A child-like faith in the old creed is no longer possible, but it is equally impossible to surrender it.
—Pages From a Journal
To be sure, the Mark Rutherford of the *Autobiography* and *Deliverance* is not to be completely identified with his creator. White makes a point of providing some discrepancies between Rutherford's history and his own. Rutherford, for example, completes his theological training and becomes a Dissenting minister, whereas White was expelled and preached only occasionally from Unitarian pulpits. Nor did White, like Rutherford, suffer through a long, eventually broken engagement. There does not appear to have been a real-life counterpart of Edward Mardon, Mark Rutherford's atheist friend; instead, Mardon is White's alter ego, one of the voices of his divided self in the *Autobiography*. Names and places are changed, and, of course, at the end of the *Deliverance* Rutherford dies, whereas White continued to live and write. Finally, as the relation between White and Mardon suggests, Rutherford is a more limited personality than White, a concentrated, focused version of the brooding, anguished side of his creator.

Nonetheless, the evidence that the *Autobiography* and *Deliverance* contains White's own deepest experience is compelling. *The Early Life of Mark Rutherford*, written in White's final years, follows the *Autobiography* closely, even using similar descriptions and expressions. In introducing *The Early Life*, White tells us that "a good deal of it has been told before under a semi-transparent disguise, with much added which is entirely fictitious. What I now set down is fact" (EL, 5). Insofar as it is possible for any man to write honestly in retrospect about his deepest thoughts and feelings, the *Autobiography* is true. Speaking of *The Early Life*, White exclaims in a letter to his friend Miss Partridge that he is recording, for the benefit of his children, all that he can remember of his life from childhood to his marriage; but "How much is *wahrheit* and how much is *dichtung*? The afternoon and evening in and on the peacefulllest of rivers, the (to me) sacred Ouse! Wahrheit
or *dichtung?* Both." Further confirming the authenticity of the *Autobiography*, his second wife, Dorothy Vernon White, writes that one day Hale told her about part of his life—his experience of "the horrors" at Stoke Newington. She adds that she had heard it all before, in *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*. White had much in common with his character "the authoress of 'Judith Crowhurst,'" who describes how she creates: the plot is "manufactured," but her own feelings are transferred to the heroine. "The only parts not worthless" in her novel, she believes, "were those which were autobiographical" (MP, 140).

The alternating images of confinement and liberation that characterize the *Autobiography* as a whole are set in motion in its first chapter. As he reenters memory and struggles to give it meaningful shape, Mark Rutherford begins a litany of the "perfect poetic pleasures" of childhood:

I remember whole afternoons in June, July, and August, passed half-naked or altogether naked in the solitary meadows and in the water; I remember the tumbling weir with the deep pool at the bottom in which we dived; I remember, too, the place where we used to swim across the river with our clothes on our heads, because there was no bridge near, and the frequent disaster of a slip of the braces in the middle of the water, so that shirt, jacket, and trousers were soaked, and we had to lie on the grass in the broiling sun without a rag on us till everything was dry again. (A, 4)

In winter he skated "over long reaches," played football, or got up "a steeplechase on foot." Weekdays, and especially the two half-holidays a week from school, are associated with images of freedom: water, nakedness, motion, timelessness.

Yet on Sunday, "the compensation came" (A, 5). The spacious, edenic memories suddenly contract, and images of enclosure and restraint take their place. Time is now important: "After family prayer and breakfast the business of the day began with the Sunday-school at nine o'clock. We were taught our
Catechism and Bible there till a quarter past ten. We were then marched across the road into the chapel” (A, 5). Whereas Carlyle recalled “sacred lambencies, tongues of authentic flame from heaven” kindling the chapel of his childhood, White’s memory divides childhood into two distinct portions, “week-day and Sunday”; the latter “a season of unmixed gloom” (A, 3, 5). White evocatively re-creates the child’s perceptions of physical and mental restriction. He is not only inside the chapel but is enclosed within a pew. Although he knows it is sinful to sleep under the gospel, the foul, dense atmosphere of the chapel—on hot nights women were carried out fainting—makes it impossible to sustain attention, or even to stay awake. The sermon provides no incentive to alertness: “The minister invariably began with the fall of man; propounded the scheme of redemption, and ended by depicting in the morning the blessedness of the saints, and in the evening the doom of the lost” (A, 7). The child finds himself envying the pew-opener and the old man who snuffs the candles, both of whom are able to move about freely and thus avoid “that terrible drowsiness.” Such descriptions abundantly suggest why White hated Sundays all his life. Three tedious services, lengthy prayer meetings, the reading of the Bible without explanation or comment, and the profound boredom of the “long prayer” are remembered with nightmarish intensity. He describes the prayer as a “horrible hypocrisy, and it was a sore tax on the preacher to get through it”: “It generally began with a confession that we were all sinners, but no individual sins were ever confessed, and then ensued a kind of dialogue with God, very much resembling the speeches which in later years I have heard in the House of Commons from the movers and seconders of addresses to the Crown at the opening of Parliament” (A, 6). The rest of the day was as wearisome as the chapel services. No secular reading was tolerated, and Sunday dinner was cold and unappetizing: “The meat was cooked beforehand . . .; the only thing hot which was permitted was a
boiled suet pudding, which cooked itself while we were at chapel, and some potatoes which were prepared after we came home” (A, 5). Letters remained unread unless they clearly contained news of illness or other disaster.

White's account of his childhood in *The Early Life* is more restrained and less imagistically pointed than the one in the *Autobiography*, but it sustains the division between Sunday and the rest of life. White was born in Bedford in 1831; his first memory was the coronation of Queen Victoria and a town's dinner in Bedford's St. Paul's Square (EL, 40). The river in which he bathed flows under a stone bridge just a few yards from the White home on the High Street. It is difficult to find any cause or foreshadowing of White's later melancholia in his weekday life. He enjoyed visiting relatives and recalls his Colchester aunt's gingerbread and kisses, which did him "more good, moral good ... than sermons or punishment" (EL, 12). Amusements such as roasting potatoes over open fires, going "bat-fowling" with lanterns in the dark, buying twenty apples for a penny, eating gooseberries from a neighbour's garden together create a picture of a perfect childhood. He especially recalls the delight of a holiday visit to his nurse, Jane, at Oakley. Significantly, White emphasizes the naturalness and ease to be found in her one-room "Homeric house." No special entertainment was provided; "there was just the escape to a freer life" (EL, 41).

As in the *Autobiography*, though, "Sunday ... was not happy" (EL, 45). Here he adds the information that he was made to stand up in the pew as a spectacle to other children when he had fallen asleep, and that among the books deemed appropriate to his years was one about a boy who drowned and went to hell for wickedly going swimming on a Sunday (EL, 46).

White was certainly not alone in judging the Victorian Sunday to be a day of tedium and gloom, of cold dinners, tight clothing, boring sermons, and edifying books. The accounts of two other well-known Nonconformist childhoods concur with
his memory. Edmund Gosse, in childhood a Plymouth Brother, described Sunday as a time of “unbroken servitude.” “The absence of every species of recreation on the Lord’s Day grew to be a burden which might scarcely be borne.” John Ruskin also found Sunday insufferable: “The horror of Sunday used even to cast its prescient gloom as far back in the week as Friday—and all the glory of Monday, with church seven days removed again, was no equivalent for it.” Considering Rutherford’s attitude toward the Lord’s Day, it is disturbing to find that the oscillation between freedom and constraint comes to poise at the conclusion of chapter 1 of the Autobiography with the account of his conversion. This admission to Bunyan Meeting was a necessary step to his becoming a Dissenting minister. At the time, White seems to have seen nothing strange or inconsistent in his decision to join the ranks of those devoted to glorification of the Sabbath. Before examining this event and its consequences, however, it will be useful to pause for a moment to consider the context of nineteenth-century Independency in which it occurred.

