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Robert Elsmere as a Reflection of the Tractarian Controversy (1833-1890)

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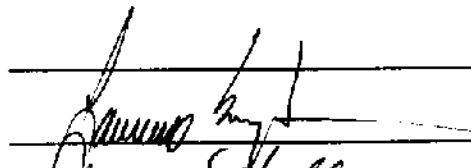

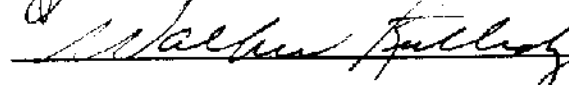
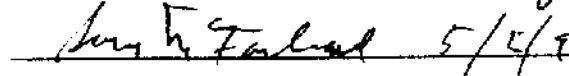
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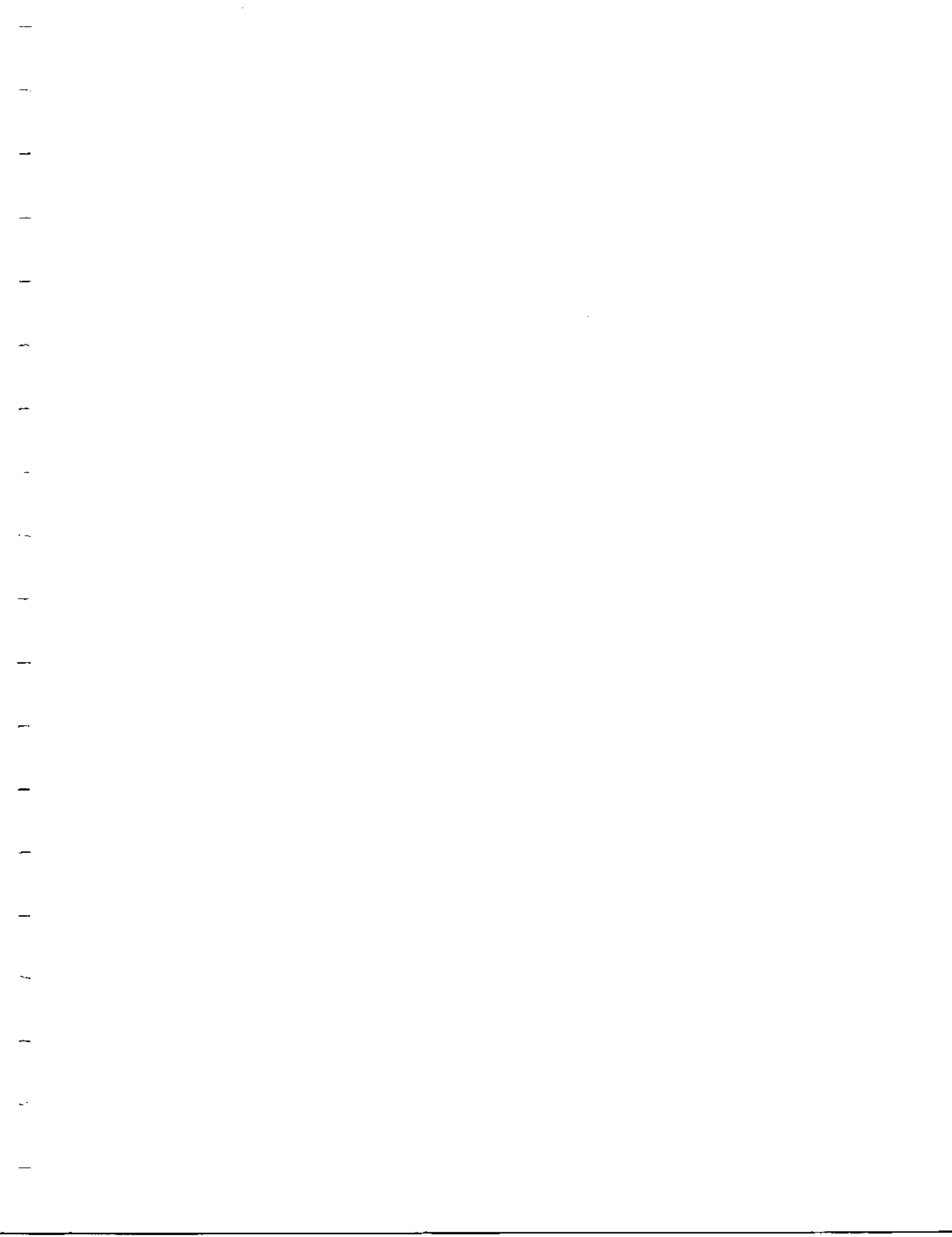
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Abstract

