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Study of the Puritan element in Emily Dickinson

Marion Alice Payzant

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A Study of
THE PURITAN ELEMENT
in
EMILY DICKINSON

by

Marvin Payzant

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

State University of Montana
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Approved:

Chairman of Examining Committee

Chairman of Graduate Committee
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Preface

Our approach to the study of the poetry of Emily Dickinson leads through the theological framework erected about the system of John Calvin. It is our purpose to reveal that the original tenets of the Puritan faith were an integral and formulating factor in the inheritance and the environment of our poet; that they manifest themselves in her letters, and particularly in her poems, as an influence which largely determined both the trend of her thought and her way of life.

The ideal cherished by the Puritan Fathers of the seventeenth century in America was as nearly pristine, as nearly unaffected by contact with divers and varying modes of life, as has been any ideal in the history of the human race. During the first one hundred years in the New World, man's interest was narrowed by existing conditions to the household, the political community, and the divine realm, of which the visible symbol was the church. Men were filled with an intense degree of religious enthusiasm, and with the sense of a mission to fulfill, in furthering the ideal which they had set for themselves in adopting the Calvinistic theology. They lived in a world which was ruled over by God and John Calvin, and every aspect of life and thought was dominated by the accepted theological system. Such was Puritanism in its inception, in that period which successive generations have called the Golden Age of Piety. It is within the confines of this century that we must seek our definition of the un tarnished Puritan ideal, for the centuries which followed brought modifying influences.
At the close of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, change was already apparent, in the low type of piety in the churches. The deterioration of the general religious tone was indicated in the summoning of the Reforming Synod of 1679-80, under the leadership of Increase Mather. It met to bewail the spiritual deadness of the times, in the hope of devising a remedy. It expressed "a sense of decay of godliness in the land, of increase of pride, neglect of worship, Sabbath-breaking, lack of family government, censurings, intemperance, falsehood and the love of the world..."¹ There accompanied this condition a departure, in some measure, from the orthodox Calvinistic doctrine and an increasing adoption of Arminianism. The difference between the church and the world, which had characterized the preceding century, was rapidly ceasing to exist.

With the Revolution, the clergy were lowered from their position of supreme importance, and the lawyers, the soldiers and the statesmen were exalted. The forces of the community as a whole tended to drift from a concentration upon ecclesiastical to secular fields. The period has been called one of growing material prosperity, under the chief guidance no longer of the clergy, but rather of the social class to whose energy this prosperity was due. Professor Parrington calls this decadence of Puritan theology "the transformation of the English Puritan into the New England Yankee."²

There was a spreading reign of formalism where spontaneous, individual faith had before existed. Cotton Mather is deeply disturbed over the fact that "The peculiar spirit, or error of the time is indifference in religion." As the eighteenth century advanced, "Some ministers and some congregations began to question the extent of human inability, and to query whether God had not so conditioned regeneration, or the employment of 'means', that a sincere, though necessarily imperfect obedience would bring saving grace to him who rendered it." This theory, which offered the doctrine of freedom of the will, in stating that the elect of God are not pre-chosen, but that a righteous life and good works will bring men into the way of salvation, was, of a necessity, destructive of the whole Calvinistic system. Although a champion of traditional theology appeared at this crisis, in the person of Jonathan Edwards, and although his teachings, accompanied by the revivals which Whitefield conducted in New England, beginning in 1740, comprised the "Great Awakening", a revival movement which showed that orthodox theology could still be of greater popular interest than politics, with the Unitarian separation in 1815, the death-blow was dealt to the monopoly which Calvinism had enjoyed. This movement, developing rapidly after 1830, produced a change so startling as to warrant the term of the "Renaissance of New England."

Though Calvinism did not go down to immediate defeat, in that

4. W. Walker, op. cit., p. 252
"'Till long after 1800, the orthodox clergy of New England maintained their formal eminence unbroken,"⁵ and "In general, the regions where Edwardeanism had become powerful before 1800, had given scanty welcome to Unitarian speculations,"⁶ the ideal of theocratic stewardship of the "Fathers" had fallen, and the faith of John Calvin had been forced to yield its supremacy.

Even such a brief summary will indicate that only in the first century in America was the dominance of the orthodox Puritan faith unchallenged. When we view it as it persisted outside of that century, we view it incorporated into, and modified by the changing social and economic conditions which accompanied the increasing complexity of civilization in the New World - a complexity which was foreign to the simple, rigorous life of the original Puritan Fathers, who divided their time between the worship of God and the conquest of the wilderness.

In attempting to determine whether or not Emily Dickinson is a "Puritan", we shall accept the term as it was defined by Calvin, and adopted by the early ministers who, driven from England years before they came to America, had taken refuge in Geneva, and upon migrating to the New World "had brought in their intellectual baggage the system of (the Genevan thinker) rather than of Luther."⁷ We shall turn to a study of the orthodox faith in its inception, in an effort to evolve a definition of the most characteristic attributes of the original Puritan

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⁷. Farrington, op. cit., V. I, p. 11
ideal, which sprang from the doctrine developed in England, formulated
definitely at Geneva, and carried to the New England shores, where, of-
fering the Scripture, interpreted according to the ardent Hebraism of
the Calvinistic creed, as man's guide in all temporal and spiritual af-
fairs, it became the dominant force for a century. We shall observe
how far such a definition, embracing the orthodox conception of the
term "Puritanism", may be applied to the life and work of Emily Dickin-
son.

We shall concern ourselves with no modification of this strictly
orthodox interpretation, except that which characterized the doctrine
of Jonathan Edwards, and which is strangely coincident with Emily Dick-
inson's one modification of the traditional "old Calvinism"; namely, an
infiltration of the quality of mercy into the character of the Absolute,
based upon the conception of an essentially benevolent Deity.
Puritanism

We find that until 1700 in New England, the dominant ideal was rather the moral than the political, the tradition of the English Bible rather than that of the Common Law. The Puritans had come to the continent of America to "live in accordance with no laws but those of the Scriptures," interpreted according to the system of John Calvin. So we find them "appealing to the Bible as a final arbiter, and finding there the record of a government of which God was King, and God's glory the prevalent aim, (namely, the Hebrew Commonwealth), taking this as their model, and seeking to build upon a similar foundation, a great theocratic state." 9

Cotton Mather, in his "Magnalia", sets forth their creed of cosmic absolutism, stripped of all technicality, as follows. After accepting the Holy Scripture as the Supreme Judge, "by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest," 10 he states the Sovereignty of God, who is "the alone fountain of all beings, and hath most sovereign dominion over them, and upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth." 11 This Sovereign Being, "from all eternity did . . . freely and unchange-

11. Mather, loc. cit.
ably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." 12

In the beginning, God created man with perfect freedom of will.

But Adam and Eve "and we in them, fell from original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin." 13 "And in the fall, they exerted their will in opposition to the will of God, thereby meriting for themselves and all posterity, eternal punishment. So,

"man, by his fall into the state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation—so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself or to prepare himself thereunto..." 14

But God mitigated his justice. Through the mediation of Christ, certain human beings were chosen by God to be relieved of the punishment of sin, and received into eternal salvation. These were the elect: none other could be saved, nor could any acts of the elect impair their salvation.

"By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained unto everlasting death. These angels and men thus predestinated and fore-ordained are particularly designed, and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished." 15

Since there were no certain signs by which the elect might be known, there was a possibility that any man might be of their number. Therefore, it was every man's chief preoccupation to attempt to determine whether he were elect. The one possible test of election was man's

13. Ibid., p. 186.
15. Ibid., p. 185.
ability to exert his will in true harmony with the will of God.

"Men, attending the will of God revealed in His work, and yielding obedience thereunto, may from the certainty of their effectual calling be assured of their eternal election."16

But even the elect were infected with hereditary sin.

"This corruption of nature during this life doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be, through Christ, pardoned and mortified, yet both itself and all the emotions thereof are truly and properly sin."17

Furthermore, no will of the Devil was more frequent than that which deceived men into believing themselves regenerate when in truth they were not. The task of assuring oneself of election, then, could end only with life.

The Puritans of the first century in America were blinded by the vision of their ideal, to every aspect of life which was not a contributing factor to the furthering of it.

"Perhaps not since the time of the . . . Apostles had there been in the world a faith so literal, a zeal so passionate: not even in the time of the Apostles was there connected with these an intelligence so keen and robust."18

It is true that their membership contained men of humble position, but their leaders were men of character and education. .

"Their ministers were the peers in learning and ability of any in the Puritan wing of the Church of England. . . . The religious motive, ever predominant in the beginning of the enterprise, had enabled it to draw on the best elements of a great party in England, and to attract men whom no mean or ordinary aims would have drawn across the

17. Ibid., p. 186.
These men flung both their hearts and their intellects into the service of religion. They accepted religion as the thing of supreme and paramount importance, and acted upon that acceptance. They did not attempt to combine the sacred and secular - they simply abolished the secular. We find this lofty theological ideal dominating every aspect of life, physical and spiritual, during the period of its supremacy, the seventeenth century in America.

In their literature, Barrett Wendell informs us,

"The intellectual activity of New England expressed itself chiefly in a religious form, and next, in a form which, if the term 'history' include diaries and the like, may be broadly described as historical. More than half of Whitcomb's titles (in his Chronological Outlines of American History) are incontestably religious in character... From 1600-1700 there are nine titles to which the name of literature may properly be applied, if under the name of literature one include not only the poems of... Mrs. Anne Bradstreet, but the 'Bay Psalm Book', the first version of the New England Primer, and so pervasively theological a poem as Michael Wigglesworth's 'Day of Doom.' 20

To these Puritan fathers, religion was the chief thing. "The meeting-house was the central building of the Puritan town. The village grew up around it, and the country roads were laid out with reference to it."21 For "however scattered the population everything in those Puritan days must focus in the meeting-house. Attendance upon Divine service was made urgent both by public opinion and by fear of future

20. Wendell, A Literary History of America, p. 56.
punishment." 22 Indicative of the influence of the meeting-house, and of
the type of piety which prevailed during the first generation in America —
a type which looked toward the welfare of the soul, to the neglect of the
things of the body — is an entry in Governor Winthrop’s diary, to the ef-
fact that,

"There were so many lectures now in the country, and many
poor persons would usually resort to two or three in the week—
to the neglect of their affairs, and damage to the public. The
assemblies were, in divers churches, held 'till night, and
sometimes within the night, so as such as dwelt far off could
not get home in due season, and many weak bodies could not en-
dure so long, in the extremity of the heat or cold, without
great trouble, and hazard of their health." 23

Second only to the meeting-house as an educator in family and commun-
ity responsibility, was the town meeting, which, because it dealt with
church affairs, "was held in the meeting house, and partook not a little
of the sacredness of the actual Sabbath service." 24 "This town meeting,
held down to 1846 within the sacred building, gave almost as much time
to such parish questions as the choice of a minister, his compensation
and his orthodoxy, as to secular problems of roads and schoolhouses." 25
Within the meeting-house, every child whose parents sought its salvation
had to be baptised, every citizen who cared for public opinion had to have
a regular "sitting," every sinner might be at any moment summoned for pub-
lie confession and judgment.

Their scheme of legal punishments depended upon theology rather

p. 47.
23. Winthrop’s Journal, Published under Auspices of American Historical
Association, V. I, New York, 1908, p. 325.
25. Ibid., p. 47.
than upon jurisprudence. They imposed penalties according to the moral and ecclesiastical odiousness of each crime, not according to the degree in which it was detrimental to society's welfare. "They did not choose such punishments for crimes, as were merely in proportion to their affecting the safety or peace of society..."26 "In that branch of law, more especially, which is distinguished by the name of crown law, they professed to have no regard to the rules of the common law of England. They intended to follow Moses's plan... but no further than it was of a moral nature, and obligatory upon all mankind."27

Furthermore, the personal disputes in the community were settled by the minister. "The elders, or the ministers, although they were not considered as one of the estates, yet no matters of great weight or moment, whether of a religious or a civil nature, were determined without their advice, and a formal reference to them."28 The judges stood not alone as civil magistrates, punishing the criminal in order to make an example of him for the benefit of the community at large, but rather as ministers of divine wrath, giving the wretch in this world a foretaste of the pains of hell. It was their idea that,

"church and civil government might very well stand together, it being the duty of the magistrate to take care of matters of religion, and to improve his civil authority... For the end of their office is not only the quiet and peaceable life of the subject in matters of righteousness and honesty, but also in matters of godliness."29

27. Ibid., p. 459.
28. Ibid., p. 424.
29. Hutchinson, loc. cit.
The continual emphasis is laid upon the supremacy of the Puritan church in seventeenth-century New England, not only in spiritual, but also in temporal matters.