When his biography of Bunyan was published in 1905, White wrote to his friend Philip Webb that he had enjoyed writing the book because “Elstow and the Ouse and in a measure the temper of the man are in my blood” (L, 328). Bedfordshire had long been a stronghold of Independency; it was Bunyan’s home, and Bunyan Meeting his church. The Old Meeting had been built on the site of the barn of Bunyan’s ministry, which was licensed in 1672 “for the use of such as doe not conforme to the Church of England who are of the Perswasion commonly called Congregational to meet and assemble in.” On the Roll of Church Books of the Meeting, Hale White is listed as number 1936 of “those admitted”; Bunyan himself is number 27. White liked to think of himself as inheritor not only of Bunyan’s temper but of Cromwell’s. When his second wife asked whether he was descended from Cromwell’s Major White, he replied that his
ancestors were nothing more than farmers "who may have been, and indeed very likely were officers in Oliver's army" (GD, 196). His mother, Mary Ann Chignell, came from Colchester, where her family had been members of the Lion Walk Congregational Church since the mid-eighteenth century. His father, William White, was a trustee and deacon of Bunyan Meeting, active in lay preaching and for a number of years superintendent of the Sunday school. Bunyan Meeting held about seven hundred people and was filled every Sunday, although in White's estimation this faithful attendance was owing not to the gifts of the minister but to "the simple loyalty which prevents a soldier or a sailor from mutinying, although the commanding officer may deserve no respect" (EL, 16). The "commanding officer" in this case was the Reverend John Jukes, who was minister during most of White's childhood. The White family much preferred Jukes's predecessor, the Reverend Samuel Hillyard, who had befriended William White when he was a young man. Hillyard, who was fourth in the line of succession from Bunyan, was a universally beloved pastor in Bedford for nearly fifty years. He died in 1839, and was, from the point of view of the White family, the last of the real Puritans to occupy that pulpit.

The gospel under which young Hale White frequently drowsed was "Moderate Calvinism," or "the New System." One of the far-reaching consequences of the Evangelical Revival was the gradual erosion of Calvinist doctrine among Independents. "Moderate Calvinism" was really midway between traditional Calvinist doctrine and the Arminian universalist emphasis of Congregationalism in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In 1876, R. W. Dale, the great nineteenth-century Congregationalist preacher and theologian, remarked that "among the present aspects of our theological thought, perhaps none is more obvious than the general disappearance of Calvinism." In his *History of English Congregationalism*, Dale argued that the "characteristic genius of the Revival was silently working against the
Calvinist creed” throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century, despite the fact that the great Calvinist doctrines of original sin, election, and the final perseverance of the saints were still maintained by Independent theologians. Calvinist doctrine was undermined, however inadvertently, in the pulpit: the preachers who had caught the true spirit of the Revival might be assured that, according to the eternal counsels of God, Christ died only for the elect; but they preached as if they thought that He died for every man in the congregation.”

Eventually, preachers tried to bring their theology into closer harmony with their sermons: “They thought that while preserving the strong foundations of the Calvinist theology and its method, they could modify some of the Calvinist doctrines, which in their rigid form had become incredible to them. But they were attempting an impossible task, and doing injustice to the constructive genius of their great master. They had not learnt that theologians who begin with Calvin must end with Calvin. ‘Moderate Calvinism’ was Calvinism in decay.”

Some renowned Congregationalists of the nineteenth century illustrate Dale’s thesis. Thomas Binney, twice chairman of the Congregational Union, was never a Calvinist. He rejected the belief in eternal torment and maintained instead “the universality of the Divine Father’s love.” In 1859, James Baldwin Brown, eminent Congregational minister and theologian, challenged the forensic framework of the traditional doctrine of the Atonement in his book *The Divine Life in Man*. This work, which insisted on the fatherhood of God, aroused considerable controversy at the time, but by the 1880s many of the leading Congregational clergy embraced the “Larger Hope”—the idea of Universalism—and believed in the eventual salvation of all people. Similarly, William Jay, one of the most distinguished Congregational preachers of the age, “never called himself a Calvinist.” Like Robert Elsmere’s evangelical friend Newcome, Independents were increasingly unable to conceive of God as the “arch-
plotter against his own creation." R. Tudur Jones writes that in the second half of the nineteenth century, Congregationalists "desired to hear more of life than of death; more about God's goodness than about his justice." He concludes that "moderate Calvinism had been the theology of the new humanitarianism and now that humanitarianism felt that moderate Calvinism was not moderate enough."22

While the nineteenth-century reevaluation of Calvinism may ultimately have had beneficial consequences, Hale White believed that the apparent divorce of dogma and faith inevitably engendered dishonesty. "Moderate Calvinism," he writes, was for him a term "not easy to understand": "If it had any meaning, it was that predestination, election, and reprobation, were unquestionably true, but they were dogmas about which it was not prudent to say much, for some of the congregation were a little Arminian, and St. James could not be totally neglected" (EL, 17). Moderate Calvinism seemed to White a pernicious compromise, since it encouraged both minister and congregation to use words and phrases that had once had a vital spiritual significance as a kind of empty shorthand, devoid of meaning and associative power. One was perforce involved in hypocrisy when doctrine was declared to be true but was totally removed from ordinary experience—a fact he knew with painful clarity because his own "conversion" had involved him in this kind of lying.

White did not experience a call to the ministry in any way. In fact, he rather wanted to be an artist but was overruled by his mother. His father appears to have been reticent in the whole matter. His mother, whom White describes as being "a little weak in her preference for people who did not stand behind counters" (EL, 55–56), had grown up among the "prosperous commercial middle class of Lion Walk" and was ambitious for her son. White's friend and cousin, William Chignell, was being trained as an Independent minister, and in White's words, his mother "desired equality with her sister-in-law" (EL, 56; cf. GD, 33).
With retrospective justice, he adds: "Besides, I can honestly declare that to her an Evangelical ministry was a sacred calling, and the thought that I might be the means of saving souls made her happy." Such exculpatory second thoughts about his mother are few, however, and in general White's treatment of her contrasts sharply with the love and admiration he shows toward his father. On the whole, Mrs. White is conspicuous by her absence from her son's memoirs and letters; when White mentions her at all it is usually in a detached and critical manner. He speaks of her "little affectations," her "slight weakness in favour of rank," and her pride in being on visiting terms with people who "lived in a 'park' " (EL, 42). This kind of woman, Dissenting but not democratic, class-conscious and ambitious, appears frequently in White's fiction. For her part, Mrs. White was obviously proud of her son and carefully noted in her diary the occasions when "dear Hale" preached, married, or did anything remarkable.\(^2\)

It was determined, then, that Hale should enter the Countess of Huntingdon's College at Cheshunt in Hertfordshire. He was, of course, unable to consider Oxford or Cambridge because of the Test Acts.\(^2\) Before he could enter a college, he had to be officially "admitted" to the congregation of Bunyan Meeting.