Between 1833 and 1890, the controversial Tractarian or Oxford Movement created a turmoil in British society. In 1888, amid the religious and political consternation of that time, Mary Augusta Arnold Ward published *Robert Elsmere*, the story of an Anglican priest who came to question and ultimately reject his faith because of the truths he uncovered in his studies of history. This thesis illustrates how the novel captured the religious conflict of the individuals and families who were caught in the midst of the Tractarian period in British history.

outline

THESIS: *Robert Elsmere*, the 1888 work of Mary Augusta Arnold Ward, captured the British religious crisis within the family that had been sparked by the Tractarian or Oxford Movement (1833-1890).

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Robert Elsmere
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"Conviction is the Conscience of the Mind."
-Ward, 344

In 1833, a religious movement began at Oriel College, Oxford, one of the foremost Anglican seminaries at that time in Britain, that affected the Church of England and eventually all of British society. The Tractarian or Oxford Movement, as it was variously called, encompassed most aspects of the religious life of Britain. The Church took on a more intellectual and Roman Catholic theology, and was effectively split along lines of personal conviction. Because of its highly intellectual bearing, the movement, as led by such men as Cardinal John Henry Newman and Edward B. Pusey, was particularly felt in the upper classes.

The works of many British authors focused upon this crisis of faith in mid-Victorian society. James Anthony Froude's (1818-1894) *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849) developed from his own religious agonies while at Oxford. John Henry Newman's (1801-1890) anonymous work *Loss and Gain* (1848) explored, almost autobiographically, a young man's conversion to Roman Catholicism in Oxford. The High Anglicanism of poet Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) was also a popular outlet for the spectrum of British society to feel the effects of the Tractarians. The "popular" authors, those previously mentioned as well as Tennyson, William Morris, and Walter Pater, all were voices for the masses and the intellectuals, echoing the religious turmoil through their works.

Among these, the works of Mary Augusta Arnold Ward (1851-1920) reflected the Tractarian movement's impact on individuals and families. She probed the controversies and spiritual questions of Britain through her protagonists and thus gave the masses a more detailed look at the human side of the movement. Particularly in *Robert Elsmere* (1888), the story of an Oxford-trained Anglican priest who questioned his faith during academic pursuits, did Mrs. Ward capture the spiritual turmoil of the time. The novel mirrored the crisis of religious conviction characteristic of the later stages of the Tractarian controversy

and its effects upon the individuals and families of mid-Victorian Britain.

The Tractarians

The Tractarians had their inception in a question of religious politics. Since the beginnings of the Church of England in the 1530s, the monarchy and Parliament had power over the Church as established in the 1534 Act of Supremacy. By the 1800s, however, many intellectuals were concerned that the Church had become too subordinate to the state, as was seen in the suppression of Irish Catholicism by Anglican Britain. On July 14, 1833, John Keble, a resident fellow at Oriel College, Oxford, and "...Professor of Poetry (1832-1841) - a distinction achieved after his volume of devotional poetry *The Christian Year* (1827) had become a best-seller" (Jay 8), began the dispute which sparked the Tractarian movement. In his Assize Sermon on National Apostacy, Keble stated

"...that disrespect to the Successors of the Apostles, as such, is an unquestionable symptom of enmity to Him who gave them their commission at first and has pledged himself to be with them forever. Suppose such disrespect general and national...grounded not

on any fancied religious tenet, but on mere human reasons of popularity and expediency...that nation, how highly soever she may think of her own religion and morality, stands convicted in his sight of direct disavowal of his Sovereignty..." (Bettenson, 317-318)

Keble was aghast that Britain would force any country in its realm to submit to her brand of Anglicanism when the country had a previously established and sacred belief system.

In response to the sermon, a conference was held in July of 1833 at Hadleigh, Suffolk, supporting the Irish Church Bill. The bill "...proposed the suppression of a number of bishoprics in a country where the richly endowed State Church was supported by funds levied from a community the majority of whom were Roman Catholic" (Jay 7). The conference participants, all associates of Keble, became more radical than their High Church origins suggested. They "...regarded political disestablishment as important only in so far as it focused discussion upon the claim of the Church to a spiritual authority greater than that accorded to Dissenting teaching" (Jay 8). This Roman Catholic sympathy, foreshadowed by the conference which supported the rights of Irish Catholics, was to color the direction of the Oxford Movement.

Two of the six men who attended the conference, Richard H.