The result was inevitably a fixity of social structure, which, developed during two centuries of social and geographical isolation, produced characteristic ways of thinking and feeling among the people of New England. "There can be little doubt that the deepest traits of Yankee character had origin in the intense religious convictions of the immigrants." 30

In attempting to arrive at a true understanding of these religious convictions, and of the spirit which they developed among the first settlers on the New England shores, attention should be directed toward an essential element in the Puritan tradition - that of nonconformity. Webster defines a Puritan as "one who, in the time of Queen Elizabeth and the first two Stuarts, opposed traditional and formal usages, and advocated simpler forms of faith and worship than those established by law." This definition was extended in the seventeenth century to apply to the whole body of English nonconformists, who insisted upon "the personal relation between God and man", and tried to base theology on the letter of the Bible, rejecting those traditional elements which they adjudged to be mere human innovations in the doctrine and practice established by the Apostles.

"Though he called on Calvin for aid...accepting his

theology and . . . his political theories, the Puritan asserted the individual's right to read and interpret the Bible for himself, setting this principle against that of the Anglican, for whom the Church was in a measure both the mediator between God and man, and the final interpreter of the Scriptures."31

"It has been said that all men in all times have been divided into conformists and non-conformists—into those who reverence tradition, submerge the individual into the organization, and set form in religion above life, and those for whom man's own relation to God is the center—and individual inquiry, not corporate dogma, is the key to truth."32

According to this hypothesis, Puritanism was an expression, in a given historical period, of the nonconformist spirit.

The Reformation taught that man is not responsible to any priest, but to the Lord. No one but the Lord has a right to man's soul and conscience. Upon this doctrine the English Puritans placed special emphasis. The Gospel as they interpreted it made every man responsible directly to God, and thus the individual was honored and exalted.

"They felt bound not only to interpret the Bible for themselves, but to test all principles and institutions by their reason and conscience. . . As Protestants they appealed to the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and duty. They asserted its authority in opposition to the traditions of the Church. But, in the interpretation of the Bible, they insisted upon the right of private judgment. They denied the right of the Church or of councils to give them an interpretation of the Word. A Puritan was a man who submitted with meekness to the teaching of God's word as he understood it."33

"Not liberty of conscience . . . but the sovereignty

of conscience—this is what the fathers believed in."34

It is this sovereignty of the individual conscience which we discover to be the formulating element in the Puritan tradition. An unwillingness to accept anything which private reason and judgment have not proven and found good. This spirit prevailed during the "Golden Age of Piety" - the seventeenth century in New England.

"The rules and the morality of Puritanism were developed from within, as the fruit of individual faith; not imposed from without. The fathers lived under laws and among institutions which were not lifeless monuments, but the flowers of an earnestly cherished conviction."35

Puritanism was not dependent wholly upon theology and political theory, but likewise upon the traits of the social class from which came some of its most striking aspirations and conventions. It was a middle-class movement. "The capable leaders who created the early institutions of Massachusetts Bay Colony were Jacobean English of middle station."36 The social constitution of the Puritan party made for plain speech for plain men. Simplicity came to identify their mode of self-expression - a simplicity that, whether inspired by the religious side of Puritanism or not, emerged as a characteristic element in what they wrote, as an examination of the opinions of three representative seventeenth century Puritans will indicate. Richard Mather, "eschewed obscure phrases and exotic words", because he looked upon "the affectation of such things" as savoring of "carnal wisdom." John Cotton felt

34. Byington, op. cit., p. 182.
35. Murdock, op. cit., p. 100.
it his duty "to preach with such a plainness as became the Oracles of
God, which are intended for the conduct of Men in the Paths of Life,
and not for Theatrical Cattentation and Entertainments." Thomas Hook-
er asserted that, "As it is beyond my skill, so it is beyond my care to
please the niceness of men's palates with any quaintness of language.
They who covet more sauce than meat . . . they must provide cooks to
their mind. . . The substance and solidity of the frame is that which
pleaseth the builder." 39

Whether stimulated by middle-class thriftiness or by religious
zeal - distrustful of all things unduly worldly - may be conjectured,
but we find an entry in Winthrop's Journal to the effect that "... There were many laws made against costly apparel." So it appears that
simplicity characterized not only the speech, but the dress of the sev-
enteenth century Puritan in America.

The Puritans were not kindly disposed toward laziness. Their eco-
omic status and the rigorous demands of life in the New World, caused
them to take up the standard of Discipline in Work as a beacon. Fur-
themore, idleness was to be shunned as a work of the devil. Thomas
Hooker points out the way to success in Christian life, giving warning
against idleness,

"Whilst the stream keeps running, it keeps clear; but
let it stand still, it breeds frogs and toads and all manner
of filth. So while you keep going, you keep clear; but do

38. Mather, Magnalia, Bk. III, p. 5.
39. G. L. Walker, Thomas Hooker: Preacher, Founder, Democrat, N.Y.,
    1891, p. 156.
but once flag in your diligence, and stand still, and oh! what a puddle of filth and sin thy heart will be."\textsuperscript{41}

We find Winthrop noting the fact that, "Mr. Peter, preaching at Boston, made an earnest request to the church . . . that they would take order for employment of people (especially women and children in winter time) for he feared that idleness would be the ruin both of church and commonwealth."\textsuperscript{42} Industry - the discipline of work - was exalted as an aid to material and spiritual betterment, and Sloth was shunned both as an economic menace, and as one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

Calvinism imposes upon whoever accepts it, the duty of constant, terribly serious self-searching.

"In those days of recoil from the outward ceremonial religion, in which the Papacy had so long held men, the inward facts of personal experience were made the subject of the most careful scrutiny and dissection. The question before every individual who holds the Calvinistic faith is whether he can discern within himself the signs which shall prove him probably among the elect of God?\textsuperscript{43}"

"As soon as children could talk, they were set to a process of deliberate introspection."\textsuperscript{44} An account of the prevailing youthful piety is contained in Winthrop's Journal.

"There was a youth of fourteen years of age . . . so wrought upon by the ministry of the word, as, for divers months, he was held under such affliction of mind as he could not be brought to apprehend any comfort in God—being much humbled and broken for his sins (Though he had been a dutiful child, and not given up to the lusts of youth,) and especially for his blasphemous and wicked thoughts,

\textsuperscript{41} G. L. Walker, op. cit., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{42} Winthrop's Journal, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{43} G. L. Walker, op. cit., p. 160.
\textsuperscript{44} Wendell, Cotton Mather, p. 29.
whereby Satan buffeted him, so as he went mourning and languishing daily; yet, attending to the means, and not giving over prayer, and seeking counsel, etc., he came at length to be freed from his temptations, and to find comfort in God's promises, and so, being received into the congregation upon good proof of his understanding in the things of God, he went on cheerfully in a Christian course. 

In "The Soul's Preparation for Christ", Thomas Hooker informs us of the intense degree of introspection necessary,

"A man must prove his ways as the Goldsmith doth his gold in the fire, a man must search narrowly and have much light to see what the vileness of his own heart is, and to see what his sines are..." 

Out of this practice of "looking inward" emerged the desire for character as opposed to mere action - "means" alone are not enough to insure man's salvation. We find Hooker informing his "flock" that, although outward duties are important, these without Christ cannot save anyone. "Forms are but the bucket. Christ is the well. If you say your bucket shall help you, you may starve for thirst if you let it not down into the well for water."

The exponents of the Calvinistic doctrine were imbued with a profound sense of the presence of God in the world, and of the responsibility to him for every act of their lives. They believed that God was always near at hand, ready and anxious to interpose in their most trivial affairs. "From the cosmic absolutism of their creed, which conceived of God as a stable Will sustaining the universe, binding together what would otherwise fly asunder, two important corollaries were derived:

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45. Winthrop's Journal, p. 120.
47. Tyler, op. cit., p. 201.
the universality of the moral law and the necessity of divine judgment."48

God was everywhere, not in a pantheistic sense, but as a personal, ever-watchful deity, who in truth saw the fall of every sparrow. This idea, closely united with the conception of the universality of moral law, fostered the association of God's will with natural causes.

Tempests are not regulated by natural laws, but are evidences of God's displeasure. Winthrop writes, on the day following a great storm,

"This happened after a general fast, which occasioned some of our ministers to stir us up to seek the Lord better, because he seemed to discountenance the means of reconciliation. Whereupon the next general court, by advice of the elders, agreed to keep another day, and to seek further into the causes of such displeasure, etc., which, accordingly was performed."49

The belief in the necessity of divine judgment placed on the throne of the universe, a stark, divine justice, upon which scarcely fell one glimmer of pity, copious in maledictions, providing the source for the doctrine of theological determinism. We find Thomas Shepard expressing an attitude on the subject which was characteristic of his age and sect: "Is there any escape? If the man be one of the elect, yes: if he be not one of the elect—no. In the latter case, God shall set himself like consuming fire against thee, and trod thee under his feet. . . ."50

One need not wait until the Day of Judgment to see the workings of

50. Tyler, op. cit., p. 204.
divine justice: evidences are present in earthly events, as Winthrop indicates in the following account:

"Two men . . . returning in a boat from the windmill, struck upon the oyster bank. They went out to gather oysters, and not making fast the boat, when flood came in it floated away, and they were both drowned—although they might have waded out on either side; but it was an evident judgment of God upon them, for they were wicked persons. . ."51

God was present in the universe, and he was the Hebraic God of wrath.

The characteristic which has popularly come to be the most intimately associated with the definition of the Puritan, is his contempt for this world, for external nature, for the delights of the senses—a contempt which was stronger during the seventeenth century in New England, than it had been before or has been since that time. The Puritans of the first generation in America were preoccupied with the task of obeying the rigid edicts of an all-powerful God whose will was expressed once and for all in Holy Writ. As Barrett Wendell remarks,

"We must recall again the creed that at almost every moment made the concerns of another world than this, the chief reality in the minds of the Puritans. It was our duty, they held, to live for the glory of God; only by so living, with all our hearts, could we assure ourselves of the election which alone could save us from the eternal penalty of Adam’s sin and our own."52

So they lived in an all-pervading moral atmosphere. Their concentration upon what lay beyond the bounds of mortal experience lifted them above human weakness, it filled them with the idea of a great destiny. The ideal of conduct which it offered was austere, but lofty,
"inspiring an intense earnestness that went with them into everything — piety, politics, education, work, play. It was an earnestness that could well be called terrible."

Cotton Mather tormented himself over the question which he put to himself concerning his son, "What shall be done for the raising of Sammy's mind above the debasing meanness of Play?" The history of the Puritan Fathers is full of incidents which show that they did their work from day to day as though standing on the threshold of the spiritual world. In that light, Duty becomes the Supreme Law.

Religion may be said to include three elements: theology, worship and ethics — that is, an intellectual explanation of the universe, a conscious relation of the human soul to the divine and infinite, and an ordering of the practical conduct of life. Puritanism made theology the corner-stone of religion. Theoretically, it took the Bible as its law; but what it really offered was a scheme of the universe: God in three persons; the race of men ruined through the sin of its first parent; a sacrificial atonement; the appropriation of that atonement through faith as the sole condition of an eternal Heaven, and its rejection, the seal of an endless perdition.