This event took place in February 1848, when White was seventeen years old. Traditionally, those who desired to be admitted to church fellowship had to satisfy the pastor and two deacons that "they understood the central truths of the Evangelical faith, and trusted in Christ for eternal salvation, and were resolved to keep His commandments."\(^2\) After the pastor and deacons gave their testimony to the church, members voted on whether the candidate should be admitted. A personal profession of faith before the church meeting was also required.

In the Autobiography, Rutherford explains that "conversion, amongst the Independents and other Puritan sects, is supposed to be a kind of miracle wrought in the heart by the
influence of the Holy Spirit, by which the man becomes some­thing altogether different to what he was previously” (A, 9). The candidate was expected to feel that he was guilty both of original sin and of sins he had actually committed, for which he deserved eternal punishment. Christ had become his substitute and “His death . . . the payment for my transgression. I had to feel that His life and death were appropriated by me[;] . . . that I, person­ally, was in God’s mind, and was included in the atonement” (EL, 58).

Conversion, then, was central to Puritan experience. In Puritanism in Old and New England, Alan Simpson remarks that “The essence of Puritanism—what Cromwell called the “root of the matter” when he surveyed the whole unruly flock—is an experience of conversion which separates the Puritan from the mass of mankind and endows him with the privileges and duties of the elect. The root of the matter is always a new birth, which brings with it a conviction of salvation and a dedication to warfare against sin.”

Certainly White regarded his own conversion as the first great event of his life: “Nothing particular happened to me till I was about fourteen,” says Mark Rutherford, “when I was told it was time I became converted” (A, 9). Then, “I remember with perfect distinctness the day on which I was admitted” (A, 11). The memory was indeed powerful: White wrote of it in both autobiographies; he spoke to Dorothy about it (“He told me about his . . . ‘profession’ of Christ. . . . He remembers the scene vividly” [GD, 71]); he commented on it in his notebooks; and he made the experience of conversion, of “turning around,” a central theme of his fiction.

What White remembered with “perfect distinctness,” however, was his own unconscious hypocrisy. As an adult, he sardonically remarked that the spiritual experience described by converts was “very often inaccurately picturesque, and . . . framed after the model of the journey to Damascus” (EL, 57).
His own experience was "not . . . eventful":

I can see myself now—I was no more than seventeen—stepping out of our pew, standing in the aisle at the pew-door, and protesting to their content before the minister of the church, father and mother protesting also to my own complete content, that the witness of God in me to my own salvation was as clear as noon-day. Poor little mortal, a twelvemonth out of round jackets, I did not in the least know who God was, or what was salvation. (EL, 59)

Much later White remarked to Dorothy that he remembered "standing up there alone and beginning, 'I was born of pious parents.' " He thought that his profession was written out rather than spoken extempore, and recollected "one sentence, that having been brought up in a religious household he had not needed 'like Saul of Tarsus' any great or sudden conversion" (GD, 71).

The description of Mark Rutherford's conversion is White's memory expanded and enriched:

I was obliged to declare myself convinced of sin; convinced of the efficacy of the atonement; convinced that I was forgiven; convinced that the Holy Ghost was shed abroad in my heart; and convinced of a great many other things which were the merest phrases. . . . It was the custom to demand of each candidate a statement of his or her experience. I had no experience to give; and I was excused on the grounds that I had been the child of pious parents, and consequently had not undergone that convulsion which those, not favoured like myself, necessarily underwent when they were called. (A, 10–11)

The phrase "born of pious parents" lingered tenaciously and accusingly in White's memory. His self-hatred for his youthful hypocrisy ("I was satisfied I understood what I did not in the least understand. This is very near lying" [EL, 59]) surfaces in his characterization of Thomas Broad of The Revolution in
Tanner’s Lane. The minister’s son is the most hypocritical and morally repugnant of all White’s characters; the description of him is familiar and bitter: “being the child of pious parents, and of many prayers, [he] had never been exposed to those assaults of the enemy of souls which beset ordinary young men, and consequently had not undergone a sudden conversion.”

The doctrines that White penetrated and reinterpreted later in life were at this time empty phrases for him. Within the Puritan tradition of personal faith, individual responsibility, and relationship to God, the remark “I had no experience to give” is a damning statement. He himself had experienced neither the conviction of sin nor the grace of God: “I was pretty much the same after conversion as before” (LP, 88). The piety of his parents had served as his own counterfeit experience. What passed for conversion in nineteenth-century Independency was “altogether unmeaning.” He professed himself a child of God, but he was completely untouched and unchanged by the event, “save that I was perhaps a little more hypocritical” (A, 10).

Two aspects of White’s descriptions of his conversions are particularly striking. First, all his recollections somehow make him seem younger than he actually was. In the Autobiography, Rutherford is “about fourteen” (A, 9); White told Dorothy that he was “15 or 16 years old” (GD, 71). In The Early Life, although he admits to his real age—seventeen—he is only a “poor little mortal, a twelvemonth out of round jackets” (EL, 59). Even if we allow that the confusion of years is owing to the natural erosion of memory, it is intriguing that White diminishes his responsibility for the event by imagining a child who has barely reached the age of reason. Clearly he does not wish to accept that he was so easily fooled. We have to keep reminding ourselves that he was not too young to know what he was doing; he was initiated as a church member so that he could attend a college.

The second notable point is the curiously passive manner in which he describes his participation in the conversion and
subsequent matriculation at Cheshunt. In both *The Early Life* and the *Autobiography*, he depicts himself as an object acted upon by others, having no voice of his own in the proceedings. In the *Autobiography*, Mark Rutherford is "told it was time I became converted"; in his testimony he is "obliged to declare myself convinced of sin"; the conclusion of his examination is "that I was proposed for acceptance"; in the Meeting, "I had no experience to give; . . . I was excused. . . ." Similarly, in *The Early Life*, when he is voted down in his wish to be an artist, "I was handed over to a private tutor" to be prepared for college. The Rutherford of the *Autobiography* is even more emphatic: it was necessary "that an occupation should be found for me," and eventually "it was settled that I should 'go into the ministry.'" After a few months of preparation, "I was taken to a Dissenting College" (A, 9–12, EL, 56; my emphases). We might, of course, explain this language as the product of White's deliberate distancing of emotionally charged material; but only partly, I think. The persistent passive is also an accusation of those who had encouraged him to make what he felt in retrospect was the "great event and great blunder of my life."

At the same time, the irony and anger that pervade much of White's writing on religion suggest that, although he felt betrayed by a community and a religious tradition, he also knew that the chief traitor was his own unawakened heart. Looking back, Mark Rutherford observes, "It is wonderful to think how I could take so much for granted" (A, 16). *The Early Life* expresses similar incredulity: "It is almost incredible to me now, although I was hardly nineteen, that I should have accepted without question such a terrible invention" as the doctrine of election (EL, 60). I have suggested that later in his life White felt that in Bunyan Meeting he had unconsciously lied—had, in fact, blasphemed. We can find, I believe, an indirect retrospective judgment on his profession of faith in his remarks about Job: He "loathes his words, he repents in dust and ashes, because he had
spoken hearsay about God. If we understood this, what would become of our theologies and churches?” (LP, 118; my emphasis). Job, like White, had spoken things about God that he himself had not experienced.