Froude and William Palmer, along with their close associates John Keble and Newman, became the backbone of the movement. After being convinced of the strength of the conference results, the latter courted Edward B. Pusey and Issac Williams into joining them as well. These six, then, would lead the Church of England on a path of revitalization of Anglican practice and theology through an imitation of Roman Catholicism. This would ultimately result in one of the greatest schisms in Anglican history.

Newman dated the birth of the movement from Keble's sermon of July 14, 1833. In his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), Newman explained, "I have ever considered and kept the day, as the start of the religious movement of 1833" (Newman 41). According to most accounts, the three main leaders of the Tractarians were Keble, Newman, and Pusey -- all Oriel College fellows. The three were the main contributors to a series of pamphlets entitled *Tracts of the Times*. Historian Stephen Neill stated that the *Tracts* "...[recalled] the clergy to a sense of the Church as the Bride of Christ, and to their own vocation as a gift of God, independent of any connexion with, and certainly not subordinate to, the will of any State..." (Neill 257-258). Likewise, according to Powel Mills Dawley, a past member of the National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church, "...the purpose of the *Tracts* was to reawaken the Church of England to the

implications of that basic Catholic heritage which Englishmen had refused to repudiate at the time of the Reformation" (Dawley 232). The implications of the Tracts were far-reaching as the Church began to divide along pro-Anglican and pro-Roman Catholic lines.

Edward Pusey joined the movement late, and was the tamest of the Tractarians. According to Bonnell Spencer, who has served on the Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church, Pusey published "...the *Library of the Fathers*, an English edition of the works of the theologians of the Church. This was to show the continuity of Anglican theology with that of the fourth and fifth centuries" (Spencer 301). This would later become his basis for radically reformulating the practices of the Anglican Church after 1845.

Certainly, the most controversial of the leaders was John H. Newman. He was the son of a religiously broadminded London banker and a mother with French Huguenot origins whose "...family [was] driven from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes..." (Dessain 1). Newman claimed that he grew up having "...'no formed religious convictions'" (Newman 14). Elected a Fellow at Oriel in 1822, he was instrumental in heading the first generation of Tractarians until 1845.

In 1841, Newman authored "Tract XC", "...designed to show

that the official teachings of the Church of England might bear an interpretation in harmony with what was popularly associated with Rome. This at once made him the storm center of "recrimination" (Wilson 240). Newman, though, appears only to have been echoing Parliament's "...Act of 1829 [which] had emancipated the Roman Catholics..." (Smith 16), allowing them to worship freely, legislation which had made England question her spiritual direction. The tract concluded with a rejection of Anglican exclusivism:

"...The Protestant Confession was drawn up with the purpose of including Catholics, and Catholics now will not be excluded. What was an economy in the reformers, is a protection to us. What would have been a perplexity to us then, is a perplexity to Protestants now. We could not then have found fault with their words: they cannot now repudiate our meaning."

(Bettenson, 32)

The leadership at Oxford decried the tract, which apparently "...suggested that subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles might be reconciled with 'Roman Catholic error'" (Dessain 75).

According to John Moorman, bishop of Ripon and grandson-in-law by marriage to Mary Augusta Ward, the Thirty-nine Articles the Oxford leadership referred to are the 1571 "...official platform

of the Church of England and, as such, have to be 'assented to' by every ordinand and new incumbent....[they] are a statement of the Church of England's attitude towards the doctrinal disputes which were convulsing Europe at the time, including such doctrines as Predestination and Transubstantiation" (Moorman 214). The authoritarian way in which the Church attacked his historical interpretation of the Anglican communion was one of the major factors which led Newman to resign his living and seek shelter with the communion with which his sympathies lay--Roman Catholicism. On 9 October 1845, John Henry Newman "defected" to the Roman Catholic Church, describing it as "the One Fold of the Redeemer" (Sugg 71).

After Newman's 1845 defection, Edward Pusey assumed the leadership of the second generation of Tractarians within the Anglican church. Where the first generation under Newman (1833-1845) had concentrated largely on theological questions, the second generation (1845-1890) reintroduced traditional Roman Catholic practices which had fallen into disuse. According to Steven Neill,

They introduced a great many changes in ceremonial and in the manner of conducting the services; and, as liturgical science was at that time almost non-existent in the Church of England, much of what they

introduced was direct imitation of the liturgically
least defensible medieval practices of the Roman
Catholic Church. (Neill 267)

The medieval practices which the Puseyites introduced included
priestly vestments such as "...chasubles or copes, to...tapers
and incense, and even....crosses and candles...while chancels
were filled with surpliced choirs who began singing the services
in a much more elaborate way" (Moorman 363). Some saw these
liturgical modifications as unnecessary bravado and excess where
moderation was called for.

