of “Hades” in 1817, with “On subjects of minor importance, minute explanation would be entirely unnecessary. But when those which embrace our faith, our habits, or our hopes, are questioned, it becomes a matter of serious and of fair discussion.” It sought to demonstrate that “Hades” means the grave and not a literal, local hell.¹⁰⁰ People who had difficulty with the idea that Jesus descended into hell after his death as Acts 2:31 might suggest found it important to prove that Hades was not hell. Those who could not bear the idea that dead loved ones were trapped for ages in the grave were eased by speculations like the one in a Carolina devotional book, which claimed that the “disembodied spirit rests in an unconscious, unfeeling state,” instead.¹⁰¹

One of the most popular theories held that upon death the soul would be instantly in its final place—heaven or hell.¹⁰² In the monthly *Baptist Preacher*—a publication much read by southern ministers—Rev. Sylvanus Landrum wrote: “There is no intermediate state for us in the world to come. There are but two places to which the souls of men go when the fitful dream of

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ “Hades,” *Evangelical Guardian and Review*, May 1, 1817, 30–31.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰¹ A. W. Mangum, *Myrtle Leaves, Or, Tokens at the Tomb* (Raleigh, NC: Branson & Farrar, 1864), 73.

¹⁰² Ibid., 74.

life is broken, to heaven or to hell.” He took no pains to examine the exegesis of Scriptural terms regarding an intermediate place. He simply denied there was one.¹⁰³ In 1855, another Baptist publication popular in the South, the *Christian Review*, took up the question, acknowledging the “very deep interest” it raised, and the unpleasantness of the idea of an indefinite period of waiting between death and heaven. Given that the body disintegrated, this author believed that it was reasonable to assume that the soul would be awake and active through this period, reminding Baptists that Paul had promised that “so great a cloud of witnesses” are observing us. Ultimately, though, this Baptist said there is an intermediate reality, but we must content ourselves that little has been revealed about it.¹⁰⁴

In the eighteenth century, John Wesley had viewed Paradise as a holding place—an antechamber of heaven, where the souls of the dead wait for judgment—and Hades a similar holding place for hell. He did not believe that the story of Lazarus and the rich man was a parable, but a depiction of these contiguous spaces—Paradise and Hades, where the righteous Lazarus awaited judgment to eternal reward and the unredeemed rich man awaited judgment to eternal hell.¹⁰⁵ A Methodist funeral sermon, on the other hand, preached in Texas in 1849, was titled, “The State of the Departed Souls Demonstrated, in Opposition to the False Notions of their Sleep in the Grave, or their Consignment to a Middle Place.” This sermon indicated that the dead maintain full consciousness at death and go instantly to heaven or hell. They would not,

¹⁰³ Rev. Sylvanus Landrum, “The Two Ways: A Sermon,” *Baptist Preacher*, February 1854, 36.

¹⁰⁴ “Art. IV—The Intermediate State,” *Christian Review*, July 1, 1855, 381–388, 407–408.

¹⁰⁵ Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, I:533–534.

however, engage fully in the joys or horrors of each until after judgment, according to this interpretation.¹⁰⁶

Southern bookstores stocked and advertised an 1845 book by Episcopal Rector J. W. McCullough titled *The Dead in Christ: An Inquiry Concerning the Intermediate State, the Future Blessedness, and the Mutual Recognition*. He wrote the book “to counteract, in the mind of the reader, the general tendency of the age to rationalism and scepticism, and induce, if possible, a deeper feeling of holy awe and reverence for invisible beings, and things spiritual and eternal.”¹⁰⁷ He believed that the good and evil dead were both in Hades, awaiting judgment. He dismissed the idea that this intermediate place was beneath the earth’s surface, writing that few intelligent people still believed that hell was at the center of the earth.¹⁰⁸ McCullough’s concept of Hades was that it shared our spatial environment, just on the other side of a thin veil. “Embodied spirits come up close to one side of the barrier of materialism; and unembodied and disembodied spirits come up close to the other. The prayers and aspirations of men are heard on the other side; the whispers and revelations of spirits on this side.” Humans had isolated themselves “by sensualism and unbelief from the communion of other orders of intelligent beings.”¹⁰⁹ Episcopalians were the most keen audience for McCullough’s book at first, but he

¹⁰⁶ Rev. Chauncey Richardson, *A Sermon Preached on the Occasion of the Death of Mrs. Sarah Milton Whipple* (Houston, TX: Office of the “Telegraph,” n.d.), 4–9.

¹⁰⁷ J. W. McCullough, MA, *The Dead in Christ: An Inquiry Concerning the Intermediate State, the Future Blessedness, and the Mutual Recognition* (Baltimore: Joseph Robinson, 1845), ix–x; “Advertisement 1 — No Title,” *Charleston Gospel Messenger and Protestant Episcopal Register*, January 1846, 1; “Advertisement 2 — No Title,” *Episcopal Recorder*, August 16, 1845, 2.

¹⁰⁸ McCullough, MA, *Dead in Christ*, 61, 71–73.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

took criticism for it as unrepresentative of Episcopalian doctrine, because he suggested that some remediation of sin happened in the afterlife.¹¹⁰ His interpretation would become of particular interest to a broader audience, though, as the Spiritualist movement took hold in the next decade.

The whole issue grew more complex when paired with the question about the various terms that had come to mean “hell” to modern audiences. Scholars disagreed over whether the original usage referred to *eternal* punishment. Theodore Clapp taught that the word “sheol,” which was often interpreted “hell” in Old Testament translations was never associated with a word meaning “eternal.” He pointed out that the word never appeared in the Old Testament, and asked whether that entire document had been a “tremendous fraud,” to have omitted something so vital.¹¹¹

All of the words translated “hell” in the Old and New Testament became rich fodder for sermons and articles that addressed the issue of universal salvation. Even as the disputants might come to agreement that a term could indicate a place of punishment, the debate then turned to whether the original scribes had in mind *eternal* punishment. Another sign, therefore, that a veiled pro- or anti-Universalist conversation was in progress was exegetical discussions of words like “everlasting,” “eternal,” or the Anglicized equivalents of the Greek: *aion* or *aionion*.¹¹² For the most part, scholars could all agree that some uses of these terms meant “endless” or “forever” and some meant “for a very long time.” But they could not agree about which was meant in which context. Theodore Clapp wrote, “They who peruse the Holy Scriptures in the English

¹¹⁰ “For the Episcopal Recorder,” *Episcopal Recorder*, November 9, 1850.

¹¹¹ “Meaning of the Word Hell,” *Christian Register*, May 6, 1848, 27:19.

¹¹² “Religious and Moral: Future Retribution,” *Augusta Chronicle*, August 27, 1823; Campbell, *Five Discourses on Hell*, 11–12.

language only are led astray by the circumstance that the original words rendered by our translators “forever, everlasting,” &c., do not by necessity signify an endless duration.”¹¹³ In his “Five Discourses on Hell,” Presbyterian minister Alexander Campbell of New Orleans refuted Theodore Clapp’s analysis of the Greek words *aion* and *aionios*, citing Aristotle as his defense.¹¹⁴

Often tied to the defense of eternal punishment was a question about degrees of punishment. This came in reaction to the Universalist charge that a fair Deity could not see identical torment as equally due every unsaved soul. The Rev. Wilbur Fisk, writing about “Future Rewards and Punishments” in *Methodist Magazine* in 1823, acknowledged fairness in future punishment might require differences in the degrees of misery, but not in the duration. “Man will exist for ever,” he wrote, “and that endless existence may be either happy or miserable.”¹¹⁵ An Episcopalian response to challenges to eternal punishment appeared in an 1834 issue of the *Gospel Messenger and Southern Episcopal Recorder*—and like so many others, it never used the word “Universalist.” This author agreed that the words translated “everlasting, eternal, for ever and ever” in Scripture could sometimes mean eternity and sometimes “ages and ages.” But he countered the claims of Universalists by saying that, if the words did not mean eternal when applied to hell, then they could not be assumed to mean eternal when applied to heaven. He, also, acknowledged that hell would offer less affliction to a

¹¹³ “Meaning of the Word Hell,” 2.

¹¹⁴ Campbell, *Five Discourses on Hell*, 11–12. This Campbell should not be confused with the founder of the Disciples of Christ, or “Campbellite” movement.

¹¹⁵ Rev. Wilbur Fisk, “Future Rewards and Punishments,” *Methodist Magazine*, October 1823, 366.

“heathen sinner who never heard of the Son of God.”¹¹⁶ In other words, the punishments of hell would be measured and fair.

The publications that undermined the idea of universal salvation without overtly attacking Universalism far outweigh direct attacks on the Universalist Church and its members in the publications popular with southerners. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the ideas challenging hell and the people considering them were more widespread in the South than were those officially labeled Universalist. For the orthodox Christian, then, the battle was to be waged against both the explicit and implicit expressions of this presumed heresy.

THE BATTLE OVER HELL

The wrangling to undermine or defend the concept of hell took a number of forms during the antebellum period in the Deep South. The veiled anti-Universalist oratory in orthodox pulpits worked quietly to discourage straying from within the church. Outside its doors the war, for all its attempts at nineteenth-century civility, could at times get quite rude. There were public debates and editorial battles. There were power plays and now and then a pure-and-simple dirty trick. At stake, though, were the souls of humanity (to the orthodox) and the character of God (to the Universalists), with cheering and adamant supporters on both sides, and a group of questioners often growing more frustrated with the wrangling.

A Universalist minister arrived in New Orleans in 1823 and began to draw a crowd of two or three hundred. He also drew the ire of the mayor who threatened to fine and imprison the preacher if he attempted to preach the doctrine of universal salvation in his town again. A

¹¹⁶ “Appendix to the Apostles’ Creed Briefly Explained and Practically Considered: On Future Punishment,” 268–269.

Universalist supporter who owned a vessel docked in the river opened it to the public, and a substantial crowd boarded to hear a Universalist sermon safely out of the town limits. A local citizen lambasted the mayor in the local paper for his own proclivity to attend illegal “bull baiting” exhibitions, while making it against city code for several hundred Universalists to worship freely in their own town. The embarrassed mayor did not hinder Universalist ministers in New Orleans again.¹¹⁷

Southern readers of the *Methodist Magazine* received early exposure to the reactions of their ministers to the perceived growing threat of Universalism beginning in the June 1823 issue. An address of Rev. Timothy Merritt to the New-England Conference, titled “A Discourse on Future Punishment,” offered from beginning to end a reaction to Hosea Ballou’s *Treatise on Atonement*, which had become the primer of American Universalism. Merritt promised to “show the absurdity” of Ballou’s system—and Merritt did render it quite absurd in the mangled form in which Merritt presented it. He stated, for example, “The Treatise we are examining does not allow that we are under even the law of love to God . . . we are under no law of God. . . . He gives us to understand that sin is not an infinite evil, he has told us in substance that it is a great good”—not the intended teaching of Ballou.¹¹⁸ The length of the article, spanning four issues, and the alarm of Merritt’s tone also belie his attempt to paint Ballou’s treatment as absurd. Clearly Merritt saw a threat in Ballou’s teaching. Of further interest, from the makeup of the article, he assumed that the rest of the ministers were already familiar with Ballou’s *Treatise* and the Universalist threat. “You have had occasion to lament the pernicious effects of this doctrine

¹¹⁷ Thomas Whittemore, *The Modern History of Universalism from the Era of the Reformation to the Present Time* (Cambridge, MA: Author, 1830), 424–427.

¹¹⁸ “A Discourse on Future Punishment,” 203.

in every part of our country,” he wrote. “Wherever it has been received by the thoughtless, it produces an indifference to religion, contempt of the threatenings of God’s word, neglect of salvation, and encourages men to indulge in whatever dissipation and folly their depravity may incline them to pursue.”¹¹⁹ For southerners reading this at a distance in 1823, the broadening effects of this idea would soon be felt.

Delegates to the South Carolina Convention of Universalists in 1833 reported that the clergy in one community had deliberately scheduled special services, in order to prevent their members from also attending the meetings of a visiting Universalist minister.¹²⁰ Southerners were curious about the debates over church doctrine and were often willing to show up when a Universalist minister appeared in town.¹²¹ When Universalists attempted to meet privately in a home in one Georgia community, within site of the Methodist church, the Methodist preacher complained that the neighborhood was being desecrated.¹²² And, while it was customary for southern churches to open their pulpits to traveling Protestant ministers, they tended to be closed to Universalists. Even Theodore Clapp had let congregation members pressure him into retracting a pulpit invitation he had made to the preacher and newspaper editor L. F. W. Andrews, who was traveling through New Orleans in 1834, before Clapp had openly declared his

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 202.

¹²⁰ Fuller, “Proceedings of the South Carolina Convention of Universalists, A.D. 1822: Order of Public Services. Circular Letter,” 4.

¹²¹ Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 426; Richard Eddy, D.D., *Universalism in America: A History (Vol II: 1801–1886)* (Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1886), 376–377.

¹²² Miller, *Larger Hope, The First Century*, 752.

belief in universal salvation. In the years to come, Clapp would change his stance.¹²³ As a minister set up a new Universalist church in Mobile ten years later, he wrote of the encouragement he was receiving from Clapp: “He says he is anxious to ‘fraternize’ with clergymen of our denomination, because he fully and perfectly agrees with us in regard to the future destiny of man.”¹²⁴

For many orthodox southerners, Universalists and Unitarians fell outside the boundaries of acceptable Christian doctrine. The Rev. Carey Crane of Columbus, Mississippi, addressing an 1845 meeting of the local Baptist association, preached a sermon later published in a national journal for Baptist clergy. In it Crane allowed a degree of ecumenical brotherhood with other Christians, saying: “The pivot of our faith is sovereign grace, manifested through the mediation and intercession of Jesus Christ. Whatever views of truth which do not derogate from this pivot, nor deny the trinity and a future state of rewards and punishments, are allowed, though not always encouraged or sustained,” which included virtually all existing Protestant denominations as brothers accept Unitarians and Universalists.¹²⁵

The defection of a minister toward or away from Universalist doctrine in any part of the country drew attention in the antebellum southern press. New England minister Matthew Hale Smith became the butt of jokes in the New Orleans *Picayune* in 1840 due to his on-again-off-again commitment to Universalism. A year later Smith published his sensational autobiography, *Universalism Examined, Renounced, Exposed*, promising the “Testimony of Universalist

¹²³ “Universalism,” *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, May 31, 1834; “The South,” 94.

¹²⁴ “Universalism in Mobile,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, March 9, 1844, 150.

¹²⁵ Crane, “History and Principles of Baptists,” 143, 161.

Ministers to the Dreadful Moral Tendency of Their Faith.” The book was in its twelfth printing in two years.¹²⁶

A number of southern ministers who converted to Universalism began to preach the new doctrine immediately upon making the announcement of their conversion—rather than taking time away to master the new ideas or to grow into leadership roles. The *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* reported the conversion of two Methodist ministers in Fayetteville, Tennessee, and their speedy organization of a church there.¹²⁷ Campbellite minister C. F. R. Shehane converted to Universalism in 1841 and was soon engaged in public debates against orthodox ministers in Wetumpka, Alabama. The *Messenger of Glad Tidings*—a local Universalist paper—reassured its audience that, while Shehane was a recent convert, the doctrine was “easy to be understood, and his knowledge of the Bible qualifies him to go forth in power.”¹²⁸ It is also fair to assume that these ministers studied the questions surrounding the change of doctrine for quite some time before announcing their defections from orthodoxy. They were, therefore, likely quite able to preach and defend their faith from the beginning of their public conversions.

¹²⁶ “Hard To Keep The Run,” *Daily Picayune*, August 18, 1840; Matthew Hale Smith, *Universalism Examined, Renounced, Exposed: In a Series of Lectures, Embracing the Experience of the Author During a Ministry of Twelve Years, and the Testimony of Universalist Ministers to the Dreadful Moral Tendency of Their Faith* (Tappan & Dennet, 1842); “The Christian Advocate,” *Nashville Union and American*, August 11, 1854; “Episcopal Bishop Turned Universalist,” *Daily Confederation*, June 8, 1858.

¹²⁷ A. F., “Universalism in Tennessee,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, March 30, 1850; “Another Conversion in the Ministry,” *Universalist Magazine*, May 31, 1823, 196.

¹²⁸ “Discussion in Alabama,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, September 2, 1843, 42.

Antebellum southerners found a vivid imagery of hell in the literature and drama available to them. One did not have to travel to a revival or camp meeting to get the horrible details of monstrous creatures and wretched agony, though such rhetoric was a staple there.¹²⁹ John Milton's *Paradise Lost* began to reappear as a standard in southern bookstores advertisements in the late 1820s, reviving interest in the classic depiction, where new generations were able to read of a land of "hideous giants" and "terror-punishment."¹³⁰ Robert Pollok's epic poem *The Course of Time* drew much attention following its 1827 appearance and had a resurgence in the mid-1840s. It followed a heavenly traveler as he stumbled into hell and sought an explanation for its horrors—including an undying worm with a "1,000 snaky heads."¹³¹ An explanation of the Apostles' Creed in an Episcopal magazine warned: "*There*, conscience never sleeps, and Satan is ever active, in his business and his pleasure to torture his victims."¹³² These depictions sold books, filled auditoriums and camp sites, and brought people to their knees.

Did the terror of hell save people? In New Orleans in 1848, this question raised an interesting point of dispute between Theodore Clapp and the Presbyterian Alexander Campbell. Clapp's famous "Discourse on Hell" had boldly claimed, "This doctrine, since its first

¹²⁹ Stella, "A Night at A Camp Meeting," *Southern Ladies Companion*, December 1848, 211; Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 25. Sarah Gayle of Alabama described the rhetoric of a local Methodist camp meeting as "threatenings and maledictions."

¹³⁰ "[Advertisement]," *Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA, November 8, 1828); "[Untitled]," *Macon Weekly Telegraph* (Macon, GA, December 11, 1830); "The Southern Literary Messenger," *National Banner and Nashville Whig* (Nashville, TN, September 25, 1835)

¹³¹ Robert Pollok, *The Course of Time: A Poem, in Ten Books*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1827); "New Books," *Southern Galaxy*, October 16, 1828 (Advertisement); "Just Received," *Augusta Chronicle*, February 28, 1829 (Advertisement); "Pollok's Description of Hell," *Universalist Watchman, Repository and Chronicle*, September 7, 1844, 60.

¹³² "Appendix to the Apostles' Creed Briefly Explained and Practically Considered: On Future Punishment," 268.

promulgation, has never been able to prevent a single sin—a single species of crime—nor to convert a single sinner. On the contrary, it has operated, immeasurably, to multiply and increase the very mischiefs it was intended to suppress.”¹³³ Campbell, in his written response to Clapp, challenged his audience to compare the “number of conversions on each side” of “men of admitted wicked character and abandoned habits, such as drunkards, debauches, gamblers, and persons of profane and dishonest lives—men of falsehood, deceit and cruelty.”¹³⁴ Both men were seeking to get to the truth of the question of hell by asking, is the idea effective? Neither could produce a measure of effectiveness that would satisfy the other. Clapp could not accept that people professing faith out of fear had truly entered a state of life-changing faith. Campbell, on the other hand, did not expect people to profess faith without the concept of hell attached. For Clapp, “mischief” was the byproduct of hell doctrine, and for Campbell, the absence of hell doctrine meant the loss of souls. The tone of the two men in dealing with each other demonstrated that the stakes were much higher for Campbell, who considered Clapp an enemy of salvation.

Fear could be an effective tool of persuasion, and both sides of the Universalist debate employed it. Commentators sought to defend or overturn the doctrine of future punishment armed with stories of murders and suicides—all attributable to the belief in hell or the lack thereof.¹³⁵ In 1820, a writer using the pseudonym “Philanthropist” wrote to *Universalist Magazine*: “Only convince people that God is their enemy, that the Almighty Ruler of heaven

¹³³ “A Discourse on Hell.”

¹³⁴ Campbell, *Five Discourses on Hell*, 7.

¹³⁵ Bressler, *Universalist Movement in America*, 60. Bressler has described the heavy reporting by Universalists of suicides following religious revivals.

and earth is and always will be their avowed foe, that they are inevitably to be damned for some slight offence which they may have committed, and you will set husbands to murdering wives, and mothers to murdering children; you will cause anarchy and disorder to reign triumphant, and render abortive the laws of God and man.” He reported that a woman, just a few months earlier, fearful that her children would eventually commit a wrong that would send them to hell, murdered them. And just weeks earlier, in nearby Rockingham, he said, a woman had cut her own throat—leaving behind her husband and children to fend for themselves—because she was convinced she would not be saved.¹³⁶ Even before Theodore Clapp had publicly declared himself convinced of universal salvation, a correspondent published a sermon in which Clapp told the story of a father throwing his two sons off a bridge after hearing a sermon about hell.¹³⁷ But accusations were also turned against Universalists. An 1829 article titled “Twelve Reasons for Not Being a Universalist” pointed out that, for believers in the creed, “the present life has no purpose, and when trouble outweighs joy in life, you have a duty to murder yourself or friends.”¹³⁸ The *New York Evangelist*, in 1842, blamed Universalism for a recent suicide—saying that a Calvinist would have never taken such a step, knowing the penalty that awaited.¹³⁹

Of course, extreme examples have long served as rhetorical tools. The degree to which they reflected or influenced thought is impossible to measure, but an entry in Sarah Gayle’s journal offers some insight into the mind of a southern mother in 1827. Gayle worried, as has

¹³⁶ “Communications: Horrible Effects of the Doctrine of Endless Misery,” *Universalist Magazine*, November 25, 1820, 85.

¹³⁷ “Universalism in New Orleans,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, November 18, 1843, 86, 16:22.

¹³⁸ “Twelve Reasons for Not Being a Universalist,” 387.

¹³⁹ “Shrewdness of Calvinism,” *New York Evangelist*, December 1, 1842, 188.

been said, about her own salvation and that of her mother. As she sat watching her daughter play one day, she began to worry about her child's future. Then, she remembered the infant she lost in childbirth and thought, "'There's the rub.' One little one is safe, the innocent babe that never breathed in this world—that is now a child of Paradise."¹⁴⁰ Given the terrifying rhetoric of hell, the burden on a parent to see a child safely to heaven must have been quite heavy—particularly when the parent found herself moving between tentative faith and borderline skepticism, never finding peace. Even as late as the Civil War period, bereaved mothers expressed a similar consolation that their children had been removed from temptation before they were old enough to fall prey to it.¹⁴¹ And for some, even an established creed brought no relief. Theodore Clapp recalled his anguished discomfort, observing a distraught mother at the funeral of her small child as a Calvinist minister delivered the eulogy, suggesting that God might not be able, "in perfect consistency with infinite justice" to take the child to heaven because all bear "the guilt of Adam's first sin."¹⁴²

Some undoubtedly attended the debates for entertainment, but for many, the "hell question" remained a gaping need, drawing southerners to watch and read about debates. The *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* reported a war of words going on between Theodore Clapp and Jerome Twichell, a Presbyterian minister in New Orleans. Clapp had claimed that the Old Testament never once mentioned hell, but it appeared fifty-three times in the translations in common use. Twichell began a running argument in the local *Delta* over the accuracy of Clapp's

¹⁴⁰ Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 29–30.

¹⁴¹ Virginia Davis Gray, *Life in Confederate Arkansas: The Diary of Virginia Davis Gray*, ed. Carl H. Moneyhon (Fayetteville, AR: Arkansas Historical Association, 1983), 52.

¹⁴² Clapp, *Clapp's Autobiographical Sketches*, 9–10.

exegesis of the words interpreted “hell.” The *Trumpet* gleefully reported on the debate when Clapp was able to publish letters from the two leading Hebrew scholars in New Orleans supporting Clapp’s scholarship.¹⁴³

The debate over the proper scriptural translations of Greek and Hebrew terms posed a problem for ministers and lay people who wanted to decipher the truth. Each scholar needed only accuse the other of a faulty interpretation and nonscholars did not have the education to determine where the truth lay. When Methodist minister Daniel Isaac reprimanded four prominent Universalists in his 1819 treatise *The Doctrine of Universal Restoration Examined and Refuted*, he expressed the angst: “It is surely a pity we are not all critics, and capable of embellishing our pages with Greek characters—what wonderful things we might bring to light! By introducing words into a work from the dead languages, the vulgar are led to consider the author as a man of learning, and on that ground to attach a degree of importance to his production which it often ill deserves.”¹⁴⁴ Alexander Campbell attacked the educational credentials of Hosea Ballou, Walter Balfour, and Theodore Clapp (whose credentials were very similar to his own), writing: “Authors of these interpretations are either unlearned or unstable men, and possibly they may, in some cases, be both; also, when we know men to be unlearned and unstable, or both, we may be equally certain, that whenever they become commentators on the Bible, they will wrest the holy oracles, pervert their meaning, and change the truth of God into a lie.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ “Controversy in New Orleans,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, July 20, 1850, 22.

¹⁴⁴ Isaac, *Doctrine of Universal Restoration Examined and Refuted*, 152.

¹⁴⁵ Campbell, *Five Discourses on Hell*, 31, 35.

Appeals repeatedly went out to ministers to enter into public debates over the question of universal salvation. Debates were highly publicized, well attended, and—depending on what publication was telling the story—always a glorious victory for their own defender. A debate in Greenville, Georgia, in 1838 drew a “large collection of people” for five hours.¹⁴⁶ In 1843, the *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* celebrated the triumph of the Universalist C. F. R. Shehane over the “Partialist” Rev. J. L. Chapman in Wetumpka, Alabama—offering Shehane’s closing speech to subscribers.¹⁴⁷ Nightly, crowds overflowed the Temperance Hall in 1848 Charleston to hear the discussion between Dr. Dods and Rev. Mr. Haynes “in relation to the truth of endless punishment or universal salvation.”¹⁴⁸ The debate between Theodore Clapp and Alexander Campbell in New Orleans that same year was never face to face, but was held from their separate pulpits—with the sermons published after the fact—where they attacked each other’s creeds and obliquely their character.¹⁴⁹

Methodist Rev. Lovick Pierce defended himself in Georgia newspapers after the publication of what purported to be the transcript of his three-day debate with the Universalist C. F. R. Shehane at Americus, Georgia, in March of 1850. Pierce claimed that the “reporter” John C. Burruss had edited his two-hour speech to twenty minutes and published it, despite their agreement beforehand that he would not publish the debate without Pierce’s endorsement.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ P. Brownson, “Universalism in Georgia,” *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, April 28, 1838.

¹⁴⁷ “Discussion in Alabama.”

¹⁴⁸ “Endless Punishment,” *Augusta Chronicle*, May 1, 1848.

¹⁴⁹ Campbell, *Five Discourses on Hell*; “Meaning of the Word Hell.”

¹⁵⁰ “Universalism and Myself,” *Savannah Republican*, August 24, 1850.

Pierce followed soon with a treatise titled, *Universalism Examined and Condemned, upon the Principles of a Common Sense Interpretation of the Bible—Being the Substance of My Replies to Mr. C. F. R. Shehane.*¹⁵¹ In it he included the transcript of a letter of appeal from a group of three Baptists, five Universalists, four Methodists, and three unaffiliated who had initiated the debate. They wrote him, saying, “We, the undersigned, are desirous of hearing the doctrine of Universalism, which has caused so much excitement in this section of the country.”¹⁵² He apologized for having to engage in public discord, but said that propriety demanded that he respond to the pamphlet in which “my arguments are so abridged as to make them appear ridiculous.”¹⁵³ He also included letters with Shehane that laid out the terms of the debate. Pierce insisted that they must agree only to debate “the natural, unsophisticated, common sense meaning of the Scriptures.” He insisted: “You need not plan to draw me into a war of words. It is not the *humbug pageantry of words* that we need, but the settlement of truth, by the natural and common sense meaning of the Bible.”¹⁵⁴ Pierce, in other words, had no intention of debating the Greek and Hebrew origins of “Sheol,” “Tartarus,” “Gehenna,” “*aion*,” or any other of the terms under dispute. He wanted to use the King James Version of Scripture as “common sense,” the King James Version being clearly in favor of the non-Universalist view of eternal punishment. Shehane apparently had his own ideas about what “common sense” meant and the debate had embarrassed Pierce, who attempted to prevent the publication of its transcripts. John Burruss,

¹⁵¹ Pierce and YA Pamphlet Collection (Library of Congress), *Universalism, Examined and Condemned, upon the Principles of a Common Sense Interpretation of the Bible, Being the Substance of My Replies to C.F.R. Shehane, in a Debate with Him at Americus, March, 1850.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, v.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vi–vii.

who preached and edited a Universalist newspaper in Notasulga, Alabama, responded to Pierce's complaint by publishing *Letters to Rev. Lovick Pierce, D.D.* in 1853. In it he addressed Pierce's charges, suggesting that most of Pierce's rhetoric in the debate was read directly from the *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, which when stripped down to his original thoughts left only the very brief text.¹⁵⁵

Debates like this one had embarrassed any number of ministers who had never been formally trained to read the ancient Greek and Hebrew, or were rusty with the languages, and found themselves feeling foolish when the debate inevitably moved in that direction. The year after the debate, an article in the *Southern Methodist Pulpit* encouraged the creation of education societies for young Methodist ministers, saying, "The Christian ministry to be useful must be respected. . . . To be respected the ministry must cultivate itself more—if not in the literature and sciences of the world, at least in the peculiar science of its own profession."¹⁵⁶ Ministers who might have felt very accomplished at debates over what the Bible *says* found themselves out of their depth when the subject turned to more complicated interpretive issues.