Transcendence and determinism underlay the Puritan theocracy. God resided outside of, and above the universe, interfering by means of his inscrutable decrees, according to the pleasure of his absolute will,

53. Tyler, op. cit., p. 100.
54. Cotton Mather, Diary, p. 126.
and fore-ordaining whatever comes to pass. Man is lost through Adam's sin, and is by nature corrupt: his liberty is not self-determined, but works only within the limitations of his fore-ordained nature. Such a doctrine caused the soul to be confronted with the most tremendous realities and immeasurable issues. A highly metaphysical system was made the basis of individual belief, and a mystic experience of sin, self-despair and conversion, was required of the soul.

In turning to a consideration of the works of Jonathan Edwards, we find that his conception of the majesty and sufficiency of God, like that of Calvin, was the keynote of both his philosophical and theological systems. He believed implicitly in the Sovereignty of God, and with that as the guiding factor in his own religious experience, he set about to defend Calvinism from the Arminian school of Whitby and Taylor. Yet,

"He was convinced that Calvinism needed to be modified so that the responsibility of man should be more clearly taught. And a second aim was no less ardently his. Edwards sought to foster a warm, emotional type of Christian character, touched and vivified by a sense of the immediate communion between God and the human soul."55

His conception of the character of the Absolute was more kindly than Calvin's. There was no longer a Sovereign Will at an immeasurable distance from man, but a kinder leader and ruler of nature. The Hebraic God loses his grim and formidable outlines, as we listen to Edwards'

55. Williston Walker, op. cit., p. 281
attitude toward the Supreme Being.

"My sense of divine things gradually increased and became more and more lively and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory in ... everything. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds and the blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water and all nature."56

He upheld the tenet of Calvinism which maintained that all mankind sinned in Adam. "It is evident that man is in a fallen state; and that he has naturally scarcely anything of those sweet graces which are an image of those which are in Christ."57 He adheres to the doctrine of the Elect, in which "if strict restitution be exercised towards the degenerate part of the system, the restoration of the objects of it is not possible,"58 and according to which, "those elect creatures, which must be looked upon as the end of all the rest of creation, considered with respect to the whole of their eternal duration, and as such made God's end - must be viewed as being, as it were, one with God."59

But his Sovereign God has ceased to be wholly the God of Wrath. In his "Inquiry into Freedom of the Will", he dissertates upon the excellency of Christ. "The beauties of nature are really emanations or shadows of the excellencies of the Son of God. So that when we are delighted with flowery meadows and gentle breezes of wind, we may consid-

57. Ibid., p. 5186.
er that we see only the emanations of the sweet benevolence of Jesus
Christ." 60 In place of the outpourings of divine fury, there comes the
infiltration of the quality of mercy, owing to the essential benevo-

lence of the Deity.

"Goodness and severity are but other words for sovereign
benevolence and strict equity, the glory of which is abund-
antly conspicuous in the various divine dispensations towards
the children of men, even in this life—but will appear
still more transcendent in the day when God shall judge the
world in righteousness." 61

Edwards sought to defend the Calvinistic doctrine of the complete
sovereignty of God in conversion against the Arminianism of the school
of Whitby, by maintaining that,

"human freedom implies simply the natural power to act in
accordance with the choice of the mind. With the origin
of the inclination, man has nothing to do... While man
has full natural power to serve God, that is, could free-
ly follow a choice to serve God if he had such an inclina-
tion, he will not serve God 'till God reveals himself to
him as his highest good, and thus renders the choice of
obedience to God, men's strongest determination." 62

We discover, in examining the teachings of this man, whom tradi-
tion has marked as the greatest of our Puritan divines, that, through
him, "it came about that Calvinism found itself insensibly drifting
away from the pessimistic toward the optimistic: away from the misan-
thropic toward the philanthropic." 63 Not only does Edwards describe God
as a Benevolent Sovereign, but holds that "True virtue (on the part of
man) most essentially consists in Benevolence to Being in general." 64

60. Library of World's Best Literature, p. 5185.
61. Edwards, op. cit., p. 89.
64. Edwards, op. cit., p. 94.
The Puritan Element in Emily Dickinson's Ancestry and Environment

The line of Edward Dickinson, Emily's father, could be traced directly to the first of the name in America - Nathaniel Dickinson, who emigrated from England to Massachusetts Bay Colony between 1631-1635. Remaining only a short time in Massachusetts, he removed to Wethersfield, Connecticut, where he took up his permanent abode sometime between 1635 and 1640. In successive generations, the families of Samuel, Ebenezer and Nathan moved from Wethersfield to Hadley, Massachusetts, and on to Amherst.

A study of the genealogy of the Dickinson family, which Judd included in his "History of Hadley", reveals the close connection which Emily Dickinson's ancestry had, from the beginning, with the orthodox church. The original Nathaniel, who settled in Wethersfield, was a freeman and a Deacon, first in Wethersfield, and later in Hadley, where he died. His concern with the erection of the first meeting-house in Hadley, shows him to have been active in the religious affairs of the community. A house where the people might meet for public worship and religious instruction was an early object of attention in Hadley, as in most other places in New England. On December 12, 1661, the

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65. This material concerning the Dickinson family is contained in Sylvester Judd's Genealogy of the Dickinson Family, in his History of Hadley (including Early History of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst and Granby). Springfield, 1905, pp. 33-46.
66. Judd remarks (p. 69), that "By the early laws of Massachusetts, none but orthodox church members could be freeman, and none but freemen could hold offices or vote for rulers."
town ordered as follows: "The town have ordered that they will build and erect a meeting-house, to be a place of public worship... The town have ordered that Mr. Russell, Mr. Lewis, Goodman Warner, and Goodman Dickinson... be a committee for the aforesaid occasion."67

Later, we find Samuel, son of Nehemiah, son of Nathaniel, a Deacon in Shutesbury, whither he had removed, and where he died about 1747. Ebenezer, also son of Nehemiah, likewise a Deacon in Amherst, where he settled in 1731. Nathaniel, son of Joseph, son of Anthaniel, was a Deacon in Hatfield, until he died, in 1745. Benjamin, great-grandson of the first Nathaniel, was of collegiate education and a licensed preacher, and resided in Hadley most of his life. William, great-great-grandson of the first Nathaniel, was a Deacon in Hadley until his death in 1849. Nathaniel's great-great-great-grandson, the Reverend Timothy Dickinson, was graduated from Dartmouth College in 1785, and was ordained as pastor of the Congregational church in Holliston in 1789.

Emily Dickinson's grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, was the son of Nathan,68 son of Nathan, son of Nathaniel, and died in Amherst in 1775. He was a man of intense and active piety, who "in his fervor for the 'in-bringing of the Kingdom'... foresaw the universal education of ministers, and calculated the millennium in the near future of 'about seven years'".69 It was for the purpose of carrying out this

ideal that he became one of the founders of Amherst Academy — a group of good men who "had the best interests of learning and religion at heart, and were ever foreseeing and far-seeing beyond most men in their generation."  

In 1820, he was voted one of the committee who were "to secure a good and sufficient title to the ten acres of land conditionally conveyed to the trustees of this Academy as the site of said institution by the late Colonel Elijah Dickinson," (son of Deacon Obadiah Dickinson, son of the first Nathaniel). As one of the founders, he was of the group who "framed and reported a constitution and system of by-laws for raising and managing a permanent charity fund as the basis of an institution in Amherst . . . for the classical education of young men of piety and talents for the Christian ministry." After the college was established, we find the board of trustees to include, "The Rev. David Parsons, Noah Webster, Rev. James Taylor, Rev. Joshua Crosby, Rev. Daniel A. Clark, Nathaniel Smith, Samuel F. Dickinson and Rufus Graves."  

M. D. Bianchi tells us that "This ardent enthusiast, almost bigot, lost all the money he had not previously given away, in his fanaticism for education and religion," and it was upon Amherst Academy, whose chief design was "to train ministers for Congregational churches," that his most zealous enthusiasm and energy were expended.

It should here be noted that, from the beginning, the Congregational

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70. Wms. Tyler, History of Amherst College, N.Y., 1895, p. 15.
71. Ibid., p. 16.
72. Ibid., p. 6.
73. Ibid., p. 21.
74. Ibid., p. 6.
75. Ibid., Introduction, p. xiii.
church was the established "orthodox" Puritan church in America. The structural foundation of the church polity and organization adopted by the Fathers was based upon the Plymouth model of Congregationalism, which was accepted by the Boston leaders ten years after the founding of Plymouth Colony. The Massachusetts Puritans and the Plymouth Separatists had never had doctrinal disagreement, both being pronounced Calvinists, and with Plymouth Congregationalism thus influentially established by those who were to be leaders in all early Massachusetts history, the way was made easy for the adoption of full Congregationalism by the Puritan immigration that came later, and this tendency to conform to the type developed in 1629-1630, was undoubtedly stimulated by the order of the Massachusetts General Court in 1631 that franchise should be limited to those in church membership.

"This made Congregationalism essentially a state church, and insured that all later coming bodies of Christians, not violently out of sympathy with the views of the founders, would organize themselves after the pattern with which the founders had connected the franchise, and which was in so many respects attractive to advanced Puritans." 76

"It is to be noted that Puritan ecclesiastical institutions on New England soil shaped themselves essentially on one model—that of Plymouth." 77

It was orthodox Congregationalism that dominated religious life in Amherst.

Macgregor Jenkins, whose father was a friend and intimate of the Dickinson family, and for a time their pastor, and who himself lived

77. Ibid., p. 124.
next door to the Dickisons throughout his childhood, makes the comment that "Miss Emily grew up in an era of stern orthodoxy, and her parents were entirely conventional in their attitude toward religious questions." 78 We learn from Emily's biographer, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, that Edward Dickinson, Emily's father, was "a pillar in the First Church . . . and served its interests with utter fidelity." 79

The glimpses which we catch of Edward Dickinson, through the medium of Emily's letters, reveal him as typically Puritan in his concentration upon religion, divorced from all worldliness, as the chief thing in life. He, like the early Puritans, "lived in an all-pervading moral atmosphere", which developed within him a "terrible earnestness." Emily tells us that "His heart was pure and terrible, and I think no other exists." 80 "He never played," 81 and he was prone to reprimand his children if he found them engaged in any occupation which might not be reckoned as ministering to the well-being of their immortal souls. Of such a reprimand Emily speaks: "I got down before father this morning, and spent a few moments profitably with the South Sea rose. Father, detecting me, advised wiser employment, and read at devotion the Chapter of the gentleman with the one talent. I think he thought my conscience

78. Macgregor Jenkins, Emily Dickinson, Friend and Neighbor, Boston, 1930, p. 80.
79. We are informed in J. G. Holland's History of Western Massachusetts, Springfield, 1855, Vol. II, Part III, p. 169, that "The First Church of Amherst was the first church to be there established and . . . it adopted the orthodox principles of the Congregational Platform."
81. Ibid., p. 263.
would adjust the gender."82

Edward Dickinson took care to preserve not only his religion, but every aspect of his life, from the taint of worldliness. One Sunday afternoon, Emily writes that "Father and Mother sit in state in the sitting-room, perusing such papers only, as they are well assured, have nothing carnal in them."3 He avoided poetry, having "made up his mind that it's pretty much like life."84 "Edward Dickinson was a Puritan of Puritans."85

With an ancestry and home environment of such an intensely Puritan quality, it is interesting to note what were the influences brought to bear upon Emily Dickinson outside of her father's house, in the town itself, wherein she lived as any other of her contemporaries, until after the twenty-third year of her life. McGregor Jenkins, commenting upon life in Amherst as late as 1876, when, in the country as a whole, everyone felt "the beginning of a new era",85 and "the air was electric with change", notes that the town "lay remote in the Pelham hills. It felt the stirrings of a new day faintly, if at all. It was Amherst with its colleges, its dusty village streets, its trees and simple homes."