Despite Pusey's leadership, a schism did occur. Some of the
brighter lights of the movement were carried into Newman's camp
after his defection -- men such as Edward Henry Manning and
Thomas Arnold, son of Dr. T. Arnold of Rugby and brother to
Matthew Arnold, the Victorian poet (Moorman 347; Spencer 301;
Smith 15-18). Three sides emerged from this schism; those
staying behind with Pusey and the "traditional" Church, the few
who felt their allegiance tied to Newman and the older of the
traditions, and the rational skeptics who turned to a non-mystic
option. Between these extremes was the moderate majority, those
belonging to the Church of England, but not aligned with any of
the factions.

The moderates included those members of the Church of

England who, though moved by the Tractarians, neither fully subscribed to nor denied all positions of the tracts. Nearly across the board, they felt that "...the Oxford men brought back to life the forgotten doctrine that the Church is the body of Christ, that the life it lives is His life, and that, outside of the divine authority that He has given it, it should neither desire nor seek for any other authority" (Neill 258). In essence, they felt that the Church was not answerable to civil authority (either the monarchical or Parliamentary), but was preordained as the authoritative and visible symbol of Christ on earth. It is these members of the Church and the rationalist skeptics with whom Mrs. Ward's novel is chiefly concerned.

The Arnold Wards

An example of the Moderate sympathies in the wake of the Tractarian controversy can be seen in the family history of Mary Augusta Arnold Ward. Her grandfather was Dr. Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), once headmaster of Rugby and Regius Professor of History at Oxford in 1841. According to E.M.G. Smith, a biographer of Mary Ward, Arnold was noted for his "...outspoken criticisms of the clergy....[but] led the Broad Church spokesmen (those who advocated a tolerant and comprehensive approach to

doctrine) in attacking the Tractarians as preaching a return to superstition and popery, a revival of the judaizing spirit condemned by St. Paul" (Smith 17-18). Bishop Moorman related that "Dr. Arnold thought the Tractarians 'a very bad party' which was more likely to wreck the Church than revive it" (Moorman 353). By attacking in equal measure both extremist groups, he aligned the family with the Moderates.

Dr. Arnold's sons, Matthew (1822-1888) and Thomas (1823-1900), differed somewhat from the sympathies of their father. Bishop Moorman concluded that Matthew ultimately "...gave up orthodox Christianity as 'a fond but beautiful dream'" (Moorman 380). According to Neill, Matthew, "...who at the end of his life held on to a shadowy Christian faith, expressed more poignantly than any other what the men of that generation suffered through the disappearance of that robust faith by which their fathers had been upheld" (Neill 265). The spiritual conflict of his rational skepticism was captured in the closing stanzas of his 1867 poem "Dover Beach":

The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full and round
earth's shore
Lay like the folds of some bright girdle
furled;

But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind down the vast
edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

...

And we are here as on a darkling
plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle
and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

The younger Thomas took a more moderate stance, one which placed his own family in a state of turmoil. A graduate of Oxford who held various minor positions in the government of the British colony of New Zealand, he fell in love with a "...lively dark-haired girl" (Jones 13) named Julia Sorell. She was the daughter of French Huguenots who still recalled the Roman Catholic persecution of their Protestant ancestors. Julia's "...horror of Catholicism...[was] so real that just before her wedding she made Thomas promise never to become a Roman Catholic" (Smith 19). Despite his vow, five years later, Thomas convinced

himself that he was called, like Newman, to the Catholic faith and, to the utter dismay of his wife, he followed Newman and converted (Jones 17). Though returning briefly to the Anglican communion in 1865, he reconverted for the last time in 1876, Catholic until his death in 1900 (Jones 31, 51, & 133).

Mary was born on June 11, 1851. Only five at the time of her father's first conversion, she "...recalled hardly anything of [those] years of stress [between her parents] except a vague impression of a house among flat fields, where she had run among the little wild lilies" (Jones 18). As she grew, though, "...according to the custom of that day in religiously divided families, the sons were trained in the father's faith and the daughters, in their mother's....[but Mary] came to feel that her mother's struggles with poverty, even her own childish privations, were somehow Newman's fault rather than her father's" (Smith 19-20). Although Mary was never formally admitted to Oxford, she later studied there from the time she was sixteen while her father researched his *Manual on English Literature* (Jones 20).