For onlookers, this must have been great drama, given the packed buildings and long sessions, night after night. Certainly, many came to the fray with minds made up, a team chosen, and cheering for points won. These wars of words, however, left others with a very modern dilemma—the dilemma of making up their own minds. The days of memorizing catechism in a

¹⁵⁵ John C. Burruss, *Letters to Rev. Lovick Pierce, D.D.: Being a Review of a Pamphlet Recently Published by Him Entitled "Universalism Examined and Condemned," Purporting to Be the Substance of His Replies to Rev. C.F.R. Shehane, in a Debate with Him at Americus, Ga., March 1850* (Notasulga, AL: The author, 1853), 13–17.

¹⁵⁶ "Editorial Miscellany," *Southern Methodist Pulpit* 4 (1851): 50–53.

state-established church, and trusting the spiritual consequences to God's chosen shepherds, were gone.

* * *

Literate Protestants in the antebellum Deep South found themselves with more reading options than their ancestors could have imagined. The world around them was in a state of perpetual flux, but the realities of death and mourning were ever-present. While the Enlightenment-era rationalism had faded from southern drawing rooms, there were minds that still questioned what, for many, seemed most irreconcilable with some of the messages of Christianity: the concept of hell. Theodore Clapp's autobiography recalled the antebellum years, saying, "The Bible has passed through the severest ordeal to which it has ever been subjected."¹⁵⁷ The ripples of thought that kept some, like Sarah Gayle, from fully committing to the creeds of orthodox denominations shook the South in small, but uncomfortable ways throughout the antebellum period—creating cracks, more than breaks, in certitude. Was it possible that hell was a misinterpretation of Scripture?

As southerners read about or listened to the endless arguments over the exegesis of Scripture and the badly interpreted King James Version, some were willing to leave the responsibility for all of this to scholars and ministers. Surely, God would hold those in authority accountable for having misled them? But some felt the burden of determining for themselves where the truth lay—about hell, about Scripture, about it all.

¹⁵⁷ Clapp, *Clapp's Autobiographical Sketches*, 395.

CHAPTER IV.
QUESTIONING OTHERWORLDS: MYSTICAL PATHS TO THE BEYOND

It shall be a guide-book to my soul, telling of the pathway arched with galaxies and paved with suns, through which that soul shall pass in triumph to its final rest!

—Augusta Evans, *Beulah*, Beulah speaking of Jean-Paul Richter's "Dream upon the Universe"

During the antebellum period, "reasonable" religion attempted to quiet the enthusiasms of the Second Great Awakening. Westward emigration and the rise of industrialization and a market economy weakened familial and communal bonds. Skepticism stemming from disputes over scriptural translation and denominational creeds created a corresponding need for new forms of proof for beliefs people did not want to abandon, particularly beliefs concerning the afterlife. Americans began longing for a return to the mystical in their contemplation of the spiritual realm, even as they demanded that science undergird the mysticism.¹ As the southern frontiers grew into established communities, book markets expanded, competing churches were established, and theaters, libraries, and social circles created many alternatives for the thirsty minds of literate people. In their contemplation of the afterlife, a solid subset felt drawn to

¹ R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 6–7; "Mysticism, Christian" in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, 791–792. For purposes here, I use the term "mystical" in the occult sense of being privy to mysteries—not in the sense of Christian mysticism, which connects the human soul to God for purposes of improving that soul. The longing referred to in this chapter is for a glimpse behind the veil of the unseen. "Authority-Are Human Creeds Necessary!" *Sunday Delta*, September 12, 1858.

intriguing, if unorthodox, ideas.² Their interest in science took the form of experimentation in the supernatural—or in exploring it vicariously through the writings of those who dared experiment—writers such as Emanuel Swedenborg, Thomas De Quincey, and Andrew Jackson Davis. Literate southerners moved beyond the science of mesmerism to its mystical aspects, which laid the groundwork for a new variety of Spiritualism. Even ministers were often actively engaged in these forays into the spiritual unknown. No longer content with the vague and limited views of the afterlife available in Scripture, many mined dreams, visions, and spirit communications for what they hoped were first- or at least second-hand encounters with the world beyond. While southerners proved more resistant to these trends than northerners did, this impulse gathered sufficient force to affect the region. There is also reason to believe that a number of southerners were engaging in their exploration of these ideas by stealth. This not only suggests that numbers were likely larger than we might otherwise suspect, it raises the prospect that, for southerners, fear and guilt were attached to this pursuit. Both the resistance and the stealthy pursuit render the picture of the antebellum South quite variegated on the ideas of afterlife.³ The new waves of ideas running through the South created simultaneously a more robust image of heaven and a less horrendous hell.

² For an excellent discussion of the opening of the antebellum religious marketplace, see R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

³ John H. Wigger, “Taking Heaven by Storm: Enthusiasm and Early American Methodism, 1770–1820,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 14, no. 2 (July 1, 1994): 177–178. Wigger talks about persistence of supernaturalism among Methodists, despite nineteenth-century attempts to squelch it.

VICARIOUS MYSTICISM

The exploration of the spiritual realms beyond what Scripture described began for many following and reading about the experiences of others who dared to tread outside the bounds of orthodoxy or who were propelled in that direction by circumstances beyond their control. Southerners read the writings of European mystics and consumed the writings of Americans who claimed to have some special contact with supernatural realms. Stories of people encountering the dead or spirit beings while in trances or dreams captivated the attention of literate white southerners. Though still a second-hand accounting of the afterlife, these stories offered new insights into life beyond death from contemporaries or near-contemporaries. Time and changing meanings had not yet called as much into question about the original intent of these authors as it had for the writers and translators of Scripture. And the fact that people so near in time to antebellum southerners had been privileged to enjoy—or in some cases, endure—these experiences raised hope for some that these revelatory experiences might be available to average men and women.

Emanuel Swedenborg

The voluminous writings of eighteenth-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg remained in print and rather wide circulation in 1820, though he had been dead for more than half a century and had become somewhat obscure to southerners. As the thirst for vicarious experience of the afterlife grew during the antebellum period, however, Swedenborg became a familiar name in southern drawing rooms.⁴ His mysticism was heterodox in the details, while

⁴ Hawkins, J. T., “Swedenborg’s Skull,” *Augusta Chronicle*, June 7, 1823; “Reminiscences of a Tour to the South-West: Number One,” *Southern Literary Journal and Magazine of Arts*, April 1836, 107; “Notes of a Northern Excursion,” *Southern Rose*, March 4,

retaining a Christian framework, which made it more palatable for questioners who feared venturing too far from Scripture and tradition.⁵ Michael O'Brien has called the church that arose from Swedenborg's work "Protestantism suddenly grown optimistic and imaginative," with "an especial appeal to restless Presbyterians" in the South.⁶ While some dismissed Swedenborg as ridiculous, many found his elaborate descriptions of the spiritual realms worth exploring and believed they were getting an eye-witness accounting of heaven from a near-contemporary.⁷

Beginning in 1743, Swedenborg experienced visions of heavenly and infernal spheres while in trance states. He claimed that God had opened his spiritual eyes, enabling him from that time until his death in 1777 to carry on conversations with spiritual beings. He drew his writings from these conversations, which focused primarily on descriptions of the afterlife. He claimed to be reviving truths lost for thousands of years—truths about what he called the "correspondences" or correlations of the things of earth to those of the spiritual and celestial worlds. He saw himself

1837, 108; Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 181. McDannell and Lang have credited Swedenborg with creating the modern conception of heaven in the eighteenth century, offering "a vigorous alternative to an ascetic, theocentric heaven."

⁵ Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 599–601; Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*, 140–144; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 46. According to Schmidt, it was this continued immersion in Christian and biblical symbols in Swedenborg's work that led Ralph Waldo Emerson to be dismissive of the man's mysticism as laden with the baggage of tradition.

⁶ O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 1068.

⁷ Wilson, *Beulah*, 322, 409. Evans puts the name of Swedenborg into the dialogue of two different characters who are counseling Beulah Benton in her questioning. Her guardian responds to her anguished questioning with the statement, "My child, if I could aid you, I would gladly do so; but I am no Swedenborg, to whom the arcana of the universe have been revealed." The second, a young man who has come to visit, counsels her that no revelation is worthy or necessary beyond that "which began in Genesis, and ended with John on Patmos." Among the revelations he discounts are the "extravagances of Swedenborg . . . which prove the fallacy of the assumption of continued inspiration."

as responsible for the advent of a Church of the New Jerusalem—and such a church began, based on his principles.⁸ But many who read the works of Swedenborg—surely the majority who did so—read them without an affiliation with the church.⁹

Swedenborg described a universe of seven concentric realms—composed of three hells, three heavens, and a “world of spirits”—with God at the center as “the sun of heaven.”¹⁰ In Swedenborg’s cosmos, angels were once people who had since lived in the world of spirits and progressed to the heavenly kingdoms. Of these creatures, Swedenborg wrote, “Angels do have all the senses we do—far more delicate ones in fact.”¹¹ They communicate with language, form communities, and live in houses, have bedrooms, gardens, and flower beds. They become couples—in some cases reuniting with the marriage partner from life—but do not procreate. They live an active life, keeping busy with the work of church, community, and home. Communities have specific universal functions. Some work as guardian angels for the affairs of the world, for example, and some raise the children who died in infancy.¹² Swedenborg’s hells

⁸ Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary: Containing Definitions of All Religious Terms* (Philadelphia: Joseph J. Woodward, 1830), 575–576.

⁹ O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 398–399. O’Brien describes a Virginia historian who invited a guest to look through his books, which included “history, Politics, and even Swedenborgianism.”

¹⁰ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1758, 2000), 153; For a concise description of Swedenborgian doctrine written by a minister of the New Jerusalem Church, see John Hayward, *The Religious Creeds and Statistics of Every Christian Denomination in the United States and British Provinces* (J. Hayward, 1836), 106–107.

¹¹ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 175.

¹² Bernhard Lang, “On Heaven and Hell: A Historical Introduction to Swedenborg’s Most Popular Book,” in *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Heard & Seen*,

are not a place of punishment, but the natural environment of choice for those who preferred evil in life, because “volition makes us who we are.”¹³ These realms are filthy and dangerous, filled with thieves and tormenters, where inhabitants take on the appearance of the condition of their hearts, which is often monstrous, governed by fear. Swedenborg said that there is no progress out of hell, though God does send angels to ease the misery of those in the hells at times.¹⁴

A lull in interest in Swedenborg marked the early part of the antebellum period—a hiatus some credited against British poet Robert Southey, who had soundly ridiculed Swedenborg’s “unintelligible mythology” and disparaged his followers as heretical and loudly so in one of his famous satirical “Letters from Espriella,” which first appeared in 1808 and went into multiple printings.¹⁵ Though the writing was satirical, he did get to the heart of Swedenborg’s “celestial history” rather well in this synopsis:

I am copying from the books of his believers when I tell you—that his interiors were opened by the Lord; that he conversed with the dead, and with the very worst devils without danger; that he spoke the angelic language, and respired the angels’ atmosphere; that for twenty-six years he was in the spirit, and at the same time in the body; that he could let his spirit into the body or out of the body at pleasure; that he had been in all the planets, and in all the heavens, and had even descended into hell.¹⁶

by Emanuel Swedenborg (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1758, 2000), 15–20. The material not directly quoted from Swedenborg is drawn from Lang’s introduction.

¹³ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 94, 361, 378.

¹⁴ Lang, “On Heaven and Hell: A Historical Introduction to Swedenborg’s Most Popular Book,” 16–20; Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 413.

¹⁵ Robert Southey, *Letters from England: By Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella*, vol. III, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814), 113; Wilson, *Beulah*, 217 Evans places into the character Beulah’s mouth the opinion that Southey was an imbecile. She also has two male characters—Hartley and Lindsey—making references to Swedenborg that indicate that the character Beulah was seeking answers from his writings. Robert Milton Underwood, “Skeptical Inquiry and Religious Awakening in ‘Beulah,’ by Augusta Jane Evans” (M.A., California State University, Dominguez Hills, 2011), 37, 46, 56.

¹⁶ Southey, *Letters from England*, III:115–116.

While there was only very occasional mention of Swedenborg in the South until the early 1840s, interest grew during that decade and the 1850s, and his books were advertised in southern bookstores throughout the period.¹⁷ This renewed attention is likely associated with the resurgence of interest in mesmerism, and the advent of the Spiritualist movement, which was markedly influenced by Swedenborg.¹⁸ The southern familiarity with Swedenborg often makes itself known in the comparisons that reviewers make between new material and the work of Swedenborg, from which it is often assumed to be borrowed, and the allusions to his ideas that appear in a variety of venues.¹⁹ In 1841, southern periodicals gave attention to a biography of Swedenborg, written by a Swedenborgian minister named B. F. Barrett—who followed the next year with *A Course of Lectures on the Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church, as Revealed in the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg*, which also drew notice in southern

¹⁷ Advertising appears most heavily in the New Orleans area and is predominant in the 1850s. For examples, see *Daily Alabama Journal* October 18, 1850 (p. 3), *Daily Picayune* January 18, 1853 (p. 2) and May 9, 1854 (p. 2), and *Augusta Chronicle*, June 22, 1859 (p. 2). “[Advertisement],” *Daily Alabama Journal*, November 26, 1850. This advertisement is filled completely with books by Swedenborg.

¹⁸ Schoonmaker, “Mystery and Possibility,” 27; Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 34. One of the most significant shapers of Spiritualism in the United States was Andrew Jackson Davis, who claimed his volume, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind* (1847) was channeled from the spirit of Swedenborg.

¹⁹ “Art. IX. The Dial [Review],” *Southern Quarterly Review*, October 1842, 469. Some accused the Transcendentalists of borrowing from Swedenborg as they promoted their resistance movement against the structured religion and intellectualism of Harvard. “Art. VI. [Review of Swedenborg Titles],” *Southern Quarterly Review*, October 1843, 414–415; “Sketches of the Flush Times of Alabama,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, December 1852, 746; H. T. T., “Art. VIII. — Passion Flowers of Poetry,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, July 1854, 180.

publications.²⁰ The *Southern Quarterly Review* hailed the books, acknowledging most southerners to be ignorant of Swedenborgian doctrine, but indicating hope that this was about to change. “Persuaded as we are, that his writings . . . however slow their progress may have been in times past, and in however little popular favor held, are yet destined to impart a new impulse to social progress and infuse new life into the body politic and theological.” It went on to suggest that much of the popular writing of the current day owed its thinking to Swedenborg.²¹ Readers of the works of nationally prominent figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James Sr. were introduced to Swedenborg in those readings.²² There were vocal detractors, and powerful voices, like the *Southern Literary Messenger*, heaping scorn on those who believed “impostors” like Swedenborg—equating his followers with Mormons and Millerites.²³ Swedenborg’s writings were a secret pleasure, therefore, for some who imbibed, “read by stealth, away from company—free from the curiosity of the prying eye. Persons have been afraid, as if they were engaged in some necromantic orgies, to breathe a word to their friends of their peculiar and

²⁰ Benjamin Fiske Barrett, *Life of Emanuel Swedenborg: With Some Account of His Writings* (S. Colman, 1841), <http://archive.org/details/lifeemanuelswed00barrgoog>; Benjamin Fiske Barrett, *A Course of Lectures on the Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church, as Revealed in the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg: Delivered in the City of New York During the Winter of 1840-41* (published for the author, 1842).

²¹ “Art. VI. [Review of Swedenborg Titles],” 414–415.

²² R[alph] W[aldo] Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures*, (Boston: Phillips, Samson, 1850), 95–158. Emerson included “Swedenborg, Or, the Mystic” among the seven “representative men” he feted in an 1850 volume. Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 579. According to the Genoveses, even southerners who rejected the Transcendentalism of Emerson hailed his book *Representative Men* as genius. S. G., “Ralph Waldo Emerson,” *Southern Rose*, November 24, 1838, 102; Henry James, *The Secret of Swedenborg: Being an Elucidation of His Doctrine of the Divine Natural Humanity* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1869); O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 599.

²³ “The Rise and Progress of the Mormon Faith and People,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, September 1844, 527.

forbidden occupation.”²⁴ A number of southerners were disciples of Swedenborg while attending more traditional churches. One southerner traveling in Boston in 1837 was eager to attend a Swedenborgian church, in memory of a woman of very fine character back home who had “attended the Episcopal church with her husband and children, but her heart was in Swedenborg’s heaven.” He wrote back a charming description of his experience to a magazine in Charleston, talking of how he respected this woman’s fortitude in believing “amid ridicule, and sometimes harsher tones.”²⁵

Others were very open in their admiration and devotion, and it was the influence of associates and prominent figures, more than any other factor, that built a following for Swedenborg among southerners.²⁶ An 1838 article in another Charleston magazine included glowing praise for Swedenborg’s understanding of the mystical nature of handwriting.²⁷ Readers of the New Orleans–based *Southern Quarterly Review* were treated to many articles celebrating Swedenborg and his teachings during the period 1842–1847, while the magazine was under the editorship of Daniel Whitaker, who was a believer.²⁸ Natchez homeopathic physician William

²⁴ “Art. VI. [Review of Swedenborg Titles],” 415.

²⁵ “Notes of a Northern Excursion.,” 109.

²⁶ O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 1069; Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 597–600. The Genoveses acknowledge that, while southerners liked to boast that heretical ideas such as Swedenborg’s had no place in the South, the evidence belies the claims. Influential people were reading his work—and a subset of them became followers.

²⁷ W, “Autography: Number One,” *Southern Literary Journal and Magazine of Arts*, April 1838, 302–303.

²⁸ “Review 1 — No Title,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, October 1844; “The Swedenborg Library Part I,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, April 1846; “Art. III — Emanuel Swedenborg,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, October 1846; *Swedenborg Library No 42 to 49*, 1847; George Bush, “Art. IX. — Mesmer and Swedenborg: Or the Relations of the Developments of

Henry Holcombe was a Swedenborgian, who in time wrote several volumes on the afterlife.²⁹ The writings of Swedenborg drew prominent Georgia citizens William Frederick Pendleton and Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas.³⁰ In South Carolina, former Gov. James Henry Hammond's brother Marcellus was a follower, as was former Gov. James Hamilton and College of Charleston President Nathaniel Russell Middleton.³¹ An early biographer suggested that John C. Calhoun might have been a Swedenborgian before his death, but a family member wrote a note to the *Charleston Mercury* to assure them that Calhoun had not succumbed to the ardent attempts of a friend to proselytize him to that faith. The friend was likely James Hamilton, who claimed to have been in nightly contact with Calhoun after his death.³² Respectful treatment of Swedenborg diminished in the late antebellum period, as the "isms" became associated in the southern mind

Mesmerism to the Doctrines and Disclosures of Swedenborg," *Southern Quarterly Review*, January 1847; W, "Art. VI. — The Philosophical Character of Swedenborg," *Southern Quarterly Review*, April 1848.

²⁹ O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 464–465. O'Brien describes Holcombe as a man who was "unafraid of being judged," based on his diary entries.

³⁰ Ibid., 1068; Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, *Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas*, ed. Virginia Ingraham Burr (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 324n.

³¹ O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 1068; W, "Art. VI. — The Philosophical Character of Swedenborg"; Bush, "ART. IX.--MESMER AND SWEDENBORG."; Robert Tinkler, *James Hamilton of South Carolina*, Southern Biography Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 256–258.

³² "John C. Calhoun Not a Swedenborgian," *Charleston Mercury*, February 23, 1859; "The Late Gen. James Hamilton of South Carolina," *Southern Literary Messenger*, January 1858; "Religious [sic] Opinions of Mr. Calhoun and of His Biographer, R. K. Cralle, Esq.," *Mississippi and State Gazette*, February 23, 1859.

with abolition and Christian infidelity, and Swedenborg was blamed for spawning the ideas.³³ Despite the associations, he remained a part of the southern conversation.³⁴

Swedenborg's accounting of the worlds beyond gave people several things they wanted that were absent or challenged in Scripture. His heaven maintained a comforting similarity to life on earth, only better.³⁵ He claimed that there would be marriage and "conjugal love" in the afterlife. And while he supported the scriptural ideas of singing and praise as a heavenly pastime, he added the element of progress and industriousness. He kept a concept of hell, but made it less terrible and more fitting with the image of a loving God. And he suggested that the dead remain aware of and tangibly involved with the lives of their loved ones still living—something particularly appealing to those who sought consolation from Swedenborg's works. He did not suggest, however, that his experiences of celestial travel were available to others. His readers were asked to be content with a vicarious travel account.

Thomas De Quincey

In the early 1820s, a very unusual sort of European mystic caught the interest of American audiences and became a favorite in the South. Upon the arrival of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, "the sensation created in the public mind" simultaneously set people

³³ "The Moral and Religious Aspect of the Times," *Daily Morning News*, January 12, 1856.

³⁴ August 7[, 1865] in Alexander Hamilton Stephens, *Diary of Alexander Hamilton Stephens, June, 1865*, *Recollections of Alexander H. Stephens: His Diary Kept When a Prisoner at Fort Warren, Boston Harbour, 1865: Giving Incidents and Reflections of His Prison Life and Some Letters and Reminiscences*. (New York: Doubleday, 1910), 430. While serving his sentence for his role as Vice President of the Confederacy after the Civil War, Alexander Stephens was very grateful for the northerner who brought him literature written by Swedenborg to contemplate, "all works I have been desirous of getting for some time."

³⁵ McDannell and Lang, *Heaven: A History*, 191.

evaluating the impact of opiates and generated a thirst for mystical experiences.³⁶ In a state of opium “reveries,” English writer Thomas De Quincey reported traveling to places of the mind—places connected to the soul. He saw grand palaces of magnificent architecture. He floated above oceans, and visited the “Orient.” He conversed with the dead and saw the future. He also had dreadful nightmares—“visions as ugly, and as ghastly phantoms as ever haunted the couch of an Orestes.”³⁷ De Quincey’s *Confessions* first appeared in serialized form in a British publication late in 1821, then appeared as a book in 1822, with De Quincey withholding his identity.³⁸ Several decades passed before its author’s name became commonly known.³⁹

The *Confessions* were a marvel of self-revelation and self-indictment—refreshingly unusual for the time.⁴⁰ Though De Quincey’s opium addiction would always be the first association people had with his name, it never diminished the impression they held of him as

³⁶ “Confessions of an Opium Eater,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, December 1850, 764.

³⁷ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, 2nd ed. (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1823), 83.

³⁸ Julian North, *De Quincey Reviewed: Thomas De Quincey’s Critical Reception, 1821–1994*, *Literary Criticism in Perspective* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997), 7.

³⁹ “Confessions of an English Opium-Eater: Being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar,” *Saturday Magazine*, January 19, 1822, 63–68; “Confessions of an English Opium-Eater,” *Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, March 1, 1823, 269–272. This publication published an excerpt with no credit beyond “From the London Magazine” and no introduction. Several decades passed before its author’s name became commonly known. It was published at least thirty-four times between 1822 and 1860, at times with new material added by De Quincey or others—one edition nearly doubling the pages of the original very brief edition. “WorldCat Export of Editions of De Quincey’s Confessions of an English Opium-Eater 1820-1860” (WorldCat, September 21, 2013) “WorldCat Export of Editions of De Quincey’s Confessions of an English Opium-Eater 1820-1860” (WorldCat, September 21, 2013). The 1856 edition published by Gresham of London had 398 pages and an introduction by Charles Whibley. At least seven different publishing houses put out their own editions of this volume in 1856 alone.

⁴⁰ North, *De Quincey Reviewed*, 8.

spiritually privileged, connected to the mind of God. Upon the release of a twenty-one-volume set of his writings in 1859, the *North American Review* declared: “He has traversed with more or less profundity of insight and research the grandest provinces in the empire of human speculation; and his familiarity with metaphysics, and the subtile distinctions involved in them, is so close and intimate, and his expositions are so elaborate and lucid, as almost to produce the impression that we are holding converse with a mind contemporary with the aboriginal secrets of nature.”⁴¹

De Quincey touched a soft spot in human nature when he began to talk of the opium-assisted dreams of death and the future state. In one dream he was taken to see the soul of a young woman he believed he had abandoned in need years earlier—an episode that had tortured him since. In the blissful environment of heaven, he knew that she would not go back to the streets where he had last seen her—and it relieved his burden of guilt.⁴² In another dream, he believed he had foreseen the Judgment Day of Scripture, the horror and shock of which he described as it had unfolded for him.⁴³ This dream presented a glimpse at the dark and dreaded day that Christians anticipated, when God would “separate the wheat from the chaff,” sending the unrepentant to hell. It offered gripping embellishments on the scriptural account, bringing the day to life with a drama that had the extra power of a De Quincey dream—possibly a new fragment of a revelation about the end times.

⁴¹ “Art. IV. — Writings of Thomas De Quincey,” *North American Review*, January 1859, 113.

⁴² De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, 48–53, 77–80, 177–178.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 178–180.

The *Southern Literary Messenger* hailed the reappearance of *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* in 1841, two decades after its anonymous debut, and predicted “a rapid sale.” It said of the *Confessions*: “They bear the stamp of genius and scholarship;—they evince feelings of genuine goodness and intensity. . . . The melancholy details, the moral lessons, the episodes of eloquent reflection, are unrivalled.”⁴⁴ Tending always to see him as “odd,” while also with a mind “brilliant, imaginative, stored with all learning, and of rare originality,” southern literary publications considered his work a part of the established foundation of reading, usually pointing out his foibles, while lauding his talents.⁴⁵ One reviewer asserted that “almost all the reading public know something of his works,” and declared his *Confessions* to have taken “a high rank among the noble productions of this period of literature.”⁴⁶ Southern literary circles were familiar with the work of De Quincey throughout the antebellum period, and he became a household name among newspaper readers in the South in the 1850s.⁴⁷ H. T. Tuckerman, writing for a southern audience, applauded the “scientific insights” De Quincey brought to the subject of psychological imagery that informs people during sleep.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ “Confessions of an English Opium Eater,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, November 1841, 814.

⁴⁵ “Theological Essays;,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, July 1854, 447; “[Thomas De Quincey],” *Savannah Republican*, March 11, 1851.

⁴⁶ “Observations, on the ‘Caesars,’ of De Quincey,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, October 1859, 288; “Horticultural,” *Southern Planter*, March 1855, 82.

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Secret Eye*, 215; Beech Grove, Sept. 6th, [1862], Saturday, in Sarah Morgan Dawson, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, ed. Charles East, 1st Touchstone Edition (New York: Simon & Schuster by arrangement with the University of Georgia Press, 1992), 254.

⁴⁸ H. T. Tuckerman, “Something About Sleep,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, August 1859, 141.

The spiritual questioners in southern society—people like Augusta Evans’s character, Beulah Benton—found themselves drawn to De Quincey, perhaps because his own life showed evidences of a similar struggle. He was raised in a very strict Church of England home. His mother was close friends with the writer Hannah More, who wrote books about the Christian moral upbringing of young people. De Quincey’s theological writings showed both the foundations of that upbringing and the questioning of a restless intellect.⁴⁹ The spiritual yearning was ever-present, but even after he rid himself of the worst of his opium habit, he continued to explore dreams for meaning, apparently finding a richness there that was missing in the traditional avenues of spiritual development offered in Scripture, church, and hymns. In 1851 a Savannah newspaper published a witty description of the eccentric thinker, by this time much celebrated in the small Scottish town where he was living out his last years: “On fair days, at all hours . . . climbing hills and wandering among the shady woods as if he sought something he could never find.”⁵⁰ His opium addiction was also a familiar malady to southern families, and while some complained that he glamorized the practice, most credited him with attempting to demonstrate the cost of it.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Neil Tomkinson, *The Christian Faith and Practice of Samuel Johnson, Thomas De Quincey, and Thomas Love Peacock* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1992), 215–219.

⁵⁰ “[Thomas De Quincey].”

⁵¹ S.A. Gayle to John Gayle, May 3, 1832, Gayle Family Papers, Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, as cited in Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 11. Alabama First Lady Sarah Gayle apparently developed an opium “habit,” as had many women in antebellum America. Though her descendants appear to have excised most references to its use from her journals, they failed to notice one sentence in a letter to her husband John, where she wrote, “A large pile of opium has taken me to the seventh Heaven.”; “Dr. McMunn’s Elixer of Opium,” *Daily Morning News*, June 1, 1850; Leah Rawls Atkins, “High Cotton: The Antebellum Alabama Plantation Mistress and the Cotton Culture,” *Agricultural History* 68, no. 2 (April 1, 1994): 103; Samuel B. Thielman, “Medicine for

De Quincey's fame and reputation grew solidly with his later works—histories and translations, written with great eloquence and literary detail. They appeared in southern bookstores, and it was not unusual to see brief statements of De Quincey's thoughts on matters of a remarkable breadth—the state of affairs in Russia or the strength of wrought iron—appearing in the region's newspapers.⁵² His translation of the “Dream Upon a Universe” by Jean-Paul Richter—another story of a heavenly journey while in a dream state—became the subject of blissful adoration by Beulah Benton as she searched for truth in her guardian's library

Madness, 1820–1860,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 61 (1987): 25–46; Anya Jabour, “‘It Will Never Do for Me to Be Married’: The Life of Laura Wirt Randall, 1803-1833,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 2 (July 1, 1997): 232–233; Tanfer Emin Tunc, “The Mistress, the Midwife, and the Medical Doctor: Pregnancy and Childbirth on the Plantations of the Antebellum American South, 1800–1860,” *Women's History Review* 19, no. 3 (July 2010): 408; North, *De Quincey Reviewed*, 11–12; Robert Morrison, *The English Opium Eater: A Biography of Thomas De Quincey* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2010), 162–163. From the pen of De Quincey, opium became the path to unknown worlds—wonderful and horrible dream worlds. Though he attempted to show it as a bad habit gladly overcome, some believed that it provided in him and other writers who indulged in opiates a tool of literary inspiration. De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, 115, 182–183, 269. De Quincey proudly announced that he was now down to a regular intake of “about 170 or 180 drops,” occasionally “as high as 500,” but overall a great improvement from the high of 8,000 drops that had marked the nadir of his addiction before reaching the state of mind where he could devote sufficient energy to defeating the power it had over him. From the pen of De Quincey, opium became the path to unknown worlds—wonderful and horrible dream worlds. Though he attempted to show it as a bad habit gladly overcome, some believed that it provided in him and other writers who indulged in opiates a tool of literary inspiration. De Quincey sought something more sublime than a pain killer or a literary device. He wrote, “Here were the hopes which blossom in the paths of life, reconciled with the peace which is in the grave; motions of the intellect as unwearied as the heavens, yet for all anxieties a halcyon calm: a tranquillity that seemed no product of inertia, but as if resulting from mighty and equal antagonisms; infinite activities, infinite repose.” His message echoed Swedenborg's, though, saying to his readers, this voyage is not for you. The marvelous stories ended with the confession that “a crisis arrived for the author's life, and a crisis for other objects still dearer to him. . . I must die if I continued the opium.”