82. Letters of Emily Dickinson, p. 200.
83. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 100.
84. Ibid., p. 104.
85. Genevieve Taggard, The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson, N.Y., 1950, p. 372. Contains an article from the Portland, Oregon, "Sunday Oregonian" for March 19, 1899, in which the above statement was made by Mrs. T. L. Eliot, who "was born in the...house that is now the Dickinson place in Amherst. Her grandfather bought the house from the D's. about 70 years ago, and 30 years later, her father sold it back again to them."
86. Jenkins, op.cit., p. 3.
Emily Dickinson’s sister-in-law, writing before her death in 1913, of "Society in Amherst Sixty Years Ago" gives us a first-hand glimpse into the life that must have been most familiar to Emily:

"The social life in Amherst in those early days was no less unique in grace and simplicity than that of Northampton, though differing always in certain social habits held contraband by piety and conscience in Amherst. The harmless cards and dancing common there were not even so much as mentioned at Amherst as suitable or even possible occupations for immortal beings, until quite a recent date."87

Edward Dickinson was not alone in his concentration upon eternity, in his scorn of the frivolities of this life as opposed to the serious business of the soul’s preparation for salvation. It was an attitude that prevailed among his fellow townspeople, as well.

Mrs. Bianchi remarks that "The Church dominated all life, social and public, in Amherst in the mid-century."88 There is no doubt that it dominated educational life, as an investigation of Tyler’s "History of Amherst College" will reveal; and in so doing, it was also exerting its influence upon the already "Bible-bound" village, because "Amherst College and Amherst were one."89 Before the college built its own chapel, the first plans for which were formulated in 1825, "morning and evening prayers were . . . attended in the old village meeting-house . . . and the relation between the students and the families in the village, was in the highest degree confidential and affectionate."90

Let us recall that "The chief design at Amherst College was to

87. Bianchi, op. cit., p. 35.
88. Ibid., p. 93.
89. Ibid., p. 36.
90. W. S. Tyler, op. cit., p. 28.
train ministers for Congregational Churches\(^{30}\) and "to advance the Kingdom of Christ the Redeemer, by training many pious youths for the Gospel ministry,"\(^{92}\) and take note of the fact that "The aim of those to whom were committed the various offices of instruction and discipline was . . . largely a moral aim."\(^{93}\)

When in May, 1821, the Rev. Z. S. Moore was elected the first president, he was likewise appointed to be "professor of theology and moral philosophy."\(^{94}\) We find the second president, Dr. Humphrey, who was appointed to office in July, 1823, instructing the Senior class in "natural theology, the evidences of Christianity, and intellectual and moral philosophy."\(^{95}\) There was "prominence given to modern history - especially the history of the Puritans, in connection with the civil and ecclesiastical history of our own country."\(^{96}\) "Morning prayers and the morning recitation were . . . held before breakfast."\(^{97}\)

When, in 1823, it was decided to have a church specially connected with the college, so that it would be no longer necessary to attend service at the village meeting-house, it was "formed on the principles of the Congregational platform,"\(^{98}\) and "adopted a creed and covenant which are the same with those of the Orthodox Congregational Churches...."

It has already been noted that the first president of Amherst was

\(^{91}\) W. S. Tyler, op. cit., p. 28.
\(^{92}\) Ibid., p. 268.
\(^{93}\) Ibid., Introduction, p. xii
\(^{94}\) Ibid., p. 22.
\(^{95}\) Ibid., p. 43.
\(^{96}\) Ibid., p. 65.
\(^{97}\) Ibid., p. 80.
\(^{98}\) Ibid., p. 268.
a pastor - the Rev. Zephaniah Swift Moore. Rev. Nathan Humphrey, the second president, had been a minister for sixteen years. "He was a zealous champion of orthodoxy, evangelical religion, Christian missions, and of all the distinctive principles of the founders."\textsuperscript{99} The third president was the Rev. Edward Hitchcock, D.D., the fourth, President Stearns, "the Christian gentleman . . . for many years pastor of a Church in the vicinity of Boston . . . bringing with him . . . the principles of his Puritan ancestry."\textsuperscript{100} In 1842, the professors "with a single exception, were preachers."\textsuperscript{101}

Revivals were a characteristic feature of college life, during which periods of religious enthusiasm, "the students spent whole days in fasting and prayer."\textsuperscript{102} In his farewell address, delivered in 1842, President Humphrey says: "Amherst College has been blessed with several special revivals of religion. No class has ever yet graduated without passing through at least one season of spiritual refreshing."\textsuperscript{103}

There was some prejudice outside of Amherst against the extreme orthodoxy of the college, and in meeting it, Mr. Sam Willard of Boston declared that "All that is great and good in our land sprang from orthodoxy. The spirit of orthodoxy animated the Pilgrims whom we delight to honor as our forefathers. It has founded this college, and is founded on a rock."\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{99} Tyler, op. cit., p. 41
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., Introduction, p. x.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 276.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 270.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 276.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 49.
It was to this institution that Col. Elijah Dickinson, son of Deacon Obadiah Dickinson, son of the first Nathaniel (1727-1813) (Genealogy and Personal Memoirs of Mass., p. 74) had bequeathed the original college site of ten acres of land. It was this institution that Samuel Fowler Dickinson, Emily's grandfather, had been instrumental in founding, and on whose board of trustees he had served for many years. Edward Dickinson, Emily's father, was treasurer of Amherst College until he was succeeded in the office by his son, William Austin Dickinson, an Amherst graduate. In 1857, Enoa Dickinson, another descendant of the original Nathaniel of Wethersfield, erected the Nineveh art gallery as a bequest to the college "on the site of the old church, where for thirty years he had attended meeting, where he was baptized and made a profession of religion, and of which he remarked to Dr. Hitchcock that if he should desire to leave his name anywhere on earth, that would be the spot."105

It was not through the members of her family alone that Emily Dickinson was closely in touch with the life at Amherst College. President Hitchcock in 1848106 "introduced the custom of inviting the freshmen, soon after entering college, to meet the families of the faculty and others from the village at his own house. He never gave up his faith in . . . the influence of cultivated Christian families in town, over college students. In accordance with this same idea . . . the Senior levee was changed by Dr. Hitchcock into a social party in

105. W. S. Tyler, op. cit., p. 146.
106. Ibid., p. 120.
the evening." Of attendance at these meetings, and at similar others, given by Amherst professors, Emily Dickinson tells us in one of her letters, dated June 21, 1852: "Last week the Senior Levee came off at the President's. I believe professor Haven is to give one soon, and there is to be a reception at Professor Tyler's next Tuesday evening, which I shall attend." And again, in March, 1851: "A Senior Levee was held at Professor and Mrs. Haven's on Tuesday of last week. Vinnie played pretty well. There's another at the President's this evening."

In addition to these purely social meetings, it should be added that President Hitchcock opened his home on Monday evenings for a meeting - "partly for inquiry and partly for conference on questions of political piety and personal religion, to which all students and some townspeople were invited." Mrs. Bianchi tells us that "Before Emily ceased to mingle with the other young people, she shared the lectures upon which the town thrrove"; and since she attended the Levees at Dr. Hitchcock's, it is not unlikely that she was present at these discussions sponsored by him.

President Hitchcock was, besides, the Dickinson's neighbor, after 1845, when Emily writes to Mrs. Strong that "Dr. Hitchcock has moved into his new house . . . across the way from ours." And Emily knew not merely the man, but the product of his pen as well, for she tells

107. W. S. Tyler, op. cit., p. 133.
109. Ibid., p. 78.
us that "When flowers annually died and I was a child, I used to read
Dr. Hitchcock's book on 'The Flowers of North America'. This comforted
their absence, assuring me they lived."\textsuperscript{113}

Dr. Hitchcock, then, was another influence for orthodoxy. President
of a strictly orthodox college, we have many evidences that he
clung to the beliefs of his Puritan forbears. Tyler tells us of him
that "President Hitchcock continued to the last to believe in and rely
on moral suasion, and personal, social and Christian influence, as the
sceptre of his power... He was a firm believer in the doctrine of
total depravity."\textsuperscript{114} He, like his ancestors of the seventeenth century,
had a sense of the presence of God in the world, the God who "was al-
ways near at hand, and more than willing to interpose in their small-
est affairs." At the dedication of the college observatory, President
Hitchcock remarked, "We should be very faithless and ungrateful to
doubt that the same Providence who has done so much for us the past
year, will send us a fitting telescope if it is best for us to have one,
and send it, too, just at the right time."\textsuperscript{115}

In his Preface to "The Power of Christian Benevolence, as Illus-
trated in the Life and Labors of Mary Lyon", he points out that one of
the chief merits of Miss Lyon's life was its power "to illustrate the
value of moral and religious influence in regulating the conduct and
forming the character of the young... to show what a wise economy

\textsuperscript{113} Letters, Vol. 2, p. 325.
\textsuperscript{114} W. S. Tyler, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p. 121.
there is in making religion the first, second and the third thing in a
literary institution." 116 He asserts that Miss Lyon's life "will do
something to stay the general declension from the good old way of our
Puritan fathers, who taught their children betimes to worship God and
fear His holy name." 117 Thereupon, he dedicates his book "to the ser-
vice of the Redeemer, in the fervent hope that it may contribute to
this blessed end." 118

Another contact with Amherst College, and with the prevailing or-
thodoxy, came to Emily through her intimacy with the Fiske family, who
were neighbors to the Dickinsons. "Helen Fiske, the daughter of Profes-
sor Fiske, and later to be known as the Helen Hunt, so familiar in
American literature, was her favorite playmate." 119 Surely Emily must
have know well Helen's father, the Reverend Nathan W. Fiske, who "a
powerful preacher, an acute metaphysician, and a profound theologian,
preached to the reason, the conscience and the hearts of students in
Amherst College." 120

One of Emily's deepest friendships was with Dr. and Mrs. Josiah G.
Holland, who "were intimates of the entire family, and until the death
of Dr. Holland in 1861, the families visited back and forth familiarly,
Emily going to them after she had ceased to accept invitations even

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116. Edward Hitchcock, The Power of Christian Benevolence, Published
by the American Tract Society, 1858, p. 4.
117. Hitchcock, loc. cit.
118. Ibid., p. 5.
120. W. S. Tyler, op. cit., p. 134.
from her own cousins in Boston."  

A goodly portion of Emily's letters which remain to us are those addressed to Dr. and Mrs. Holland, and in them, we discover evidences of this intimacy. In 1860, we find Emily bewailing the fact that "It is so long since cattle show, when Dr. Holland was with us," and a little later in the same year, she writes to the Hollands, "If agreeable to you, we [Vinnie and Emily], will take the Amherst train on Tuesday morning for Springfield, and be with you at noon." She writes to Mrs. Holland at the time of Dr. Holland's death, "I shall never forget the doctor's prayer my first morning with you - so simple, so believing." The friendship with Dr. Holland and his wife was one of the few to which Emily clung throughout her entire life, even beyond the time of her retiring into seclusion.

Dr. Holland's biographer tells us that "John and Judith Holland were members of the church that was formed in Plymouth, England, and emigrated with their pastor to Dorchester, Massachusetts; and whatever thread of Dr. Holland's ancestry we trace to its beginnings brings us to one of those God-fearing Puritans who settled about the 'Bay'". In his youth, books were a rarity in the Holland home - not even a country paper was taken, and "Josiah's only resource to satisfy the intellectual craving that he felt was to borrow from the severely orthodox minister, Parson Moody, his standard works in divinity."

121. Bianchi, op. cit., p. 68.
125. H. M. Plunkett, Josiah Gilbert Holland, N.Y., 1894, p. 2.
126. Ibid., p. 11.
Dr. Holland married Miss Elizabeth Chapin of Springfield in 1845, and she held the faith of his fathers: "It was the stern Puritan industry and frugality of the woman, who at all hazards, no matter what the sacrifice, would keep the outgo within the income, that created the serene atmosphere of peace and hope about him."\textsuperscript{127}

A sense of moral responsibility was the great abiding element of Dr. Holland's life, and his inmost conviction was that "The right living of the life that now is makes the best preparation for that which is to come."\textsuperscript{128} He, like the first Puritans, believed in a life guided by the Bible; to him, as to them, the Scripture was the final authority:

"I assume that the Bible communicates a correct knowledge of God and human duty and destiny, or that nothing whatever is known of them. I assert that in the degree in which this Bible has been received, as a whole, and in particular, as the rule of faith and duty, have those thus receiving it found rest, peace, fearlessness of the future, and everlasting happiness."\textsuperscript{129}

He holds the belief of an immanent, Supreme God - "a God of Providence, who ministers to my daily and individual wants, and prescribes for me when I cry to him, and holds immediate relations with every moment of my life."\textsuperscript{130} Holland was always active in the service of his faith:

"During all his life he was an active participant in Sunday School work, either as teacher or superintendent, and even when 'recreating' in Paris, took charge of the Sunday School in the American Church there. Wherever he

\textsuperscript{127} Plunkett, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 89.
\textsuperscript{129} J. C. Holland, \textit{Gold Foil}, N. Y., 1882, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., p. 72.
Anyone coming frequently into the presence of such a man, as did Emily, could not fail to feel the force of his religious enthusiasm.