In April 1872, Mary married the devoutly Anglican Humphry Ward, son of Rev. and Mrs. Henry Ward of Hull (Jones 22). It was his influence and unswerving support that encouraged the young Mary to open her writing to public scrutiny. After a series of

novels and pamphlets dealing with political and academic concerns which were moderately received by the public, her triumphal *Robert Elsmere* was released in 1888. The book conveyed the struggles of an individual who, like the Tractarians, was convinced of the truth of a new belief system.

Robert Elsmere

Robert Elsmere is the story of a man who found "...liberation from the old faith and [became] the founder of the new faith for which the spiritually hungry public longed" (Smith 33). While Robert tried to find a common ground between his views and the Church of England, he exceeded even Newman's defection by not only leaving the Church for a faith with some similarity to the old, but to one which rang with the truth of a rationalist's conviction. Each of the novel's three settings reflects a stage in Robert's religious evolution.

The country setting of the first section, like the settings throughout the novel, is far from fictitious. Westmoreland, as Ward writes of it, is the county of Westmorland, which she remembered from her youth and adulthood. Set amidst the counties of Yorkshire, Lancaster, Cumberland, and Durham in the North Country, the county was at the heart of the Lake District and in

many of the central settings of Ward's novels. In 1974, though, because of county boundary reorganizations, Westmorland "...vanished entirely" (Tourtellot 8).

The Westmoreland countryside is the setting for the first 147 pages of the 604-page novel. Covering only the first of seven "books," or major divisions in the work, it is in Book I, "Westmoreland," that Robert's faith in the teachings and beliefs of the Church of England were strongest. Fresh out of Oxford, he was holidaying with relatives, the vicarage family of Long Whindale, while recovering from illness before traveling on to accept a "...clerical post offered by a relative" (Smith 34) in Murewell, Surrey. Introduced to the reader first through the eyes of Agnes Leyburn, Robert was perceived as "...very accomplished -- a teetotaler -- he has been to the Holy Land, and his hair has been cut close after a fever..." (Ward 7). Physically a mixture of plainness and effeminacy, though, Robert's

...mouth was large, the nose of no particular outline, and in general the cutting of the face, though strong and characteristic, had a bluntness and naivete like a vigorous unfinished sketch. This bluntness of line, however, was balanced by a great delicacy of tint - the pink and white

complexion of a girl, indeed - enhanced by the bright reddish hair, and quick gray eyes. (Ward 22)

During his Westmoreland idyll, Robert was introduced to and captivated by Catherine Leyburn, the older sister of the previously mentioned Agnes. The daughter of a strict "Evangelical, with a dash of Quakerism" (Ward 76), Catherine was referred to by her younger sister Rose as "St. Elizabeth" (Ward 13) or St. Catherine. She was a selfless young lady whose joy came from helping the less fortunate, particularly those whom life has left desolate. Throughout the novel, she was described as "...pale, with traces of patient fatigue round the eyes and mouth" (Ward 11), the image of a woman bound for emotional hardship.

Amid this setting of cliffs and mountain crags, Robert was overpowered by his conviction of the righteousness of Anglicanism. He related to the Leyburns "...a dramatic account of a sermon on evolution preached by the hermit-veteran Pusey, as though by another Elias returning to the world to deliver a last warning message to man" (Ward 73). In this manner, he might be likened to the impressionable younger Thomas Arnold. Robert embraced the religious fervor of the second generation of Tractarians much as did the younger Thomas Arnold who, when reading "...a life of Saint Brigit of Sweden...[found] a

spirituality which he could not live without" (Jones 17). The spirituality which Robert embraces, for these first moments, is High Anglicanism -- the strict, selfless faith of his beloved Catherine.

Robert's religious conviction carried through the first portion of his ministry at Murewell, in the heaths and woodlands of Surrey in the south of England. There he and his new bride Catherine discovered a parish desperate for the religious zeal of a devout Churchman. This need he answered with two years of heartfelt devotion to his parishioners. According to J.S.C. Wand, former bishop of London, the laity "...expect from [the cleric] as a 'man of God' a life of irreproachable morals and willing helpfulness" (Wand 210).

At the center of Robert and Catherine's ministry was their work to improve the living conditions at Mile End, a hamlet in the valley below Murewell.

'The houses, which were built on a swamp originally, are falling into ruin; the roofs, the drains, the accommodations per head, are all about equally scandalous. The place is harried with illness.... They are all crippled with rheumatism....And as to vice - the vice that comes of mere endless persecuting opportunity - I can tell you one's

ideas of personal responsibility get a good deal
shaken up by a place like this!' (Ward 200-201)

Robert's attempts to bring the plight of the hamlet's dwellers to the attention of the squire of Murewell, a Mr. Wendover, were the catalyst to both his supreme moment of glory in his ministry and to his loss of faith. Although the squire set things to right at Mile End--improving conditions for all his tenants--Robert fell under his spell of rational skepticism, much as the younger Thomas Arnold fell for Newman's words and beliefs of Catholicism.