⁵² “De Quincey on Russia,” *Athens Post*, March 23, 1855; “Wrought vs Cast Iron,” *Fayetteville Observer*, May 12, 1853; “New Books at Bryan's Bookstore,” *Daily South Carolinian*, March 25, 1854.

and was favored by southern critics, as well.⁵³ De Quincey's book sales became something of a standard against which southern author William Gilmore Simms measured the success of his own writing.⁵⁴ The name of De Quincey is sprinkled through the literature of the South—a name literate readers were expected to recognize.⁵⁵ The mention of him by Confederate soldiers during and after the war, as they pondered the meaning of events, also indicates that his work had permeated southern thinking during the antebellum years.⁵⁶

Southern subscribers to the *Christian Observer* had been cautioned against giving too much credence to the dreams described by people under the influence of opium, belladonna and other substances used for various anesthetic and “quality of life” purposes.⁵⁷ An ancient belief

⁵³ Evans, *Beulah*, 155; Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater. And Analects from John Paul Richter*, 1867; Thomas De Quincey, “Analects from John Paul Richter,” *Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, April 1, 1824.

⁵⁴ “De Quincey’s Writings,” *Memphis Daily Appeal*, June 18, 1859; “Fanny Fern,” *Nashville Union and American*, August 7, 1853; Simms to Henry Carey Baird, March 17, 1854, in Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, and T. C. Duncan Eaves, eds., *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, vol. III (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1954), 288; Simms to Henry Carey Baird, Woodlands, SC, April 14, 1854, in *ibid.*, III:292.

⁵⁵ Sherwood Bonner [Pseudonym for Katherine McDowell], *Dialect Tales* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1883), 9; Mrs Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *The Black Gauntlet: A Tale of Plantation Life in South Carolina* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1860), 497; Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 142–143. The Genoveses describe De Quincey’s influence in the South, and their footnotes on the subject are particularly useful in understanding De Quincey’s dualistic reputation for brilliance and for bad influence—a dualism they attribute to his opium habit.

⁵⁶ John Henderson, “Letter from John Henderson to His Mother, Mary Ferrand Henderson, May 15, 1864 (In Which He Discusses His Brother, Leonard, Who Was Killed a Few Weeks Later at Cold Harbor) : Electronic Edition.” Text, 1, accessed December 18, 2013, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/unc/unc09-14/unc09-14.html>; George Cary Eggleston, *A Rebel’s Recollections* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 1–2.

⁵⁷ “Essays on Superstition, Part 5,” 202.

persisted, though, in the connection between dreams and the world of spirit.⁵⁸ According to De Quincey expert Frederick Burwick, the credence Thomas De Quincey gave to dreams reflected a cultural belief of his time—the idea that the true nature of the soul reawakens when the body sleeps.⁵⁹ Therefore, as people read these dream accounts, they read them not as flights of fiction, but potentially as glimpses of the spirit world. They were captivated by the prospect that they might, after all, be getting an account of heaven by someone who, not so long ago, saw it. And they were intrigued with the idea that this journey might be available to themselves.

Seers—Asleep and Awake

The names of Swedenborg and De Quincey were indelibly tied to ethereal mysteries, but were also distant from the everyday lives of southerners. These mystics were mythic and exotic and built careers around their experiences. Southern newspapers also brought stories of the mystical experiences of those who were living more ordinary lives, but by some act of grace or mysterious luck received access to the world beyond the veil. These characters were less distinctive as individuals—their stories often disappearing as fast as they appeared—but the stories never stopped. Each new account, if trusted, offered more evidence: the testimony of an average person who had been in contact with the life beyond. For the moment in time that each took the spotlight, the world circled near, in hopes of getting details to fill in the hazy picture of heaven offered by Scripture.

⁵⁸ Tuckerman, “Something About Sleep,” 141.

⁵⁹ Frederick Burwick, “The Dream-Visions of Jean Paul and Thomas De Quincey,” *Comparative Literature* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 1968): 4.

Antebellum southerners did not yet have a name for what today we call the “near-death experience,” but they did report them.⁶⁰ Recent research indicates that, on average, twelve percent of people surviving a near brush with death report an unusual mystical encounter, which would suggest it was likely southerners experienced or heard about such encounters with some regularity.⁶¹ The reported incidents often followed situations in which people were nearly buried alive—a possibility greatly feared during this period. They were warned of the “death-trance” or “catalepsy,” which was a sleep so like death that hope was often lost for the patient.⁶² The danger of it became particularly visible to them in 1852, when Dr. Herbert Mayo of England, published a book titled *On the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions*, which included the story of his father’s near-tragedy. Dr. Mayo’s father had laid in a trance state for ten days following a bout of yellow fever in Surinam. He could hear the conversation commanding that he be buried, but had no power to show that he was alive. An attendant pleaded that he not be buried until decomposition appeared, which saved his life. American newspapers picked up the story, sharing Mayo’s advice ascertaining surely that a person was dead, and not in a trance,

⁶⁰ Raymond A. Moody, *Life after Life* (New York: Mockingbird Books, 1975). The term Near-Death Experience, also called NDE, was popularized in the United States by the release of Raymond Moody’s best-selling *Life after Life*, though the experience itself has been reported throughout recorded history. For an account of a near-death experience during a yellow fever epidemic in Boston, see “Miscellaneous: The Dead Alive,” *Christian Observer*, December 23, 1842, 204.

⁶¹ Lee W. Bailey and Jenny Yates, eds. *The Near-Death Experience: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 7.

⁶² “Premature Burials,” *Augusta Chronicle*, March 31, 1852. Among the myriad medicines offered in newspapers of the 1840s and 1850s were some to stave off catalepsy.

before burial.⁶³ Heeding this advice, people did occasionally return from the death-trance—and once in while, with a story to tell.

Now and again in publications read by southerners, the story of Rev. William Tennant's brush with death would resurface—an account that became the standard anecdote when discussing this phenomenon.⁶⁴ The eighteenth-century New Jersey Presbyterian minister had been—along with his father William and brothers Gilbert, John, and Charles—ministers well known in the American colonies. These Scottish-born immigrants brought with them the magical lore of that place, and they were appreciated in no small part because they professed a supernatural Christian experience. Gilbert claimed to have been healed miraculously from a disease that should have been fatal, John reported being asked for and having seen visions of

⁶³ James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Detroit: Partridge Press, 1972), 177.

⁶⁴ “Religious and Moral,” *Augusta Chronicle*, June 21, 1823. Though Tennent had died approximately forty-six years earlier, this piece was revived from *The Works of Charles S. Buck*—a much-respected religious authority to southerners—and presented with little introduction of the man, presuming apparently that readers already knew who he was. In it, Tennent softly rebuked George Whitefield for his attempts to get an assembled gathering of clergy to talk about their longing to be “called home” to their rest. He did not desire to be called home until Jesus was ready for him to be there. He said, “My business is to live as long as I can—as well as I can—and to serve my Master as faithfully as I can, until he shall think proper to call me home.” Whitefield expected his experience in heaven to make Tennent long for it, but his experience there made him more responsible about the duties of life on earth. Charles Buck, *The Works of the Rev. Charles Buck* (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1822), 59; Elias Boudinot, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. William Tennent* (Philadelphia: Freeman Scott, 1827); “Miscellaneous.”; *Life of the Rev. William Tennent: Formerly Pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Freehold, New Jersey, in Which Is Contained, among Other Interesting Particulars, a Account of His Being Three Days in a Trance and Apparently Lifeless* (New York: Robert Carter, 1847); “Buried Alive,” *Fayetteville Observer*, March 18, 1852; “The Dead Alive,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, February 9, 1858; Hiram Mattison, *The Immortality of the Soul, Considered in the Light of the Holy Scriptures, the Testimony of Reason and Nature, and the Various Phenomena of Life and Death* (Philadelphia: Perkinpine & Higgins, 1864, 1867), 225–229; Tennent's story is also discussed in several histories. See Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England*, 2; Wigger, “Taking Heaven by Storm,” 178n; Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 184–185.

Christ during his own illness, and William recounted being taken to heaven after what appeared to his family and friends to be his death.⁶⁵ William Tennent never exploited his story—never attempted to build fame or fortune from it, though rumor had it he did write an account that was lost in South Carolina when Tennent’s son died there. Elias Boudinot prepared the biography more than a quarter-century after Tennent’s death, based on the recollections of witnesses.⁶⁶

As Tennent recalled the experience, he had been in the midst of a conversation with his brother about his fears for his “future welfare,” when he found himself instantly “in another state of existence, under the direction of a superior Being, who ordered me to follow him.” He floated for an indeterminate period until he “beheld at a distance an ineffable glory,” something impossible to communicate to mortals. He saw beings adoring and worshipping the “inexpressible glory,” which had no shape. They sang songs and hallelujahs, and Tennent “heard things unutterable,” feeling joyous. He asked his guide if he could join the throng but was told, “You must return to earth,” which “seemed like a sword through my heart.” And in an instant, he saw his brother in front of him, arguing with the doctor. A period that felt like no more than twenty

⁶⁵ Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 182–186; Wigger, “Taking Heaven by Storm,” 167–194. Wigger describes the persistence of folk culture that shaped the early Methodist “enthusiasm” in America. He includes the Tennents as examples of that persistence.

⁶⁶ Boudinot, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. William Tennent ...*, 5. The more than twenty-six editions of his memoir in publication between 1806 and 1860 all trumpeted on the title page that the book includes “an account of his being THREE DAYS IN A TRANCE, AND APPARENTLY LIFELESS.” Boudinot compiled the accounts with some trepidation, saying, “In these circumstances, it is peculiarly embarrassing if some of the facts to be recorded are of such a nature, that it is most desirable to have their authenticity so fully established, that incredulity shall be confounded, and the sneer of the sceptical and profane lose its effect.” (The number of editions is estimated from the variations registered in the WorldCat database and almost certainly undercounts the numbers. The earliest appearances were serialized accounts in magazines, followed quickly by published volumes.)

minutes to him had been three days. He said that the glorious music was “not out of my ears, when awake, for at least three years.” Nothing on earth could compare after that.⁶⁷

Evaluated beside the many very elaborate near-death stories that have surfaced since, Tennent told a quite basic tale. His description of a lengthy journey, awe-inspiring glory, and singing that stayed with him, but little beyond that, was much in keeping with heavenly anticipations of the early antebellum period, and fully in line with Scripture. For those who lived in the 1810s and 1820s, though, it was a remarkable phenomenon—a first-hand account—and the story remained in print perpetually through the 1820s with occasional reappearances thereafter. The *Fayetteville Observer* resurrected it as late as 1854 in an article regarding the frightening prospect of burying someone alive.⁶⁸ These stories confirmed beliefs in a journey to a wondrous place and the idea that there was a time to die of God’s choosing.

New Orleans minister Theodore Clapp also commented on resuscitations of the dead in his autobiography. Though it was common practice for those of means, including clergy, to evacuate New Orleans during its numerous yellow fever epidemics, he had considered it a spiritual duty to remain. He stayed, along with the Catholic priests and nuns who never abandoned the dying—one epidemic taking six thousand of the city’s residents in twelve days. Given his liberal theology, Clapp was often the minister of choice called to the bedside of dying atheists and agnostics, and claimed, “It is probable that I have seen a greater number of those called irreligious persons breathe their last, than any clergyman in the United States.” He claimed that they tended to die much more peacefully than Christians, who had been taught about fearful possibilities after death. But he also brought up the situation of “those who have been

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

⁶⁸ “Buried Alive.”

resuscitated after they became cold and pulseless.” They returned from these death sleeps, Clapp said, saying that they had not suffered agony.⁶⁹ Being a Universalist in fact if not in name, Clapp found it significant that the “death sleeps” of the committed Christians occasionally took them to heaven, but the “death sleeps” of atheists never took them to hell. They never returned with fearful accounts.

In Lawrence County, Alabama, and vicinity beginning around 1854, residents began to witness the peculiar behavior of a young Cumberland Presbyterian minister named C. B. Sanders, who in later life would be remembered as “The Sleeping Preacher.”⁷⁰ These episodes began while Sanders was away at school and suffered a typhoid fever that gave him headaches so severe, he claimed, “It will surely kill me . . . my head feels like it has opened.”⁷¹ During the episodes that followed, his attending physician claimed that the bones of his head pulled apart by a half inch beneath the skin.⁷² Sanders fell into sleeping trances, lasting from minutes to weeks, during which he could preach eloquent sermons, translate from Hebrew and Greek (despite his lack of training in these languages), remotely view people and hear conversations in distant

⁶⁹ Clapp, *Clapp’s Autobiographical Sketches*, 71, 129, 147–148, 231. Tales of epidemics appear throughout Clapp’s autobiography and have been a much-mined source in studies of death and dying in the antebellum period. Clapp expressed great admiration at all times for the Catholic priests in the city, men he considered to “have displayed the most unflagging zeal, and ardent, persevering industry,” in all things.

⁷⁰ The communities of north Alabama and southern Tennessee in which Sanders served began to witness this phenomena in the 1850s, but the written accounts do not appear until 1876. G. W. Mitchell, *X + Y = Z; Or the Sleeping Preacher of North Alabama* (New York: W. C. Smith, 1876); “Alabama’s Sleeping Preacher,” *Pulaski Citizen*, January 7, 1876; “The Sleeping Preacher. A Marvelous Development Of Clairvoyance In Alabama. Singing Hymes and Delivering Sermons,” *Augusta Chronicle*, October 3, 1875.

⁷¹ Mitchell, *X + Y = Z; Or the Sleeping Preacher of North Alabama*, 23–24; “The Wonderful Sleeping Preacher,” *Staunton Spectator*, February 18, 1879.

⁷² Mitchell, *X + Y = Z; Or the Sleeping Preacher of North Alabama*, 126–127.

places, read the writing on a sealed letter in someone's pocket, and identify the location of lost items. He remembered none of it upon awaking, except in rare cases.⁷³ Most oddly, while in these states, he would address letters affectionately to himself (Sanders) as "To My Casket" and sign the writing "X + Y = Z," as though his body was occupied by another soul that went by this name. The letters included an alternate date to the standard one; the last of them was dated: "Seventeenth day, 2d month, 19th century, A.M. 5876, A.D. 1876, 1 P.M."⁷⁴ Sanders's neighbors found his trance-state visions and writings intriguing rather than frightening. Other ministers examined him for evidence of "imposture," but could find none.⁷⁵ Like William Tennent, Sanders never sought fame or fortune, and refused to cultivate himself as a medium, though Spiritualists encouraged it.⁷⁶ Nor would he take money for his counsel. His biography was written some years later, in 1876, by a fellow minister, G. W. Mitchell, who filled it with eye-witness accounts, attested to by the signed affidavits of sixty-nine area residents from communities throughout north Alabama and south Tennessee—many of them the ministers who had examined him.⁷⁷ By this time, Sanders was receiving each day "scores of letters from the host of believers in second sight," and he found his "peculiar powers" annoying.⁷⁸ Some of the

⁷³ Ibid., 34, 41.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 189–191.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 186–187.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 196–198. This book, like many in the period, overtly disclaims any connection to Spiritualism. "The Wonderful Sleeping Preacher". This article claims that Sanders also refused to be called a clairvoyant or to have any association with mesmerism or animal magnetism, "but simply says of himself, "I am a vessel of mercy whom the Lord has chosen to this end."."

⁷⁷ Mitchell, *X + Y = Z; Or the Sleeping Preacher of North Alabama*, 5–7.

⁷⁸ "Alabama's Sleeping Preacher"; "The Wonderful Sleeping Preacher."

publicity that he received suggested that he was insane and that all who testified to his credibility were deluded, but most accounts offered support to this as one of the unimpeachable stories.⁷⁹ After the release of his book, he found himself “in almost incessant ministerial labor,” according to the *Staunton Spectator*, with reportedly hundreds saved through his testimony.⁸⁰

While the stories of Tennent and Sanders would become known by the books that succeeded them, most of the stories of such marvels appeared only briefly—just long enough to serve as the next in a long line of reminders that some individuals had been privileged to go where others could not. They were just sparse enough to seem rare, but regular enough to keep them from falling out of the public consciousness. Southerners had often associated such accounts with the superstition of the slaves, but by the 1840s the growing number of stories of clairvoyant phenomena outside the black population had literate white southerners taking notice.⁸¹ There was the 1845 story of a woman in Cadiz, Ohio, who for some years past had “involuntarily and unconsciously delivered a religious discourse from one to three hours” in the morning service at her Presbyterian church each Sunday to as many as five hundred people—finally waking to remember nothing.⁸² There was an 1847 report of a fifteen-year-old Cherokee prophetess living near Fort Gibson, Arkansas—one of those just spared from being buried alive

⁷⁹ “The Sleeping Preacher. A Marvelous Development Of Clairvoyance In Alabama. Singing Hymes and Delivering Sermons”. The *Augusta Chronicle*, borrowing from a Nashville paper, claims that it feels the duty to remind people of men like the “powerful thinker” Robert Dale Owen, who “now raves in a mad-house.” Saying that it was unable to find facts connected to his parentage, “we are disposed to believe there has been, either lately or recently, some predisposition to cerebral disorders in his family.”

⁸⁰ “The Wonderful Sleeping Preacher.”

⁸¹ Charles Colcock Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* (T. Purse, 1842), 127–128.

⁸² “A Remarkable Psychological Phenomenon,” *Augusta Chronicle*, December 8, 1845.

while cataleptic—who awoke to tell of communing with the savior and was able to foretell events, drawing huge crowds.⁸³ Upon the death of Henry Clay in 1852, southern papers reported that he had been gifted with “second sight” upon his deathbed, which “brought to his bed-side not only the persons of his living friends, but also those who had departed this life for many years.”⁸⁴ A story surfaced in 1854 of an episode in which second sight predicted a maritime disaster.⁸⁵ An article appeared in both Louisiana and Georgia newspapers in 1858 describing an event it declared to be the best-authenticated case of second sight—an episode in which King Charles of Sweden and four attendants had simultaneously witnessed a scene that later came to pass.⁸⁶ In 1859, the account of Marietta Davis’s visit to heaven during a nine-day coma was reviewed in southern newspapers.⁸⁷ In 1860, a story of second sight among the Quakers and a romance that came from it circulated.⁸⁸ And crowds kept the show of Robert Heller—“The Celebrated Second-Sight Seer”—performing in Mississippi River towns through most of November and December 1860.⁸⁹

⁸³ “A Prophetess!” *Mississippi Free Trader*, September 8, 1847.

⁸⁴ “[Untitled Re: Henry Clay’s Deathbed Visitors],” *Athens Post*, July 30, 1852.

⁸⁵ “Second Sight,” *Athens Post*, November 10, 1854.

⁸⁶ “A Story of Second-Sight,” *Sunday Delta*, August 22, 1858; “A Story of Second-Sight,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, August 17, 1858.

⁸⁷ “Scenes Beyond the Grave [Review],” *Memphis Daily Appeal*, April 22, 1859; J. L. Scott, *Scenes Beyond the Grave: Trance of Marietta Davis*, Third Edition (Dayton, OH: Deuel, 1856).

⁸⁸ “The Ring and the Slipper,” *Keowee Courier*, October 13, 1860.

⁸⁹ “The Celebrated Second Sight Seer,” *Memphis Daily Appeal*, November 11, 1860.

Stories of people transformed by trauma or near-death experiences—along with those born with special “sight”—were not an everyday event, but built on a corpus of stories over the ages that had survived to confirm these experiences. George de Benneville of eighteenth-century New England had told a near-death story. Jane Leade of seventeenth-century England had built a following based on her near-death and visions of heaven. The name of Jacob Böehme—usually called Behmen during this period—surfaced now and again in southern publications, recalling the German mystic who had become notable at the turn of the sixteenth century when he had an episode while sipping tea one day and saw heaven.⁹⁰ Heavenly visions were not common, but they were believed possible.

ACCESSIBLE MYSTICISM

The explorations of heaven and hell experienced vicariously through mystics and mediums—seemingly -ordinary people who had been so lucky as to have access to the arcane—only aroused a greater thirst for spiritual adventure in a portion of the southern population. For the spiritually skeptical, these second-hand accounts had raised questions about obtaining proof of this world beyond. This yearning had people examining their own abilities—their dreams and mystical aptitudes—and had them using the services of those who claimed the ability to connect them with people they might recognize beyond the veil. The reports coming out of these experiments added depth and detail to the ideas of the afterlife that were fascinating, conflicting,

⁹⁰ For a thorough look at the visions of these three mystics and the transfer of these ideas to America, see Donna L. Cox [Baker], “European Mystics and Universalism in America,” Seminar Paper (Tuscaloosa, AL, Fall 2008); “Art. III. — The Men of Science in the Middle Ages,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, August 1856, 289; Sidney Lanier, *Poems of Sidney Lanier. Edited by His Wife, with a Memorial by William Hayes Ward* (New York: Scribner, 1885), 31–32.

disturbing, and for some, addictive. Many were asking, “Can I prove this to myself? May I experience it first-hand?”

Dreams

For all the talk of ridding the culture of superstition, literate white southerners continued to pay close attention to dreams—particularly hoping to mine from them glimpses of the afterlife and of loved ones gone.⁹¹ They relished the words of Wordsworth, as he wrote about grief for his lost partner in *Excursion*:

I call'd on dreams and visions, to disclose
That which is veiled from waking thought; conjured
Eternity, as men constrain a Ghost
To appear and answer; to the grave I spake
Imploringly;--looked up, and asked the Heavens
If Angels traversed their cerulean floors,
If fixed or wandering Star could tidings yield
Of the departed Spirit – what Abode
It occupies – what consciousness retains
Of former loves and interests.⁹²

Even as late as 1859, and as cynical as was the character of Beulah Benton, she found resonance with these lines.⁹³ In 1848, another poet, identified only as Susan from Richmond, wrote an elegant tribute to “The Land of Dreams.” She described “an angel sweet and mild,” who arrives in the weariness of night and “lulls us into calm repose.” In the “mystic land,” “strange and shadowy phantoms glide about our haunted way!...airy pinions // Beacon us to field

⁹¹ Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England*, 102. As early as seventeenth-century North America, ministers like Increase Mather and John Hale were attempting to dissuade colonists from trusting in dreams.

⁹² William Wordsworth, *The Excursion: Being a Portion of The Recluse, a Poem* (Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1820), 126.

⁹³ Wilson, *Beulah*, 321.

Elysian.” Touching perhaps on the element of dreams that was most meaningful to the bereaved, she wrote:

Phantom of the long departed
Rise before us as we roam;
The beloved, the gentle-hearted,
That have left their earthly home;
Some with meek and starry eyes
Gazing downward from the skies,
Others wearing beauty’s bloom
Clasp us in their cold embrace;
Some uprising from the tomb.—
Oh how sad each altered face!⁹⁴

Sarah Morgan—a young woman raised in Louisiana—wrote of a rich and sometimes disturbing dream life in her journal. In answer to a question about whether she dreamed, she said, “Dream? Don’t I! . . . royal, purple dreams, that De Quincey could not purchase with his opium; dreams that I would not forego for all the inducements that could be offered. I go to sleep, and pay a visit to heaven or fairyland. I have white wings, and with another, float in rosy clouds, and look down on the moving world; or I have the power to raise myself in the air without wings, and silently float wherever I will, loving all things and feeling that God loves me. I have heard Paul preach to the people, while I stood on a fearful rock above. I have been to strange lands and great cities; I have talked with people I have never beheld.”⁹⁵

It was not unusual for dreams to be reported in newspapers, with the apparent intention of imparting instruction or meaning. As a cautionary tale to youth, the *South Carolina Temperance Advocate* recounted a dream story in its “Juvenile Department” in 1847. A New Jersey carpenter, prone to drink and prone *not* to go to church, had dreamed that he died and found himself in hell.

⁹⁴ Susan, “The Land of Dreams,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, August 1848, 485–486.

⁹⁵ Sep 6, 1862, Saturday, Beech Grove, in Dawson, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 254–255.

It appeared to be the inside of a bar, with all the inhabitants sitting quietly on benches in long black robes. He commented to the landlord of the establishment, “I expected to find hell full of fire and a place of torment, as it was always represented to me while living, but I find it very agreeable.” The robed inhabitants then opened their robes to reveal that their bodies were “a solid mass of fire.” The man begged the landlord to let him go back to earth, and he agreed—but only for one year. The man, upon waking, shared the story with the minister who lived next door, who counseled him to heed the warning, or else it could “enhance his future punishment.” The carpenter did well for a while, then slipped back into his old ways. According to the minister, a year to the day after the dream, the drunken man fell to his death from a stairway.⁹⁶ While the intention of the story was to discourage drinking in the young people of South Carolina, it carried also a message that dreams—particularly the fearful ones—should be heeded for spiritual insights supporting an orthodox Christian view of hell.

A recounting of “A Mother’s Dream” in a Mississippi newspaper in 1851 also suggested that dreams of death and afterlife might contain mystical truth. This young mother “in a State of the sunny South” dreamed she was in a garden where mothers “behold the future of their offspring.” In the dream, she watched all three of her beloved little “buds” die before they could bloom. According to the story, her children died over the coming years—all three. She comforted herself with the knowledge that each one “art happier, a saint in heaven, and with watchful care thou hoverest even now, I know, around the loved while on earth—shielding with protecting wings from harm, and whispering sweet words of heaven where now thou art.”⁹⁷ She

⁹⁶ “Tenant’s Dream,” *South Carolina Temperance Advocate*, September 30, 1847.

⁹⁷ “A Mothers Dream,” *Hinds County Gazette*, October 2, 1851.

described a decidedly Swedenborgian view of the role of children in heaven—an idea that had been incorporated into the conception of heaven over the previous decade.

A dream once reported by eighteenth-century English nonconformist minister and educator Dr. Philip Doddridge—which reads much like a near-death experience—appeared regularly in religious periodicals throughout the antebellum period. In 1841, the *Watchman of the South* printed the account, and other newspapers picked it up, making the story available to a broader southern audience.⁹⁸ Doddridge lived in a perpetual state of poor health, having tuberculosis, so the afterlife was a subject of great concern. The dream that created such a legacy came after a night of conversation about the transition from earthly life to heavenly—and whether there was an instant or gradual movement. Doddridge dreamed that he died and felt himself rising up from his body. “In an instant he was sensible that he had exchanged the prison-house and sufferings of mortality, for a state of liberty and happiness.” He saw his friends below mourning him, and wished he could comfort them in his delight, but he kept rising and saw his town receding in the distance as he “found himself swiftly mounting the skies.” An angelic escort accompanied him through “a vast region of empty space” to a glorious mansion, where he shared “new wine” with “the Lord of the mansion” and reviewed in portraits on the walls the moments of his own life—all the times that angels had preserved him from peril. He felt “thrilled with an unspeakable bliss,” as the Lord told him his labors were over, and he had earned a rich reward. Then he awoke in tears, unable to recall the dream without great emotion for a very long

⁹⁸ “Dr. Doddridge’s Dream,” *Greenville Mountaineer*, January 15, 1841; “Dr. Doddridge’s Dream,” *Episcopal Recorder*, January 2, 1841; *ibid.*, 162. In 1841, the same article appeared in multiple papers. The *Episcopal Recorder* was one of the few who credited the *Watchman of the South* as the original source.

time to come.⁹⁹ Though the presentation of “Dr. Doddridge’s Dream” would change during the course of the antebellum years, generally becoming more embellished, no attempt was made to dismiss it as wishful thinking. While the accounts suggested that his conversations before bed “shaped” the dream, the story was always presented as though it offered a glimpse at the world to come.¹⁰⁰

Dreams were one spiritual experience available to all—not the special gift of chosen ones. They cost nothing, required no special education, and were experienced by everyone at some point. The possibility that dreams opened doors to the spiritual realm, then, offered hope that anyone could—on some given night—have their moment of connection to the divine, to departed loved ones, to wisdom, to the ideas that seemed to make people like Swedenborg, Tennant, and Doddridge special.

Mesmerism

As mesmerism reappeared in the United States in the late 1830s, along with its scientific possibilities, it raised new questions about the connections between the physical and spiritual

⁹⁹ For early iterations of the Doddridge dream from an English magazine, see “The Remarkable Dream of the Late Dr. Doddridge,” *Baptist Magazine* IX, no. 3 (March 1817): 88–90; “The Remarkable Dream of the Late Dr. Doddridge,” *Baptist Magazine* IX, no. 5 (May 1817): 167–168. See chapter 5 for a discussion of changes in the Doddridge dream accounts between 1817 and 1860.