In 1847, we find Emily preparing to go to Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary, studying "Algebra, Euclid, Ecclesiastical History, and reviewing arithmetic . . . under the instruction of Miss R. Woodbridge, daughter of Rev. Dr. W____, Congregational minister in Hadley."132

Here, again, the theological influence appears.

In November, 1847, she writes to Mrs. Strong that she is "really at Mt. Holyoke Seminary", which was to be her home "for a long year."133

Here, she came under the influence of Mary Lyon, founder of the Seminary, who aimed to make "religion the first, second and the third thing",134 in her institution, and who "thoroughly understood and cordially embraced the doctrines of the Puritans, just as they lie in their massive strength in the Bible."135 "Her faith was very simple. The theology she owned took color from Calvin's determining brain. . . Religion with her was primarily neither an intellectual assent, nor an emotional experience, but a life."136

One of her students tells us that "Her scholars sat in those seats before her, and were permanently changed in habits and character. She

131. Plunkett, op. cit., p. 119.
133. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 27.
134. Hitchcock, op. cit., p. 4.
135. Ibid., p. 364.
was a mighty moral architect." And another, recounting her own experience, says, "I cannot describe her power as a teacher of the Bible, but I know and believe that no one who came under her teaching failed to feel its influence all her life."138

There are many evidences that Mary Lyon's powerful personality exerted a far-reaching influence over all the young ladies committed to her care; and it should not be supposed that Emily Dickinson was an exception to the rule, particularly as she writes at this time, "You know, I am always in love with my teachers;" and after arrival at Holyoke, she remarks, "I love this Seminary, and all the teachers are bound strongly to my heart by ties of affection."140

That Miss Lyon accepted the Calvinistic doctrine is indicated in her union with the "orthodox" church. "Her consciousness of reliance on Christ for salvation, and of her obligation to honor Him by obeying His last command, led her openly to profess her faith in Him by uniting herself with the Congregational Church ... in 1822." She, like the first Puritans, lived as though she were on the threshold of another world. She asserted that "This world is intended as a place of education for heaven, and when it is not made such, it is perverted from its true use." From the Journal which she kept, we find that she felt it "a blessed privilege to fit dear ones for Heaven."143 When a human

138. Ibid., p. 402.
140. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 34.
141. Hitchcock, op. cit., p. 38.
142. Ibid., p. 371.
being thus fixes his mind upon eternity, and absorbs himself and all his faculties in self-searching, and self-preparation for the life "beyond", Duty, as we have previously observed, becomes the Supreme Law. Miss Lyon's idea of education was "to know one's duty, in the largest sense." 144

With this acceptance of Calvinism, there came inevitably that introspection, that intense self-searching, whereby man seeks to determine whether he be one of God's elect. "No display of costly silks, or precious gems could divert her eyes from the soul within, hastening on to the judgment." 145 Her preoccupation with eternity led her to turn her eyes from the things of the world, to concentrate only upon those means to salvation which life offered. She impressed it upon her pupils that

"Every instance of robbing God, of appropriating to ourselves what belongs to him, he marks as with a pen of iron and the point of a diamond... If you spend precious hours in sleep or in listlessness, in reading works which merely gratify your taste and imagination, or in writing letters home, the robbery is registered on high." 146

She, like her Puritan forebears, had a deep sense of the presence of God in the world: "It was to her a delightful fact, that the eye of God never wandered from her, and one of which she seemed every joyfully conscious." 147 She followed Calvinism in its fundamental concept of mankind's fall in Adam's original sin - the doctrine of the Elect, whereby God, through the mediation of Christ, chose to redeem a portion of mankind, and condemn the remainder to eternal punishment. "In lan-

146. Ibid., p. 223.
147. Ibid., p. 155.
language mostly scriptural, she would spread before her youthful audience the depravity of the heart, the plan of salvation through Christ, the woes of the lost, and the glories of the redeemed. 148

She believed in the necessity of divine judgment: her God was the Hebraic God of whom the first Puritans lived in never-ceasing awe and fear. She believe in hell, and "She proposed to have her pupils believe in hell also. She stood before them in chapel . . . and made hell real. . . She would uncover the fiery billows rolling below, in the natural, but low, deep tones with which men talk of their wills, their coffins, and their graves." 149 Of such a God Thomas Hooker wrote: "When God lays the flashs of hell-fire upon thy soul, thou canst not endure it." 150

She, like the first settlers on the New England shores, determined to "live in accordance with no law but that of the Scripture." She accepted the Bible as her final authority, and taught that: "When the Bible speaks, we are not to parley. It is our statute-book." 151 It was natural, then, that she should insist upon the regular study of the Bible among her pupils.

"The scholars were expected to study the weekly [Bible] lesson at least two hours in their own rooms. On Monday they were examined on it an hour or more in separate divisions, by teachers of sections, much as in a well-conducted Bible class; and on some subsequent day of the week, it was reviewed. The result of this arrangement was,

148. Hitchcock, op. cit., p. 233
149. Bradford, op. cit., p. 95.
that in a three-year course of study, more time was given to the Bible than to any other book." 152

Emily writes of her daily occupations at Holyoke, and notes that
"At nine we all meet in Seminary Hall for devotions." 153 President Hitchcock tells us that, "Miss Lyon was in the habit of occupying half an hour in the morning . . . in explaining and enforcing some particular Scriptural truth." 154 Emily comments on Miss Lyon's daily afternoon sermons: "At 4:30 we go into Seminary Hall, and receive advice from Miss Lyon in the form of a lecture." 155

In addition to this Bible study, emphasis was laid upon works in theology. The Course of Study from the Catalogue of 1848-9, includes "in the studies of the Junior Class, 'Marsh's Ecclesiastical History'; in those of the Middle Class, Alexander's 'Evidences of Christianity', and in those of the Senior Class, Paley's 'Natural Theology', and Wayland's 'Moral Philosophy.'" 156

Thus did Emily, at the most sensitive, emotional and impressionable age of seventeen emerge from the orthodox atmosphere which pervaded her father's house, into the even more rigorously theological atmosphere of Mt. Holyoke.

Little is known of the young Leonard Humphrey, Principal of Amherst Academy during the period of Emily's attendance there, except that he was later her tutor, and that, upon his death in 1850, she

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153. Letters, p. 29.
156. Gilchrist, op. cit., p. 440.
"My master has gone to rest, and the open leaf of the book, and the scholar at school alone, make the tears come, and I cannot brush them away; I would not if I could, for they are the only tribute I can pay the departed Humphrey. .. This is my first affliction, and indeed 'tis hard to bear it. . . When the unreconciled spirit has nothing left but God, that spirit is lone indeed." 157

Although there is no available proof of the common supposition that Emily was in love with Leonard Humphrey, there can be little doubt that she, who was "always in love with [her] teachers," 158 held this one particularly dear.

Mabel Loomis Todd's brief biographical note in her edition of Emily's letters, states almost all that we know of Leonard Humphrey. She informs us that, after holding the office of Principal at Amherst Academy, he was "a theological student at Andover." 159 It was a theology modeled after the beliefs of our first Puritan fathers that Humphrey studied, for we know that "Defeated at Harvard in 1805, the orthodox party retreated to Andover, where they founded the Theological Seminary, which until very lately . . . defended old Calvinism." 160 Later, "he was a tutor at Amherst College," 161 that fortress of orthodoxy, where, it is to be remembered, "The professors, with a single exception, were preachers." 162 A notice in the "Hampshire and Franklin Express," reprinted in Genevieve Taggard's "Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson",

158. Ibid., p. 25.
159. Ibid., p. 50.
tells us that "Religion had shed... over all his natural endowments her chastening influence." It was this man, under whose intellectual guidance Emily came, in the sixteenth year of her life.

Every influence with which Emily was surrounded during her life previous to 1854, when she retired from the world, seems to have led inevitably back to the religion which, as we have observed, "dominated all life, social and public, in Amherst." Ever her neighbors were outstanding champions of orthodoxy - "The Jenkinses; [Rev. Jenkins was at one time the Dickinson pastor], the Bliss family; [Rev. Daniel Bliss was the founder of the Protestant College at Beirut, Syria], and Deacon Luke Sweetster," who "unfalteringly preserved his John Calvin sternness." "Rev. Edward S. Dwight of New Haven... was installed as Pastor of the First Church of Amherst, July 19, 1854," and there are evidences in Emily's letters, that he was on intimate terms with the Dickinson family. In 1854, she writes to Austin, "You must think of us tonight while Mr. Dwight takes tea here," and again, in 1849, "Did Mr. D. give you a message from me? He promised to be faithful, but I don't suppose divines think earthly loves of much consequence."

Emily's ventures into the world outside of this tiny realm, ruled over by God and John Calvin, were few. Aside from her year at Mt. Holyoke, her occasional visits with the Hollands in Springfield, her

164. Ibid., p. 75.
165. Ibid., p. 90.
166. Holland, History of Massachusetts, p. 169.
trip to Boston in 1846, where she visited her aunt’s family for a fortnight, and her journey to Washington in 1854, after which she retired into the seclusion of her father’s house, unbroken save for two enforced trips to Boston for eye treatment in 1864 and 1865, she never left Amherst.

172. Bianchi, *op. cit.*, pp. 120, 121.
Emily Dickinson's Puritanism as Indicated in Her Published Letters

Emily Dickinson's letters give evidence that she accepted the results of her training. Until her visit to Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1854, when the event occurred which resulted in her shutting herself away from the world, she was as thoroughly orthodox in her theology, and in the application of it to her life, as any member of her household, or of the "godly village" of Amherst.

We know that she faithfully attended services in the old meeting-house, where she and Vinnie "went early to avoid the crowd, and fell asleep, with the bumble bees and the Lord God of Elijah."173 There are indications that her presence in church was not merely in accordance with her father's will, but that she was an active and ardent believer, and took delight in the sermons expounded from the pulpit. She writes from Holyoke, "Professor Smith preached here last Sabbath, and such sermons I never heard in my life. We were all charmed with him, and dared to hear him close."174 Back in Amherst, she writes on a Sabbath, "I have just come in from church... Our church grows interesting - Zion lifts her head. I overhear remarks signifying Jerusalem."175 Later in the same year, she writes to Austin, "We had such a splendid sermon from Professor Park; I never heard anything like it, and don't expect to again, 'till we stand at the Great White Throne, and He reads from

175. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 81.
the Book, the Lamb's Book." 176 She writes in March, 1854, before her trip to Washington, "I went to meeting alone all day. I assure you I felt very solemn... I wish you had heard Mr. Dwight's sermons today. He has preached wonderfully." 177

When the minister, with the stern fervor of the old Divines, preached of the wrathfulness of God, and His judgment upon sinners, awe sank deep into Emily's soul. Such a sermon was the one which she heard in the autumn of 1853, and upon which she comments in a letter to Dr. Holland:

"The minister today, not our own minister, preached about death and judgment, and what would become of those, meaning Austin and me, who behaved improperly—and somehow, the sermon scared me... I long to come to you, and learn how to be better. He preached such an awful sermon... that I didn't much think I should ever see you again until the Judgment Day, and then you would not speak to me. ... The subject of perdition seemed to please him, somehow. It seems very solemn to me." 178