The self-contempt engendered by his inadvertent false witness became habitual, but the event had an even more destructive result: here began the sense of perpetual exile that imbues White's life and much of his work. His feelings of alienation are complex. He may not truly have known “who God was, or what was salvation,” but he deeply felt their loss. His grief, moreover, was compounded by an amorphous sense of guilt. The Calvinist creed, he writes, “had as evil consequences that it concentrated my thoughts upon myself, and made me of great importance. God had been anxious about me from all eternity, and had been scheming to save me” (EL, 59). He lost the sense of being chosen and individually valued, but self-consciousness and anxiety remained. Furthermore, he no longer had the satisfaction, however contemptible, “of belonging to a society marked off from the great world” (A, 11). From now on, he lived on the boundary between the two. In 1891, White wrote to his friend Mrs. Colenutt that he disliked visiting Bedford, for “my father’s shade meets me at every corner” (L, 52). Surely White's relationship to Bunyan Meeting also accounts for some part of his reluctance to return to his native town. Not only his father's shade but his own past self—his folly and his failure—met him there.

II

In the fall of 1848, White matriculated at Cheshunt. The College, organized by George Whitefield in the eighteenth century under the patronage of the Countess of Huntingdon, was by the nineteenth century officially linked to the Congregational denomination. Independents in general tried to sustain a Puritan
tradition of intellectual rigor, and nineteenth-century Independ­ency included in its ranks such well-known theologians as R. W. Dale, A. M. Fairbairn, Thomas Binney, and Baldwin Brown. Yet White's educational experience at Cheshunt appears to have been entirely profitless. He thought the instruction academically superficial and spiritually pernicious. Mark Rutherford's description is bitter and pointed: "During the first two years at college," he writes, "my life was entirely external. My heart was altogether untouched by anything I heard, read, or did, although I myself supposed that I took an interest in them" (A, 18). Classical instruction was "inefficient," and biblical study "a sham" (A, 13). The Bible, which in later years White valued above all other books, was at Cheshunt "a magazine of texts, and those portions of it which contributed nothing in the shape of texts, or formed no part of the scheme, were neglected" (A, 14). Although the future lives of the students were to be spent in the teaching of biblical truths, "there was no book less understood either by students or professors" (A, 13). Lectures on the teleological argument for God's existence were as "irrelevant as the chattering of sparrows": "When I did not even know who or what this God was, and could not bring my lips to use the word with any mental honesty, of what service was the 'watch argument' to me?" Systematic theology "was the great business" (A, 14) of the students' academic life. The author of the Calvinist manual, White remarks, "justified the election of a minority to heaven and a majority to hell on the ground that God owed us nothing, and being our Maker, might do with us what He pleased" (EL, 60; cf. A, 14). Moreover, "not a word was ever spoken to us telling us in what manner to strengthen the reason, to subdue the senses, or in what way to deal with all the varied diseases of that soul of man which we were to set ourselves to save" (A, 14). All human failings were labeled "sin," and for this "there was one quack remedy" (A, 14–15).
At this time White still did not actually doubt the theology he was taught; but "at no point did it come into contact with me" (A, 15). He was able to accept what he calls the "terrible invention" of Calvinist doctrine only because it was meaningless: "all this belonged to a world totally disconnected from my own, and . . . I never thought of making real to myself anything which this supernatural world contained" (EL, 60–61; my emphasis).

The spiritual life of the students was "not very deep," conversation was "trivial," and instruction "irrelevant" (A, 17, 13). In these two years, nothing moved White, spiritually or emotionally. His memories may be distorted, but even so, it is difficult to reconcile this scathing description of life at Cheshunt with the image of the erudite Independent academies praised by historians. White's concluding judgment is bleak: "I learnt nothing at Cheshunt, and did not make a single friend" (EL, 63).

In his final year at Cheshunt, however, this moribund existence was penetrated by a new influence. "As well as Paul must have remembered afterwards the day on which he went to Damascus," White recalled the day he discovered a copy of the *Lyrical Ballads* (A, 18; cf. EL, 61, GD, 33). The poetry "conveyed . . . no new doctrine, and yet the change it wrought in me could only be compared with that which is said to have been wrought on Paul himself by the Divine apparition." He could now reclaim the Pauline archetype of conversion and recognize its vitality, for here was genuine conversion, actual rebirth. His heart and spirit were now moved, and a process begun which altered the nature of his belief. Though he finds it difficult to express the precise significance of this feeling of renewal, it "excited a movement and a growth which went on till, by degrees, all the systems which enveloped me like a body gradually decayed from me and fell away into nothing" (A, 18–19). This dynamic language effectively communicates the process of the shattering of the old self, a stripping away of the
Calvinist trappings that shrouded the unawakened spirit. As the scales fell from Paul's eyes, so the "systems" fell from White's consciousness. Blindness gave way to light, as he finally apprehended what was real. Wordsworth's God, White says, "is not the God of the Church, but the God of the hills, the abstraction Nature, and to this my reverence was transferred." The tyrannical deity of the Calvinist manual, "altogether artificial, remote, never coming into genuine contact with me," was replaced by one "which I thought to be real, one in which literally I could live and move and have my being." Wordsworth did for him "what every religious reformer has done," and what White himself was later to do: "he re-created my Supreme Divinity; substituting a new and living spirit for the old deity, once alive, but gradually hardened into an idol" (A, 19).

Although the "God of Nature" remains a vague concept, the divine presence which White felt in reading Wordsworth's poetry was intensely real to him. In a short essay entitled "Belief, Unbelief, and Superstition," he attempted to clarify what he meant by spiritual reality: "Suppose that the light which struck down St. Paul on his journey to Damascus was due to his own imagination, the belief that it came from Jesus enthroned in the heavens was a sign of strength and not of weakness. . . . If Christ never rose from the dead, the women who waited at the sepulchre were nearer to reality than the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection" (P, 85). Similarly, in the Autobiography, Mark Rutherford remarks that Paul's hope of the second coming of Christ may have been a "baseless dream": but it is nevertheless the "hope and the prophecy of all noble hearts, a sign of their inability to concur in the present condition of things" (A, 204). In his journals, White observes that "A mere dream, a vague hope may be more potent than certainty in a lesser matter. The faintest vision of God is more determinative of life than a gross earthly certainty" (MP, 220). Ironically, the Puritan heritage of intuitive knowledge of divine mystery—"the inner light"—was evoked
in White through Romantic poetry: the felt immanent presence of God, and a hopeful openness to the supernatural dimension came to him in "the God of Nature."