¹⁰⁰ Stephens, *Diary of Alexander Hamilton Stephens, June, 1865*, 258–259 Alexander Hamilton Stephens contemplated the import of dreams as he served his prison sentence for his part as Vice President of the Confederacy. He wrote, “Some dreams seem to carry the unmistakable impress of an agency other than that known in ordinary workings of the mind. Impressed on consciousness are matters on which the mind had never before indulged a thought, but which come to pass in almost exact accordance with the vision. What I say is mainly from my own experience. I have had many such dreams. Reason cannot explain some of the many impressions and fixed conclusions of the mind.”

planes.¹⁰¹ Even as some mesmerists were using the “magnetic fluid” to perform painless tooth extractions, others were claiming that a mesmerized person became a medium, allowing contact with the dead. Those who sought either to prove or to debunk the scientific aspects of the claims of mesmerism had to also field (or sidestep) the questions of spiritual phenomena. Numerous accounts of mesmeric displays in southern towns brought praise for the science of it, but expressed a cautious reserve about the “clairvoyance.”¹⁰² The *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, for example, reported a story on mesmerism with this disclaimer: “Throughout these remarks, we have reference to inquiries instituted on purely physical principles, and for physical ends,—to cases in which there is no adequate moral reason to suppose a miraculous interference or supernatural agency. The Deity, certainly, can suspend his own laws; but we can conceive of no possible mode of proving this suspension, and no ground even for suspecting it, in the absence of some powerful moral reason to render it probable.”¹⁰³ In other words, they were not willing to say that God could not perform the feats they witnessed, but they had no reason to believe God had been involved. Others found the clairvoyance compelling—as the report by a Pensacola

¹⁰¹ For description of the emergence of mesmerism as a scientific interest in the U.S. South, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

¹⁰² “Mesmerism,” *Mississippi Free Trader*, March 9, 1844; “Mesmerism,” *Mississippi Free Trader*, April 20, 1844; “The Grid Iron,” *Mississippi Free Trader*, April 24, 1844; “Animal Magnetism, Neurology and Phreno-Magnetism.”

¹⁰³ Husson, “Art. VI.—Animal Magnetism: Report on the Magnetical Experiments Made by the Commission of the Royal Academy of Medicine, of Paris, Read in the Meetings of June 21st and 28th, 1831,” 435.

physician who confirmed that mesmerized patients undergoing surgery, who met death as a white-robed figure or a departed loved one while entranced, died soon after.¹⁰⁴

Throughout the 1840s, southerners found a number of voices summoning them to place their faith in mesmerism. An 1841 review in the *Southern Literary Messenger* of Chauncey Townshend's *Facts in Mesmerism* gave them permission to reconsider the lost science, as presented by this British minister who had "brought to bear upon the subject of mesmerism, a spirit of philosophic inquiry, a strength of mind, and force of talents that, despite the most deeply-rooted prejudices and obstinate incredulity, must command our respect." In fact, it dared them not to, writing, "No one, who pretends to 'keep a run,' either of the humbugs of the day, or of the improvements and discoveries of the age, ought to omit reading this volume."¹⁰⁵ When a popular mesmerist named Webster, spent time in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1847, a group of the town's "most distinguished Divines, Physicians, and intelligent citizens" certified their training under Dr. Webster and "their belief in sympathy, clairvoyance, and all the other wonders produced in the mesmeric sleep."¹⁰⁶ The literate southern public, therefore, appears to have engaged in the inquiry demanded of them by the Townshend reviewer, with mesmerism being a subject of keen interest throughout the decade.

Townshend's study was still being digested in 1842 when the novel *Zanoni* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton appeared in southern bookstores. The author incorporated animal magnetism into what the New Orleans *Picayune* described as a "preternatural" theme, where "even reason itself

¹⁰⁴ "The Power of Foretelling Death"; "Lectures and Experiments in Mesmerism," *South Carolina Temperance Advocate*, December 31, 1846.

¹⁰⁵ "Facts in Mesmerism," 807–808.

¹⁰⁶ "Mesmerism," *Greenville Mountaineer*, February 5, 1847.

is forced into curious attention, and sometimes actually startles at the daring strides of a gigantic genius.”¹⁰⁷ Bulwer wrapped up the first volume of this novel with the character Glyndon musing on the power of mesmerism. He wrote, “As a patient on whom, slowly and by degrees, the agencies of mesmerism are brought to bear, he acknowledged to his heart the growing force of that vast and universal magnetism which is the life of creation, and binds the atom to the whole. A strange and ineffable consciousness of power, of the Something Great within the perishable clay, appealed to feelings at once dim and glorious, . . . An impulse that he could not resist led him to seek the mystic.”¹⁰⁸

Southerners were actively engaged in the groundswell of interest surrounding mesmerism, though they felt pulled between the desire to avoid charges of being “over-credulous” and the desire to observe and make up their own minds.¹⁰⁹ Depending upon their location, some would have to read about mesmerism for quite some time before an actual mesmerist offered exhibitions in their town and then might have just a few nights to get a seat in a packed house.¹¹⁰ A young man studying at the University of North Carolina in 1843, wrote home to his uncle about the fascination with the phenomenon in Chapel Hill, saying that mesmerism, Millerism, and a reported comet were “the principal topics of conversation” there, as he believed they were elsewhere. There had been at least ten articles on animal magnetism in the local newspaper in the previous six weeks, indicating that it was, indeed, a subject of great

¹⁰⁷ “Zanoni,” *Daily Picayune*, April 28, 1842.

¹⁰⁸ Baron Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Zanoni* (Harper & Brothers, 1842), 217–218.

¹⁰⁹ “Facts in Mesmerism.”

¹¹⁰ “Mesmerism,” *Mississippi Free Trader*, April 10, 1843.

interest.¹¹¹ Articles were appearing with advice about how to mesmerize yourself and how to prevent yourself from being abused while mesmerized.¹¹² A pithy opinion piece published in the New Orleans *Picayune* said: “Men who scoff at Christianity and avow their disbelief in the Holy Bible, swallow mesmerism and all its mysteries, and pronounce all persons rank sceptics who do not do the same.”¹¹³

Another volume that captured the interest of literate southerners was *Six Lectures on the Philosophy of Mesmerism* by John Bovee Dods, which sold out and went into a second printing within a month of its first printing in 1843.¹¹⁴ In one lecture, Dods told his audience that anyone who remained skeptical about the truth of mesmerism should be suspected “either of ignorance or dishonesty,” given the fact that it could be done at home on one’s own children as a test.¹¹⁵ Here, he cited the added value of mesmerism: it offered the potential to experience a first-hand encounter with the spiritual realm at home.

While mesmerism was most often associated with issues of healing or pain control, its promise to connect the living with the dead became a subject of interest in the late antebellum period. Chapter Two of this dissertation described the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis and Louis Cahagnet on their forays into the world beyond death through mesmeric trance. William

¹¹¹ “Exum Whitaker to William F. Lewis, April 1, 1843,” April 1, 1843, “True and Candid Compositions: The Lives and Writings of Antebellum Students at the University of North Carolina,” Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/mss04-06/mss04-06.html>.

¹¹² “How to Mesmerize Yourself,” *Mississippi Free Trader*, July 12, 1843; “Mesmerism,” *Mississippi Free Trader*, April 10, 1843.

¹¹³ “[Untitled],” *Daily Picayune*, June 1, 1843.

¹¹⁴ Dods, *Six Lectures on the Philosophy of Mesmerism*, v.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

Gregory also wrote extensively of his work in mesmerism, offering the evidence of producing clairvoyance in his subjects without having to induce the new process he called “hypnotism.” He described the ability to view people and places remotely, including the power to see the dead or “shelled” souls—phenomena that the *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany* encouraged readers not to dismiss too lightly.¹¹⁶ Gregory described some subjects entering into what he called “Extasis”: a “higher state or phase of existence” in which they were contemplating visions—“scenes of beauty and happiness so perfect, that, in comparison, the world, with all its luxuries, appears utterly worthless and insignificant.” One subject remained in this state for many weeks.¹¹⁷ People in this condition were said to “see visions of saints or angels, perhaps of heaven, and describe these visions in glowing colors.”¹¹⁸ And while it would be easy to dismiss some of them as dreams, Gregory found it harder to dismiss the ones in which “ecstatic” patients reported communication with spirits and brought back information they could not have known about those departed spirits. He also found that their reports of the spirit world often agreed with the reports of Swedenborg (though not of Andrew Jackson Davis’s “appalling hotch-potch of all possible metaphysical systems”).¹¹⁹

Mesmerism created a bridge between scientific and spiritual inquiry that allowed any number of people to cross into territory they might have been skeptical of under other conditions. It allowed an average person to enter into an unfamiliar state of mind and to feel the sensations of floating, of the relief of pain, of the removal from care while in the relaxed condition. Even if

¹¹⁶ W., “Art. VI—Animal Magnetism,” 413–414, 430–431.

¹¹⁷ Gregory, *Letters to a Candid Inquirer, on Animal Magnetism*, 168–169.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 178–179.

most did not also see departed loved ones in that state, they questioned whether others in the right conditions might. It opened the way for Spiritualism, and few that traveled the one path were not also drawn to the other.

Spiritualism

Scholars have credited mesmerists, along with Shakers, Swedenborgians, Unitarians, Universalists, and Transcendentalists in preparing the United States population for the Spiritualist movement of the 1850s, by widening the concept of God and heaven and suggesting that the barriers between heaven and earth might be permeable.¹²⁰ Bereavement had always created a longing to see departed loved ones again, and many beliefs and practices had emerged throughout human history that were “spiritualist” in orientation—seeking to connect the living with the dead by some means. The shamans of aboriginal cultures around the world, the Oracles of Delphi, the psychomantea of ancient Greece, the mediums of the Shaker communities, certain of the mesmerists, clairvoyants or “seers,” and the conjurers on southern plantations had all been

¹²⁰ For an excellent concise summary of American Spiritualism “as a site for growth of American metaphysical religion,” see Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*, 177–253; Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 16–21. Carroll also credits the influence of Charles Fourier, the social theorist of the French Enlightenment who conceived that the individuals of human society are part of a “larger socio-spiritual whole.”; Mollie McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism & the Cultural Politics of 19th-Century America*, n.d., 45. McGarry credits Shakers and Swedenborgians for introducing an androgynous God and the Transcendentalists and Universalists for creating a “universal” one. Kenneth D. Pimple, “Ghosts, Spirits, and Scholars: The Origins of Modern Spiritualism,” in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore & the Supernatural* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1995), 75–89. Pimple provides the testimony of the mother of the Fox sisters, which offers details left out of most accounts of the “tapping” event that is said to have started Modern Spiritualism. Pimple questions the scholarship of historians or other scholars who would allow the veracity of the whole movement to stand or fall on the question of whether the raps really happened in the Fox household.

spiritualists of a sort.¹²¹ Even John Bunyan’s struggling Christian, moving heavenward in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, had communicated with the dead.¹²² The Spiritualism that emerged in America in the 1850s generated the hope that science could open these doors between the living and the dead, explain their existence, and justify their use.¹²³ It clothed the mystical in the scientific making the pursuit of Spiritualism therefore not only legitimate but essential to human understanding and development. This was not a step backward but a leap forward—at least so it was billed and accepted by those who found in it permission to restore to their lives what had been lost by the demystification of the spiritual realm in an increasingly “reasonable” religious environment.

The brand of Spiritualism that caught the public interest, filled lecture halls, and created very animated discussions in southern drawing rooms in the 1850s is now remembered as “Modern Spiritualism” or “American Spiritualism.” Groundwork had been laid by the work of Andrew Jackson Davis, the “Poughkeepsie Seer,” who could diagnose illness while in a mesmerized state and wrote of his visions of the world beyond the veil. He had already built a following, much of it drawn from the Universalists. He brought Swedenborg back to public awareness in the concept of “harmonialism,” which was drawn from Swedenborg, Fourier, and

¹²¹ John J. Kucich, *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2004), xi–xxxii. Kucich points out the spiritualist elements at work in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and the Salem Witchcraft Trial of 1692.

¹²² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 72–73, 80; Henry Clay Blinn, *The Manifestation of Spiritualism among the Shakers, 1837–1847* (East Canterbury, NH, 1899), 10. Blinn used the Bunyan reference to justify the spiritualism of the Shakers.

¹²³ Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*, 7.

elements of mesmerism.¹²⁴ But Davis would have to yield the spotlight to some young girls in Rochester, New York. It began slowly at first, with the 1847 report of Maggie and Kate Fox that they had established communication with the spirit of a murdered peddler buried in their home by means of “raps” in the walls. The “rapping” phenomenon spread through their neighborhood, eventually drawing larger crowds and then fame and fortune. Davis’s work would then provide the foundation on which the Fox sisters and many other mediums would climb to success; Davis used their spotlight, as well, to draw attention to what he had long been trying to teach about the hidden world—something he referred to as “Harmonial Philosophy.”¹²⁵ As the Fox sisters, Davis, and many others, though, became stage performers with audiences to please, accusations and sometimes evidence of fraud, along with faulty “readings,” tainted their reputations.¹²⁶ Still, there was sufficient convincing phenomena suggesting spirit communication to draw an ever-larger audience, including notable people whose names served to lend credibility to the practice.

The movement spun into numerous directions with people of all varieties discovering their own talents as “mediums” and establishing careers or followings. Some were trance mediums, some communicated through “automatic writing,” and some were healers.¹²⁷ Women

¹²⁴ Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 18–19.

¹²⁵ “Letter from A. J. Davis,” *Liberator*, March 30, 1855, 51.

¹²⁶ Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Reluctant Spiritualist: The Life of Maggie Fox* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2005) Stuart describes the ascent of Maggie Fox to fame, then her descent to alcoholism and destitution, during which she was paid to announce that the “rappings” had been a hoax--a story she later recanted, leaving the story of the Fox sisters believed by those who want to believe them and rejected by those who want to reject them. The truth about how things began can only be guessed. Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, 125.

¹²⁷ Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, 146.

found opportunities open to them as never before, drawing crowds to hear them speak.¹²⁸ Groups were learning to “tip” tables with the power of spirits and to channel spirit communication through writing, using a device called a “planchette.”¹²⁹

Compared to the North, the South offered little fertile ground in which Spiritualism could flourish, yet southerners did experiment with it, study it, and in some cases, commit to it. Thanks in no small part to the presence of African traditions and the remnants of other folk practices, southerners had been raised with a sense of the spirit world and the survival of spirits around them.¹³⁰ In July 1850, the *Augusta Chronicle* published the story of a man who sat in the Cave Hill cemetery until midnight, hoping for a sign of communication with his dead wife.¹³¹ According to one of her slaves, Sarah Morgan of Louisiana sat daily at the graves of her departed family members, talking to them.¹³² A poem that appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1850 titled “The Spirit-Harp” by Frances Osgood—based on a German ballad—described

¹²⁸ For a thorough study of the role of women in the Spiritualist movement and its impact of their pursuit of liberties, see Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. This opening to women was tempered by the general requirement that women be mediums--therefore mindless agents in the exchanges with the spirit world--and generally with the expectation that women were being managed by men.

¹²⁹ “Correspondence,” *Spiritual Magazine*, May 1860, 228–233.

¹³⁰ Schoonmaker, “Mystery and Possibility,” 19–21, 119–126, 315, 430–431. Schoonmaker has demonstrated that southern Spiritualism developed as a unique form of thought, due to the mixed influences of European, African, and Native American cultures. For a very thorough look at the transfer and mixing of cultures in New Orleans during the formative period, see Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); For a discussion of the slaves’ perception of the afterlife, see Raboteau, *Slave Religion*; Baldwin, “‘A Home in Dat Rock’: Afro-American Folk Sources and Slave Visions of Heaven and Hell.”

¹³¹ George D. Prentice, “Written at Night in Cave Hill Cemetery,” *Augusta Chronicle*, July 14, 1850.

¹³² *Ibid.*; Dawson, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 278.

spectral music as a cultural element to a southern audience well before Spiritualist mediums from the North were exhibiting such a thing on stage.¹³³ Nancy Schoonmaker writes that the people of Mobile had been “primed by the wonders of mesmerism and a tradition of consulting clairvoyants,” and were therefore ready in 1850 to “try the spirits.”¹³⁴

The number of southerners who were committed Spiritualists cannot be estimated with any confidence. Spiritualists were avid anti-institutionalists, so it is difficult to gauge properly even those who were firmly dedicated to it.¹³⁵ With respect to the South, we encounter the problem in that committed Spiritualists had a vested interest in overestimating and anti-Spiritualists (or anti-Northerners) had a vested interest in underestimating the numbers. Counting is further complicated by the fact that southern individuals had a vested interest in hiding their involvement. In 1859, the *Spiritualist Register* provided tallies that suggested about five percent or 1.25 million people actually identified themselves as Spiritualists in the United States, of which five thousand each were in Georgia and Virginia, six thousand in Alabama, a thousand in Florida, and seven thousand in the Carolinas. The Georgia editor who was repeating the story claimed that the statistics were ten times the truth in Georgia and that a Virginia editor reported

¹³³ Kucich, *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 54.

¹³⁴ Nancy Gray Schoonmaker, “Seeking Solace from the Dead the Spiritualists of Mobile,” *Alabama Heritage* no. 104 (Spr 2012): 23; Reginald Horsman, *Josiah Nott of Mobile: Southerner, Physician, and Racial Theorist*, Southern Biography Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 76. Josiah Nott spent three years in the mid-1840s experimenting on fifty subjects in Mobile, using mesmeric techniques. He said that the group included some of the “most respectable gentlemen and ladies of Mobile.”

¹³⁵ Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*, 14. Moore states that the largest estimate of the numbers involved in Spiritualism nationwide during the 1850s was eleven million—a number offered by a Catholic with a vested interest in inciting alarm. Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, 25, 29–30, 163–191.

the same thing in that state.¹³⁶ A number of men and women of influence became committed Spiritualists, though. The most thorough accounting of Spiritualist activity in the region to date has been the work of Nancy Gray Schoonmaker, who claims, “There were enough Spiritualists in the South to make them a visible and articulate minority.”¹³⁷

Spiritualism thrived in New Orleans and found an active following in Memphis, Tennessee, and Macon, Georgia, where there were large African American populations.¹³⁸ New Orleans resident Nathan W. Daniels, who was to become the white leader of the African American 2nd Louisiana Native Guard Volunteers in the Civil War, was an active Spiritualist. After the war, he married Cora Hatch, one of the nation’s most famous Spiritualist mediums.¹³⁹ Cotton broker Godfrey Barnsley, a Spiritualist in Mobile had an active correspondence with people curious about his experiences—letters that Nancy Schoonmaker says “reflect an openness to innovation [about afterlife beliefs] seldom attributed to the nineteenth-century South.”¹⁴⁰ Politician, planter, and former governor James Henry Hammond of South Carolina was intrigued after reading Judge J. W. Edmonds’s *Spiritualism*—and began to debate it with his friend, author

¹³⁶ “Statistics of Spiritualism,” *Daily Morning News*, March 31, 1859; “Spiritualists,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, November 10, 1860.

¹³⁷ Schoonmaker, “Mystery and Possibility,” 1.

¹³⁸ Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, 29–30.

¹³⁹ Nathan W. Daniels and C. P. Weaver, *Thank God My Regiment an African One: The Civil War Diary of Colonel Nathan W. Daniels* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), xv, 15–16, 172–173. Daniels was raised in the North and became a resident of New Orleans as a young adult, before the Civil War began.

¹⁴⁰ Schoonmaker, “Seeking Solace from the Dead the Spiritualists of Mobile,” 23.

William Gilmore Simms.¹⁴¹ Hammond expressed intense excitement in his diary. “I must *see* and *hear* myself to believe,” he wrote. Simms went to New York, visited mediums, and was converted.¹⁴² Hammond brought a medium to South Carolina, and was convinced. At last, he had found a religious system that resonated with his own sense of rational conviction about spiritual things.¹⁴³

Ministers were, in fact, very much a part of the Spiritualist experimentation occurring in the South. The Universalist ministers Jesse Babcock Ferguson of Nashville and L. F. W. Andrews—who lived in a number of southern cities during his years of ministry—appeared in the 1859 *Spiritualist Register* listings as public speakers for Spiritualism.¹⁴⁴ Ferguson recalled one of his first introductions to Spiritualism was in a visit to Ohio, where a Methodist minister, formerly of Tennessee, joined the “circle.”¹⁴⁵ Methodist minister Samuel Watson of Memphis

¹⁴¹ Elizabeth Merritt, *James Henry Hammond, 1807–1864* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1923), 111; William Gilmore Simms to Evert Augustus Duyckinck, Woodlands, S.C., April 18, 1856, in Oliphant, Odell, and Eaves, *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, III:424–425. Simms’s interest in Spiritualism shaped the character of Nell Floyd in his *Eutaw a Sequel to the Forayers, or the Raid of the Dog-Days a Tale of the Revolution*, which delighted Hammond.

¹⁴² William Gilmore Simms to James Thomas Fields, Woodlands, S.C., April 19, [1856], in Oliphant, Odell, and Eaves, *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, III:431.

¹⁴³ Hammond, *Secret and Sacred*, 262–263.

¹⁴⁴ *The Spiritualist Register for 1859; Facts, Philosophy, Statistics of Spiritualism* (Auburn, NY: U. Clark, Spiritual Clarion Office, 1859), http://spirithistory.iapsop.com/1859_spiritualist_register.html.

¹⁴⁵ J. B. Ferguson, *Spirit Communion: A Record of Communications from the Spirit-Spheres with Incontestible Evidence of Personal Identity (sic), Presented to the Public, with Explanatory Observations* (Nashville, TN: Union and American Steam Press, 1854), 17; Schoonmaker, “Mystery and Possibility,” 8–9. Schoonmaker has demonstrated that Methodists were heavily represented among the Christian Spiritualists of the South—a phenomenon she credits to their early intrigue with visions, trances, dreams, and ghosts; their belief in the voice of

wrote a trilogy of books describing the “investigations of spiritual intercourse” he shared with a group in that town in 1855. An Episcopal bishop led the group, and the medium was “an honest, pious young lady, a member of the Baptist Church” in Memphis. The group attempted to represent all the city’s churches with lay people or, in three cases, ministers.¹⁴⁶ New Orleans “Unitarian” minister Theodore Clapp endorsed Spiritualism as an inspirational aid to Christian faith and practiced it while traveling in Europe. In his autobiography he wrote of a “cool, clear and philosophical” gentleman in New Orleans who had been skeptical of religion until he became a Spiritualist “and of course a firm believer in God, inspiration, and immortality.”¹⁴⁷

The numbers who experimented with Spiritualism and read the works is undoubtedly a great deal larger than those who wore the label, but is even more impossible to estimate. Books appearing in the 1850s disagreed over whether Spiritualism was the work of God or the Devil. While more southerners tended to believe the latter than the former, many just saw it as a harmless diversion—another “ism” to take or leave.¹⁴⁸ Many toyed with it or viewed it as entertainment. As late as 1863, Sarah Morgan recounted having a group of friends over, when someone “suggested calling the Spirits, which game I had imagined ‘played out’ long ago.” Her description of the game makes it clear the young people were engaging in a combination of spirit

the Holy Spirit in man; and the inherent promise in Christianity of the reunion of a Christian with family in the future life.

¹⁴⁶ Rev. Samuel Watson, *The Clock Struck One, and Christian Spiritualist* (New York: Samuel R. Wells, 1872), 87.

¹⁴⁷ Clapp, *Clapp’s Autobiographical Sketches*, 311–312, 364.

¹⁴⁸ Mitchell, *X + Y = Z; Or the Sleeping Preacher of North Alabama*, 4, 196–197. The tendency of many who were reporting spiritual experiences to assert that they were NOT affiliated with Spiritualism or mesmerism indicates the discomfort that many had in accepting the label or indicating any affiliation with the body of believers—though they support the belief in spirit communication in one form or another.

rapping and automatic writing. She wrote, “I do not actually believe in Spiritualism; but there is certainly something in it one cannot understand. . . . Each was startled in turn by extraordinary revelations concerning themselves.”¹⁴⁹ Future Alabama governor William Oates found himself in an altercation with a neighbor after accusing the man’s daughter of being a fraud, when she served as the medium in a séance—indicating that Oates found it acceptable to attend a séance if the medium was legitimate.¹⁵⁰

Much like Universalism, most southerners felt the need to distance themselves from any declared belief in Spiritualism, as Morgan did, and yet a number of them were reading the literature, engaging in séances, or attempting to experiment with the practice.¹⁵¹ It offered a “do-it-yourself” prospect, with articles appearing like the February 1853 piece in Montgomery’s *Daily Alabama Journal* on “Becoming a Medium.”¹⁵² Readers of the *Macon Weekly Telegraph* found advertising from Partridge & Brittan’s of New York offering the “Spiritualist’s Library”—“a complete assortment of Books and Periodicals devoted to the facts, philosophy, and advocacy of Spiritualism,” which included all of the back issues of the weekly *Spiritual Telegraph* and the second volume of the annual *Shekinah* magazine.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Friday, January 30th, [1863] in Dawson, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 414–416.

¹⁵⁰ Schoonmaker, “Seeking Solace from the Dead the Spiritualists of Mobile,” 114–115.

¹⁵¹ Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 597. The Genoveses write, “Much of spiritualism’s intellectual attraction came from its repudiation of the occult and its appeal to science.” They say that southerners liked to boast that Spiritualism was a northern blight, but overlooked how many among them were engaging in it.

¹⁵² “Becoming a Medium,” *Daily Alabama Journal*, February 26, 1853.

¹⁵³ “Spiritualist’s Library,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, March 22, 1853.

The bookstores advertising in the *Augusta Chronicle* in 1853 started most of their “New Book” lists with the books related to Spiritualism. J. C. Morgan’s bookstore in New Orleans listed thirty-three “New Works on Spiritual Intercourse” for sale in its establishment in January of 1853.¹⁵⁴ A person needed only to obtain a single book on the subject to open to themselves the whole world of Spiritualist practice.¹⁵⁵ Spiritualist books usually had pages of advertising in the back, offering many other titles—always more for the curious to explore by mail order. A person who bought or borrowed Nathan Francis White’s *Voices from Spirit-Land* in 1854, for example, would find six pages advertising sixty-nine different Spiritualist publications that could be ordered directly by mail.¹⁵⁶ Tools of Spiritualism, like planchettes for automatic writing were also available by mail order.¹⁵⁷ And it does appear that southerners were exploring Spiritualism—if in secret.

The growing ridicule in the reporting of Spiritualism in unsympathetic southern publications after 1853 reveals a discomfort with the influence it was having in the region. Any

¹⁵⁴ “New Works on Spiritual Intercourse,” *Daily Picayune*, January 18, 1853.

¹⁵⁵ For examples of the derisive humor that accompanied most articles related to Spiritualism after 1853, see “Spiritualists at Law,” *Daily South Carolinian*, December 23, 1853; “New Uses of Spiritualism,” *Daily Morning News*, June 3, 1854; “Doesticks Sees the Spirit Rappers,” *Daily Morning News*, November 9, 1854; “Spiritualists Beat by the Heathen,” *Daily Morning News*, March 28, 1857; “Spiritualism in an Economical Point of View,” *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel*, May 28, 1857; “Spiritualism—Practical Manifestation in Pulaski County,” *Daily Morning News*, November 12, 1858; Procrustes Junior, “Foolometers,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, January 1, 1860; R. B. W. Jr., “A Lecture—Not on the Devil,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, June 1, 1860.

¹⁵⁶ Nathan Francis White, *Voices from Spirit-Land* (Partridge and Brittan, 1854).

¹⁵⁷ An advertisement for a planchette appears as Figure 5 in the image gallery in Braude’s volume. Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*.

seeming silliness in the northern papers was promptly reported in the South.¹⁵⁸ The Savannah *Daily Morning News* in 1853 reported on the rise in admissions to New York insane asylums credited to Spiritualism.¹⁵⁹ Articles that emphasized the table tipping and movement of objects in seances over the simple claims of communication with the spirit world made for effective ridicule.¹⁶⁰ Efforts to discourage experimentation at times conflated Spiritualism with the perceived backward superstitions of the South's black population.¹⁶¹ Anti-Spiritualist newspapers were also much more likely to talk about séances that claimed to have contacted the illustrious dead—and there were admittedly ridiculously many.¹⁶² One tongue-in-cheek editorial asked why Spiritualism had rendered it bad manners to talk about the Devil, while the elite of the “braggart nineteenth century” gather in posh places to watch messages “painfully spell[ed] out letter by letter, such drivelling nonsense as the veriest ploughboy in Buncombe county, North Carolina, ought to be ashamed to utter!”¹⁶³

Some went beyond ridicule to a more alarmist message of the physical, emotional, financial, or spiritual dangers of Spiritualism. A South Carolina paper published a Bishop's

¹⁵⁸ “Convention of Spiritualists,” *Daily Morning News*, October 15, 1852; “The Convention of Spiritualists,” *Mississippi Free Trader*, October 20, 1852; “Spiritualists at Law”; “Doesticks Sees the Spirit Rappers”; “Spiritualism in an Economical Point of View.”

¹⁵⁹ “Effects of Spiritualism,” *Daily Morning News*, March 16, 1853.

¹⁶⁰ “Another Rap,” *Daily Picayune*, December 25, 1853; Procrustes Junior, “Foolometers.”

¹⁶¹ “Spiritualism—Practical Manifestation in Pulaski County”; “Spiritualism,” *Daily Confederation*, November 15, 1858, 1858–11–11–15.

¹⁶² “Correspondence of the Courier,” *Charleston Courier*, January 24, 1860; “Spiritualist Nominations,” *Charleston Mercury*, April 29, 1856.