Emily learned early that the things of this life are of no avail, unless they be used in preparation for the Life which is to come. There is evidence that she, too, held the creed that "at almost every moment made the concerns of another world than this the chief reality in the minds of the Puritans." 179 She probably had learned from Mary Lyon that "This world is intended for preparation for heaven, and when it is not made such, it is perverted from its true use," 180 and her concen-

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177. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 121.
179. Barrett Wendell, Cotton Mather, p. 29.
tration was upon Eternity as she wrote to Mrs. Strong, Sept. 8, 1846,

"How swiftly summer has fled, and what report has it borne to heaven of misspent time and wasted hours? Eternity only will answer. The ceaseless flight of the seasons is to me a very solemn thought; and yet why do we not strive to make a better improvement of them... Let us strive together to part with time more reluctantly, to watch the pinions of each fleeting moment until they are dim in the distance, and the new-coming moment claims our attention."181

She, like Thomas Hooker, believed that one "must prove his ways as the Goldsmith doth his gold in the fire."182 She appraised herself relentlessly, and offered self-rebukes for any hours stolen from those which should have been spent in preparation for Eternity: "It startles me when I really think of the advantages I have had, and I fear I have not improved them as I ought. But many an hour has fled with its report to Heaven, and what has been the tale of me?"183

Her God was the Sovereign Power, "the alone fountain of all beings,"184 and, like all true believers in the doctrine of Calvin, which taught that every man is responsible to God for every act, she was imbued with a sense of His Immanency. So she writes, Jan. 29, 1850,

"God is sitting here, looking into my very soul to see if I think right thoughts. Yet I am not afraid, for I try to be right and good, and He knows every one of my struggles. He looks very gloriously, and everything bright seems dull beside Him; and I don't dare look directly at Him for fear I shall die."185

This sense of God's presence, caused Emily to conceive of Him as a

Personal Deity who concerned Himself with her every thought and action. When she recalls her Thanksgiving vacation at home, during the period of her attendance at Holyoke, she says, "Never did Amherst look more lovely to me, and gratitude rose in my heart to God, for granting me such a safe return to my own home." Upon the conclusion of her stay in Boston she remarks, "I returned home ... in very good health and spirits, for which it seems to me I cannot be sufficiently grateful to the Giver of all mercies."

We have observed how Emily did not forget that "It is our duty to live for the glory of God" — that "only by so living can we assure ourselves of the election which alone can save us from the eternal punishment of Adam's sin and our own." Her intense desire was to live in a manner that would serve to prepare her for salvation. It was essential that the spirit possess all strength, that it triumph over the flesh. Anything that weakened the spirit was accursed, so Emily observes, "Colds make one very carnal, and the spirit is always afraid of them." To the end that the spirit might be strengthened, that the soul might progress on its way toward salvation, Emily was willing to accept any discipline, any means of shutting out temptation and worldliness. She remarks in writing to Austin in 1853, that "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for they shall have their Reward. Dear Austin, I don't feel funny, and I hope you won't laugh at

188. Wendell, Cotton Mather, p. 29.
anything I say."190

Any departure from the path of Duty was defeat, a triumph of sin over the spirit. This rule applied not only to the major issues which life offered, but to its every-day routine. At twenty, Emily records what she believes a signal victory:

"At noon [while attending her sick mother] I heard a well-known rap, and a friend I loved so dearly came and asked me to ride in the woods, the sweet, still woods, and I wanted to exceedingly. I told him I could not go, and he said he was disappointed; he wanted me very much. Then the tears came into my eyes, though I tried to choke them back, and he said I could and should go, and it seemed to me unjust. Oh, I struggled with great temptation, and it cost me much of denial; but I think in the end I conquered—not a glorious victory, where you hear the rolling drum; but a kind of helpless victory... I had read of Christ's temptations, and how they were like ours, only he didn't sin."191

Thus, as she stood on the threshold of womanhood, nothing had shaken her faith in the creed of her Fathers. The intensity and ardor of her belief is uttered in her cry, "God keep me from what they call 'households', except the bright one of Faith."192

In 1854, Emily writes to the Hollands from Philadelphia, "We were three weeks in Washington while father was there."195 It was on this occasion of the first long venture from the home of her childhood, that she met, and fell in love with, the man who was to change the course of her entire life.

191. Ibid., pp. 47-8.
192. Ibid., p. 49.
193. Ibid., p. 163.
There is no certain information as to his identity. Mrs. Bianchi, who was the first to break the silence enshrouding Emily’s life, says that,

"In that first witchery of an undreamed Southern spring-time, Emily was overtaken—doomed once and forever by her own heart. It was instantaneous, overwhelming, impossible. There is no doubt that two predestined souls were kept apart only by her high sense of duty, and the necessity for preserving love unmarred by the inevitable destruction of another woman’s life."\(^{194}\)

Mrs. Bianchi does not know the name of Emily’s lover, for "All that ever was told was a confidence to Sister Sue, Austin’s wife, sacredly guarded under all provocation 'till death united them."\(^{195}\) But she tells us that he was married, and that he "withdrew with his wife and an only child to a remote city, a continent’s breadth apart."\(^{196}\)

There has been further conjecturing about Emily’s love story. Josephine Pollitt, inspired by the remark which Emily made to Thomas Wentworth Higginson on the occasion of his visit to her in Amherst, that "Major Hunt interested her more than any man she ever knew,"\(^{197}\) suggests that it was Edward Bissell Hunt with whom Emily fell in love, and whom she renounced because he was the husband of Helen Fiske, the friend of her childhood. But since Major Hunt was childless, this romance does not accord in every detail with that which Mrs. Bianchi outlines.

\(^{194}\) Bianchi, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 47.
\(^{195}\) Ibid., p. 47.
\(^{196}\) Ibid., p. 47.
\(^{197}\) Josephine Pollitt, \textit{Emily Dickinson — The Human Background of Her Poetry}, New York, 1930, p. 120.
Finally, Genevieve Taggard, Emily's most recent biographer, dis-
proves Mrs. Bianchi's statement that Sue Gilbert was Emily's only con-
fidante, in producing a sworn testimonial, by one who refuses to reveal
her identity, to the effect that,

"Three persons, Mrs. A. B. H. Davis, Mrs. Maggie Mahar,
the servant in the Dickinson family, and Lavinia Dickinson,
who was Emily's sister and my friend, told me that the man
Emily Dickinson loved and renounced was Mr. George Gould
[later the Rev. George Gould] who graduated from Amherst
College and later became pastor of the Congregational Church
in Worcester, Massachusetts. And ... I was told that
Emily Dickinson's father forbade the match."198

This is a complete departure from Mrs. Bianchi's story, for George Gould
was not married until years later, and if it were he whom Emily renounced,
it was rather in meek submission to her father's will, than in accept-
ance of a self-imposed "Calvary" rising from her deep sense of Duty to
God and to her friend, who was her lover's wife.

The mystery is as yet unsolved, but the deep note of renunciation
which sounds throughout the whole of Emily's poetry, tells of a choice
that lay before her involving good and evil, in which the Dickinson gen-
erations spoke in her blood, and, looking toward the everlasting Future,
in which the soul meets its eternal Punishment or Reward, "her Soul
stood straight." In her most definite utterance concerning this great
moral crisis, there are two persons concerned, herself and the man she
loved, and the decision lay with them. There is no hint of a coercive
outside force, in the person of Edward Dickinson. Her own words go to
support the truth of Mrs. Bianchi's story - that her lover was not free

to marry her, and that "The one word he implored, Emily would not say."199

Her religion gave her strength in her hour of trial.

"I rose because he sank
I thought it would be opposite
But when his power bent,
My soul stood straight.
I told him Best must pass
Thru' this low arch of flesh:
No casque so brave
It spurn the grave-
I told him worlds I know
Where monarchs grow
Who recollected us
If we were true
And so with thew of hymn
And sinew from within
In ways I knew not that
I knew, 'till then--
I lifted him."200

Here is no timid spirit, trembling in submission before the will of an austere father, but a soul rising in exultant victory over temptation to sin.

We are not concerned with the identity of the man whom Emily loved, but it seems unlikely that he was the Reverend George Gould, whose love was forbidden to her by her father. Certain it is that Emily made a great renunciation, and thus ended that part of her life which had to do with active existence in the living world. In writing to Mr. Higginson about herself in 1868, she tells him, "I do not cross my father's ground to any house or town."201 She built her world of treasured and familiar things deep within, and distant from fearful circumstance.

201. Letters, p. 313, Vol. II.
Aside from the members of her household, and her dog, Carlo, nature, as much of it as graced her father's garden, or that she saw from the window of her room, was her only companion. When Thomas Wentworth Higginson, calling upon her asked her if she never felt any want of employment, not going off the grounds, and rarely seeing a visitor, she answered, "I never thought of conceiving that I could ever have the slightest approach to such a want in all future time," and then added, "I feel that I have not expressed myself strongly enough."

Never again was she to enter the Church in whose orthodox Calvinism she had been reared, until the day on which they carried her body there for burial. Never again would she walk along the shady streets of Amherst, on the way to a College lecture or a Senior Levee. That part of her life was ended.

It has been a prevalent supposition that in withdrawing from the world that had been familiar to her, from its church and its conservative social activities, she renounced her faith as well. But she never renounced the Sovereign God who was the center of Calvin's conception of the universe. Removed from the influence of the old Calvinism which was thundered from the pulpit of the First Church in Amherst, her God, like that of Jonathan Edwards, lost his Hebraic outlines, and to her, as to Edwards, became characterized by a "sweet benevolence" rather than by a grim austerity. Emily "looked through Nature up to Nature's

God", 203 and she, as did Jonathan Edwards, found that "God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds and the blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water and all nature." 204 She did not revolt against Puritanism: she ventured no further in her modification of the old Calvinism than did he, who was dubbed the champion of orthodoxy. In her letters, the only indication of her modification of the theology of her Fathers is revealed in the statement contained in a note written during the winter of 1860-61, "I believe the love of God may be taught not to seem like bears. Happy the reprobates under that loving influence." 205

The Bible, more than ever before, perhaps, was her authority and her guide, as it had been the guide of her fathers before her. "Should you ask me my comprehension of a starlight night, awe were my only reply, and so of the mighty Book. It still incites, infatuates, blesses and blames in one. Like human affection, we dare not touch it: yet flee - what else remains?" 206 And in writing to Mrs. Holland in 1858, she says, "Don't tell, dear Mrs. H.- but wicked as I am . . . I read my Bible." 207

She who had foregone earthly happiness, in contemplation of what she would encounter in the Hereafter, did not cease to meditate upon

204. Library of the World's Best Literature, p. 5180.
Immortality. The things of nature turned her thoughts toward things of heaven, and we find her "Quickened toward all celestial things by crows I heard this morning." 208 There was scarcely the distance of a threshold between her and the life that lies beyond mortality: "I cannot tell how Eternity seems. It sweeps around me like a sea." 209

She who tasted the bitterness of love denied, in order to remain strong in spiritual integrity, says, years after she had made her choice, "A chastened grace is twice a grace. Nay, 'tis a holiness." 210 Here was no pagan, worshipping some other than the God of Revelation. She clung to the habit of prayer, as she had learned it in her childhood. In writing to Mr. Bowles in 1856, she says, "I ask God on my knee to send you much prosperity." 211 and again, in 1863, "We pray for your new health - the prayer that does not go down when they shut the Church." 212 Finally, in 1865, she writes to him, "We pray for you every night. A homely shrine our knee." 213

These brief glimpses which Emily Dickinson's letters give us of her way of life after 1854, reveal that in ceasing to worship in God's House, after the approved fashion of her day, she did not cease to be a worshipper before His Throne. Her published poems, to which we now turn, give us an insight into her way of thought, that confirms her as a Puritan.

209. Ibid., p. 295.
210. Ibid., p. 390.
212. Ibid., p. 200.
The Puritan Element in the Poems of Emily Dickinson

In establishing our definition of the Puritanism which characterized the seventeenth century in America, we have noted how the tenets of Calvinism, which were man's guide in both spiritual and temporal affairs, largely determined the social and economic order during this period of their unchallenged dominance. Such a digression from the study of the Calvinistic creed in its theological aspects alone, seemed necessary to a development of an understanding of the Puritan spirit, as it was evolved from the acceptance and application of this theology to the practical ways of life. But in our consideration of Emily Dickinson, we shall seek only for the appearance of orthodox Puritanism, insofar as its theological tenets and the attitude of mind which it fosters appear in her poems.