White's sense of renewal at this period is expressed in his general response to life around him. Wordsworth awoke in him a "new capacity" (EL, 61), and he now read other books with tearful emotion. In his own college White had made no friends, but now he found one or two in other institutions whose experience resembled his own (A, 20). The most striking aspect of his transformation was a growing interest in the origins of Puritanism. Here, too, Wordsworth led him indirectly back to his heritage through the now awakened springs of emotion. Even though for some time he "had no thought of heresy," the "seed was there" (EL, 63). He began to search for the living heart of his heritage:

The artificial, the merely miraculous, the event which had no inner meaning, no matter how large externally it might be, I did not care for. . . . Nearly every doctrine in the college creed had once had a natural origin in the necessities of human nature, and might therefore be so interpreted as to become a necessity again. . . . But it was precisely this reaching after a meaning which constituted heresy. The distinctive essence of our orthodoxy was not this or that dogma, but the acceptance of dogmas as communications from without, and not as born from within. (A, 21; my emphasis)

To find the original necessity that had inspired the dogma became a central inquiry. Eventually, White desired a more personal God than the "abstraction Nature," although his love of the natural world remained a source of deliverance throughout his life. His love of Wordsworth was also enduring. His devoted and careful Wordsworth scholarship reflects his affection and admiration for the poet. His second wife wrote that even in his last years he "spoke of the Coleridges and Wordsworths as of personal
friends, with all the intimacy, love, and reverence” (GD, 28). To Wordsworth he owed the spiritual awakening that began his “reaching after a meaning.” The “revolution” wrought by the poet, he believed, was deeper and more permanent than the work of biblical critics, and “it was Wordsworth and not German research which caused my expulsion from New College” (EL, 62–63).

White transferred to New College, St. John’s Wood, London, in October 1851. The college, formed by the amalgamation of Homerton, Highbury, and Coward colleges, had just opened. John Harris, who had been Professor of Theology at Cheshunt, was invited to be its first principal.

Dr. Harris’s lengthy inaugural lecture was on the timely subject of the inspiration of Scripture. Although Harris appears to have attempted to confront the complexities of the question and offer a new theory of inspiration, his final word was orthodox: “No theory can be accepted in contravention or limitation of the Biblical idea of inspiration, which does not rest on authority equal to that of the Bible itself.”

William White, Sr., saw the position as a reactionary one and sarcastically commented that Harris’s sixty-eight pages might have been condensed into one, its substance being: “First, there was an inspiration to prepare the minds of the sacred writers to receive the truth. Second, there was a revelation to be received. Third, there was an inspiration to enable the recipients to give out the truths received. And the last was ‘plenary and complete so as to preserve the writers or speakers from all error.’”

On February 3, 1852, the students were examined in class on Harris’s lecture. The purpose of the examination was to “elicit discussion on such points” as needed clarification in order to pursue thorough study of the subject at hand. Along with Frederic White and Robert Theobald, who had transferred with him from Cheshunt, Hale White asked some pointed questions relating to the meaning of inspiration, the formation of the
biblical canon, and the authenticity of the separate books.\textsuperscript{34} A letter to his father in January suggests that White came to the examination prepared for a confrontation.\textsuperscript{35} Dr. Harris refused to allow thorough discussion of the subject, stating emphatically that inspiration "is not an open question within these walls; there is a certain body of truth, received as orthodoxy by the great majority of Christians, the explanation of which is one thing, but the foundation must not be questioned."\textsuperscript{36}

Shortly after the examination, the three students were invited to explain their views before a special meeting of the College Council. They appear not to have been contacted or questioned prior to this invitation. In a subsequent letter to William White, Sr., expressing his regret for the whole affair, Dr. Harris explained that he had only done his duty in immediately informing the council of the students' views: "Of course, I have only moved in this affair ministerially—reporting what I knew I should be expected to report, (or be justly blamed for withholding)—& leaving the Council to act accordingly."\textsuperscript{37} On February 13, the students were called in separately before the council and asked questions which, when they became known, aroused much indignation and some scorn. Among these were the following: "Can you explain the mode in which you conceive the sacred writers to have been influenced?" "Do you believe a statement because it is in the Bible, or merely because it is true?" "You are aware that there are two great parties on this question, one of which maintains that the inspiration of the Scriptures differs in kind from that of other books—the other, that it differs only in degree. To which of these parties do you attach yourself?" "Are you conscious of any divergence from the views expressed by the Principal in his introductory lecture?"\textsuperscript{38} The interview appears to have been formidable. White reminds readers of \textit{The Early Life} that he was then a twenty-year-old youth, being interrogated by a number of solemn and apparently hostile divines
“in white neckerchiefs” (EL, 65). In his ferocious pamphlet, *To Think or Not to Think?*, William White, Sr., replied indignantly to each of these questions, concluding with some reason that “it would have saved a world of trouble if the young men had been called in, and had been commanded to sign the inaugural lecture.”

The students’ answers to these questions were unsatisfactory. Shortly after the interview, they were informed that the council, after “long and anxious deliberation,” reluctantly resolved that the opinions expressed by them were “incompatible with the retention . . . of their position as students for the Christian ministry.” William White, Sr., had not waited to learn the results of this interview. Upon hearing that the students had been asked to appear again before the council, he went immediately to London. He sensed something insidious in the rapidity of the whole business, and requested permission from Dr. Harris to attend the next meeting of the council. He also wrote to Thomas Binney, who was chairman of the New College Council and personally known to White. Binney was the eminent minister of King’s Weigh House Chapel, a famous preacher and the first great advocate of disestablishment. He was well known as the active champion of Dissenters’ grievances. Furthermore, about thirty years earlier, Binney had been pastor of Bunyan Meeting for a twelvemonth and had left that pastorate amid rumors of his heterodoxy. Advising Binney of his own application for admission to the council meeting, White wrote, “I have faith in your judgement and integrity of purpose.” Unfortunately, Binney was ill and could neither answer the letter nor attend the meeting. Two of the fathers—William White and the other Mr. White—went to the meeting, and after remonstrating against the entire proceeding, requested that the students’ moral character be placed above suspicion and that the opinions for which they were condemned be explicitly stated. They also asked for a copy of the creed by which the students were judged.
The council, "most anxious to remove even the possibility of a misapprehension" of the students' views, appointed a committee to discuss matters further with them. After more deliberation, the council requested the students to withdraw for three months and reconsider their opinions. The students felt that they could not comply, and again asked for an answer to their three previous requests. The resolution that succeeded the fifth meeting of the council, on March 17, stated that the opinions of the students "respecting the authority of the Sacred Scriptures" were considered to be "inconsistent with their position as students of New College." Because their offer of a three-month withdrawal had been refused, and considering that they had already sufficiently complied with the students' requests, the members of the council felt they had "no alternative but to declare its unanimous judgment, that the connexion of these students with New College must cease."  

On March 17, 1852, came the expulsion that William White angrily suggested was "intended from the first." While Hale White and his friends believed they had been expelled because, as William White put it, they would "not profess a belief in dry dead formulas," the New College Council saw the matter differently. The students were removed because they had "unhappily been led to reject the Supreme Authority of the Sacred Scriptures."  

The grievances of the students and their supporters against the New College Council were both general and specific. The most significant general grievance concerned the implications of these proceedings for the changing attitudes of Nonconformity. That an Independent institution that supposedly had no head but Christ should speak, as it were, ex cathedra, was to William White an outrage: "But is not this Popery? it will be asked. . . . Of course it is—the very essence. Nay it is more. It is the Sanhedrim revived." He compared the proceedings to the Inquisition and demanded of the Dissenters of England
whether this is not a melancholy sight. . . . here is a Dissenting Doctor; and, moreover, an 'Independent,' one of that sect which arrogates to itself the special title of defender of liberty—freedom of conscience—right of private judgment, etc. . . . adopting an index expurgatorius, like a Pope of Rome.' This parallel was also seized upon by William Maccall, editor of The People, in his article "The Bible and the Truth: The New College Heresy." Maccall emphasized the irony of the situation: descendants of the Puritans were creating a "quasi-prelatical institution." He sarcastically noted the growing propensity of Dissent to become respectable, and in the process to detach itself from the center of its heritage. Dismay at the expulsions, then, went beyond personal considerations. That an Independent college should act in this way was for many witnesses an ominous indication of the direction of English Nonconformity.