¹⁶³ W Jr., “A Lecture—Not on the Devil,” 451–452.

accusations that Spiritualists were devil worshippers.¹⁶⁴ Papers told the stories of northerners dying of starvation or becoming the victims of murder, suicide, divorce, or infidelity because of belief in the counsel of mediums.¹⁶⁵ They warned of fraud and the bilking of the gullible.¹⁶⁶

A correspondence that appeared in the 1854 volume of the Spiritualist magazine *Shekinah* offered one example of a southerner who was secretly exploring Spiritualism, “which we of the South ridicule and denounce.” The daughter of a minister, she had come to question the truth of Scripture and had counted herself an atheist and materialist until she lost a person she loved dearly. The claims of Spiritualism were compelling, but she did not trust them until she heard it vouched for by someone of noted national character, and it was to him she had written the letters, requesting that he respond to her pseudonym (her mail was sometimes opened by others), and that he burn her letters. He chose instead to remove both of their names and publish them in a national publication. She appealed to him to answer her heartfelt questions with his own first-hand experience of spiritual contact. She asked, “I pray you then, sir, to tell me, Is there a Spiritual World? And shall we there recognize each other? I do not ask for arguments from the schools, but of your own personal knowledge. Can you tell aught of that world, which will console me for the loss of one I so prized?”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ “A Bishop on Spiritualism,” *Daily South Carolinian*, December 4, 1855.

¹⁶⁵ “A Man Starving Himself,” *Charleston Mercury*, September 13, 1856; “Suicide from Spiritualism,” *Charleston Mercury*, May 25, 1857; “Suicide of a Medical Student—Love and Spiritualism,” *Daily Morning News*, February 27, 1857; “Another Victim of Spiritualism,” *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel*, March 25, 1857; “Separation of Husband and Wife by Order of the Spirits,” *Daily Morning News*, February 4, 1859; “Latest Foreign News,” *Jackson Daily News*, June 22, 1860; “Demoralizing Effect of Spiritualism,” *Daily Morning News*, February 26, 1859.

¹⁶⁶ “Exposure of Spiritualism,” *Daily Morning News*, December 25, 1858.

¹⁶⁷ “The Comforter,” *Shekinah*, 1853, 25–37.

Consolation for the bereaved drove much of the interest in the claims of Spiritualism. Consolation literature thrived in the antebellum United States, addressing the depression particularly of parents who outlived their children.¹⁶⁸ While orthodox Christianity offered the promise of an eventual reunion, Spiritualists claimed the ability to offer an immediate audience with a lost loved one. Godfrey Barnsley, who traveled between his cotton brokerage offices in Savannah, Mobile, and New Orleans in the 1840s and 1850s, had been drawn to the concept of spirit communication by a “seeress” after the death of his wife in 1845. He became convinced of his ability to receive messages from the dead, and once Spiritualism became an important part of popular culture, many of his friends became believers.¹⁶⁹ Former South Carolina Governor James Hamilton visited the Fox sisters in New York, in order to communicate with his dead son.¹⁷⁰

Francis H. Smith of Baltimore cited a fundamental impetus behind the movement—the desire to get a first-hand or at least a second-hand, near-at-hand view of heaven. The shaking of faith in the translation and interpretation of Scripture in recent decades, the endless creedal arguments between denominations, the rise and fall of prophets and movements, had people thirsting to hear of heaven from a familiar voice. Smith wrote of “nearest and dearest friends”

¹⁶⁸ McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism & the Cultural Politics of 19th-Century America*, 21–27. McGarry discusses the connection between bereavement and the attraction to Spiritualism, particularly for women. For a discussion of consolation literature in the North, see Ann Douglas, “Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880,” *American Quarterly* 26, no. 5 (December 1974): 496–515; Francis H. Smith, *My Experience: Or, Footprints of a Presbyterian to Spiritualism*, 1860, 11. Francis H. Smith, like many others, was drawn to Spiritualism and convinced of it, when a message came from a soul identifying itself as his son, who had died twenty years earlier.

¹⁶⁹ Schoonmaker, “Seeking Solace from the Dead the Spiritualists of Mobile,” 20–27.

¹⁷⁰ Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 597.

who could communicate: “Believing, also, that they, having passed beyond the veil that conceals from our natural eye the future that awaits us, have a better knowledge of the realities of the world to come, man’s duty here and destiny hereafter, than any man or number of men on earth; I accept their teachings, always subjecting them to the test of reason and my own intuitive sense of right.”¹⁷¹ Smith published his account of his conversion to Spiritualism after thirty years as a Presbyterian.

In his book *Spiritual Communion* Nashville minister Jesse Ferguson addressed this yearning for an experience of the spiritual realm: “All men are mediums; but mediumship has its degrees.” Such communication was open to all who “comply with the conditions by which it would attract and fill the small or large vessels of our souls.”¹⁷² He rejected, as did a number of Spiritualists, the idea that “exalted Spirits” truly desired to communicate through the “strange and apparently silly, trifling, and useless phenomena” of rappings and table tipping. If they did so, it was to capture the attention of the naysayers who had ridiculed anyone who claimed to witness an apparition. It was harder to explain tables, dishes, and carpets moving without human manipulation than words coming from a medium’s mouth.¹⁷³

While some were drawn to Spiritualism for the feats like table-tipping—and were often disillusioned when fraud was proved—quite a few were more interested in hearing what a spirit might say about the world beyond. A body of literature began to filter into southern libraries in the 1850s with the channeled words of the dead, often the illustrious dead, describing their experiences after death and the purposes of life. Books like Judge J. W. Edmonds’s *Spiritualism*,

¹⁷¹ Smith, *My Experience*, 21.

¹⁷² Ferguson, *Spirit Communion*, 8.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8–10.

Jesse Ferguson's *Spirit Communion: A Record of Communications from the Spirit-Spheres*, Francis Smith's *My Experience: Or, Footprints of a Presbyterian to Spiritualism* began to circulate—some nationally, some in small circles—some to acclaim, some to ridicule, some to both.¹⁷⁴ They did not always agree with each other, but general concepts began to emerge from their detailed conversations with spirits about the celestial realms.

Some pursued Spiritualism within a Christian context. Summoned spirits demonstrated a respect for pure Christianity, though they were rarely complimentary of modern denominational schisms. The messages echoed the complaints of the time that sectarianism was destroying the Christian message. One said of a preacher who “desired to head a party,” “Partyism is not of Christ—not of God—nor of Humanity. Peace on Earth—Freedom of thought. Let all judge as they have capacity.”¹⁷⁵ “Another spirit counseled “*More Union* is the cry of the Spirits—More Union. How deficient are all Christian bodies in a rational and an improving union. When now I view them from my Spirit-home, my soul almost sinks within me at the shameless hypocrisy of their professed love for all mankind.”¹⁷⁶ A spirit in a Nashville séance was queried as to whether

¹⁷⁴ J[ohn] W[orth] Edmonds and George T. Dexter, *Spiritualism*, 2 vols. (New York: Partridge & Brittan, 1853). Though Dexter co-authored the book, he is almost never mentioned when people speak of the book at the time. Judge Edmonds was the celebrity author. “The Vision of Judge Edmonds—Wonderful Statement,” *Daily Morning News*, May 20, 1852; “Judge Edmonds’ Spiritual Intercourse,” *New York Evangelist*, June 10, 1852: 94; “Judge Edmonds on Spiritualism,” *Daily Morning News*, October 27, 1853; John Bovee Dods, *Spirit Manifestations Examined and Explained. Judge Edmonds Refuted; Or, An Exposition of the Involuntary Powers and Instincts of the Human Mind* (New York: DeWitt & Davenport, 1854); Ferguson, *Spirit Communion*; Ferguson’s book was mainly known around Nashville. See “New Book on Spiritualism,” *Nashville Union and American*, April 19, 1855; Smith, *My Experience*; Smith’s book was known in Spiritualism circles. See “My Experience; Or, Footprints of a Presbyterian to Spiritualism,” *Banner of Light* 7, no. 15 (July 7, 1860): 4.

¹⁷⁵ Ferguson, *Spirit Communion*, 44.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

he had met “Orthodox Divines” in the afterlife. “Many,” he responded, “Many of them, too, are far above me many below. Their elevation has grown out of their sincerity not their orthodoxy.”¹⁷⁷ The *New York Evangelist*, however, cautioned readers to avoid any spirit in a seance that encouraged heterodoxy ; this was the defining distinction between the good spirits and the evil ones.¹⁷⁸ Judge J. W. Edmonds’s *Spiritualism*, an 1852 volume coauthored with a medical doctor, was one of the best-known works on the subject in the South.¹⁷⁹ In a world divided into so many Christian sects, he said, his hope in pursuing knowledge of the spirit realms was to find “in this new revelation some common platform on which all might congregate and unite in one common adoration of the God of all.” He also rejected the idea that the Christian philosophy should cause anyone to “shrink from the investigation of Nature.”¹⁸⁰

Some spirits described their journey to the afterlife, usually offering a comforting picture. O. F. Parker of St. Louis communicated through a medium in Nashville his death story, which resonated with the yearning in society concerning reconnection with departed family. As he lay on his deathbed, the spirit said, he saw the spirits of his grandparents and father approaching as

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 53.

¹⁷⁸ “Orthodox Spiritualists,” *New York Evangelist*, July 30, 1857, 1.

¹⁷⁹ James Henry Hammond credited Edmonds’s book *Spiritualism* for the appeal of the idea to him. Edmonds’s name is the most-oft mentioned name in all discussions of Spiritualism in the South. For sampling, see Hammond, *Secret and Sacred*, 262–263; “The Vision of Judge Edmonds—Wonderful Statement”; “Judge Edmonds on Spiritualism”; “[Untitled],” *Daily Alabama Journal*, December 28, 1853; “Spiritualist Nominations”; “The Story of Death,” *Memphis Daily Appeal*, December 12, 1857; “Spiritualism on Sunday,” *Daily Confederation*, December 4, 1858.

¹⁸⁰ Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, 9, 69–70. Edmonds introduces the work with a letter of appeal “To the Public,” regarding the criticisms that had been directed toward his religious beliefs and questions as to whether he had been a proper judge. He wrote: “I believed in the Christian religion, and would administer civil law according to the principles of the Divine law as it had been revealed to us.”

he “looked inwardly.” They spoke to him of peace and told him it was his time to depart, staying with him as his “Spirit was freed.” His spirit hovered over the bed, and he heard the people in the room commenting upon his death. He stayed near his body until it was buried, then his relatives took him to the “First Sphere,” the second and better, and finally a third, which was the place his “inclination responded to.” They let him know there were better spheres where they hoped to see him as he progressed and that they would be helping him in his development.¹⁸¹ According to Judge Edmonds and Dr. Dexter, who believed they were hearing from the spirit of Emanuel Swedenborg, “God has no locality,” but fills the universe, therefore souls would be in union with God in any realm.

Spirits contacted in seances described a place of infinite beauty. One circle claimed to be under the “guardianship” of the spirit of Sir Humphry Davy for eighteen months. When posed a question about the nature of “our spirit home,” Davy’s spirit responded that earth’s language could not suffice: “Beautiful is an Arabian night, when the clear amber of the heavens is studded with star-diamonds, and the bright moon passes forth to guide us in the path; but far more beautiful is our spirit home.”¹⁸² The spheres of heaven grow “more gloriously beautiful” as you ascend higher, according to Davy, who spent some time describing the sixth sphere. Even the “fabled garden of Eden did not equal this sphere of more than supreme beauty,” he claimed.

The foot sinks in flowers of divine color, of which you can ne’er conceive, sending forth their incense all around. Amid valleys of fragrant flowers flow brooks, sparkling in the rays of our sunlight divine. Anon roll oceans, tossing their mighty billows to the east and to the west. Many landscapes are diversified with hill and dale, valleys and mountains—mountains towering to a stupendous height, until they are almost lost in the sky above. Oh, the skies of this heavenly sphere—to what shall I liken them? To Italy’s summer sky?—to

¹⁸¹ Ferguson, *Spirit Communion*, 41–42.

¹⁸² Smith, *My Experience*, 110.

Persia's lovely arc?—to aught that man has ever beheld? No; all is inadequate to tell their glory.¹⁸³

Davy's spirit also addressed the question of future punishment, saying, "God punishes no man; man works out his own hereafter, and the state of punishment is terrific—fearfully awful." Angels, however, work to bring back to life, the bud of goodness that remains to bring the dark souls "upwards to dwell in the abodes of bliss."¹⁸⁴ Jesse Ferguson, after years of spirit communication, claimed that humans should relieve themselves of their fears about future "penal sanctions." "Every man commences the future life in the precise state of development in which he leaves this," he wrote. Those who are of an elevated spiritual development serve to guide and teach those who enter the realm at a lower level.¹⁸⁵

Messages from spirits almost always described a world of progression—a rapid learning, but not an instant knowledge of all things, because "we love to improve our spirit-minds, much more than you of earth."¹⁸⁶ And infants and small children who die are then nurtured and raised by angels, according to Davy.¹⁸⁷ The spirit of Swedenborg told Edmonds and Dexter that mothers on earth are usually surrounded by the spirits of their dead children, who have been nurtured and sent back to comfort and assist them.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Ibid., 111.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 110.

¹⁸⁵ Ferguson, *Spirit Communion*, 189–191.

¹⁸⁶ "Heaven," *New Orleans Daily Creole*, November 10, 1856; Smith, *My Experience*, 67, 111.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, *My Experience*, 111–112.

¹⁸⁸ Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, 120–121.

Spirits actively helped and taught loved ones back on earth.¹⁸⁹ A spirit speaking through a medium at a circle attended by Jesse Ferguson said, “Think not that your good friends, at death, go far off. Give up the false idea. Look not to the grave. . . . They are around you; and could they express their happiness and their interest in you, you would never look again for them in the dark grave.” He suggested that spirits are whispering to their loved ones, tending the growth of their minds and guiding them away from the wrong ideas.¹⁹⁰ Another spirit in Ferguson’s acquaintance suggested that spirits make noises in the homes of those they tend, trying to alert them of their presence.¹⁹¹ Most mediums that achieved public notice claimed to have been in contact with the illustrious dead. A Savannah paper reported one who had summoned John Q. Adams.¹⁹² Smith’s circle channeled not only Davy, but also Edgar Allan Poe, who spoke of God’s mercy and his own regret that his talents had been destroyed by alcohol.¹⁹³ His circle also called Noah Webster, who was very grateful that at last a circle had taken an interest in calling him up.¹⁹⁴ They called up Benjamin Franklin.¹⁹⁵ Dexter and Edmonds most often communicated with Lord Bacon and Emanuel Swedenborg, who told them that in every age, “we spirits have been compelled to try and make ourselves felt.” In time, they contacted Daniel Webster, John C. Calhoun, and Henry Clay. Unlike some of the public displays in which such characters

¹⁸⁹ Smith, *My Experience*, 111.

¹⁹⁰ Ferguson, *Spirit Communion*, 20.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁹² “Spiritualism in New Hampshire,” *Daily Morning News*, October 11, 1851.

¹⁹³ Smith, *My Experience*, 130.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

commented on the politics of the moment, these spoke of heavenly matters, occasionally of regrets for time or opportunities wasted on earth, and only obliquely of the state of affairs on earth.¹⁹⁶ Henry Clay, directing himself to U.S. Senator Nathaniel Tallmadge of Wisconsin, who was among those present, said:

How very dim life on earth seems to me now! I look upon it as a troubled dream, wherein were indeed some bright spots, some kind feelings shed around my path to make it brighter. I was but the germ placed in a casket of clay, whose inner unfoldings, whose heaven-sent aspirations, should have begun to develop themselves sooner while placed there.¹⁹⁷

In 1855 Rev. Samuel Watson and his investigative team in Memphis sought the wisdom of spirits to answer the question of whether there was an intermediate state. The spirit of John Wesley told the group that the spirits of the dead do not go directly to heaven. Another spirit added, “No one has ever yet been saved in heaven; no one sent to hell,” apparently meaning that the journey toward the final destiny is still in progress for the most developed of human souls.¹⁹⁸ He described three places—an “outer darkness,” a place “of happiness and delight, called paradise,” and a “high and exalted” place called “third heaven.” The idea of hell, it claimed, was misinterpreted from the work of Josephus.¹⁹⁹ A soul is attracted to the realm to which its nature is suited, though to every soul is given “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”²⁰⁰ At first, while the memories, thoughts, and affections of a person remain dominant, the soul will see a heaven that

¹⁹⁶ Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, 128, 393, 399.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 403 Senator Tallmadge was an active part of the circle for whom all of the communications in the book came, and he wrote an appendix to the book.

¹⁹⁸ Watson, *The Clock Struck One, and Christian Spiritualist*, 43.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 97–98.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 43–44.

looks much like earth. That will change as the earthly attachments dissolve.²⁰¹ In a later session, spirits informed the assembled group, “This world is the seed field of elements which are to bear flower and fruit in heaven. . . . To grow in wisdom, intelligence, goodness, and usefulness forever, is the life and felicity of heaven.” The spirit found the idea of a material heaven, with gates and thrones, absurd.²⁰²

In Spiritualism, enthusiasts, devotees, and the curious found rich detail to place on the sparse bones of the afterlife as it had been traditionally described. They learned of processes and landscapes, of occupations and evolutions. They found reason to believe that the dearly departed had not really gone far, were still engaged in the events of earthly life, and might be contacted under the right conditions. They were attracted to a vision of heaven that bound itself intricately to earth and to forms of spiritual devotion that had the potential to answer back. For the subset of the southern population who indulged, it was worth the risk of discovery and the requisite censure to peek behind the veil, if only in secret and only briefly.

Anyone hoping to pursue knowledge of Spiritualism or, worse, a commitment to it, in the South, was bound to face scorn. Jesse Ferguson, asserting to his followers that he did indeed have “intelligent and blissful communion with departed spirits,” said, “I know the prejudices against it, and would not needlessly offend them. But I say to you as your friend, your preacher, and as one that must suffer more for this avowal than all others present, it is neither humbug nor imposture, nor the work of the Devil, saving to those who may make humbug and deception of

²⁰¹ Ibid., 98–99.

²⁰² Ibid., 94–95.

the holiest privileges of man.”²⁰³ The *Charleston Courier* heaped scorn on the memory of Dixon L. Davis, a hydropathic physician in South Carolina in whom “the multifarious errors of Yankeedom” had become manifest, including Spiritualism. Finding no respect at home, he had moved to Chicago to start newspapers and to publish pamphlets about Spiritualism.²⁰⁴ Spiritualism was not a path to glory for anyone who intended to remain in the South.

Had it arisen at an earlier time in the South, Spiritualism might have found a hearty environment for growth, but it was the 1850s, and the movement was associated with abolition. It was not just a northern-born “ism.” Spiritualists shared the stage with abolitionists and often *were* very vocal abolitionists, making use of their fame and making this “ism” the most dangerous of them all.²⁰⁵ News began to surface that mediums were channeling southern icons like Thomas Jefferson and John C. Calhoun and talking politics from the grave.²⁰⁶ Late in the legislative session of 1859, Alabama’s lawmakers overrode a governor’s veto to pass a new tax, assessing \$500 for “spiritual mediums” performing in the state—likely concerned about the risk that mediums might sway voters as the voices of dead luminaries like Calhoun and Jefferson told

²⁰³ Ferguson, *Relation of Pastor and People*, 13.

²⁰⁴ “Dixon L. Davis,” *Charleston Courier*, September 25, 1860.

²⁰⁵ “Spiritualism and Anti-Slavery,” *Liberator*, July 23, 1858, 119. Andrew Jackson Davis reported that he had been warned that associating himself with the anti-slavery movement would damage his connection with the South. In this 1858 article, he said that he was willing to sacrifice his reputation to stand for the truth about slavery.

²⁰⁶ “The Spirit Rappers in Washington,” *Daily Morning News*, March 29, 1853; “Spiritual Manifestations,” *Daily Picayune*, June 5, 1853; “Correspondence of the Courier,” *Charleston Courier*, January 24, 1860.

the crowd who should be chosen in the upcoming presidential election.²⁰⁷ Spiritualists were hindered but not stopped.

Often the criticism or ridicule appeared to be tacked on to the end of an article reprinted from a paper more friendly to Spiritualism and, therefore, more of an advertisement for the practice than a discouragement. In the summer of 1853, the *Southern Literary Messenger* began an article titled “Spiritual Manifestations” with the suggestion that “once a channel is opened for the reception of prodigies”—acknowledging that such prodigies have always existed—“all manner of portents will hasten to avail themselves of the favourable opportunity presented.”²⁰⁸ And as it attempted to disagree with or ridicule the writings of those who were commenting on Spiritualism—men like Horace Greeley and Charles Beecher—the author was offering southern readers a list of the notable people who claimed to have found some credence in the claims of Spiritualists. The lengthy article meant to tamp down interest might just as well have had the opposite effect.²⁰⁹ Newspapers reported on the project of a team of Harvard professors to disprove the claims of Spiritualism, but then had to report that the head of the research team had

²⁰⁷ “Tax on ‘Spiritual Manifestations,’” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, December 20, 1859; Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years’ Record of the Communion between Earth and the World of Spirits*, 3rd ed. (New York: Author, 1870), 417. Celebrated medium Emma Hardinge claimed in her memoir that the legislation was passed specifically to prevent her own tour in the state—passing just as she arrived in Mobile, where she was slated to begin her tour.

²⁰⁸ “Spiritual Manifestations,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, July 1853, 385, 394.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 385–395. It is clear from the tone of the article that the author’s intentions were as much to insult the North, in general, as to insult Spiritualism, specifically. The point was made numerous times that the North embraced Spiritualism because it had no “principles of judgment” (p. 386).

converted to Spiritualism.²¹⁰ And given the flood of interest that followed the remainder of 1853 and 1854, it is safe to say that the *Southern Literary Messenger* was not successful in turning the southern public off of the subject.

Readers of other southern newspapers found themselves also having to decide how to interpret the articles. The *Charleston Mercury* in 1857 reported efforts to expel a Harvard divinity student for performing Spiritualist acts, because so many had witnessed his “feats” and said they could not be faked. The *Mercury* editor reported it cynically, saying that the student had “succeeded in duping large ‘circles’ in this city and the neighboring towns.”²¹¹ Readers, however, had to ask whether the editor of the *Mercury* could be trusted above an entire community who had observed this young man’s actions. The *Daily Confederation* in Montgomery picked up a story from the *Richmond Dispatch* that derided the New Yorkers who had failed to attend regular churches that Sunday morning, due to bad weather, but had turned out in large numbers to hear the Spiritualist Judge J. W. Edmonds.²¹² The article, which intended to criticize Spiritualism and the North, further advertised the popularity of Judge Edmonds—whose book on *Spiritualism* had helped convert some to Spiritualism.²¹³

The criticism clearly prevented many southerners from ever considering Spiritualism and tempered the enthusiasm of some who explored it. But those who chose it or chose to explore it

²¹⁰ For a history of the Harvard examinations into Spiritualism, written by a Spiritualist who believes the experiments helped the cause, see Allen Putnam, *Agassiz and Spiritualism: Involving the Investigation of Harvard College Professors in 1857* (Boston: Colby & Rich, 1874).

²¹¹ “Expulsion of a Spirtual [sic] Medium,” *Charleston Mercury*, April 13, 1857.

²¹² “Spiritualism on Sunday.”

²¹³ “Judge Edmonds on Spiritualism”; “The Vision of Judge Edmonds—Wonderful Statement”; Hammond, *Secret and Sacred*, 262.

under these conditions were taking a risk beyond what many in the North faced. Those who explored it or embraced it secretively in many cases would have been attaching an element of fear and guilt to the new conceptions of heaven and hell. Those who embraced it openly, did so with a strength of will that could be contagious. The new conceptions permeated society and affected thought and conversation, whether or not a person was a believer. After a decade of Spiritualism, talk of heaven, hell, and other prospects had grown much less abstract. Attention had shifted to the details.

* * *

Throughout the antebellum period—particularly after 1840—waves of increasingly strong demand for mystical underpinning to ideas of the afterlife rolled through southern communities. The vernacular of Spiritualism, terms like the “Spirit-Land,” found their way into common use.²¹⁴ Ministers themselves were infected with the desire to find a more magical conception of the worlds that beckoned—the fate that inspired men to live life in one way or the other. The bereaved saw in this new thought a desirable alternative to the bleak message of a reasoned religion, which told them they must be separated from dead loved ones for the remainder of their lives. Independent-minded southerners, frustrated with the arguments between educated ministers over the reliability of Scripture and creed, hoped to find answers from sources they could trust—from family members and friends who had made the journey ahead of them. And odd as it seemed to some then, and odder still to many now, a subset of the literate white population trusted the sleeping more than the waking, the dead more than the living. And for them, heaven grew, while hell shrank.

²¹⁴ “Oh Think Not of Her as Dead,” *The Southern Literary Messenger*, August 1855, 518; White, *Voices from Spirit-Land*, 91.

CHAPTER V.
THE FATE OF SKEPTICISM, RATIONALISM, AND “ISMS” IN GENERAL: THE CIVIL
WAR ERA

I saw that I was the victim of a miserable delusion, in supposing my finite faculties could successfully grapple with the mysteries of the universe. I found that to receive the attempted solutions of philosophy required more faith than Revelation, and my proud soul humbled itself, and rested in the Bible.

—Augusta Evans, *Beulah*, 1859

In the last days of the antebellum period, southerners continued to explore expanded views of the afterlife available in the literature of the time. Some questioned the place of hell in their theology and others gave it less thought than their ancestors had, while maintaining a technical belief in its power and importance to society. When they gave it attention most continued to see it as the fate of the bulk of mankind. The language and ideas of Swedenborgianism, mesmerism, and Spiritualism appeared in the novels and poems sold in local bookstores. Sermons by the region’s orthodox clergy, which had once focused on heaven as a goal to attain began to explore it as an environment to relish. Spiritually speaking, the years 1859 and 1860 represent a time of rather subdued contemplation after the turmoil of Spiritualism had shaken the peace in the mid-1850s. They were the calm before a new storm.

The advent of the Civil War opened new possibilities for inquiry regarding afterlife beliefs because death became so prevalent. People felt the urge to express their feelings about it in writing, descendants kept the materials they created, and archives have preserved much, leaving a rich record. In tracts, catechisms, and hymns, we see how the concepts of heaven and hell were being shaped in young minds. The records of the time also demonstrate how the stress

of war was reforming priorities and beliefs, at least temporarily. As soldiers began to die, the priority of spiritual leaders turned toward preparing them for heaven by the fastest possible means. And the literature being produced out of the South began to return to the tone of the sermons and tracts that had circulated in 1820 and before, which had focused on the path to heaven and not on the world beyond. During the Civil War era, the rhetoric of the afterlife, therefore, became a blend of new ideas and old—often chosen for the effectiveness or comfort in a given situation. There is a sense of a people, much like Beulah, giving up the struggle with frightening new ideas, and returning to the safety of orthodoxy.

THE AFTERLIFE IN PUBLISHED LITERATURE 1859–1860

A perusal of bookstore advertisements in 1859 and 1860 in southern newspapers reveal little awareness of the crisis that loomed ahead. Southerners tastes in books continued to reflect diverse interests and a tendency to read books often as not published outside the South. They were enjoying a new edition of the works of Edgar Allan Poe and the complete novels of Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton. They were reading a southern voice of the Enlightenment in the *Works of Thomas Jefferson*. They read travel accounts and histories of Greece, France, Holland, Belgium and other locales. They read fiction, politics, humor, self-help, biography, science, history, and religion. And while the overt “isms” had gone relatively quiet in the South, the residual effects were evident within the texts they read.

Southern advertisements featured T. S. Arthur’s *Steps toward Heaven*, for example, a collection of lessons about the path to heaven, which began with the words, “No special theology is taught in this volume. It addresses itself to no particular sect or denomination. It has no aim

but to assist men to grow better, and thence, happier.”¹ But elements of heaven and its dynamics described by Arthur have a clear Swedenborgian influence, whether or not Arthur was aware of the source of his thought. After the death of one character, for example, a conversation ensues in which a wise old man tells a young person that the dead man “could not live in eternal association with spirits or angels, the movement of whose lives was not in harmony with his own.” He would “go to his own,” referring to the angels with which he was in harmony or “sympathy,” an idea much more Swedenborgian than scriptural.² Arthur also reflected the desire to find spiritual revelations in dreams. He wrote of a mother who had lost her child. In a dream (of which she said, “I call it a dream, but regard it as a revelation”), she was taken to the “upper kingdom of our Father,” where she saw her child being tended “in the arms of the angel-mother,” also a vision of Swedenborg. The angel-mother assured her: “He is safe in his celestial home for ever, and is and will be blessed far above anything you could ask—for it hath not entered into the heart of even a mother to conceive what transcendent delights are in store for those who are born into heaven. Is it not, therefore, better for your child?”³ Arthur encouraged his readers to open their eyes and “know our celestial visitors when they come.”⁴ His work would have been familiar to many southerners, appearing often in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and *Graham’s Magazine*,

¹ T[imothy] S[hay] Arthur, *Steps Toward Heaven: Or, Religion in Common Life ; a Series of Lay Sermons for Converts in the Great Awakening* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1858), iii; “New Books,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, January 4, 1859.

² Arthur, *Steps Toward Heaven*, 98–99.

³ *Ibid.*, 171–172.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 174–175.

and he penned a number of popular novels, usually carrying simple moral messages.⁵ In his 1858 novel *The Hand but Not the Heart*, also on sale in southern bookstores, another rather Swedenborgian idea slipped in as the main character described meeting his soul mate Jessié Loring. “There are true marriages in which the parties are drawn towards each other by sexual affinities peculiar to themselves,” the character began, continuing, “When I first met Jessié Loring, a spirit whispered to me—was it a lying spirit?—a spirit whispered to me—‘the beautiful complement of your life!’”⁶ Arthur appeared to have had no intention of spreading a Swedenborgian picture of heaven, specifically. He was simply telling interesting stories, incorporating the cultural elements that were familiar at the time, which indicates the degree to which these ideas had permeated literary culture and were seeping into southern reading by the late 1850s.