Mr. Wendover, a historian and philosopher who "...despised priests..." (Ward 254) was a formidable opponent for the ever tolerant Robert. Faced with the squire's agnosticism and cynicism, Robert failed to acknowledge the warning given to him by his High Church peer. On speaking of Wendover, Robert's friend, the High Churchman Rev. Newcome, stated

'Wait, my friend...till you have watched that
man's books eating the very heart out of a poor
creature as I have. When you have once seen
Christ robbed of a soul that might have been His,
by the infidel of genius, you will loathe all this
Laodicean cant of tolerance as I do.' (Ward 165)

Because of his failure to close himself from the studies he lived for in the squire's library, Robert was faced with a crisis of

conviction. Through the historical research for a novel he wished to write, Robert began to see "...the image of a purely human Christ - a purely human, explicable, yet always wonderful Christianity" (Ward 321). In short, he lost his ability to believe in the divinity of Jesus, the single factor upon which his faith had depended. When the studies and the squire had finished taking their toll on him, Robert's religious

...foundations were swept away....Only the habit of faith held, the close instinctive clinging to a Power beyond sense - a Goodness, a Will, not man's. The soul had been stripped of its own defenses. (Ward 347)

Following the example of Newman, who in 1845 left his parish, St. Mary's, Oxford, for the Roman Catholic communion, Robert and Catherine settled in London -- churchless and with few acquaintances. Catherine continued in the conviction that the Church of England, through her, would win Robert back and became more and more unswerving in her own religiosity. Yet, from the beginning of his new life, Robert begged Catherine to help him "'...be an honest man - to follow conscience - to say and do the truth'" (Ward 361). Upon request of some of their Murewell acquaintances, particularly the squire, the Elsmere took part in a branch of London society.

Within these circles into which Robert was readily accepted and from which Catherine was excluded due, in part, to her lack of worldliness, Robert discovered that the part of himself which was dormant reawaken with vigor. At a breakfast party held by some of the Elsmeres' mutual acquaintances and to which Robert went alone, he was introduced to Mr. Murray Edwardes. Edwardes, a Unitarian, "...preached a simple creed, drove it home by pure and generous living...[and] was beginning to be heard of and watched with no small interest by many outsiders" (Ward 417). Robert, under Edwardes' tutelage, began active work with this faith -- a faith which echoed his own beliefs.

According to Bonnell Spencer, "Unitarianism...denies the doctrine of the Trinity and therefore that Christ is God in any unique sense..." (Spencer 262). For the Victorians, the Unitarians seemed a skeptical enigma -- worshipping God but denying Him in all but the most incomprehensible form. The Unitarian's overriding quest was for "...accommodations...made between science and religion" (Helmstadter 136). Robert's voracious appetite for academic research and study made him well adapted for debate and lectures in the Unitarian forum.

After his initial introduction and indoctrination into the subtleties of the Unitarian faith, Robert branched off to work in London's East End, where he founded "...The New Brotherhood of

Christ" (Ward 375). Here, while giving solace to the needy and tending to his followers as he did in his ministry to the people of Mile End, Robert found spiritual fulfillment and peace.

Although Robert's new religion took a radical turn from the direction of the ritual-bound Tractarians--both the Puseyites and Newmanites--and the younger Thomas Arnold, his was as disciplined, as spiritual, and as intellectually theological as any in the English society. Regarding the impact of the Tractarians, Bishop Denison of Salisbury is noted to have said that

...however much he disapproved of certain features of the movement, it must be recognized that under its influence the standards of discipline, faithfulness, and personal holiness among the clergy had been raised, the sacraments restored to their centrality in the life of the Church as instruments of the operation of divine grace, and the study of theology made once more the primary concern of the mind of the Church.