Second, the students and their friends were disturbed that a college should so eagerly dismiss them for the exercise of their minds. "Every student," William White argued, "goes to College, not with a belief rigidly formed, but that, by study and thought, and the attainment of knowledge, he may form his belief." His professors' duty should be to assist him "by counsel and argument, out of the mists and ravelments which encompass him into the broad daylight, and on to the firm ground of truth." Aside from the initial examination and the council interviews succeeding it, the students did not appear to have been approached for discussion of the disputed topic by any of their professors. Robert Theobald asserted in a letter to the Council and Subscribers of New College that prior to the conversation of February 3, which led to his expulsion, he had "never received any hint from any Professor . . . , that my opinions were regarded as dangerous or heretical." The students had received neither counsel nor argument. Inevitably, they felt that both the academic and the religious values of the institution had failed them. The real heresy had been the denial of their right to seek the truth.
In addition to these general grievances, the students and their supporters had more specific complaints. First, they felt that the proceedings had been altogether too hasty to allow justice to be done: "They became 'suspect' on the 3rd, and were tried and condemned on the 13th," and expelled a little more than a month later. Second, the kinds of questions they were asked in their interviews were either exceedingly difficult to answer briefly or were patently absurd. In his editorial, Maccall gave a scathing analysis: "Do you believe a statement because it is in the Bible, or merely because it is true?" Did ever orthodoxy put so suicidal a question before? The framer of this question must have imagined either that the Bible contains all truth, or that it contains no truth, or else that the truth contained in the Bible is in eternal contradiction to the truth to be found out of it." Finally, there was the discourtesy that had characterized the entire procedure. William White was particularly exercised about the fact that neither Dr. Harris nor any of the other instructors had bothered to let him know that his son's opinions were changing in such a manner as to make his teachers uneasy. White felt he had a right to expect such a courtesy, since a couple of years prior to these events he had candidly asked Dr. Harris if Hale were suited to be a candidate for the ministry.

One of the students' requests concerned the protection of their moral reputations. They wanted it to be made clear that they had been expelled for their heterodox opinions only. Such a clarification was not forthcoming. Instead, the statement of the council in its annual report implied that the students' conduct was censured as well as their opinions: "Their case was not brought under the notice of the Council until it appeared, both from their statements and from their conduct, that there was no probability of their opinions being changed by any instruction which might be offered to them" (pp. 9–10). Robert Theobald was eloquent about this "insidious stab at our moral character" and noted that the statement had produced the effect the council
"whether this is not a melancholy sight. . . . here is a Dissenting Doctor; and, moreover, an 'Independent,' one of that sect which arrogates to itself the special title of defender of liberty—freedom of conscience—right of private judgment, etc. . . . adopting an index expurgatorius, like a Pope of Rome." This parallel was also seized upon by William Maccall, editor of The People, in his article "The Bible and the Truth: The New College Heresy." Maccall emphasized the irony of the situation: descendants of the Puritans were creating a "quasi-prelatical institution." He sarcastically noted the growing propensity of Dissent to become respectable, and in the process to detach itself from the center of its heritage. Dismay at the expulsions, then, went beyond personal considerations. That an Independent college should act in this way was for many witnesses an ominous indication of the direction of English Nonconformity.

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must have hoped it would: "It has been argued that it was impossible that the Council could have expelled three Students merely for holding views at variance with their own on the subject of the Inspiration and Scripture authority: that doubtless they had other and weightier reasons for the expulsion which, out of kindness to the young men, they would not avow, and so were benevolent enough to fasten on their heresies without exposing their immorals. . . . all this is confirmed by the fact that they refused to grant to these young men a certificate of unblemished character." 57

Last, the students were offended by what they saw as the hypocrisy of their expulsion by these particular professors, especially Dr. Harris. Although Mark Rutherford characterizes the president of the college as a foolish provincial, ignorant of German biblical criticism ("he knew nothing of German literature; and indeed, the word 'German' was a term of reproach signifying something very awful, although nobody knew exactly what it was" [A, 14]), this description was far from true. Ironically, in some quarters Harris himself was suspected of holding unorthodox opinions. 58 He was one of the editors of The Biblical Review, which printed very liberal views on the subject of inspiration as well as other theological issues. One reader described the periodical as "taking an eminently broad and philosophical ground in discussing the nature of religion and the basis of Christian theology." 59 In his pamphlet, William White quoted from the Review several heretical passages by such thinkers as Coleridge, Schleiermacher, and Dr. Arnold. He then charged the professors of New College with hypocrisy, claiming that the expelled students might well have been led to entertain their "dangerous notions" by reading articles edited and approved by the very principal who now condemned them.

The experience of expulsion left a painful wound in Hale White. The entire episode of the "Dissenting College" in the Autobiography is characterized by anger and resentment, and
his tone when referring to Dr. Harris here and elsewhere is self-righteous, if not vindictive. Wilfred Stone has suggested that the wound was to White’s vanity, and that his response to Harris was that of an offended young romantic who felt his teacher had not perceived his extraordinary gifts: “this man had not seen in him the makings of a new Messiah.” This judgment may contain part of the truth, but certainly not all of it.

What were White’s feelings at this juncture? Harris had been his professor during the empty, isolated years at Cheshunt. Then had come the discovery of Wordsworth. One of the consequences of White’s awakening, as I have noted, was his growing need to “reach through to that original necessity” and reinterpret central Christian truths. Harris had gone before; he was well known for his “attachment to the best and most liberal of the German Theologians.” In White’s view, Harris should have been, ideally, a fellow-seeker—at the very least, a warm supporter. But in fact “the man who of all men ought to have welcomed me, had not a word of warmth or encouragement for me, nothing but the coldest indifference, and even repulse.” When Rutherford preaches a sermon reinterpreting the meaning of the Atonement, the president damps his ardor with a cold, conventional reprimand and advises him to stick to Scripture: “His words fell on me like the hand of a corpse,” says Rutherford, “and I went away much depressed” (A, 23). The simile is precise and forceful. He had just been “reborn,” and here was the new life being threatened with a return to the grave.

It is also noteworthy that immediately following the passage just quoted, Mark Rutherford’s narrative begins a digression that is evidently the result of an associative process. He begins “it occurs to me here to offer an explanation of a failing. . . .” This failing turns out to be his reserved, secretive personality, developed as protection against a frustrated desire for affection and sympathy. He really had “an excess of communicativeness, an eagerness to show what was most at my heart.” The following
paragraph continues the free association: "I am also reminded here of a dream which I had in these years of a perfect friendship" (A, 24; my emphases).

These sudden narrative transitions are provocative. White feels repulsed by the one man who should have "welcomed" him, and his strong need for affection and approval is thwarted. The wiser voice retrospectively judging his adolescent hunger ("Only when I got much older did I discern the duty of accepting life as God has made it" [A, 25]) cannot mask the anguish of the original yearning. When Harris failed to respond, White chose the role of his antagonist.