The “spectres” and ghosts that had been something of an innovation in writing in 1820 had become a recurring device of fiction by 1860. The spirit who whispered to Arthur’s character was, apparently, some sort of guardian angel guiding the character in his choices. The works of Edgar Allan Poe were filled with spooky figures, usually less well meaning. Mrs. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft’s *The Black Gauntlet: A Tale of Plantation Life in South Carolina*, published in 1860, contained references to communion between the dead and the living.⁷ *The Haunted Homestead: And Other Nouvellettes* by Emma D. E. N. Southworth was chosen by southern

⁵ Arthur’s books *The Hand but Not the Heart* and *Lizzy Glenn* were also featured in advertisements in 1859. “New Books,” *Augusta Chronicle*, January 20, 1859; “New Books,” *Charleston Mercury*, November 17, 1859.

⁶ Timothy Shay Arthur, *The Hand but Not the Heart, Or, The Life-Trials of Jessie Loring* (New York: G.G. Evans, 1859), 9.

⁷ Schoolcraft, *The Black Gauntlet*, 264, 286, 539.

bookstores to be featured prominently in advertisements in 1860.⁸ Southworth, a Virginia writer, prefaced the stories with the enticing notice that “The Nouvellettes that comprise this volume, are all founded on facts, ‘stranger than fiction,’ that have come under my own personal observation, or have been communicated to me by persons of reliable veracity.”⁹ Ghost stories ostensibly based on true events offered the most chillingly fun reading, but also fed the continued thirst for spirit communication, even if Spiritualism itself had fallen out of favor.¹⁰

Those more concerned with meeting loved ones again in the afterlife were likely familiar with the work of Henry Harbaugh, whose new volume, *Poems*, arrived in the South to acclaim in 1860. This Pennsylvania-based minister of the German Reformed Church had made a name for himself as a visionary of the afterlife, producing *Heaven; Or, an Earnest and Scriptural Inquiry into the Abode of the Sainted Dead* in 1849, *Heavenly Recognition: Or, an Earnest and Scriptural Discussion of the Question ‘Will We Know our Friends in Heaven?’* in 1851, and *Heavenly Home; Or, the Employments & Enjoyments of the Saints in Heaven* in 1853. His books all claimed to be about “scriptural inquiries” but were much broader in truth, looking for comforting ideas of heaven in tradition and in the universal ideas across cultures. Harbaugh

⁸ Emma Dorothy Eliza Nevitte Southworth, *The Haunted Homestead; and Other Nouvellettes* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson & Brothers, 1860); “New Books,” *Daily Confederation*, June 22, 1860; “New Books,” *Augusta Chronicle*, April 24, 1860; “New Books,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, April 7, 1860.

⁹ Southworth, *The Haunted Homestead; and Other Nouvellettes*, (25).

¹⁰ “Art. VII. Brief Reviews,” *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, July 1860, 454. The *Methodist Quarterly Review* heartily recommended George W. Samson’s book *Spiritualism Tested: Or the Facts of Its History Classified, and Their Cause In Nature Verified from Ancient and Modern Testimonies*, which appeared out of Boston in 1860. Its reviewer saw it as “a work well adapted to antagonize the delusion which has been spreading like a devastating sirocco over many communities.” If bookstores carried the book, however, they did not advertise it.

claimed that Jesus had said little about heaven because he was more intent on bringing men to salvation—on building the heavenly kingdom on earth.¹¹ Like other afterlife writers, Harbaugh supplemented Scripture with ancient literature, drawing on the works of thinkers such as Homer and on pagan belief systems to demonstrate that certain key ideas are universal in human understanding regarding the world beyond death. Influenced by the Enlightenment, Harbaugh shared the common trait of afterlife commentators who studied the workings of nature—using reason, applied to these observations, to build a picture of the next world.¹² Harbaugh had also tended to look for truth about heaven in poetry. In this new volume, he offered his own verses, along with the translations of six German poems, and though it is not specifically about the afterlife, titles like “Through Death to Life,” “Heavenly Recognition,” and “Here are the Dead!” demonstrate his continued passion for this subject. Harbaugh revealed himself in this to be less skilled as a poet than as a prose writer, as the *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church South* delicately pointed out. It also noted the debt Christians owed the “pious and gifted author,” though, and recommended the book.¹³

Another volume titled *Poems* appeared in 1860, this one by Swedenborgian homeopathic physician William H. Holcombe of Natchez. Holcombe covered a wide range of subjects, but did homage to Swedenborg in “Tribute to Emanuel Swedenborg,” who he called “Nature’s noblest

¹¹ Henry Harbaugh, *The Heavenly Recognition, Or, An Earnest and Scriptural Discussion of the Question, Will We Know Our Friends in Heaven[?]* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1851, 1856), 116.

¹² H. B. Bascom, *Sermons from the Pulpit* (Louisville, KY: Morton & Griswold, 1850), 315–316; Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, 22; James H. Moorhead, *Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800–1880*, *Journal of American History*, 1984, 528.

¹³ “Art. VIII. Brief Reviews,” *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, April 1860, 278.

Priest.” The poem expressed regret that Swedenborg had been “on earth ignored, traduced, misunderstood.”¹⁴ The volume caught the notice of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, which expressed tongue-in-cheek regret that someone of Holcombe’s talent had moved from his native Virginia and become devoted to the “subtleties of Swedenborgianism.” Nevertheless, it encouraged people to read the poems, apparently not afraid to expose them to the thought. Further, it paid special tribute to his poem “New Thanatopsis,” a very lovely and elegant piece, but decidedly Swedenborgian in nature. In “New Thanatopsis,” Holcombe writes, “The Angel lives potential in the Spirit, // And both are grafted in the Natural Man” and describes “the basis of our higher life— // Celestial superstructure,” where “all are living in congenial spheres.”¹⁵ The *Daily Picayune* gave the volume advance praise as well.¹⁶

The prominent place given in southern bookstore advertisements to George Wood’s new novel *Future Life or Scenes in Another World* reveals the interest booksellers anticipated for this title. Wood described a future world remarkably like the reported scenes of heaven coming out of séances—a recreationally active existence in lush gardens attending lectures by such luminaries as Benjamin Franklin or hearing a “quartet” composed of Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.¹⁷ One aspect of Wood’s tale reflected a continued interest in the question of life on other planets—and the curiosity about the eternal fate of extraterrestrial societies, if God had sent his Son specifically to redeem the people of Earth. In George Wood’s heaven, the souls of countless unfallen worlds regularly traveled from their distant heavenly locales to attend services

¹⁴ William H. Holcombe, MD, *Poems* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 217.

¹⁵ “Notices of New Works,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, June 1, 1860.

¹⁶ “New Books,” *Daily Picayune*, September 22, 1860.

¹⁷ Wood, *Future Life*, 54, 100, 266.

with the souls of the Redeemed—to hear the story of the great sacrifice made for that special group. The Redeemed, knowing the grace of God in a way the unfallen—who had no need for grace—could not, had a purpose in the universe to share that glory, according to Wood.¹⁸ Wood prefaced this imaginative exploration of heaven with explicit statements distancing himself from modern Spiritualism (as a “revival of ancient necromancy”) and commitment to “the Westminster Shorter Catechism into which he was indoctrinated from infancy by pious parents, as the most perfect presentation of the truth of God’s word ever composed for the Church of Christ.”¹⁹ This distancing from Spiritualism and the fictional presentation gave southerners permission to enjoy a story that painted a very detailed picture of heaven beyond what Scripture offered.

Augusta Evans’s novel *Beulah* arrived in southern bookstores in 1859, bringing with it a message about the anguish of skepticism and the comfort of faith in the revelation of God as established by Christian orthodoxy. The book was a great success, North and South, selling twenty-two thousand copies in its first nine months and making Evans a wealthy woman.²⁰ Evans wrote *Beulah* as an antidote to the toxic skepticism she saw in her world—a toxin that had

¹⁸ Ibid., 266.

¹⁹ “New Books,” *Daily Picayune*, February 7, 1859; “New Books,” *Augusta Chronicle*, March 25, 1859; “New Books,” *Daily Morning News*, January 12, 1859; Wood, *Future Life*, vii–x.

²⁰ For an excellent introduction to *Beulah*, see Fox-Genovese, “Introduction,” xiii–xiv; Thomas, *Secret Eye*, 189. Writing in July of 1862, Thomas credits *Beulah* as one of the “two books which have created most sensation in the novel reading portion of the country for some time.”

created a crisis of faith in her own life at one point.²¹ The title character, Beulah Benton, explored the ideas of one philosopher after another, seeking something to replace the Scripture she had abandoned when God had seemingly taken her beloved sister. Each new philosophy captured her imagination for a time, then disappointed, until she finally concluded that reason could not satisfy her need; her only peace would come in trusting the revelation she had abandoned. Evans's Beulah was a woman who thought for herself and thought at a lofty level—something that appealed to women around the country. The anguish of Beulah's skepticism also resonated, particularly with southerners, who were finding some of their most fundamental institutions challenged in the 1850s. Critics of the novel complained of the youthful Evans's misunderstanding of some of the philosophers her character explored, but no one accused her of creating an unrealistic character or situation; no one denied the world had become skeptical.²² The *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church South* in fact claimed that the book “aims at a faithful portraiture of real life.” It celebrated a message—not readily conveyed in a sermon or tract—about the “shame, follies, and vices of fashionable life. . . . and the baseless and unsatisfying character of rationalism—the exaggerated subjective religion of some of our ‘great thinkers’—as a substitute for the truth as it is in Jesus.”²³ The *Southern Literary Messenger*, however, worried that Evans might be exciting curiosity, saying, “In paying a last tribute to the genius and promise of the ‘writer of Beulah,’ we cannot animadvert too severely upon the

²¹ For details of Evans's own bout with skepticism, see Underwood, “Skeptical Inquiry and Religious Awakening in ‘Beulah,’ by Augusta Jane Evans,” 65–91; Fidler, *Augusta Evans Wilson, 1835-1909: A Biography*; Also, for much of Evans's philosophy behind Beulah and religion, see Sexton, *Southern Woman of Letters*.

²² “Beulah,” 247.

²³ “Art. VII. Brief Reviews,” *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, January 1860, 112.

disposition discoverable everywhere, to make subtle and abstract, dangerous and seductive theories of metaphysics and theology still more attractive to the enquiring mind.”²⁴ Evans does seem to have captured through the character Beulah a number of layers of questioning that were permeating southern society in the antebellum period. And at the pinnacle of the questioning was the essence of what awaited—what is there beyond this?

Augusta Evans’s assertions that skepticism was a problem in her world find support in an article in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* written just as *Beulah* was being published. The article titled “A Reasonable Answer to the Skeptic” cautioned southerners to prepare themselves to answer for their faith when challenged by skeptics.²⁵ “For where, once, the fact of there being in the world a Divine revelation met at least with languid and indolent assent, it is now confronted by bold and bristling infidelity.” The article laid the root of the current skepticism, just as Beulah Benton did, at questioning whether the Bible was God’s revelation.²⁶ And it blamed the questioning on scientific discoveries, “which bring a cloud over many a holy text which once stood forth clear and unquestioned, insinuating into the unguarded soul the fatal thought, that that Book on which all heavenly hope is based, may not, after all, be absolutely relied on as true.”²⁷ If laymen reading the article hoped to walk away armed with the tools to battle skepticism, however, they must have been disappointed. The article concluded that the only way to battle the skeptic was to have a Theological Seminary, where profound study of the

²⁴ “Beulah,” 247.

²⁵ “Article II. A Reasonable Answer to the Skeptic,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 11, no. 3 (October 1858): 386–401.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 387.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 391.

Bible can prove its truths. In other words, overcoming skepticism would require experts, professionally trained.²⁸

The Methodist *Quarterly Review* also mentioned a new volume by Charles Darwin, called *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*, an edition of which W. T. Berry in Nashville had just released. While it credited Darwin as someone “entitled to high consideration,” this review was otherwise critical. “Mr. Darwin quotes the Bible as authority,” it says, “but does not seem to have much confidence in its chronology”—having estimated that men were manufacturing pottery in the Nile as much as fourteen thousand years earlier. The writer, however, concluded with one rather ironically interesting insight: “As to the notion that all nations were once in a state of barbarism, that this was the primitive state of the species, it might almost as well be said that they were all originally monkeys.”²⁹

The changing view of science as the enemy of God and the breeding ground for infidelity was evident in a declining number of book advertisements. An 1858 article in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* acknowledged the excesses of science, but added:

The facts of science and religion are like the summits of the same mountain range; when viewed singly and alone they may appear as if frowning upon each other in stern and formidable rivalry, but if we will descend their sloping sides into the vales below, they will be found to stand united and rooted together in one common and enduring granite basis. . . . If religion would be true to herself she must be the friend and patron of science, stimulating her researches till the veil which hangs between be rent and these twin-sisters of the skies embrace each other.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., 401.

²⁹ “Art. VIII. Brief Reviews,” 290.

³⁰ “Article IV. Popular Objections to Science,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 11, no. 2 (July 1858): 223.

While individuals consciously sought knowledge of the sciences and the “isms” that surfaced in the antebellum period, society as a whole felt the effects less directly. Publications coming out of the various orthodox Christian denominations show a marked difference in their attention to the details of the heavenly existence in 1860 versus 1820. The promise of a sermon “about heaven” was more likely now to be about an environment or community, rather than a treatise on how to get to heaven. In 1859, the *Methodist Pulpit South* published articles on “Heavenly Treasures Contrasted with Earthly,” “Angelic Study,” and “The Intermediate State.” One article with the title “The Objects of Angelic Curiosity” celebrated the curiosity that drives humans to look into the mysteries of God and encouraged its cultivation. The author inquired about salvation for inhabitants of other planets, concluding: “Whether or not the multiplied millions of worlds that revolve in immensity are inhabited with intellectual and moral beings—if so, whether or not any of them have fallen, like our own—if they have, whether or not they have been redeemed—these, and other questions equally curious, we have no means of answering.” If the other planets do have fallen inhabitants, he concluded, theologians cannot say if the “mediatorial character” of Jesus will save them, but they can say that the fallen angels will not be saved by him.³¹

³¹ Thos. O. Summers, “The Objects of Angelic Curiosity,” in *Methodist Pulpit South*, by William T. Smithson, Third (Washington, DC: Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1859), 149–150, 154; W. M. Wightman, “Heavenly Treasures Contrasted with Earthly,” in *Methodist Pulpit South*, by William T. Smithson, Third (Washington, DC: Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1859), 9–19; John W. Hanner, “Angelic Study,” in *Methodist Pulpit South*, by William T. Smithson, Third (Washington, DC: Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1859), 79–91; Rev. S. G. Starks, “Resurrection of the Dead,” in *Methodist Pulpit South*, by William T. Smithson, Third (Washington, DC: Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1859), 249–274; R. N. M’tteire, “The Intermediate State: Or, the State of the Soul between Death and the Resurrection,” in *Methodist Pulpit South*, by William T. Smithson, Third (Washington, DC: Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1859), 373–388; This preoccupation with other planets might have been aggravated by the new edition of Whewell’s *Plurality of Worlds*, which is prefaced with the statement, “Though

The struggle to mesh the biblical view of heaven with one that satisfied the longings of nineteenth-century Americans was evident in John L. Dagg's *Manual of Theology*, published by the Southern Baptist Publication Society in 1859.³² In his chapter on heaven, Dagg described the possibility that heaven was a "vast central globe, around which the stars of heaven are making their slow revolutions." He hastened to add: "There is something pleasing in this conjecture, which connects astronomical science with the hopes of the Christian; but it must be remembered that it is mere conjecture."³³ Knowledge would be "ever increasing," ensuring constant learning, in Dagg's conception of heaven. "How far the learning of the future world will include the sciences which are taught in the schools on earth, it is of little use to inquire," he continued.³⁴ Angels would convey the souls of the saved to heaven and "form part of the happy society into which we shall be introduced." It will be a city life, he asserted, where all are wealthy.³⁵ "The future happiness of the saints is called a rest; but it is not a rest of inactivity," Dagg further assured his readers.³⁶ The manual reads as apologetics—an answer to the writings of the

Revealed Religion contains no doctrine relative to the inhabitants of planets and stars; and though, till within the last three centuries, no Christian thinker deemed such a doctrine to be required, in order to complete our view of the attributes of the Creator; yet it is possible that at the present day, when the assumption of such inhabitants is very generally made and assented to, many persons have so mingled this assumption with their religious beliefs, that they regard it as an essential part of Natural Religion." Whewell, *Plurality of Worlds*.

³² O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 1097. O'Brien says that there was a ready market for the works of theology like Dagg's *Manual of Theology* in the South.

³³ John Leadley Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1859), 357–358.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 359–360.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 362.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Spiritualists, the Swedenborgians, and others who had in recent years created a very interesting heaven—a place where average people could easily and happily envision themselves.

On the eve of the Civil War, the afterlife depicted in various publications was predominantly Christian with a delicate blending of other, often attractive, ideas that did not have a scriptural basis. Heaven was presented as a desirable resort for intellectually active people, and hell was scarcely mentioned. For most at this stage, though, discussions of the future state were theoretical, speculative, and a pleasurable use of time. The advent of war would make the questions of the afterlife palpably real.

AFTERLIFE HOPES AND FEARS IN THE CIVIL WAR SOUTH

The Civil War era presents a window into southerners' views of the afterlife when it seemed most imminent—and often in their own words. Death touched virtually every family, and southerners recorded their thoughts about such things as never before. Religious groups produced a flood of doctrinal tracts on salvation, death, and eternity in mass numbers for soldiers and those on the homefront. Defeat in battle shook southern confidence in God's mercy and providence, raising new questions about man's eternal security. And, in the decades after the war, zeal for the "Lost Cause" ensured the preservation of important documents. It is one of those rare periods for which historians have almost too much information.³⁷

As we search the words of Civil War-era southerners for their concepts of the afterlife, we inevitably hit upon the problem of rhetoric. From Scripture and from hymns, people absorbed

³⁷ The earlier chapters focused on the Deep South, in the interest of seeking the most distinctively "southern" region before sectional divisions had become clear. But as the context here turns to the Civil War, the scope of "southern" will encompass the Confederate States more broadly.

images and phrases that might or might not reflect beliefs. Did they, for example, truly picture millions of souls at the “Saviour’s right hand” and simultaneously “in the bosom of Abraham,” and each of those millions of souls clothed in robes literally washed white by the blood of Jesus?³⁸ Did the expressions “seventh heaven” or “highest heaven” have a concrete meaning in their theology?³⁹ How did they reconcile a hymn that talks of “dwelling in everlasting light” with another in the same hymn book that says they will “praise him day and night” in heaven?⁴⁰ For that matter, did they think carefully about what heaven would be like if they did indeed “praise him day and night”? It is unlikely most ever examined the inherited rhetoric with care. It is important to keep this in mind as we study their words, seeking an understanding of the dynamic view of the afterlife that was emerging as death became ever-present in wartime.

The beliefs of southerners differed in subtle, rather than more substantial, ways from those in the North. As Henry Harbaugh prepared the fifteenth edition of his book, *The Heavenly Recognition*, he expressed the hope that this was one topic that “even in the present distracted and divided state of the church, is not likely to excite any sectional jealousies.”⁴¹ The North had more access and apparently greater tolerance for such “unorthodox” theologies as Unitarianism

³⁸ “Obituaries,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, April 15, 1862; Mattison, *Immortality of the Soul*, 60; “A Word of Warning for the Sick Soldier: Electronic Edition [1861-1865?],” *Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, 1999, 7, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/anonym87/anonym87.html>.

³⁹ Laura Matilda Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina 1862–1884*, ed. Rupert Sargent Holland (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1912), 180.

⁴⁰ A (compiled by) Sabbath School Teacher, ed., *Collection of Sabbath School Hymns. Compiled by a Sabbath School Teacher, for the Benefit of the Children in the Confederate States* (Raleigh, NC: Raleigh Steam-Power Press, 1863), 23, 26.

⁴¹ Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, vi.

and Universalism and had been the spawning ground for Spiritualism, Mormonism, and many other “isms,” with their numerous variations of afterlife beliefs. But southerners had been exposed to most of the same literature, lecturers, and ideas, if in smaller doses, and were by no means uniform in their ideas. Many a southern gentleman received his higher education in a northern school. And the relationships and interactions between people of the two regions ensured a continual flow of ideas, even if the rhetoric grew caustic at times. Despite the South’s reputation and self-image as a region of unified religious beliefs, sectarian differences abounded, even within the Protestant denominations.⁴² The differences between Protestants and non-

⁴² O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 1067. O’Brien says, “The Southern religious scene was complex, with as many faiths as there were peoples, as many theologies as there were individuals.”; See also Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 54–55; Drew Gilpin Faust, “*Without Pilot or Compass*”: *Elite Women and Religion in the Civil War South*, *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 250. Faust challenges as rhetorical device the image of the South as evangelically unified. The war revealed the “underlying fissures” in that supposed harmony. Julia Ellen LeGrand Waitz, *Diary of Julia LeGrand Waitz*, *The Journal of Julie LeGrand*, New Orleans 1862–1863 (Richmond, VA: Everett Waddey Co., 1911), 161. Julia Waitz of New Orleans swore in her diary never to be a church member. She wrote, “We all think differently and hate each other because we can not see alike. . . . Sectarianism awes and disgusts me.”; Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 127. When Laura Towne moved from Pennsylvania to South Carolina, she was amused by a local black minister who expressed “intense horror” to discover that she was a Unitarian. American Memory, “Bill Williams. Ex-Slave 82 Years Old. [South Carolina],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 200–201, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>. Bill Williams, slave to a Baptist minister, recalled his owner’s conviction that the slaves on a neighboring plantation were destined for hell, being Presbyterians. American Memory, “Ned Walker. Ex-Slave 83 Years Old,” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 175, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>. Another slave, Ned Walker, remembered with pleasure that his “white folks” had been Episcopalians. “Dere was no hard shell Baptist and no soft shell Methodist in deir make up. It was all glory, big glory, glory in de very highest rung of Jacob’s ladder, wid our white folks.”

Protestants added further nuances.⁴³ And when the beliefs of black southerners are taken into account, the internal regional distinctions grow wider, as elements of African traditions continued to shape black spirituality and had an effect on white culture, by extension. The South, therefore, was much like the North in the multifaceted nature of its “afterlife.”

For southerners, young and old, death had not yet been hidden away in hospitals and funeral homes as the Civil War began. They participated in the entire process as loved ones died—if they were fortunate enough to be near. The subject frequently came up in letters that often included a list of all who had died in the family and community since the last communication. Family of dying loved ones felt compelled to acknowledge the bad news to the patient, to allow the person time to prepare for death.⁴⁴ The human devastation of the Civil War

⁴³ O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 1072. Differences were even more acute between Protestants and non-Protestants. Though there was some anti-Semitism in the South, Jews had greater acceptance than Catholics, having never reached very large numbers and having assimilated into the surrounding populations. ; Though the idea was circulating at the time that Jews did not believe in an afterlife, prominent authorities on heaven like Henry Harbaugh and Hiram Mattison insisted that Jews shared a belief in the continuation of the soul. See Mattison, *Immortality of the Soul*, 54; Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, 87; Faust, *Republic of Suffering*; Drew Gilpin Faust, “The Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying,” *Journal of Southern History* (February 2001): 9. Faust has also found evidence in the letters and diaries of Jewish soldiers that they believed in “a better life” to come. ; For estimates of membership in the various American sects in 1855, see Joseph Belcher, *The Religious Denominations in the United States: Their History, Doctrine, Government and Statistics* (Philadelphia: J.E. Potter, 1855). On pages 764 and 846, he estimated that 75,000 Jews and 1,638,000 Roman Catholics lived in the southern states. With more than twenty times as many Catholics as Jews residing in the South, Protestants saw much more of a threat there. With respect to afterlife beliefs, southern Protestant theology was at times built around a resistance to anything resembling Catholic doctrine.

⁴⁴ Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America,” 481; Kate Cumming, *Diary of Kate Cumming*, Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1998), 20–21; John Sehon to Bettie Maney Kimberly, 20 Oct 1862, Augusta, Georgia. “Kimberly Family. Personal Correspondence, 1862–1864: Electronic Edition,” *Documenting the American South*, 2000, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/kimberly/kimberly.html>; Philippe Aries, “The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Toward Death in Western Society,” *American Quarterly*, *American Quarterly* (1974): 540, 542, 550. I concur with the many American

ensured more talk of death, heaven, and hell. Americans experienced carnage on a scale proportionally beyond anything the country had seen or would see again, and the South suffered the heaviest toll.⁴⁵ Child mortality had always been a tragic normality in the lives of southerners, but in this war, young men—who had survived to adulthood—were taken in the prime of life. And they were deprived the comfort of dying with family near.⁴⁶ The obituary of a Virginia soldier limned the problem: “Far in a strange land died this young soldier; truly, he has fallen in the flower of his manly strength. No mother was there to bathe his fevered brow and throbbing temples; no sister’s hand to smooth his pillow.”⁴⁷ Unable to hear the soldier’s last words, to assess his spiritual preparedness for death, or, in many cases, to bury him properly added to the family’s fears and preoccupation with matters of the soul. Preparing for death filled the minds of many wartime southerners.

historians who have disagreed with Aries’s well-known assertion that Americans kept patients ignorant of impending death and made of death a taboo subject. Evidence does not support it for nineteenth-century Americans.

⁴⁵ J. David Hacker, “The Human Cost of War: White Population in the United States, 1850–1880,” *Journal of Economic History* 61, no. 2 (June 2001): 486. Hacker’s 2001 analysis estimated 618,222 military deaths, which equaled the numbers of all other American wars combined, through the Korean War. Nearly one in eight white men of military age were killed nationwide, but in the South, the ratio was one of four—three times the northern rate. This number was accepted by historians until Hacker’s continued work produced a new estimate, which appeared in 2011. ; Hacker now estimates that the Civil War deaths totaled 752,000 and could have gone as high as 851,000. J. David Hacker, “A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead,” *Civil War History* 57, no. 4 (December 2011): 307. Hacker acknowledges that we will never have a solid count of the dead, and that most of the “uncounted dead were likely southerners (thanks to deficiencies in Confederate recordkeeping and the troubled postwar condition of the south).”

⁴⁶ Faust, “Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying,” 4, 10–11; See also Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) for an in-depth treatment of how the Civil War altered perceptions of bodily remains, allowing the process of embalming to gain acceptance.

⁴⁷ “Died,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, September 21, 1861.

Southern children were being prepared to face death throughout the war. The *Collection of Sabbath School Hymns for Confederate Children* made no effort to shield the little ones from thoughts of death and the afterlife. One hymn said, “Death with his arrow may soon lay us low.” Another described the “sweet fields of Eden.” One stanza of a song oddly titled “Happy Greeting to All” talked of the hope of heaven “if, ere this glad year has drawn to a close / some loved one among us in death shall repose.”⁴⁸ And unlike children in more peaceful times, most of these children would encounter death close at hand before a year passed.

As the war turned against the Confederacy, and defeat seemed imminent, some experienced a crisis of faith.⁴⁹ In March 1863, Julia Waitz and her friends awaited rescue in occupied New Orleans, where she wrote, “There is a great change in morals close at hand, at all events—we have all vowed to believe in nothing forevermore if the Confederates do not come this time. Heaven defend us from such a state of atheism.”⁵⁰ Women, particularly, asked how God could exact so high a human cost in what they saw as a righteous cause.⁵¹ Loreta Velazquez wrote, “We actually catch ourselves wondering whether it has always been so, and whether it will always be so until we die, and when we die, whether eternity will have anything better to

⁴⁸ Sabbath School Teacher, *Collection of Sabbath School Hymns*, 27, 31, 41.

⁴⁹ Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Noll makes an excellent case for the war as a crisis of faith from beginning to end, as the question of God’s views of slavery were at issue. Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 65.

⁵⁰ Waitz, *Diary of Julia LeGrand Waitz*, 252.

⁵¹ Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 66; Faust, “Without Pilot or Compass”: *Elite Women and Religion in the Civil War South*, 256–257.

offer.”⁵² Addressing the flagging morale of Confederates in January of 1864, an article in the *Richmond Dispatch* said, “There is no such consolation to struggling virtue, there is no ray of illumination to the mind which broads [spreads] sadly over the evil in the world, like that which the hope of a compensating future casts over the perplexities and woes of the present.”⁵³ For some, the crisis led to greater orthodoxy, in hope of appeasing their angry God.⁵⁴ For others, it opened the way to more creative thinking about matters of the afterlife, as the limits imposed by strict scriptural orthodoxy ceased to satisfy.⁵⁵

SOUTHERN HOPES FOR THE AFTERLIFE

Orthodoxy had traditionally offered little beyond a static sketch of the afterlife to southerners—at best a romantic image of white-robed saints kneeling around the throne of God, winged angels hovering above, singing hallelujahs, a crystal lake glistening in the distance. And many were content with this vague image, happy with the hope of leaving behind the hardships

⁵² Loreta Janeta Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle: The Civil War Narrative of Loreta Janeta Velazquez, Cuban Woman and Confederate Soldier*, Wisconsin Studies in Autobiography (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1876, 2003), 168. Velasquez’s memoirs have been called into question on a number of points, but there is no reason to doubt this expression of sentiment.

⁵³ “The Reward of Virtue,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 15, 1864.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of the state of mind in the South as the region appeared to be facing the “chastening hand” of God after defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, see George C. Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, The Littlefield History of the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, c2010., 2010), 270–277.

⁵⁵ Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 65; Phillip Shaw Paludan, *Religion and the American Civil War*, Religion and the American Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30–31. Paludan correctly asserts that vague ideas of heaven gave way to more detailed views of heaven by the war’s end. His assertion that one book per year about heaven appeared before the war is not accurate, however. At least six books appeared in 1860 alone concerning immortality or the future state of the dead.

of earth someday—so long as what lay beyond was a “better world than this.”⁵⁶ Traditionally, they had accepted the sufferings of life as a necessary tool to prepare them to deserve and to appreciate heaven.⁵⁷ The decades before the war had brought enough uncertainty about all sorts of traditional ideas that southerners felt somewhat bolder about asking questions. Fewer were willing to accept the generic response that “God works in mysterious ways.” The distraught parent grieving the death of a child worried and wondered and sought a more complete picture of that child’s fate.⁵⁸ Death made heaven a fascinating subject.