It has been said that "There is no poet in American Literature who is his poetry, so much as Emily Dickinson is hers,"²¹⁴ and it is true that our poet, shut away from the full circumference of life's routine by her withdrawal from the world, explores her own individual consciousness and records what she finds there. The very circumstances of her solitary existence would foster introspection, and it is natural that her preoccupation should be in finding "the phrase to every thought."²¹⁵ Consequently, it is the true heart and spirit of Emily Dickinson that we may hope to encounter in her poetry.

It has been made evident that the cosmic absolutism of the Calvin-

²¹⁴. Allen Tate, Emily Dickinson, in The Outlook, August 15, 1928.
²¹⁵. Poems, p. 17.
istic doctrine rested upon the corner-stone of a belief in God as the Supreme Power, the "alone fountain of all beings, who hath most sover-
eign dominion over them, and upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth." 216

There is no contradiction in Emily's poetry to this assertion of her belief in the Deity as the Sovereign Ruler:

"All circumstances are the frame
In which His Face is set
All latitudes exist for His
Sufficient content
The light His action, and the dark
The Leisure of His Will
In Him Existence serve, or set
A force illegible. 217

The followers of Calvin believed that since "Man, by his fall into the state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will," the Absolute Being doth "work all things according to the counsel of his own immuta-
ble and most righteous will." 218 That Emily Dickinson may have ques-
tioned this "inability" on the part of man, is suggested in her cry:

"To be alive and Will--
'Tis able as a God!
The further of ourselves be what
Such being Finitude?" 219

But such a questioning must have been only momentary, for there is evi-
dence that she felt no liberty of choice independent of the decree of God. She seeks from Him the permission both to live and to die:

"A solemn thing it was, I said
A woman white to be

216. Mather, Magnalia, p. 184.
217. Poems, p. 5.
218. Magnalia, p. 190.
And wear, if God should count me fit
Her hallowed mystery." 220

And:

"My heart asks . . .
Then, to go to sleep;
And then, if it should be
The will of its Inquisitor
The liberty to die." 221

Since God is the Supreme Governor and man has lost all freedom to
will, determinism is the law of the universe, in that God's decisions
are immutable and He "doth freely and unchangeably from all eternity
ordain whatever comes to pass." 222 Apparently, Emily Dickinson submi-
ted to what she believed her inevitable destiny, the necessity of bow-
ing before the Will of the Deity:

"Grant me, O Lord, a sunny mind
Thy windy will to bear." 223

In her opinion, the existing order, both now and in the Hereafter, is
predetermined:

"Eternity will be
Velocity, or pause
At fundamental signals
From fundamental laws
To die, is not to go
On doom's consummate chart
No territory new is stake'd
Remain thou as thou art." 224

There is no possible escape from the individual fate which God has fore-
ordained:

221. Ibid., p. 6.
222. Magnalia, p. 186.
223. Poems, p. 91.
224. Ibid., p. 232.
"Doom is the House
Without the Door
'Tis entered from the sun
And then the ladder's thrown away
Because escape is done."

Rebellion against this destiny so rigidly indicated must have seemed futile to Emily, for her strongest opposition lies in this query, which in itself indicates that she has accepted submission as her lot:

"How complicate
The discipline of man
Compelling him to choose himself
His pre-appointed pain."

It is not alone over the fate of mankind that the Lord presides. In her communion with nature, Emily sees there the manifestation of God's Will, to which the things of nature bow.

"God made a little gentian

The Tyrian would not come
Until the North evoked it
'Creator! shall I bloom?'

The Divine omnipotence of God embraces the cosmos, "Creation but a gambol of His authority."

That Emily believed in that firm tenet of Calvinism, the Doctrine of the Elect, whereby "By the decree of God, and for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life," is evidenced when she cries:

227. Ibid., p. 91.
228. Ibid., p. 295.
229. Magnalia, p. 185.
"Cornets of Paradise
Snatches from baptized generations
Cadences too grand
But for the Justified Procession
At the Lord's right hand."\textsuperscript{230}

Cotton Mather, in his discussion "Of Providence", remarks that

"The most wise, righteous and gracious God doth oftentimes leave for a season His own chosen children to manifold temptations and the corruptions of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption, and the deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled, and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends."\textsuperscript{231}

Of this "chastening" by God of His Elect, Emily must have thought as she wrote:

"Far from love the Heavenly Father
Leads the Chosen Child
Oftener thru' realm of brier
Than the meadow mild
Oftener by claw of dragon
Than the hand of friend
Guides the little one predestined
To the native land."\textsuperscript{232}

We have seen that the earliest Puritans, believing in the sovereignty of the God who ruled the universe and all within it, were "imbued with a profound sense of the presence of God in the world, and of the responsibility to him for every act of their lives. They believed that God was always near at hand, ready and anxious to interpose in their most trivial affairs."\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{230} Poems, p. 332.
\textsuperscript{231} Magnalia, p. 186.
\textsuperscript{232} Poems, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{233} See p. 17, Chap. I of text.
There is but one indication that Emily ever questioned the existence of this Personal, ever-watchful Deity. In a single poem she tells that she has grown away from the belief in the God of her childhood:

"I prayed at first, a little girl,
Because they told me to,
But stopped when qualified to guess
How prayer would sound to me

If I supposed God looked around
Each time my childish eye
Fixed full and steady on His own
In solemn honesty

And told Him what I'd like today
And parts of His far plan
That baffled me, the underside
Of His divinity.

And often since in danger
I count the force 'twould be
To have a God so strong as that
To hold my life for me." 234

For this one instance of renunciation of belief, there are many which show that her consciousness of God was the deepest consciousness she knew: "The only one I meet is God." 235 The poem which follows the one quoted above, in which she "stopped" prayer, shows her turning to it as a refuge, an approach to God:

"My period had come for prayer
No other art would do
My tactics missed a rudiment
Creator, was it you?

God grows above, so those who pray
Horizons must ascend
And so I stood upon the North
To reach this curious friend.

235. Ibid., p. 335.
The silence condescended
The Heavens paused for me
But awed beyond by errand
I worshipped, did not pray!"236

Emily must have felt God as an Immanent Personality, knowing the reach of her every thought and the depth of all her sorrow.

"Thou knowest every woe
Needless to tell Thee so
But canst Thou do
The grace next to it,
Heal?
That looks a harder skill
Still, just as easy if it be
Thy will
Grant me--
Thou knowest tho',
So why tell Thee?"237

We have her own assertion that God filled her life, so singularly empty of all the things most human beings cherish:

"My table, far as
Certainty can see
Is laden with a single crumb
The consciousness of Thee."238

We have learned that the Calvinistic conception of God as the Will sustaining the Universe led to a belief in the inevitability of Divine Judgment. Such a conviction Emily must have held, for she looks upon the grave as a bed which man must "make with awe"240 and "in it wait 'till Judgment break, excellent and fair." When a friend dies, "The

236. Poems, p. 296.
237. Ibid., p. 364.
238. Ibid., p. 263.
239. See p. 17, Chap. I of text.
240. Ibid., p. 168.
fresh surrendered, cancelled, the bodiless begun, he has "departed to the Judgment." She considers one triumphantly victorious,

"Who can pass
Acquitted from that naked Bar
Jehovah's countenance."242

After death, "We must ride to the Judgment."243

There were times when her "consciousness" of an ever-watchful God seems one from which she "would run away," but it is the thought of Judgment that restrains her:

"If God could make a visit
Or ever take a nap
So not to see us---But they say
Himself a telescope
Perennial beholds us
Myself would run away
From Him and Holy Ghost and all
But---there's the Judgment Day."245

We have seen that246 the Gospel as the Puritan fathers interpreted it made every man responsible directly to God, and that with this feeling of great individual responsibility there was developed a "sovereign conscience." Emily, like the early Puritans, seeks the sanction of her "inner voice," and exalts that sanction as being of prime importance. With it, she has courage to stand against the scorn of the universe; without it, she is lost.

241. Poems, p. 158.
242. Ibid., p. 182.
243. Ibid., p. 206.
244. Ibid., p. 295.
245. Poems, loc. cit.
246. See p. 15, Chap. I of text.
"My soul accused me
And I quailed
As tongues of diamond
Had reviled

All else accused me
And I smiled
My soul that morning
Was my friend

Her favor is the best disdain
Toward artifice of time or men
But her disdain, 'twere cooler bear
A finger of enameled fire."247

Her conscience is in constant attendance upon her, and judges every act:

"Who is it seeks my pillow nights?
With plain, inspecting face;
'Did you, or did you not?' to ask,
'Tis Conscience, childhood's nurse."248

The first Puritans felt that it was their duty "to live for the glory of God; only by so living could they assure themselves of the election which alone could save them from the eternal penalty of Adam's sin and their own."249 They 'concentrated upon what lay beyond the bounds of mortal experience' (see p. 19, Chap. I of text) and lived on earth as travellers, pausing for a moment in their journey toward Immortality, scorning the things of this life unless they were contributing factors toward the soul's Preparation for Christ." It was man's duty to prepare the soul for Eternity, to meet God, and "Duty was the Supreme Law."

Emily Dickinson, living the life of a recluse in her father's

248. Ibid., p. 258.
249. Wendell, Cotton Mather, p. 139.
house, sheltered from all echoes of the world, and seeing the manifestations of God in nature, her nearest companion, had little to distract her from concentration upon

"The only shows I see
Tomorrow and Today
Perchance Eternity."250

Only once her vision of the Hereafter seemed dimmed by uncertainty, and we find her in a mood in which she cannot subscribe to a secure belief in Immortality:

"Their height in Heaven comforts not,
Their glory nought to me
'Twas best imperfect, as it was;
I'm finite, I can's see.

The house of supposition
The glimmering frontier
That skirts the acres of perhaps
To me, shows insecure.

Better than larger values
However true their show;
This timid life of evidence
Keeps pleading, "I Don't know."251

This one mood of uncertainty is dispelled in a number of unaltering assertions of belief that:

"This world is not conclusion
A sequel stands beyond
Invisible, as music
But positive, as sound."252

She feels that "Of heaven above the firmest proof we fundamental know,"253 and her hope of meeting God in the life beyond the grave, is a sustain-

251. Ibid., p. 181.
252. Ibid., p. 195.
ing faith:

"The stimulus, beyond the grave
His countenance to see
Supports me like imperial drums
Afforded royalty."254

One can scarcely doubt that Emily, filled as she was with the intuitive sense of the presence of God, felt the nearness of the Unknown:

"The blunder is to estimate
'Eternity is then'
We say, as of a station,
Meanwhile, he is so near,
He joins me in my ramble,
Divides abode with me
No friend have I that so persists
As this Eternity."255

Puritanism, in its inception, made the inward facts of personal experience "the subject of the most careful scrutiny and dissection," in reaction from outward ceremonial religion. It was inevitable that the Puritan fathers, in their contemplation of Eternity, in their awareness of the imminence of the Judgment Day, should look within their own hearts and strive as nearly to purge them from all evil as was within man's imperfect power to do, weighted down, as he was, with the evil of Adam's sin.