Further consideration of White's heresy in the light of his mental and emotional state in 1852 brings us inevitably back to the episode of his conversion. He had joined the ranks of the elect by speaking hearsay, by lying: now he voluntarily cast himself out of that community by telling the truth. His heresy was a kind of reversal, a way of undoing his hypocrisy, and transforming—if only momentarily—his self-hatred. This natural consequence of his spiritual awakening was his first conscious, self-assertive religious act. By casting himself as a rebel and martyr, White attempted to efface the shameful image of the "child of pious parents" from his memory. Now no one else's experience passed for his own; no other's words were allowed to stand for what he believed. The cumulative negative experience of his childhood lay behind his commitment to heresy: Sundays, church, conversion, Cheshunt, all the shams and vacuous experiences in which he had participated were, in one ferocious stroke, canceled.

Wordsworth had made White emotionally vulnerable and had also awakened his latent Puritan conscience. The two conflicting impulses, Puritan and Romantic, were in potent harmony here. For some time now White had felt an excess of spiritual ardor and emotional energy that had no focus. Instead of the "perfect friend" for whom he longed, he found a noble cause.
All the energy bombarding in a void might be channeled into standing fast and fighting for religious freedom, true Nonconformity, with the fearless commitment of his ancestors. Identity and self-respect were both recovered in the event.

The energy and excitement of White's letters of this period oddly contrast with the mournful indignation of his later pronouncements on the episode:

Dearest Father

We were a very short time with the Committee yesterday.

. . . "Retire for 3 months"—of course we refused. No surrender—no compromise—I said that if I could change my opinions in so short a time that I would abandon all thoughts of public speaking. . . . I shall pack up all my traps next week—and be off. I shall save money by so doing for I am not certain that I shall have to meet the Council any more . . . & even if I have to appear before them I can come up for the day. I shall I think come home till the Council meeting is over & the matter definitively settled & then off to Portsmouth.

The letter concludes with a paragraph that charmingly qualifies the heroic posture of the first part: "Will you send me those packages of canvass etc., etc. & also some money. Alas—I have been obliged to get a whole new suit of clothes. Could not help it—which is £5.1. Don't be angry. . . . can you send those things directly—money & canvass I mean. . . . Best love to dearest Mother. . . . Your own H." 62

The attraction to heroism persisted in White's character. As late as 1904 he revealed his desire to devote himself to a great person or cause. Writing of Joan of Arc in a letter to Philip Webb, White exclaims, "Oh, that you or I could have been at Rouen with ten thousand soldiers and artillery, wherewith to blast into hell that damned bishop and his crew . . . who tried and burnt the saintly heroine! Oh, that I could have gone with her to execution, and have stood at her side in the flames!" (L, 325).
White is not posing here. He felt, as did many others, that such heroism had become impossible in his time. He agreed with George Eliot's claim that "the medium in which . . . ardent deeds took shape is forever gone." In 1852, the opportunity for heroic action and even martyrdom of sorts presented itself at New College. His treatment at the hands of Puritans confirmed White's fear that real Dissent was fast atrophying. In his own eyes, he had been thrown to the lions. The following—much later, solemn—account in The Early Life may be contrasted with the letter to his father quoted above: "The Holy Office was never more scandalously indifferent to any pretense of justice or legality in its proceedings. We were not told what was the charge against us, nor what were the terms of the trust deed of the college, if such a document existed; neither were we informed what was the meaning of the indictment, and yet the council must have been aware that nothing less than our ruin would probably be the result of our condemnation" (EL, 68–69). This is strong language. While it is true that in some circles White's reputation was considered tarnished, he was not "ruined." On the contrary, both within Nonconformity and the Established Church his heresy raised up several champions. William White's pamphlet was generally well received. It strongly impressed Charles Kingsley, F. D. Maurice, and James Martineau, all of whom wrote to William White expressing sympathy and encouragement. Various newspapers supported the students; John Hamilton, editor of The Buckinghamham Advertiser, offered to review White's pamphlet; and Mr. S. T. Porter of Glasgow promptly wrote to offer Hale White, sight unseen, a job as tutor to his own sons and those of his friends, with a view to turning the "private class into a day grammar school of distinction." Hale refused this handsome offer.

III

The combined experiences of conversion and heresy were to affect White profoundly. His character, his external life, and
his fiction all felt the reverberations of these events. One consequence was his later obsession with literal truth. White describes his father as "a perfectly honest man," and claims that "the only time he gave me a thrashing was for prevarication" (EL, 36). Given his father’s values, the unwitting hypocrisy of White’s conversion must have come to seem particularly hateful to him. His heresy—in which he demonstrated the extent of his commitment to truth—was the beginning of a lifelong reparation. In a letter to Mabel Marsh in September 1897, White becomes quite exercised about the question "what do people understand us to mean when we use certain words? . . . if a clergyman should tell his congregation that he has signed the 39 Articles, or if his congregation should know that he has signed them, would they consider that it was a mere form signifying nothing? . . . There is no theological dogma so important as the duty of veracity. . . . No religion is possible unless veracity lies at its base" (L, 159–61). The letter strongly suggests a connection between White’s views on veracity and his youthful heresy. The experience itself clearly continued to live in his memory; and his perception of himself in that past action remained dramatic and positive:

More than forty years ago the whole course of my life was changed by my refusal to slur over a difference between myself and my teacher on the subject of the inspiration of the Bible. I might easily have told him "you and I mean really the same thing," or used some other current phrase contrived in order to stifle conscience. I might have succeeded in being content with a mush of lies and truth, a compound more poisonous than lies unmixed, but I was enabled to resist. I have never regretted the decision then taken. I can see now that if I had yielded I should have been lost for ever (L, 164).

White transfers the concern with veracity to his fiction as well. Not only is there a strong drive toward autobiographical
realism in all his work, but his characters often emphasize the value of strict truth. Mark Rutherford's friend M'Kay, for example, preaches to his wife "the duty of perfect exactitude in speech," and will not tolerate in his children the use of "a mere hackneyed, borrowed expression, but demanded exact portraiture"; he compels from them "point by point, a correspondence of the words with the fact external or internal" (A, 153-54).

Some sixty years after his expulsion, White wrote in his autobiography: "It would be a mistake to suppose that the creed in which I had been brought up was or could be for ever cast away like an old garment. The beliefs of childhood and youth cannot be thus dismissed. . . . At first, after the abandonment of orthodoxy, I naturally thought nothing in the old religion worth retaining, but this temper did not last long" (EL, 77-78). It did not last long at all. The spiritual regeneration begun by the poetry of Wordsworth culminated in his awareness of what he had lost. His education at Cheshunt and the clamor surrounding his heresy only temporarily shrouded the richness of his Puritan heritage. It is part of White's tragedy, though, that as he awoke to the need for faith he was also compelled to recognize how profoundly he had alienated himself from the source of it. He was out of place in the "great world," as he called it, but he had now confirmed his exile from the religious world that was his natural home. This he realized only later, when it was impossible to return. Technically, he was self-exiled, but he naturally felt he had been forced into that position by the community to which he should belong. Thus he felt both bereft and betrayed. Although the desire for a spiritual center, a true community of the faithful, remained with him all his life, he never joined another religious group. Eventually he came to believe that he had been born too late to belong to the brotherhood he could imagine: "When life runs high and takes a common form men can walk together as the disciples walked on the road to Emmaus. Christian and Hopeful can pour out their hearts to one another
as they travel towards the Celestial City and are knit together in everlasting bonds by the same Christ and the same salvation. But when each man is left to shift for himself, to work out the answers to his own problems, the result is isolation."68 This kind of statement is as characteristic as it is sad. White remained haunted by the vision of the love, sustained by a shared faith, which caused Hopeful to keep his brother's head above the billows, so that he might "see the shining ones and the glory that is inexpressible" (CF, 191).