The idea of reunion lay at the center of all hopes for heaven. Kate Cumming, an Alabama nurse, described the emotions of wounded and dying soldiers. Most expressed disappointment that they could not be with family, but hope that they would meet again in heaven.⁵⁹ As Sarah Morgan waited out the war in New Orleans, she mourned the fact that her family would never be whole again until heaven.⁶⁰ Widow Mary Sims of Arkansas wrote notes to her dead husband in her journal: “Oh I will think of thee Love though thou are gone fo[r]ever I can near forget love

⁵⁶ Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind of Pre–Civil War America,” 494–495; Faust, “Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying,” 26.

⁵⁷ Minerva Leah Rowles McClatchey, *A Georgia Woman’s Civil War Diary: The Journal of Minerva Leah Rowles McClatchey, 1864–1865*, ed. T. Conn Bryan (Savannah, GA: Georgia Historical Society, 1967), 207; R. . Lenoir to Aunt Sade, 12 Apr 1861, Fayetteville, North Carolina *Lenoir Family Papers. Personal Correspondence, 1861–1865: Electronic Edition* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000), <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/lenoir/lenoir.html>; Velazquez, *Woman in Battle*, 154.

⁵⁸ Thomas, *Secret Eye*, 142. Gertrude Thomas said that heaven became a reality to her the night her baby died. See also M.D. Holcombe, William H., *Our Children in Heaven* (Philadelphia: Lippincott’s Press, 1868). Holcombe, a homeopathic doctor practicing in New Orleans, lost his young daughter to illness. He decided to write this book for other grieving parents, describing the Swedenborgian view of children in heaven.

⁵⁹ Cumming, *Diary of Kate Cumming*, 20–21, 35, 180.

⁶⁰ Dawson, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 610.

no never never but we will meet again love to part no more fo[r]ever where the Angels dwell love we will live f[or]ever.”⁶¹ As Annie Sehon of Tennessee contemplated the possibility that her husband would not return from the war, she prayed that her death would follow soon after his.⁶² Even children’s hymns spoke the language of reunion and “no parting there.”⁶³ It was very important that departed family members be buried together—a re-creation of the family circle where survivors could visit, often daily.⁶⁴ It was a matter of urgency to work toward the salvation of all surviving family members—even if it meant stepping beyond the bounds of propriety. Mame of North Carolina wrote these words to her uncle: “Oh! Uncle Tom I know you love God, why don’t you come out and acknowledge him before men? . . . I am afraid you think it is not quite in place for me to say this—but I love you so much, and long for you to be within

⁶¹ Sims, *Private Journal of Mary Ann Owen Sims*, 262.

⁶² Annie Sehon to Bettie Maney Kimberly, Nashville 16 Feb 1862. “Kimberly Family. Personal Correspondence, 1862–1864: Electronic Edition”. Annie Sehon died soon after, and it was her husband who had to deal with the grief. He was not as content as she to rest in the idea that they would be reunited eventually. In a letter to his sister-in-law Bettie dated 20 Oct 1864, John Sehon wrote, “Bettie I cannot school my heart nor control my thoughts; they will travel backward, not forward—the hours first spent with her, our engagement and all those treasured days of our married life—these recollections even at the side of her grave, I cannot exchange for the thoughts of heavenly reunion and happiness.”

⁶³ Sabbath School Teacher, *Collection of Sabbath School Hymns*, 9.

⁶⁴ Mary E. (now Richards) Stovall, *To Be, To Do, and To Suffer”: Responses to Illness and Death in the Nineteenth-Century Central South*, *Journal of Mississippi History*, 1990, 107; Sarah Ida Fowler Morgan Dawson, *Diary of Sarah Fowler Morgan Dawson, A Confederate Girl’s Diary: Sarah Morgan Dawson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 238; Susan Bradford Eppes, *Diary of Susan Bradford Eppes, Through Some Eventful Years* (Macon, GA: Press of the J. W. Burke Co., 1926), 52; Charles Colcock Jones, *The Children of Pride; A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War*, ed. Robert Manson Myers (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 1148.

the ‘Ark of Safety.’”⁶⁵ Unfortunately, a person could not control who entered the “Ark” with them.

As death surrounded them, they comforted themselves with the idea that the time of departure from earth was God’s conscious and wise choice—a theological assumption that had not changed with the passing decades. Writing to console her sister after the death of an infant daughter, Caroline Jones of Georgia said, “They say no earthly love is taken away until it has accomplished its work. . . . Now she has gone to be another link in the chain that draws you to heaven.”⁶⁶ Of the death of a soldier one tract said, “It is sad to lose one, so lovely and so promising, but Jesus knows best where to place his children.”⁶⁷ The letters and journals of soldiers reveal that this belief that death was in God’s hands and could not be avoided emboldened them to face battle courageously, without regard for self-preservation.⁶⁸ Southerners

⁶⁵ Mame to Uncle Tom, 26 Dec [1861–1865], in *Lenoir Family Papers. Personal Correspondence, 1861–1865: Electronic Edition*. The phrase “Ark of Safety” recurs in the writings of a number of people in this era. It does not appear to be extracted from the King James Bible; it seems more likely to reflect the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg, whose followers used the expression to describe their church. Spiritualists also used the expression, claiming that in 1860, Spiritualists estimated 25 million “non-professors out of the Ark of Safety,” whom they sought to save. See *Spiritualist Register; with a Calendar and Speakers’ Almanac, for 1861; Facts, Philosophy, Statistics of Spiritualism* (Auburn, NY: U. Clark, Spiritual Clarion Office, 1861); G Beckwith, “The Spiritual Theory,” *Fourth Annual Spiritual Register, with a Calendar and Speakers’ Almanac, for 1860*, 1860, http://spirithistory.iapsop.com/1860_spiritualist_register.html.

⁶⁶ Jones, *Children of Pride*, 1084.

⁶⁷ Rev. W. H. McIntosh, “James C. Sumner, the Young Soldier Ready for Death (1862),” *Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, 2000, 8, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/mcintosh/mcintosh.html>.

⁶⁸ Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*. Rable’s study looks at the convictions of people on both sides of the American Civil War that they were God’s “chosen,” and that Providence was at work in the affairs of war. Faust, “Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying,” 21; James M. McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford

also believed God used death to chasten those he loved—a belief that would make the Civil War a deeply “chastening” experience.⁶⁹ In the hands of southern ministers, though, the chastening stood as evidence that southerners were, indeed, God’s “chosen people.”⁷⁰ They believed God also used death to punish the wicked or protect the innocent. Escaping death by a near miss, or unexpected recovery from illness, was also seen as God’s mercy and usually carried a message that the fortunate survivor was being given another chance to please God.⁷¹ Their journey to the afterlife would begin in God’s own time.

* * *

There is no simple, definitive answer to the question, “What did southerners believe about the afterlife?” Beliefs were shaped and colored by background, creed, education, and the circumstances of the moment. Here and there, in the diaries, letters, tracts, hymns, and books, we can begin to put together a somewhat blurry composite of the most common image of heaven emerging for Protestant Christians in the Civil War–era South.⁷² In looking at their view of the heavenly environment, its inhabitants and their relationships, and the activities that would fill celestial days, we find a rich, diverse, and often contested landscape. We have much more with which to imagine than the musings of 1820 offered. Afterlife images differ in the details, but at

University Press, 1997), 64, 68; Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country*. Schantz sees this as an essential psychological element in allowing a citizenry to send soldiers to their deaths.

⁶⁹ James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 112; Annie Sehon to Bettie Maney Kimberly, Atlanta, 22 May 1864. “Kimberly Family. Personal Correspondence, 1862–1864: Electronic Edition”. Upon their father’s death, Annie Sehon reminded her sister that “Whom the Lord Loveth, he chasteneth.”

⁷⁰ Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 77.

⁷¹ Jones, *Children of Pride*, 167.

⁷² This picture of heaven includes the writing of some northern authors, since they were the main source of reading material for southerners before the war.

the center we find that people most hoped for in the next world a re-creation of their earthly lives and loves—only better.

Much as their ancestors had, Civil War–era southerners tended to envision heaven as “up” and far away, at the end of a long journey through a dark passage or valley.⁷³ One obituary declared that a young girl had been “suddenly stricken from our galaxy, and is set forever behind a horizon whose confines is the gloom of the valley of the shadow of death.”⁷⁴ In his 1858 novel *Future Life, Or, Scenes in Another World*, George Wood imagined his character taking a long flight to heaven, which was a vast interplanetary system.⁷⁵ But this idea of a faraway heaven or a long journey was not universally accepted or insisted upon. One tract published by the Confederate States of America during the war years was titled “Whither Bound?” and took up the question of the afterlife. It was adamant that both heaven and hell were physical localities, and not mere “states of being,” as some philosophies would have them.⁷⁶ Baptist theologian John Dagg insisted that heaven was a physical place and that it was somewhere other than the “atmospheric heaven” where “the fowls of heaven have their habitation.” But where exactly it was, he did not find important, as Scripture had not given the location.⁷⁷ Some described heaven

⁷³ Cumming, *Diary of Kate Cumming*, 78; Eppes, *Diary of Susan Bradford Eppes*, 193; John Willison and Evangelical Tract Society, *Light for the End of the Journey a Manual for the Instruction and Comfort of the Sick, the Wounded and the Dying* (Petersburg, VA: Published by the Evangelical Tract Society, 1863), 3.

⁷⁴ “Obituaries,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 22, 1862.

⁷⁵ Wood, *Future Life*, 31.

⁷⁶ Chaplain 10th Virginia Cavalry, *Whither Bound?* Parrish & Willingham. Confederate Imprints (Raleigh, NC: s.n., 1861), 4, <https://archive-org.libdata.lib.ua.edu/details/whitherbound00rale>.

⁷⁷ Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 357.

as across a “narrow sea” or a river, like the Jordan, within sight.⁷⁸ Methodist Episcopal clergyman Hiram Mattison rejected the idea that we have a long journey to heaven. He wrote, “It is no tiresome walk down through a lonely, dark valley; it is no weary flight upward.”⁷⁹ Episcopal Rector J. W. McCullough believed the spirit world was all around us: “How near us is the awful, the mysterious world of spirits! Nothing separates us from that dread and unexplored abode, but these thin, opaque, and crumbling veils of flesh!”⁸⁰

Wherever heaven might be—in a geographical location or a state of mind—most hoped it would look like a perfected earth. The glories of Eden would be there: verdant green meadows, brilliant unfading flowers, “trees of Paradise,” crystal clear flowing brooks, and cloudless skies. Writers on the subject described a perpetually optimal climate—an “eternal spring” or a land with no seasons at all.⁸¹ Though they did occasionally use the expression “day and night” in reference to heaven, they were far more likely to talk of “eternal day” and brightness—a brightness “above the sun,” yet without oppressive heat. But so would there be the refinements of the modern age: palaces, mansions, streets, and choirs.⁸² John Dagg emphasized that “He hath

⁷⁸ Sabbath School Teacher, *Collection of Sabbath School Hymns*, 15–16, 30; Anonymous, *Hymns for the Camp: Electronic Edition*, 2nd ed. (Raleigh, NC: General Tract Agency, Strother & Gaines Printers, 1862), 122.

⁷⁹ Mattison, *Immortality of the Soul*, 64.

⁸⁰ McCullough, MA, *Dead in Christ*, 13.

⁸¹ Anonymous, *Hymns for the Camp: Electronic Edition*, 122; John S Long, *The Great Day of Wrath and of Glory* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861), 12.

⁸² C[harles] T[odd] Quintard, *The Confederate Soldier's Pocket Manual of Devotions: Electronic Edition* (Charleston, SC: Evans & Cogswell, 1863), 81–82, 87; Anonymous, *Hymns for the Camp: Electronic Edition*, 111, 115, 119, 122, 123; Long, *Great Day of Wrath and of Glory*, 12; Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, 3; Henry Keeling, *Colporteur's Commission: A Tract for the Times, in Several Scriptural Hymns: Electronic Edition*, 1862, 5.

prepared for us a city,” insisting that “a city is a place where society abounds. . . [where] the rich and noble resort.”⁸³ People were most likely to imagine heaven to be what seemed to themselves to be a place of recreation and reward—to some, a city, to others, a bucolic garden.

Beyond its glorious landscape, Americans had come to associate heaven with the concept of home during the antebellum period.⁸⁴ The idea appears prominently in southern hymns. One hymnbook designed for the “benefit of children in the Confederate states” talked of being “on our journey home,” “homeward bound,” in “haste to your home,” “safely at home,” and numerous other variations on this theme. Some of the songs referred to heaven as the “Fatherland.”⁸⁵ Particularly interesting from a theological standpoint are words that refer to the act of *returning* home. Slaves tended to view heaven as a return to their homeland of Africa.⁸⁶ But white southerners also used this language. One hymn published for Confederate soldiers in 1862 said that the Deliverer would “take his exile home.” Another referred to heaven as “thy native place.”⁸⁷ This idea carries a connotation of death as a freedom from exile, in effect, and a return to a place a soul would know.

Though these references might be rhetorical, there was a theological basis. Theologians at

⁸³ Dagg, *Manual of Theology*.

⁸⁴ Douglas, “Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature,” 501–502. In the decades prior to the war, southern women would have been exposed to the consolation literature of the North, which was less concerned with how to merit heaven than with the nature and proximity of heaven. They wanted to see it as home, rather than kingdom; Phillip Shaw Paludan, *A People’s Contest: The Union & Civil War, 1861-1865*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1988, 1996), 368.

⁸⁵ Sabbath School Teacher, *Collection of Sabbath School Hymns*, 9, 15–16, 26–27, 42, 48.

⁸⁶ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 32.

⁸⁷ Anonymous, *Hymns for the Camp: Electronic Edition*, 110, 117.

this time were debating whether the soul pre-existed the body—hence, heaven being a return to the soul’s “native place.” Hiram Mattison described the four theories under consideration: (1) “souls are procreated by angels,” (2) “they are created by God and pre-exist in another state before they appear here in the body,” (3) “they are created by the Deity, at the time of their union with the body, or (4) “they are propagated or transmitted from parent to child in accordance with certain laws as yet unknown to man.” Mattison supported the last theory, believing it the only satisfactory explanation for the transmission of sin.⁸⁸ Rev. N. L. Rice, a Presbyterian minister from New York whose *Immortality of the Soul* was well-known by southerners, agreed that souls were not pre-existent but insisted that each was “created by God with a nature not subject to decay and death.”⁸⁹ William Henry Holcombe wrote of “departures to and arrivals from the spiritual world,” which seemingly supports the idea of a pre-existent soul.⁹⁰

Some disagreement existed about the nature of angels, as well. Most theologians asserted that angels were a completely different species. While angels and humans would co-exist in the afterlife, they would remain distinct from one another.⁹¹ However, the rhetoric found in the diaries, letters, songs, and novels of laymen often spoke of humans becoming angels after death,

⁸⁸ Mattison, *Immortality of the Soul*, 30.

⁸⁹ Rev. N[athan] L[ewis] Rice, *Immortality of the Soul and Destiny of the Wicked* (Philadelphia: Wescott & Thomson, 1871), 20.

⁹⁰ Stovall, *To Be, To Do, and To Suffer": Responses to Illness and Death in the Nineteenth-Century Central South*, 95.

⁹¹ Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, 126, 134; Mattison, *Immortality of the Soul*, 30, 45; Lang, “On Heaven and Hell: A Historical Introduction to Swedenborg’s Most Popular Book,” 17.

and the writings of Swedenborg had declared this to be the case.⁹² Five months after the death of her child, Mary Jones of Georgia wrote that an infant she saw “reminded me of our dear little one now an angel in heaven.”⁹³ George Wood’s novel envisioned souls in heaven progressing to a point at which they were worthy to do the work of angels.⁹⁴ Whatever their beliefs about the nature of angels, most southerners assigned to them the universal role of messengers and ministers in the earthly realm and as companions, makers of music, and a source of light in the hereafter.⁹⁵ Angels were an integral part of the death experience, as well. Some believed that angels foretold death. Mississippi slave Henry Cheatam recalled a time when his mother was tending a sick white woman, and a spirit “lak an angel” appeared and told the woman she was near death unless she read the Bible backward three times.⁹⁶ Far more common was the belief that angels escorted the soul to heaven.⁹⁷

On occasion, writers suggested that beings other than the triune God, angels, and earth’s

⁹² Sabbath School Teacher, *Collection of Sabbath School Hymns*, 23.

⁹³ Jones, *Children of Pride*, 1132.

⁹⁴ Wood, *Future Life*, 21.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40; *Prepare to Meet Thy God* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861), 2; Anonymous, *Hymns for the Camp: Electronic Edition*, 113, 120; American Memory, “Ex-Slave 87 Years Old [Anderson Bates—South Carolina],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 43, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>; American Memory, “I Heard Lincoln Set Us Free [Henry Cheatam—Mississippi],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 70, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

⁹⁶ American Memory, “I Heard Lincoln Set Us Free [Henry Cheatam—Mississippi],” 70.

⁹⁷ “Died,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, September 21, 1861; “Obituary,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, August 14, 1863; John G. Adams, *Memoir of Thomas Whittemore, D.D.*, Memoir of Thomas Whittemore, D.D. (Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1878), 277.

departed souls inhabit heaven. George Wood's imagined heaven included numerous inhabitants of other worlds—people of planets that did not fall from grace, who had presumably developed civilizations with the Eden-like perfection lost on earth. One such otherworldly inhabitant explained: "The germ of population commenced here as on earth, only as their Adam and Eve ate no apple, so their Paradise now covers the entire globe."⁹⁸ Such an idea might be dismissed as a fictional device if it were not supported by several other sources. First, the expression "worlds" is frequently employed in descriptions of heaven. The Confederate tract "Are You Forgiven?" described those that God would gather at Judgment Day, including "the assembled worlds."⁹⁹ Another described a soldier who "fell asleep in Jesus and rose to worlds on high."¹⁰⁰ A hymn talks of soaring to "worlds unknown."¹⁰¹ Even more compelling are the writings of two southern ministers from orthodox Protestant denominations. Episcopal Rector J. W. McCullough of Delaware wrote, "Worlds are innumerable."¹⁰² Henry Bascom, a prominent Methodist Episcopal minister from Louisville, Kentucky, wrote, "Not only was earth the theater of crime, but, by means of the consequent introduction of death . . . the dishonor of the universe. . . . And although earth itself shall fall, it is only to rise and re-appear a new-created member in the great family of worlds."¹⁰³ The degree to which this idea had filtered into southern society needs more

⁹⁸ Wood, *Future Life*, 39.

⁹⁹ *Are You Forgiven[?]* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861), 7.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Nelson Crooks and Soldiers' Tract Association, *A Soldier's Last Gift to His Mother* (Richmond, VA: Soldiers' Tract Association, M.E. Church, South, 1861, 1974z), 2.

¹⁰¹ Sabbath School Teacher, *Collection of Sabbath School Hymns*, 58.

¹⁰² McCullough, MA, *Dead in Christ*, 139.

¹⁰³ Bascom, *Sermons from the Pulpit*, 338–339.

scrutiny, but clearly a portion of the southern population weighed such possibilities.

The average southerner demonstrated little concern about the strangers in heaven; they simply wanted to be sure family and friends would not become strangers there. They were concerned that the deceased might not maintain their identity—particularly their memories and knowledge. They struggled with how a soul could be blissfully happy if it remembered the struggles of earth—but also wondered how they could recognize one another without such memories. Theologians debated whether a person’s consciousness would accompany the soul to heaven, or would a completely unencumbered spirit, intent only on praising God, be released from the body and the consciousness that had centered on self? Most of the prominent religious books assured readers that in heaven, they would be the same, only better—and that, until the Resurrection reunited bodies with souls, souls would recognize each other by means other than sight.¹⁰⁴ As to the sorrow inherent in earthly memories, experts claimed that such memories would hold no more sorrow in heaven, as the soul would now see the value of the sorrowful experiences and the justice of God’s providence.¹⁰⁵ This issue of recognition in heaven had always mattered to Americans—as attested by the fifteen editions of Harbaugh’s *The Heavenly Recognition* as the war opened. But the Civil War took soldiers far from home—and for many parents, the body never came back, nor was there a grave to visit.¹⁰⁶ The soldier very likely went to war with no image of his family to keep and the family was lucky if they had one image of the

¹⁰⁴ Wood, *Future Life*, 22; Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, 19, 67–69; Rice, *Immortality of the Soul and Destiny of the Wicked*, 26; Mattison, *Immortality of the Soul*, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, 76, 153. Harbaugh also raises the interesting issue of the passage in Revelation 6 where the martyrs cry to God for his vengeance on those who killed them, indicating not only a memory of earth, but a continuing need to see wrongs avenged.

¹⁰⁶ For a groundbreaking study of the impact of the Civil War on the industry of embalming, see Laderman, *Sacred Remains*.

soldier to remember when all other tangible associations were destroyed by battle. For parents, spouses, and children, the question of recognizing a departed soldier—and of being recognized by them—in the afterlife was one of great concern.

What about the children, too? Would they change, grow, remember? The high mortality rate of children rendered vague abstractions of heaven particularly unsatisfying for grieving parents. The night Gertrude Thomas's baby died, she wrote the words, "There is something so solemn in the very thought of death yet I felt as I looked upward that now indeed there was a reality in Heaven. The mortal had put on Immortality."¹⁰⁷ Much as mothers had expressed in the decades before, some Confederate women found solace in the belief that the early death had ensured the child's salvation. Virginia Gray wrote, "Happy, happy child—with none of the regrets, the sins, the unholy desires of older life to carry into his maker's presence."¹⁰⁸ Both the Baptists and Methodists had long since abandoned the tenet of Arminianism that unbaptized infants were sinful and unfit for heaven. Therefore, most southerners felt confident their children were in heaven, though they were unsure what becomes of a child and what a child becomes in heaven. In George Wood's novel of the afterlife, children were taken into homes there, where they continued in their education and development.¹⁰⁹ Most parents seemed to believe, or to hope, their children would remain children. Annie Sehon pictured joining "those little ones we never knew," when she walked the streets of gold.¹¹⁰ And certainly for mothers, there seemed

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, *Secret Eye*, 142.

¹⁰⁸ Gray, *Diary of Virginia Davis Gray*, 52.

¹⁰⁹ Wood, *Future Life*, 24, 29; Beckwith, "Spiritualist Register for 1860."

¹¹⁰ Annie Sehon to Bettie Maney Kimberly, Atlanta, 22 May 1864. "Kimberly Family. Personal Correspondence, 1862–1864: Electronic Edition."

always to be the belief that the child who died in her arms—whatever its new size and age—would still be hers.

Southern adults were less confident about what might happen to their marriages and kinship structures in the afterlife. As determined as they were to have relationships restored there, most understood that there were complications. While parents might want their children gathered around them in heaven, their grown children would have their own families. Further, death often separated husbands and wives quite early, and remarriage was a practical necessity. One woman's children were often raised by another. So who would be married to whom in heaven? Marriage vows, of course, lasted only until death. It was not unusual for a soldier away at war to sign his letters "Yours until death" or something similar. But those of a more romantic bent increasingly spoke of home and hearth transferred to heaven, intact, as the war made life more tenuous and home farther away.¹¹¹ Some of the unorthodox doctrines such as Swedenborgianism and Spiritualism offered hope of eternal unions in heaven.¹¹² Many southerners accepted that family structure could not survive death, but hoped that relationships would.¹¹³ In the writings of the time, it is clear that people are not willing to examine these questions. Rhetoric stops at the comforting phrase.

¹¹¹ Ted Ownby, "Patriarchy in the World Where There Is No Parting? Power Relations in the Confederate Heaven," in *Southern Families at War: Loyalty and Conflict in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford, 2000), 231.

¹¹² Stephen Chism, *The Afterlife of Leslie Stringfellow: A Nineteenth-Century Southern Family's Experiences with Spiritualism* (Fayetteville, AR: Fullcourte Press, 2005), 60. After losing her eighteen-year-old son, Leslie, to illness in 1886, Spiritualist Alice Stringfellow claimed to have communicated with him for many years by means of a planchette. She claimed that Leslie had found his "true mate" in the afterlife.

¹¹³ Stovall, *To Be, To Do, and To Suffer": Responses to Illness and Death in the Nineteenth-Century Central South*, 108–109.

White southerners also avoided the question of social status in the afterlife.¹¹⁴ A social hierarchy remained solidly entrenched in the South—particularly the barrier between white and black. The thoughts of white southerners on the question of racial equality and integration in the afterlife remain obscure to us; they simply did not address it in most of their writings.¹¹⁵ Most of what we know comes from the black population. A black minister’s anecdote to was remembered this way: “His massa had laughed and asked him once whether he thought Christ was going to take d—d black niggers into heaven, he felt sure of one thing, that they would be where Christ was, and even if that was in hell, it would be a heaven.”¹¹⁶ Arkansas slave Eliza Washington recalled the worship services her owner required them to attend: “Reverend Winfield used to preach to the colored people that if they would be good niggers and not steal their master’s eggs and chickens and things, that they might go to the kitchen of heaven when they died.” She recalled a white lady who told her, “I would give anything if I could have Maria in heaven with me to do little things for me.”¹¹⁷ Most slaves did envision white people in their

¹¹⁴ Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 287. Sarah Gayle of Greensboro, Alabama, revealed her own feelings about the this, as she buried the house slaves she had known since they were babies. As she closed the eyes of one who died in 1834, she “prayed that God would cuase us to meet in happiness in another world. I knew at that solemn moment, that color made no difference, but that her life would have been as precious, if I could have saved it, as if she had been white as snow.” Her feelings reveal some ambivalence, certainly, as though the experience was required to teach her this lesson. Also, this was 1834, well before the South had invested blood in defending the institution. What Gayle might have felt and said in 1864, we cannot know.

¹¹⁵ Ownby, “Patriarchy in the World Where There Is No Parting,” 237.

¹¹⁶ Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 42.

¹¹⁷ American Memory, “Slave Memories - Birth, Mother, Father, Separation House” [Eliza Washington—Arkansas],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 53, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

heaven, though Andy Marion of South Carolina would only concede that he had known “some” white men fit to go there.¹¹⁸ In old age, some former slaves who had been children in the war said they hoped to see their former owners in heaven.¹¹⁹ Some envisioned role reversals there, however. The whites would be the servants, blacks the masters.¹²⁰

Picturing role reversals or come-uppance in the afterlife has a long tradition, undoubtedly, so it is no surprise that white southerners were vocal about the proper place of “Yankees” in heaven. Before the war began, southerners had cultivated the idea that northerners were heretics or at least tolerant of infidelity. When southerners claimed biblical support for slavery, northern abolitionists appealed to a “Higher Law,” sealing southern contempt for their godlessness—contempt they applied to northerners in general and not just to abolitionists.¹²¹ As death and destruction mounted during the war, so did the certainty of many southerners that Yankees—those “marauding hosts of hell”—would not be in heaven.¹²² As the Yankees

¹¹⁸ American Memory, “Andy Marion, Ex-Slave 92 Years [South Carolina],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 166, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

¹¹⁹ American Memory, “Nicey Kinney. Ex-Slave - Age 86 [Georgia],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 33, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

¹²⁰ Charshee Charlotte Lawrence-McIntyre, “The Double Meaning of the Spirituals,” *Journal of Black Studies* 17, no. 4 (June 1987): 385; Baldwin, “‘A Home in Dat Rock’: Afro-American Folk Sources and Slave Visions of Heaven and Hell”. Baldwin asserts that most slaves believed that all slaveowners who did not repent (apparently repent of slavery) would go to hell. I have not found that slave sources support this broad attribution.

¹²¹ Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 40–41; Jerald C. Brauer, “Regionalism and Religion in America,” *Church History* 54, no. 3 (1985): 376.

¹²² Thomas Reade Rootes Cobb, “Letter from Thomas Reade Rootes Cobb to Marion Lumpkin Cobb, May 1, 1861,” in *Correspondence of Thomas Reade Rootes Cobb, 1860–1862, 1907*, 314; Junius Newport Bragg, *Letters of a Confederate Surgeon 1861–1865*, 1960, 63; Eliza

surrounded her home in South Carolina, Susan Jervey wrote, “We have some idea of Hell now; such obscene language and ribald oaths filling our ears for the better part of the night.”¹²³ One soldier told a correspondent for the *Richmond Daily Dispatch*: “Hell was too good for them . . . that they had neither hearts nor souls.”¹²⁴ Varina Davis wrote that she did not like to hate, but she hoped that the men harassing her husband would be kept out of paradise.¹²⁵ On the other hand, Kate Cumming asserted, “There are many good and true Christians in the North.”¹²⁶ Certainly there were many southerners who remembered that, even if they did not often say it. The concept of hell could be therapeutic for one who did not witness sufficient retribution for wrongs suffered in life, but the powerlessness of the bereaved in war could only be assuaged so long with the idea that the perceived wrongdoers would suffer in hell. Many, like Sarah Morgan, increasingly disillusioned, drew the conclusion that there was “no salvation on either side.”¹²⁷

More than who would be there, southerners were interested in how they would spend their time in eternity. They no longer seemed keen to rest and sing forever like their 1820 counterparts—though the rhetoric of old hymns still claimed so. Views of afterlife activity had grown noticeably more creative and energetic during the mid-nineteenth century. Mary Jones

Frances Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl 1864–1865* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1908), 65, 228.

¹²³ Susan Ravenel Jervey, *Diary of Susan Ravenel Jervey, Two Diaries from Middle St. John’s, Berkeley, South Carolina, February–May 1865: Journals Kept by Miss Susan R. Jervey and Miss Charlotte St. J. Ravenel, at Northampton and Pooche Plantations, and Reminiscences of Mrs. (Waring) Henagan* (Pinopolis, SC: St. John’s Hunting Club, 1921), 9.