Emily feels the necessity for self-searching, for ridding her heart of evil through conflict with her own spirit:

"The battle fought between the Soul
And No Man is the one
Of all the battles prevalent
By far the greater one."256

255. Ibid., p. 227.
256. Ibid., p. 339.
The process of self-analysis is entailed in life itself, and will continue as long as life does:

"But since Myself
assault Me
How have I peace
Except by subjugating
consciousness?"257

Emily's thoughts, when not turned toward the manifestations of God in the simple life she knew, or upon "That old fork in Being's road, Eternity by term",258 were in-dwelling. The vision of the soul, face to face with its Maker, enthralled her, and she said:

"Suffice us, for a crowd
Ourselves, and rectitude
And that companion not far off
From furthest good man—God."259

To the Puritans who kept the faith, Eternity loomed large, and the affairs of this life shrank into insignificance beside the vision of the soul's destiny. Everything led toward the period that lies beyond mortality, and all activities of mortal man were viewed in the light which Divine Judgment would be likely to cast upon them. Emily Dickinson felt the insignificance of man's earthly fate, if her Eternal Reward were assured. She subscribed to martyrdom on earth, for the hope of sainthood in heaven. Her love, with its great renunciation, looked not for the happiness of two mortals on earth, but for the joy of two souls in Paradise. Earthly desire could not overcome her sense of Duty, as the Divine Power had decreed it. It was not so much for love of

258. Ibid., p. 185.
259. Ibid., p. 341.
friend that she denied her lover, but for fear of punishment if her spirit surrendered, and hope of reward if it stood firm. Love was measured in the light that was cast upon it by contemplation of Eternity:

"Read sweet, how others strove 'Till we are stouter What they renounced 'Till we are less afraid; How many times they bore The faithful witness 'Till we are helped . . . . . . . . . Read then of faith That shines above the fagot Clear strains of hymn The river could not drown; Brave names of men And celestial women Passed out of record Into renown." 260

She accepts the suffering of the loss of love, that her soul may triumph over the temptation to sin, and may progress, secure, on its way to God. It is of such suffering in renunciation of worldly happiness that she writes:

"Earth would have been too much And heaven not enough for me I should have had the joy Without the fear to justify So, Saviour, Crucify." 261

The intensity of her spiritual vision, the knowledge that she had stood firm in the path of Duty that leads to God's Throne, rendered her impervious to suffering, for though her flesh might fail, her soul was

260. Poems, p. 11.
261. Ibid., p. 25.
strengthened:

"No rack can torture me
My soul's at liberty
Behind this mortal bone
There knits a bolder one."

The being who ministers to naught save the fulfillment of each carnal impulse as it comes, who looks not toward his soul's destiny, and who accepts no strengthening discipline, is worthless both in the sight of Emily and of God.

"The bone that has no marrow
What ultimate for that?
It is not fit for table
For beggar or for cat.

A bone has obligations
A being has the same
A marrowless assembly
Is culpabler than shame."

It is only they who accept their obligations and who persist through every trial in their adherence to the loftiness of their ideal, who attain superior rank, either on earth or in heaven.

"Power is only pain
Stranded, through discipline
Till weights will hang."

The Puritan religion is one of which "man's own relation to God is the center," and "individual inquiry, not corporate dogma, is the key to truth." It places emphasis upon man's individual responsibility to the Deity. Such a religion produces a faith that is intensely and

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263. Ibid., p. 57.
264. Ibid., p. 19.
deeply individual, springing directly from a heart that cherishes the convictions of the creed which it has voluntarily accepted. Without such a faith, men's outward observance of "means" is of no avail.

"Forms are but the bucket, Christ is the well. If you say your bucket shall help you, you may starve for thirst if you let it not down into the well for water."266 If Emily Dickinson belongs in the Puritan tradition, we may expect to find that she held such a fervent, personal belief, rising from the living waters of inner faith.

There is a mood in which her faith in God turned to bitterness:

"I left the place with all my might
My prayer away I threw;
The quiet ages picked it up
And Judgment twinkled, too

That one so honest be extant
As take the tale for true
That 'Whatsoever you shall ask,
Itself be given you'

But I, grown shrewder, scan the skies
With a suspicious air
As children, swindled for the first,
All swindlers be, infer."267

But, this bitterness forgotten, she assures us that:

"Not one by Heaven defrauded stay
Altho' He seem to steal
He restitutes in some sweet way
Secreted in His Will."268

In another period of doubt, she questions:

266. N. C. Tyler, op. cit., p. 201.
268. Ibid., p. 252.
"Is Heaven a physician?  
They say that He can heal  
But medicine posthumous  
Is unavailable." 269

And yet, she flees for solace to the Lord:

"Saviour! I've no one else to tell  
And so I trouble Thee  
I am the one forgot Thee so  
Dost Thou remember me?" 270

Such are the only evidence which her poetry contains that her faith was ever shaken, and one can not doubt that these times of questioning were brief indeed, after hearing her voice the cry that only the one who is wedded to God, in faith, has hope of salvation. Such a "bride" she was:

"Given in marriage unto Thee  
O Thou celestial host  
Bride of the Father and the Son  
Bride of the Holy Ghost  
Other betrothal shall dissolve  
Wedlock of will decay  
Only the keeper of this sign  
Conquers mortality." 271

Faith is a vital need to Emily: she could not relinquish it.

"Faith is the pierless bridge  
Supporting what we see  
Unto the scene that we do not  
A first necessity." 272

The existence of her Sovereign God is a face which she does not dream of questioning: it is certainty.

270. Ibid., p. 372.  
271. Ibid., p. 197.  
272. Ibid., p. 341.
"I know that He exists
Somewhere, in silence..."273

And:

"I never spoke with God
Nor visited in heaven
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the chart were given."274

Out of her faith, came Emily's belief in the efficacy of prayer. She kneels before the shrine to God that is in her heart, and when circumstances wound her, she finds that "to pray is left."275 When all else fails, prayer, "through which men reach where presence is denied them,"276 and by means of which "They fling their speech... in God's ear," is a solace, where "No other art would do."277

Her faith was, like that of the Fathers in the Golden Age of Piety, "the flower of an earnestly cherished conviction." It was no numb acceptance of an imposed formula of belief, but the most vital element in life itself. To her, it was stronger and more enduring than the changeless mountains:

"My faith is larger than the hills
So when the hills decay
My faith must take the purple wheel
To show the sun the way."278

We have seen that to the men who adhered to the original tenets of the system of John Calvin, the Supreme, Sovereign Being who dominated the Universe, was to be worshipped in the attitude of awe and fear. He

274. Ibid., p. 163.
275. Ibid., p. 176.
276. Ibid., p. 59.
277. Ibid., p. 286.
278. Ibid., p. 305.
was the Hebraic God of Wrath toward whom Thomas Hooker felt that his people should be taught to gaze with terror: "I think it my duty to fasten the nail of terror deeply in their hearts."\textsuperscript{273} There was a God who "Set himself like fire against the sinner, and trod him under his feet."\textsuperscript{280} His wrath was eternal and devastating, and ready to be unleashed at any moment upon any one who chanced to arouse his ire. It was such a God whose power was unmitigated, until Jonathan Edwards, in the later eighteenth century, transformed him from a God of fury into an essentially benevolent Deity. Edwards' God continued to be the Sovereign Governor of the Universe, but His children no longer quailed incessantly before His Divine wrath and judgment upon them. We have previously noted that "Edwards sought to foster a warm, emotional type of Christian character, touched and vivified by a sense of the immediate communion between God and the human soul,"\textsuperscript{281} that he believed in the excellencies and benevolence of Christ, which he saw manifested in the natural world. "The beauties of nature are really emanations or shadows of the excellencies of the Son of God. . ."\textsuperscript{282}

Such were his modifications of the old Calvinism, whose other tenets he upheld vigorously, asserting that, as a result of Adam's sin, "Man is in a fallen state,"\textsuperscript{283} and subscribing to the Doctrine of the Elect, in which the restoration of those condemned by God to eternal

\textsuperscript{279} G. L. Walker, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 43.  
\textsuperscript{280} M. C. Tyler, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 204.  
\textsuperscript{281} W. Walker, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 281.  
\textsuperscript{282} Library of World's Best Literature, p. 5186.  
\textsuperscript{283} Ibid., p. 5186.
punishment "be not possible,"284 and those chosen by Him to be saved
"must be looked upon as the end of all the rest of creation, and as it
were, one with God."285 Though the God of Jonathan Edwards relinquished
divine fury for a "sweet benevolence," he remained the God of John Cal-
vin in His unchallenged Sovereignty.

Emily's one modification of the faith of her fathers accorded with
that made by Edwards. Although we have seen that "By the beginning of
the nineteenth century, Connecticut and western Massachusetts were thor-
oughly leavened with Edwardian views and methods,"286 it is evident
that Amherst was one of the few remaining regions where "old Calvinism
continued";287 and certain it is that it was the Hebraic God whom Emily
had been taught to worship in the First Church.

But when she ceased to venture beyond her father's garden, even to
worship in the village church, God seemed to grow less terrifying.
There is no proof that Emily ever came to know the teachings of Edwards,
but we do know that her intimate friend, Josiah Gilbert Holland, was
"well-read in the standard works in divinity by Emmons, Griffin, Hop-
kins and Edwards,"288 and there is every reason to suppose that prevailing
views in theology were discussed in the home of Dr. Holland, who, we
will remember289 "was always active in the service of his faith." Like-
wise, despite the fact that Amherst was a fortress of "old Calvinism,"

289. See p. 37, Chap. II of text.
it would be quite natural that Emily should have at some time become ac-
quainted with the Edwardsian doctrine, since its influence was wide-
spread throughout western Massachusetts, and since, in her girlhood,
she had formed the habit of reading current works in theology. But
whether guided by Edwards, or seeking her way alone, her God became as
his, a Sovereign Benevolence. Like Edwards, she was "touched and vivi-
fied by a sense of the immediate communion between God and the human
soul," to the degree that she felt God's kindly presence near:

"God's residence is next to mine
His furniture is love."291

There is no hint in her poems of a wrathful Deity. If she were admit-
ted into Heaven, she looked to encounter there, "the . . . hospitable
. . . face of our old neighbor, God."292

The first Puritans were too occupied with gazing fixedly toward
the After-Life, when they were not fighting for existence amid the per-
ils of the untamed wilderness, to pause for consideration of the beaut-
ies of external nature. Edwards is the first Puritan to delight in
them; but he enjoys them, not for their own essential loveliness, but
because he sees in them, "only the emanations of the sweet benevolence
of God."293

Emily dwells with nature; and in doing so, comes close to God, be-
cause she too finds Him in the sunset and among the flowers, and hears

290. See p. 42, Chap. II, of text.
291. Poems, p. 46.
292. Ibid., p. 171.
293. Library of World's Best Literature, p. 5192.
His voice speaking to her in the song of birds:

"Like mighty footlights burn'd the red
At bases of the trees
The far theatricals of day
Exhibiting to these

'Twas Universe that did applaud
While, chieftest of the crowd,
Enabled by his royal dress
Myself distinguished God."294

And:

"The red upon the hill
Takest away my will;
If any body sneer,
Take care, for God is here.
That's all."295

Emily not only accepts the Benevolent Deity of Edwards' conception, but accords with Edwards' belief that benevolence, in being the attribute of God, should characterize mankind as well, that "True virtue (in man) most essentially consists in Benevolence to Being in general."296

Though her mode of life prevented her from venturing forth in active service to humanity, she looks lovingly out upon all living things that pass by her quiet corner:

"If I can stop one heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one life the aching
Or soothe one pain
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again
I shall not live in vain."297

Such was Emily Dickinson's one departure from the Calvinistic

294. Poems, p. 87.
295. Ibid., p. 94.
297. Poems, p. 5.
doctrines by which the Dickinson family had ordered their lives throughout the generations. In all save her rejection of the Hebraic God of Wrath, she belongs in the earliest Puritan tradition, clinging to the pristine elements of the system of John Calvin. She accepted the Sovereign Deity upon whose Divine Omnipotence Calvin founded his doctrine; and was convinced of His Immensity in the world about her. She affirmed the Doctrine of the Elect, and held to the inevitability of the Divine Judgment. She felt directly responsible to God for every act of her life, and looked toward the necessity of salvation as the matter of prime importance, overshadowing mortal experience; and in order to secure her soul's salvation, to insure her Eternal Reward, she searched her own spirit, and was willing to accept any discipline in order to assert its superiority over the flesh. To this end, she renounced earthly happiness with the man whom she loved. Her faith was the fervid, individual faith which characterized the religious zeal of the seventeenth century Fathers. In thus cherishing the ideal of the first century of Puritans, Emily Dickinson is admitted to the genuine Puritan tradition.
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**On Material Relating to Emily Dickinson**


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