(Dawley 233)

In like manner, the narrator of *Robert Elsmere* states that, in regard to the Unitarian New Brotherhood,

'...the spirit that is moving here is the same spirit that spread the Church...the spirit of devotion,

through a man, to an idea; through one much-loved, much-trusted soul to some eternal verity, newly caught, newly conceived, behind it. There is no approaching the idea for the masses except through the human life; there is no lasting power for the man except as the slave of the idea!' (Ward 577-578)

Though *Robert Elsmere* may be easily seen as a microcosm of the whole Tractarian movement's influence on the skeptical and educated portion of society, one must not ignore its personal implications. Indeed, in sections, Robert appears to mimic the life and experiences of Newman. But one, if only studying that aspect, would regretfully overlook what may be the secondary axis of Mary Ward's novel. Writing for an audience interested in the individual and family, the case is made that *Robert Elsmere* stands as a shadowy reflection of the younger Thomas Arnold's-- and Matthew Arnold's--life and experiences. "Though Mrs. Ward professed to be describing the destructive effect of Biblical criticism upon Christian orthodoxy in the nineteenth century, she was also laying bare her own private religious anxieties" (Peterson 15).

Robert, a man of mixed beliefs who ultimately chose for himself a path of his own making, independent of his wife's beliefs, compares with the young Thomas Arnold. Despite their

wives' wishes, both leave the Anglican communion to follow their ideal -- for Robert, truth as shown to him by Mr. Wendover, and for Thomas, John Newman's teachings. This scandalized not only their careers, but their marriages. For the Elsmere, as for the Arnolds, the couple is estranged to a degree because of their differing views. Robert, at his conversion, senses that "...[Catherine's] sympathy was not with him, in that comparison with the vibrating protest of her own passionate faith which must now be ringing through her, whatever he could urge must seem to her the merest culpable trifling with the soul's awful destinies" (Ward 363). Catherine is only slightly able to recognize in him a fervent faith by the end of his life.

Thomas Arnold, like Robert, cast off the old faith for one which he felt was calling him--Roman Catholicism--and was forced to leave his post in Tasmania because of his beliefs, as Robert is forced to remove himself from Murewell. Julia, Thomas's wife, saw the journey to England not as "...the natural consequence of her marriage to a temporary emigrant, [but] more and more an enforced exile, the result of her husband's selfish spiritual perversity" (Jones 20-21). The couple, divided by religion, was never fully reconciled. By converting, Thomas broke his promise to Julia that he would never become a Roman Catholic. Their love, family, and future happiness, as with the Elsmere, was

destroyed.

Critical Responses

Robert Elsmere received mixed responses within Victorian society. It was perceived as heretical by pro-Anglican forces. The now-obscure Marie Corelli, a novelist at the time of *Robert Elsmere's* publication, wrote in her *Ardath* (1889) that "...Elsmerism [was] merely a revival of Voltarian skepticism" (Peterson, 181). "In London, the Revd Hugh Haweis, a well-known Broad Churchman, denounced...*Elsmere*...from his pulpit, declaring that religious progress lay in the direction of a moderate liberalism within the Church of England" (Peterson 174). Ward, as recorded in an interview by William Gladstone, stated, "I believe in a degeneracy of man, in the Fall - in sin - in the intensity and virulence of sin. No other religion but Christianity meets the sense of sin, and sin is the great fact in the world to me" (Smith 42). One could see this view as coming from the mind and heart of Catherine Elsmere. The Rev. H.C. Shuttleworth had, perhaps, the most bitter criticism of the novel.

'...it is probably a weariness of the flesh to most of us even to hear its title...Much of Squire's smart

talk is directly borrowed from Pattison's *Memoirs*...
Whether it will live as literature will be questioned
...Elsmere's neo-Christianity would only live in an
"orthodox" atmosphere, and must die when that is
exhausted.' (Jones 83)

These views, though, in no way reflected the majority's
opinion of the novel. In the March 5, 1888 *Scotsman*, the editor
claimed it "...unquestionably one of the most notable works of
fiction that has been produced for years'" (Peterson 170). R.H.
Hutton of the *Spectator* said of Ward's *Robert Elsmere* that "...we
recognize in her book one of the most striking pictures of a
sincere religious ideal - (a religious ideal peculiar to the
present age) - that has ever been presented to our generation
under the guise of a modern novel'" (Peterson 172).

Perhaps, the most poignant acceptance of the novel was the
response of the general public, who were as enthusiastic about
the novel as they were torn by the Tractarian Movement it strove
to illustrate. "In its first year *Robert Elsmere* brought her
[3,200], enough to build Lower Grayswood near Haslemere in
Surrey" (Jones, 87). Audiences on both sides of the Atlantic
flocked to booksellers as new releases of the novel were made
available. Gertrude Ward, sister-in-law of Mary, observed:

...'I think I never was so much moved by any book as

by her [Mary's] reading aloud of the chapter where Robert Elsmere becomes aware that his faith is gone. I used to dream of him as a real person, and could think of nothing else but his difficulties.' (Jones 83).

Indeed, Mrs. Ward's characters lived in the minds and hearts of her readers.