¹²⁴ “Yankee Depredations,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, July 6, 1864.

¹²⁵ Varina Anne Banks Howell Davis, *Jefferson Davis: Private Letters 1823–1889* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 217.

¹²⁶ Cumming, *Diary of Kate Cumming*, 168.

¹²⁷ Dawson, *Diary of Sarah Fowler Morgan Dawson*, 93.

wrote: “Not that I imagine for one moment that heaven is the abode of indolent or inactive beings; but I believe all of its employments will be without weariness, and all congenial with the desires of a redeemed, immortal, and glorified spirit.”¹²⁸ Dagg described heaven’s activity as the sort of pursuits one engages in on the Sabbath.¹²⁹ Harbaugh believed that the departed would carry forward the learning and accomplishments of their earthly lives, continually perfecting relationships.¹³⁰ Spiritualist and Universalist views of the afterlife suggested continuing moral development, as well.¹³¹ Sarah Morgan delighted in vivid dreams of heaven, which included conversations with favorite writers: “Charlotte Brontë has spent a week with me—in my dreams—and together we have talked of her sad life. Shakespeare and I have discussed his works, seated tête-à-tête over a small table.”¹³² The idea of eternal rest that had held allure for the people of 1820 had less interest for later generations.

Southerners hoped that heaven involved actively looking after loved ones still on earth—another idea encouraged by the fascination of nineteenth-century Americans with Emanuel Swedenborg’s heavenly vision. Even some of the most devout in orthodox denominations tended to challenge the idea that the dead are completely cut off from the living until they meet in heaven. Annie Sehon imagined her dead loved ones surrounding “the great White Throne, praising the Lamb continually and keeping a loving watch over the loved ones left to suffer.”

¹²⁸ Jones, *Children of Pride*, 829.

¹²⁹ Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 362.

¹³⁰ Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, 128.

¹³¹ Beckwith, “Spiritualist Register for 1860”; George Cross, “The Protestant Doctrine of the Future Life under Criticism and Review,” *Biblical World* 39, no. 6 (June 1912): 412.

¹³² Dawson, *Diary of Sarah Fowler Morgan Dawson*, 217.

And when Annie died just a few months after she wrote those words, her husband believed she was watching over him as he cared for their children.¹³³ Slave Nicey Kinney believed that her master and mistress could see her from heaven and were pleased that she was following the Christian principles they taught her.¹³⁴ A soldier expressed hope that his soul would be “permitted from some Pisgah summit” to see the future that his sacrifice had built, to visit his childhood home, and to serve as the guardian angel to his “loved one.”¹³⁵ Many common folk believed that departed loved ones would appear to someone who was dying.¹³⁶ Black southerners, while experiencing visions of heaven, often asked to see a departed relative.¹³⁷ And though the Spiritualism craze had diminished, some southerners attempted to contact their dead loved ones through séances, automatic writing, and other means throughout the war and beyond.¹³⁸ Harbaugh taught that the departed dead were all around, maintaining a “constant oversight,” and he encouraged his readers to attempt to commune with them—to listen for a

¹³³ Annie Sehon to Bettie Maney Kimberly, Atlanta, 22 May 1864, and John Sehon to Bettie Maney Kimberly, Atlanta, 20 Oct 1864. “Kimberly Family. Personal Correspondence, 1862–1864: Electronic Edition.”

¹³⁴ American Memory, “Nacey Kinney. Ex-Slave - Age 86 [Georgia],” 33.

¹³⁵ William W Crumly, *The Soldier's Bible* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861), 13.

¹³⁶ Crissman, *Death and Dying in Central Appalachia: Changing Attitudes and Practices*, 20. The *Richmond Daily Dispatch* reported such a story on January 9, 1861. A man who reported having seen an apparition of his dead sister, who told him he would die, had then died.

¹³⁷ Dickson D. Bruce Jr., “Religion, Society and Culture in the Old South: A Comparative View,” *American Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (October 1, 1974): 409.

¹³⁸ Thomas, *Secret Eye*, 337; Gray, *Diary of Virginia Davis Gray*, 161; Dawson, *Diary of Sarah Fowler Morgan Dawson*, 322.

whisper that tells of the afterlife.¹³⁹ J. W. McCullough wrote, “It is almost impossible entirely to divest the mind of the notion, or the impression, if not of the belief, that the spirits of departed relatives and friends who have entered into rest, continue to care for us, and to know something about us, and that, if they are permitted, they may occasionally revisit the world, and seek the abodes of those whom they loved and cherished when on earth.”¹⁴⁰ He said that it was not only possible, but healthy, to keep ties with the spirits of the dead—claiming that it does not violate Scripture to indicate that the dead are involved with the living and can even appear. He believed that only the skepticism of modernity prevented the connection.¹⁴¹ Orthodoxy denied these claims, but grief often trumped the “accepted view.”

For those who had allowed themselves to move beyond the very static picture traditional orthodoxy had allowed, the imagined heaven of the Civil War era was a place that a person could envision living and enjoying. It was all the best of the world he or she already knew, with parks and libraries and warm hearths surrounded by loving family members. It was a desirable place, but also a dream for many—hoped for, but not sure until seen.

SOUTHERN FEARS OF THE AFTERLIFE

Only rarely did a southerner express more than a “hope” of heaven. Behind this lack of certitude lay a multitude of fears—the horrors of hell and uncertainty of salvation for self and others. Some ministers felt uncomfortable broaching the subject of hell too frequently or with too much passion, if their parishioners were among the portion of the population who considered it

¹³⁹ Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, 19–21.

¹⁴⁰ McCullough, MA, *Dead in Christ*, 30.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17, 28, 36.

“unkind, and in wretched taste, that ministers should allude to it.”¹⁴² As mothers sent their sons to war, though, the question of preparing for the life beyond became urgent. There was little time to contemplate strolls on manicured heavenly lawns when any day could be the last day.

The vision of hell, though sketchier than that of heaven, was for most a visceral terror. Rev. John S. Long wrote a tract called “The Great Day of Wrath and Glory,” widely distributed during the war, which offered a terrifying view of judgment and hell. Cast in the form of a dream, Long’s work described the “complete destruction, or rather renovation, of the physical universe” that loomed ahead. “God, through all the trackless regions of his might and wrath, shall pour down his inexhaustible anger upon it,” he wrote. “God shall lay his avenging fingers upon [the sinner] with a thrill that shall freeze his existence like a dead man.” And of hell, he wrote, “It shall consist in the subjection of both body and spirit to the gnawings of a worm that never dies, and the burning of a flame that is not quenched. And is not this wrath—wrath intense unmeasured, unspeakable?”¹⁴³ One hymn told sinners to turn around “lest you in hell forever burn / that fiery, dreadful lake.” It said that pleading for mercy there would be futile, as “He’ll close against you mercy’s door, / And lead you to despair.”¹⁴⁴ Another hymn said, “O, what eternal horrors hang / Around the second death.”¹⁴⁵ One tract warned that God would cast the “scum of His universe” into hell, which is “large and deep”—large, because most of humanity

¹⁴² Chaplain 10th Virginia Cavalry, *Whither Bound?* 5.

¹⁴³ Long, *Great Day of Wrath and of Glory*, 6, 8, 9–10.

¹⁴⁴ Joseph Hamilton Martin, *Where Are You Going[?]* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861), 186.

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous, *Hymns for the Camp: Electronic Edition*, 109.

will go there, and deep, to keep anyone from climbing out.¹⁴⁶

By the Civil War era, some traditional views of hell were being challenged. J. W. McCullough, for example, claimed that few intelligent people still viewed hell as being at the center of the earth.¹⁴⁷ Some viewed hell as a state of mental or psychological misery, rather than as a place of physical torment. One writer described it as “everlasting misery and sin. It is the loss of holiness and happiness for ever.”¹⁴⁸ Hiram Mattison believed that, because both the righteous and the damned will carry conscious memory and reflection with them to the afterlife, hell must be a place of eternal sorrow.¹⁴⁹ The author of a Civil War–era tract claimed that the inhabitant of hell will be able to see the joys of heaven “afar off, and only to aggravate his pain.”¹⁵⁰ In this sense, the hell-bound would be tortured by their own guilt and regret.

Consistent with earlier times, even the more orthodox of southerners generally believed that justice required hell to have different levels of punishment. A Baptist catechism stated that God would punish those who consciously rejected salvation “far more severely” than those who had never heard the gospel.¹⁵¹ In her diary, Kate Cumming expressed distress over the number of soldiers who had never become church members, though they “know it is their duty to belong to it. . . . How much more will they have to answer for than those who have never known God, and

¹⁴⁶ Evangelical Tract Society, *What God Says of Hell* ([Petersburg, VA]: Evangelical Tract Society, 1861), 1,3 .

¹⁴⁷ McCullough, MA, *Dead in Christ*, 73.

¹⁴⁸ Rice, *Immortality of the Soul and Destiny of the Wicked*, 168.

¹⁴⁹ Mattison, *Immortality of the Soul*, 57.

¹⁵⁰ *Prepare to Meet Thy God*.

¹⁵¹ James Petigru Boyce, *A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine* (Greenville, SC: Sunday School Board of So. Baptist Convention, G.E. Elford’s Press, 1864), 14.

have not known the privileges of the gospel.”¹⁵² A tract published during the war by the Evangelical Tract Society agreed that those without knowledge of Christianity would deserve a lesser punishment, adding, “But the least sin deserves hell—an eternal hell—though some sins deserve far hotter degrees of the furnace-heat of wrath.” Beyond that, this author believed that the inhabitants of hell continue to sin, and “each new sin heaps on fuel.”¹⁵³ While much of Swedenborg’s visions of heaven had persisted into the wartime South, his gentler views of hell were being hardened once again by the urgent need to convert soldiers rapidly.

For those contemplating the requirements of salvation, advice came from every direction—and often conflicting advice at that. A children’s hymnbook, for example, offered numerous different instructions for salvation. One song claimed, “This moment, if for sins you grieve, / This moment, if you do believe, / A full acquittal you’ll receive.” Another said that those who “sought the Saviour’s grace” and “loved his name” would “see his blessed face.” Still another said you will rest in heaven if you have given your heart to Jesus, and another said to make up your mind, give your heart to God, and part with idols and sin. A last one said to repent, believe, be born again, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.¹⁵⁴ A tract for soldiers said that to be prepared for death is “to be reconciled to God, to love Jesus as our Saviour, to know the cleansing efficacy of his blood, to bear within us the power of his grace, restraining from sin, and leading to love and holiness and good fruits. . . . To be ready for the coming of the Son of Man, your conscience must be cleansed from sin, and your guilt atoned for by his blood, and your

¹⁵² Cumming, *Diary of Kate Cumming*, 35.

¹⁵³ Evangelical Tract Society, *What God Says of Hell*, 2–3.

¹⁵⁴ Sabbath School Teacher, *Collection of Sabbath School Hymns*, 18, 26, 43.

nature renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵⁵ With so many conflicting messages, it is not surprising that people complained of sectarian disputes. The messages, for the most part, though, coalesced into a few broad age-old themes: salvation by faith, by works, or by both.

“Believe in Jesus,” said the “saved by faith” doctrine. Few felt the need to expand on that simple message, though at least one tract specified that “you must believe that Jesus paid the debt for you.”¹⁵⁶ Another tract refuted the idea that works can save anyone and claimed that any American pleading otherwise is “willfully ignorant.”¹⁵⁷ Advocates of the faith-alone approach were equally wary of too much intellect applied to the pursuit of heaven. Rev. John Grasty of Virginia warned readers that “unaided reason will only lead us into error.”¹⁵⁸ Those who preached salvation by faith struggled continually with those who put off salvation until they could rid themselves of sin and guilt—and conversely with those who claimed to have been saved by faith, but showed no evidence in their lives. This need to see a changed life complicated the purity of the message that faith alone saved.

Though most Christians, if questioned, would claim that salvation could not be earned by good works or human effort, their language often suggested otherwise. Rev. David Shaver of Virginia wrote: “It is the obvious dictate of reason that we must form earnest purposes and make strenuous efforts to gain the path that leads to the peace and the presence of God; that multitudes

¹⁵⁵ McIntosh, “James C. Sumner, the Young Soldier Ready for Death (1862),” 3–4.

¹⁵⁶ Capers, *Catechism for the Use of the Methodist Missions*, 9–10; *Are You Forgiven?* 5; *Prepare to Meet Thy God*, 4; Soldiers’ Tract Association, *The Two Steps to Immediate Conversion Addressed to the Mourner in Zion* ([Richmond, VA]: Soldiers’ Tract Association, M.E. Church, South, 1863), 6.

¹⁵⁷ Andrew Fuller, *The Great Question Answered* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861), 1.

¹⁵⁸ John S. Grasty and Evangelical Tract Society, *The Way to Zion* (Petersburg, VA: Evangelical Tract Society, 1861), 1.

fail in this endeavor because their purposes are inconstant or their efforts inefficient; that mere seeking will not suffice here—there must be striving.” He said that on the “broad thoroughfare to hell . . . the overwhelming majority of men throng.” On the road to heaven, there was “only a small minority—one here, and there another.”¹⁵⁹

Some viewed church membership—which assumed submission to church discipline—as essential to salvation.¹⁶⁰ Certainly Kate Cumming believed that the soldiers who had neglected to become church members were destined for hell.¹⁶¹ Slaves, in particular, seemed to tie church membership to salvation. South Carolina slave Emoline Wilson said, “I joined the church because de white folks did. Dey wants to go to heaven and I do too.”¹⁶² Henry D. Jenkins, also a slave from South Carolina, said that church membership was “both a fire and a life insurance. It ‘sures you ‘ginst hell fire, and gives you at death, an eternal estate in Hebben.”¹⁶³ Georgia slave

¹⁵⁹ David Shaver, *You Must Labor for Salvation* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861, 1974z), 1–2.

¹⁶⁰ Eugene D. Genovese, *Religion in the Collapse of the American Union*, Religion and the American Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 75. Genovese says that less than 20 percent of the white population were church members, for a number of reasons—one being the unwillingness to submit to the “stern demands of church discipline.” Still, most southerners attended church regularly, read their Bible, and prayed.

¹⁶¹ Cumming, *Diary of Kate Cumming*, 35.

¹⁶² American Memory, “Stories from Ex-Slaves [Emoline Wilson—South Carolina],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 214, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

¹⁶³ American Memory, “Henry D. Jenkins. Ex-Slave 87 Years Old [South Carolina],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 25, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

Alice Green also claimed to have joined the church so she would not “burn in hell.”¹⁶⁴ While church membership was seen as essential to salvation in the eyes of some, it was not seen as assurance of salvation, necessarily. Samuel Benedict, rector of an Episcopal church in Georgia, expressed a hope that none of his new church members would have their names “blotted out of that book of life, which will at the last great day be opened.”¹⁶⁵

Many expressed a belief that eternal destiny rested in a person’s own goodness and adherence to Christian practices. This gave assurance to people like Annie Sehon, who felt sure that her husband would merit heaven because “he is so good so pure so noble.”¹⁶⁶ A message of “being good” in order to go to heaven also tended to be the simplistic message for children and slaves.¹⁶⁷ Adults received the message that they must live by the Ten Commandments, avoid evil habits, and follow the sacraments of their church.¹⁶⁸ Slavery complicated the question of goodness and righteousness in southern society. Gertrude Thomas lived in fear that her father was in “the lower regions,” because he had violated one of the Ten Commandments in fathering

¹⁶⁴ American Memory, “Plantation Life: Interview with Alice Green [Georgia],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 46, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Samuel Benedict, “*The Blessed Dead Waiting for Us*” a Sermon Preached in St. James’ Church, Marietta, Georgia, on the Festival of All Saints, November 1st, 1863 (Macon, GA: Burke, Boykin, 1863), 14.

¹⁶⁶ Annie Sehon to Bettie Maney Kimberly, Nashville, 16 Feb 1862. “Kimberly Family. Personal Correspondence, 1862–1864: Electronic Edition.”

¹⁶⁷ Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 33; *Catechism, To Be Taught Orally To Those Who Cannot Read; Designed Especially for the Instruction of Slaves: Electronic Edition* (Raleigh, NC: Office of “The Church Intelligencer,” 1862), 21–22.

¹⁶⁸ E. S Taylor, *The Value of the Soul* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861), 7; Keeling, *Colporteur’s Commission*, 3; Davis, *Jefferson Davis: Private Letters 1823-1889*, 217.

children by a slave.¹⁶⁹ Some attributed an added burden to slaveowners. Gertrude Thomas wondered, “When I look upon so many young creatures growing up belonging to Pa’s estate as well as others—I wonder upon whom shall the accountability of their future state depend.”¹⁷⁰ According to some historians, the guilt associated with slavery created doubt within slaveowners as to their own salvation.¹⁷¹

Rarely, though, did southerners of any kind express real confidence in their own salvation. At best, they expressed the “hope” of heaven, a better world, reunion with departed loved ones—almost never assurance or certainty.¹⁷² Most of the orthodox denominations taught that salvation could be lost; a minister could miss heaven. Even Baptists, who claimed that true salvation could not be lost, tended to use the language merely of hope.¹⁷³ Most southerners believed that eternity was fixed at the moment of death—not before or after.¹⁷⁴ Salvation had to be earned, therefore, moment by moment.

¹⁶⁹ Thomas, *Secret Eye*, 29–30.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁷¹ David Kaser, *Books and Libraries in Camp and Battle: The Civil War Experience* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 102–110; Lawrence-McIntyre, “The Double Meaning of the Spirituals,” 397.

¹⁷² “A Word of Warning for the Sick Soldier: Electronic Edition [1861-1865?],” 5; Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, iv, viii; Anonymous, *Hymns for the Camp: Electronic Edition*, 110; “Callie” to “My beloved sister,” Norton’s Grove, Texas, 25 Aug 1861, in *Lenoir Family Papers. Personal Correspondence, 1861–1865: Electronic Edition*; Dickson D. Bruce Jr., “Religion, Society and Culture in the Old South: A Comparative View,” *American Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (October 1, 1974): 403.

¹⁷³ Boyce, *Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine*, 20; American Memory, “Ella Kelly, Winnsboro, SC. Ex-Slave, 81-Years Old,” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 19, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

¹⁷⁴ Faust, “Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying,” 10.

Soldiers, more than any other southerners, were bombarded with messages of the imminence of death. Thirsty for reading material, the tracts that circulated through the camps often had titles like “Are You Forgiven?” “Are You Prepared?” “Are You Ready?” “A Soldier’s Last Gift to His Mother,” “Death of a Christian Soldier,” “Don’t Put It Off,” and “Eternity! Think of It.”¹⁷⁵ Parents and ministers feared that camp life would corrupt even the finest Christian boys—jeopardizing their eternal state at the moment when death loomed near.¹⁷⁶ Ministers faced an even more severe evangelical threat from an idea circulating widely that soldiers, fighting in the righteous cause, would earn heaven by their service.¹⁷⁷ The tracts full of frightening warnings of hell served to combat that notion, as did the rising prospect of ultimate defeat, leading Confederate soldiers toward Christian conversion in high numbers.¹⁷⁸

Evangelicalism had no more effective tool than the fear of hell to bring about conversions and to keep the converted in the fold, so long as the fear could be maintained. The warnings were

¹⁷⁵ *Are You Ready* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861); *Are You Prepared[?]* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861); Crooks and Soldiers’ Tract Association, *A Soldier’s Last Gift to His Mother; Don’t Put It Off* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1861); Soldiers’ Tract Association, *Eternity! Think of It* ([Richmond, VA]: Soldiers’ Tract Association, M.E. Church, South, 1861).

¹⁷⁶ John C. McCabe, *The Soldier’s Grave a Chaplain’s Story* ([Raleigh, NC]: s.n., 1863), 5; R. N. L. to Aunt Sade, Fayetteville, North Carolina, 12 Apr 1861, *Lenoir Family Papers. Personal Correspondence, 1861–1865: Electronic Edition*.

¹⁷⁷ John Bratton, *Letters of John Bratton to His Wife* (Privately Published, 1942), 2; Bragg, *Letters of a Confederate Surgeon 1861–1865*, 155; “The Reward of Virtue.”

¹⁷⁸ Michael T. Bernath, *Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South*, Civil War America (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 49–52. Bernath describes the conscious efforts during the war period by Confederate opinion shapers to rid the region of a self-conception of cultural vassalage to northern thinkers. They desired a separate identity—an “intellectual independence” that was particularly important in matters of religion. See also McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades*, 75. Macpherson writes that “the dark specter of defeat” facing the Confederacy sparked religious revivals, with “scores of thousands” becoming Christians and being baptized for the first time.

everywhere—in sermons, letters, tracts, and songs. Estella Jones recalled a slave spiritual that said, “And all them sinners who never have cried, / Will surely cry that day.”¹⁷⁹ Jim Gilliard remembered a song the slaves sang at funerals: “Hark come de tune a doleful sound, my years a tender cry; a livin’ man come view de ground whar you may shortly lie.”¹⁸⁰ Preachers in Central Appalachia viewed it as their duty to preach salvation at funerals, seeing it as a good time to “frighten sinners into repentance.”¹⁸¹ One aspect of hell held more terror, and therefore more evangelical power, than any other—the prospect of eternal separation of a person from those he loved.¹⁸² One tract declared, “It will sunder all your relations to the present world. . . . this event is DEATH; and the question is, ‘Are you ready to die?’”¹⁸³ In his book about heaven, Henry Harbaugh reminded his readers that “the only ground upon which he can safely rest his hope of reunion in heaven with his sainted friends is his own personal union on earth with Him ‘of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.’”¹⁸⁴ Obituaries and funeral sermons frequently

¹⁷⁹ American Memory, “Estella Jones [Georgia],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 349, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

¹⁸⁰ American Memory, “Sold at Three Months for \$350 [Jim Gilliard—Georgia],” Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938*, 155, accessed June 25, 2007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

¹⁸¹ Crissman, *Death and Dying in Central Appalachia: Changing Attitudes and Practices*, 95.

¹⁸² Ownby, “Patriarchy in the World Where There Is No Parting,” 235.

¹⁸³ *Are You Ready*, 1.

¹⁸⁴ Harbaugh, *Heavenly Recognition*, viii.

reported that the last words of the dying were a plea for loved ones to “meet me in heaven.”¹⁸⁵

At a time when families might have wanted most of all to create warm and loving memories, they felt compelled to propagate fear “for the greater good.” For each of them, something more substantial than slavery, states’ rights, or the South were on the line. The soul of a son was in the balance.

* * *

By the end of the Civil War, the hope of heaven mattered more than ever to a grieving population, and the fear of hell had become strengthened through the tempest. With more than two hundred sixty thousand young men dead, along with all the civilians who starved or died of disease during the war, however, some bereaved southerner continued for a while to seek answers beyond Scripture about the fate of loved ones. Southerners devoured novels such as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s *Gates Ajar*, which offered fresh new views of heaven and encouraged the idea that the dead can still communicate with us. Spiritualism experienced a modest and brief resurgence, as Americans, North and South, sought comfort from direct contact with the dead. Southerners like Gertrude Thomas and Mary Dana Shindler traveled North to visit mediums and to attend séances, hoping for messages from those they had lost.¹⁸⁶ Mary Schindler wrote an

¹⁸⁵ “Obituaries,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, April 15, 1862; Faust, “Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying,” 26; McIntosh, “James C. Sumner, the Young Soldier Ready for Death (1862),” 7.

¹⁸⁶ Mary Dana Shindler, *Southerner Among the Spirits: A Record of Investigations into the Spiritual Phenomena* (Memphis, TN: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1877), 5. Southerner Mary Dana Shindler began an odyssey in May 1875, journeying to mediums and Spiritualist retreats in the North to investigate the claims of Spiritualism. She kept a journal of the various experiments in séances, spirit photography, and other forms of spirit communication and published it, targeting it “especially to the Southern people” who had not had the opportunity to investigate this for themselves. Shindler came away from her experience convinced of the legitimacy of Spiritualist claims and certain that such knowledge would bring comfort to the

account of her adventures, in hopes that southerners would seek comfort in Spiritualism—an account that was published by the Southern Baptist Publication Society.

Soon, though, the healing process helped hone a sense of unique southern identity as God’s “chosen people” and the Civil War as a righteous “Lost Cause.” With the emergence of this mythology, southerners were reminded that God expected a purer standard from His chosen ones. Their defeat in war had been God’s chastening, a rod of iron that would force a return to the true faith.¹⁸⁷ By the early twentieth century, a new fundamentalism had removed the tolerance that had once allowed the Beulah Bentons to question God.

bereaved. More significantly, this endorsement of Spiritualism was published by the Southern Baptist Publication Society.

¹⁸⁷ For the groundbreaking study of this shift in southern ideology, see Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*.

CONCLUSION

Mysticism contends that reason only darkens the mind, and consequently discarding all reasoning processes, relies upon immediate revelation. But the extravagances of Swedenborg, and even of George Fox, prove the fallacy of the assumption of continued inspiration, and the only alternative is to rest upon the Christian Revelation, which has successfully defied all assaults.

—Augusta Evans, *Beulah*

In the novel *Beulah*, the title character engaged in a war with her own intellect and finally surrendered, accepting that it required more faith to trust her own mind than to trust the revelation of Scripture. She abandoned efforts to seek truth beyond Scripture and settled into a peaceful and conventional faith. In *Beulah Benton*, Augusta Evans was rather prescient in creating an archetype for those southerners who felt the urge to explore ideas of the afterlife beyond orthodoxy in the antebellum period. The era offered numerous opportunities to question beliefs that in 1820 had seemed immutable.

The educated minority had taken some degree of pride in supposedly squelching superstitions in the region. By 1860 it was rare for a newspaper to print a ghost story that did not, at the end, reveal the foolishness of those who had believed it. People were cautioned not to place naive faith in signs and omens such as meteorites and shooting stars. They were not supposed to seek knowledge of the future in dreams. They were not to visit seers. The modern people of nineteenth-century South were to look to the Bible and to science for their answers.

By the 1840s, though, an emptiness followed the abandonment of ideas and practices deemed “superstitious.” The magical and mystical aspects of faith withered with the evaporation

of spectres, precognitive dreams, and second sight. Even a faith in miracles was considered backward in more sophisticated circles. Heaven remained hidden behind an opaque veil, but the access that superstitious practices had once promised to the hidden realms appeared closed to the modern world, as superstition died. A longing for a mystical faith emerged—fed for a while only by fiction.

The longing revealed itself in the southern fascination with Swedenborg and the local responses to the arrival of mesmerists in the 1840s and Spiritualists in the 1850s. Mesmerism, Swedenborgianism, and Spiritualism allowed people to recover what had been lost by the campaign against superstition—but this time to cultivate the ideas under the umbrella of science. The veil between the living and the dead was once again permeable, and a number of people experimented—some becoming believers and proselytizers.

Those southerners who had struggled with the idea that a loving God could send his own creatures to hell found permission to question in discoveries of science and the “isms” that rippled through the region from the North and Europe. Science offered permission to question the accuracy of the Bible, and the exegetical writings of Universalists gave society’s questioners a reason to ponder the trustworthiness of the translations of Scripture that had become available in the current age—and to question whether the Bible had ever been intended to communicate a message of eternal punishment.

Even those who had never intentionally considered the new waves of thought felt the impact, as the conversations about science and the “isms” went on around them. Heaven and hell were being treated differently in 1860 than they had been in 1820—and the differences were appearing in orthodox centers, as well as on the peripheries. Hell had softened generally, though during the war this process had begun to reverse somewhat for soldiers who needed to make

rapid decisions about their souls. For most southern Christians, the heaven that had once been mansions, thrones, and streets of gold was now a place of homes, hearths, gardens, and families—a place of delightful activity, rather than rest. There, the dead could look in on the living. Most importantly, in subtle ways, the conception of heaven in southern minds—even orthodox minds—went beyond biblical description.

The shift in thinking came with a price and one beyond what similar questioners in the North experienced. For the southerners who chose to experiment with Spiritualism or mesmerism—or who secretly harbored a belief in universal salvation while living as a Baptist or Methodist—guilt was attached to the ideas. There was the natural layer of guilt tied to experimenting with something parents, teachers, preachers or others discouraged as against God’s will. But for southerners, the ideas were also tied to “Yankee infidelity”—rendering experimentation socially dishonorable. Society, at large, had to answer for allowing this sort of experimentation, questioning, and skepticism to grow—creating a broader layer of guilt.

Charles Reagan Wilson’s *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920* described the effect of southern guilt, as God let his “chosen people” lose the Civil War. In their search for meaning after the devastation, southerners came to believe that God had used the war to bring “redemption from past sins, an atonement, and a sanctification for the future.” They had been “baptized in blood.” It was the forging of the “Lost Cause” mythology.¹ While Wilson holds to a view of the antebellum southerners as more uniformly orthodox than I have found, his thesis does provide an interesting path for understanding how the South went from a place in which people could question orthodox ideas—and ministers could sit in Spiritualist circles—to the more fundamentalist region it became by the early twentieth century.

¹ Ibid., 5.

* * *

This study marks a beginning, the first forays into a very large and complex subject. By looking at the afterlife beliefs of literate Protestants in the South, as affected by the “isms” and sciences, I have attempted to get a sense of where the edges of acceptable thought regarding life after death lay. How far could a respectable person venture from the orthodox center before encountering ridicule, scorn, censure, or other repercussions? How difficult was it for a southerner of curious mind to get access to publications regarding the “isms” and sciences? Given the tendency of historians to portray the South as solidly orthodox, I have found the edges of acceptability surprisingly broad until quite late in the antebellum period, and access to unconventional information appears to have been reasonably easy for a person of education and modest income. There were “Beulahs” in the South—more than a few—and the regional conception of heaven and hell was subtly changed by their presence.

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