According to contemporary reviewers, her novel mirrored Victorian religion and spirituality quite aptly. Laura Fasick of Moorhead State University stated that Robert is "...reassuring proof that the dissipation of Christian certainty need not dissolve belief in human identity and moral responsibility" (Fasick, 26). Indeed, according to her, "...he serves as a point-by-point demonstration that an unbeliever can remain a model of Victorian respectability" (Fasick 26).

Robert Elsmere thus transcended the confines of the Tractarians by taking religion to the masses in a way that was non-threatening. The Tractarians, particularly Newman and Pusey, made religion accessible to the divided Church. Keble wrote of religion's availability when, writing on marriage before God, he said,

Only kneel on, nor turn away

From the pure shrine, where Christ to-day

Will store each flower, ye duteous lay,

For an eternal wreath. (Keble 340)

Robert brought a faith in God through a humanized and unmythical Christ to those of the British population who were alienated from the mysticism of religion as a direct cause of the turmoil of the Tractarian controversy. This rational faith gave hope to a skeptical society struggling with the effects of religious conflict.

Appendix A

Chronology -- 1833-1890

- 1833 The Assize Sermon on National Apostacy was preached by John Keble on July 14. Irish Church Bill Conference was held at Hadleigh, Suffolk.
- 1833-45 *Tracts for the Times*, a series of 90 religious pamphlets which formed the backbone of the Tractarian movement, was published.
- 1841 Tract XC was published and condemned.
- 1843 John Henry Newman resigned his living at St. Mary's, Oxford.
- 1845 Newman was received into the Roman Catholic Church (October 9). Edward B. Pusey assumed leadership of the Tractarians.
- 1850 Thomas Arnold and Julia Sorell were married on June 12.
- 1851 Mary August Arnold was born on June 11.
- 1856 Thomas Arnold converted to Roman Catholicism and was employed by Newman at the Catholic University in Dublin.
- 1864 Newman published his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.
- 1865 Thomas Arnold returned to the Anglican Communion and taught at Oxford.
- 1867 Mary Augusta Arnold began studies at Oxford's Bodleian Library.

- 1871 Mary became engaged to Thomas Humphry Ward of
Brasenose College, Oxford.
- 1872 T. Humphry Ward and Mary August Arnold were
married on June 6.
- 1879 Newman was made a cardinal by Pope Leo XIII.
- 1888 *Robert Elsmere* was published on February 26.
Julia Ward, nee Sorell, died.
- 1890 Newman died on August 11.

(Smith *chronology*; Sugg xxiii-xxv)

Appendix B

Associated Works by Mary Augusta Arnold Ward

The Journal Intime of Henri Frederic Amiel, translation, published 1885.

This, her first major undertaking, "...served to strengthen her belief in the individuality of religious experience and gave her insight into her father's spiritual quest.." (Smith 31). It is still the cited English translation of Amiel's mysticism.

The History of David Grieve, published 1892.

It "...presents her concept of a "new" Christianity from the point of view of the intelligent working class..." (Smith 43). Set in Manchester, England, and Paris, France, the novel hints of the autobiographical works of Charles Dickens. According to E.M.G. Smith, David's religious experience includes a "conversion" under the praying and preaching of Dyson, the inevitable "falling from grace" in this limited dogma, the exciting discovery of Secularism (the popular form of Positivism), the philosophical implications of Science, and finally a "Christianity" that was positive, fruitful, and human. (Smith 46)

Helbeck of Bannisdale, published 1898.

Based on the life of her father, Thomas Arnold, and her own experiences in 1896 in the county of Westmoreland, the novel is a description of the tragedy involved in ignorant faith and conversion. The tragic quality of the novel is apparent in the chief characters - Alan Helbeck, a staunch Catholic, and Laura Fountain, a Protestant with no severe religious convictions. Alan wins her love, yet

tries to convert her to his faith. Laura, though, "...becomes a modern Antigone, dying in defense of the individual's right to battle institutional authority" (Smith 52).

The Case of Richard Meynell, published 1911.

In this work, the reader is reintroduced to Catherine Elsmere. Here, she "...suffers the second ordeal of her saintly life when her daughter falls in love with a man who, like Robert, finds he must abandon the orthodox faith" (Smith 53). According to one of her biographers, E.M.G. Smith,

In this presentation of [Ward's] faith, twenty-two years after *Robert Elsmere* and after the disappointing results of her own attempt at a cultural religion offered at the Passmore Edwards Settlement House, the author no longer proposes a New Brotherhood, but a simplified worship service and a human Christ. (Smith 54)

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