Thus a more complicated legacy of the events of 1849–52 was the deep ambivalence they generated in White about Calvinism as a creed and Nonconformity as a religious position. This ambivalence was far-reaching, and can be seen to permeate a great deal of his writing. In the course of this study it will, I hope, become apparent how radically White's concern with Puritanism informs his religious thought. For my present purpose, however, it is enough to point out some obvious areas of conflict.

White's investigation of the "original necessity" of Nonconformity had led him back to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Puritanism. In this search he was impelled by his deep need for a religion that was experientially true, that was intellectually powerful and unsentimental, and that took account of evil and human suffering. He found this in early Calvinism.

"What are the facts?" he asked in his journals: "Not those in Homer, Shakespeare, or even in the Bible. The facts for most of us are a dark street, crowds, hurry, commonplaceness, loneliness, and, worse than all, a terrible doubt which can hardly be named as to the meaning and purpose of the world" (LP, 289–90; my emphasis). White's perception of life was tragic. The majority of nineteenth-century religious substitutes and quasi faiths seemed to him facile, foolishly optimistic, unearned, and contrary to his own sense of life. In spite of its difficulties, he came to prefer the integrity of early Puritanism. The seventeenth-century Puritan Peter Bulkley, he writes, with his "firstly,
secondly, and thirdly, is a translator of the deepest experiences." Bulkley’s Puritan beliefs “are not such as come to the surface in us when we are in literary society, or in a club smoking-room, or at an ‘at-home.’ They are laboriously mined in darkness, smelted in fire, and held as a precious possession” (“Peter Bulkley,” LP, 205, 207). He is just as emphatic in *The Revolution in Tanner’s Lane*, where he defends Zachariah Coleman and the “Calvinists of that day, or of any day” from the accusation of blindly trusting in the authority of Saint Paul: “Even if Calvinism had been carved on tables of stone and handed down from heaven by the Almighty Hand, it would not have lived if it had not been found to agree more or less with the facts, and it was because it was a deduction from what nobody can help seeing that it was so vital, the Epistle to the Romans serving as the inspired confirmation of an experience“ (RTL, 11). The “facts” for White are that human beings suffer, often meaninglessly, that for every beauty there exists a corresponding brutality, that people are self-centered, weak, and unable to enact the good that they can often imagine, that self-transcendence is achieved only by hard and continual struggle. Thus, even though White sometimes agrees with the critics of Calvinism, and can understand how it may seem to be “a poor gospel,” nevertheless he affirms, “Poor!—yes; but it is genuine; and this at least must be said for Puritanism, that of all the theologies and philosophies it is the most honest in its recognition of the facts; the most real, if we penetrate to the heart of it, in the remedy which it offers” (RTL, 127).

“Genuine,” “honest,” “real,” the truth of dogma confirmed by experience: here was the great attraction of Puritanism for White. Moreover, Puritanism confronted the fact of suffering and evil. “Its roots,” he writes, “are deep in the nature of man.” In the final chapter of his biography of Bunyan (1905), White includes a last defense of Puritan theology. Here he stresses that “Heaven, hell and the Atonement were the results of the conception that there is a generic, eternal and profoundly important
distinction between right and wrong” (B, 239). White empha­sizes again the relationship between good and evil and the facts of human experience in his wonderful short story “Michael Trevanion.” As part of his investigation of his character’s narrow, dogmatic Calvinism, White probes Michael’s consciousness as he contemplates the framing of a deliberate lie. This act will, he believes, end with his damnation: “He did not believe that he should be excused if he did evil that good might come. He knew that if he did evil, no matter what the result might be, the penalty to the uttermost farthing would be exacted.” White explores Michael’s belief in damnation for “a single lapse from the strait path,” and his understanding that “there is no finiteness in a crime which can be counterbalanced by finite expiation.” The narrator reflects with characteristic engagement: “Monstrous, we say; and yet it is difficult to find in the strictest Calvinism anything which is not an obvious dogmatic reflection of a natural fact. . . . A crime is infinite in its penalties, and the account is never really balanced, as many of us know too well, the lash being laid on us day after day, even to death, for the failings of fifty years ago” (MS, 180).

Finally, White was drawn to early Calvinism because it was intellectually vigorous, because it “stood so distinctly upon the understanding” (RTL, 11). It is on this point especially that he becomes most defensive about Puritanism. He felt that “we cannot really understand a religion unless we have believed it” (MP, 240), and nothing irritated him more than the patronizing and inaccurate remarks of educated Anglicans about Noncon­formity. He knew that much of this condescension was directly owing to class prejudice. He particularly disliked Matthew Arnold’s analysis of Puritanism in St. Paul and Protestantism and Culture and Anarchy, and is scathing in his dismissal of it in his biography of Bunyan: “There is not perhaps anywhere to be found such a failure to discern the meaning of history as that of Mr. Arnold in dealing with Puritanism and Protestantism
generally. It is to his *Culture and Anarchy* that we owe the celebrated inclusion of the whole of Luther in the phrase *a Philistine of genius*’ (B, 239n.). White is especially critical of Arnold’s obliteration of historical distinctions, of his confounding nineteenth-century schismatic Dissent with the original faith and temper of Puritanism. His indignation is aroused by Arnold also as the representative of those who judged Nonconformity by glancing down from the ivory towers that Nonconformists could not themselves enter. He hurries to the defense of Bunyan, for example, claiming that many cultured readers scorn him because he was ignorant of the classics and because of his humble origin and occupation, seen to be necessarily “tainted with vulgarity”: “Other great writers have been born low down and have known neither Greek nor Latin, but they are not condemned as vulgar. The real reason for the charge is that Bunyan was a Nonconformist’ (B, 234–35). He also believes that this prejudice underlies many cool assessments of Milton: “Much of the criticism on Milton, if not hostile, is apologetic, and it is considered quite correct to say we ‘do not care’ for him. Partly this indifference is due to his Nonconformity’” (P, 110). Such animated defenses of Puritan doctrine and Puritan writers are scattered throughout White’s work. Any attack on Nonconformity was sure to evoke a strong response from him. He even annotated his copy of James Fitzjames Stephen’s *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* with judicious remarks about John Stuart Mill’s inadequate understanding of Calvinism: “Mill is quite wrong as to Calvinism. It certainly does not crush out the faculties. The most vigorous races are calvinistic. . . . The truth is that Calvinism is the apotheosis of the intellectual faculty.”

This thoughtful praise and precise analysis might well have issued from a staunch and orthodox advocate of what White calls “the most distinct, energetic and salutary movement in our history.” But while in White’s judgment Puritanism had been surpassed by no other religion in “preaching the truths by which
men and nations must exist” (B, 249), after 1852 he himself was neither a believer in Calvinist doctrine nor a participant in the tradition he came to understand so well and value so deeply. He expresses unqualified admiration for Calvinism in its original purity, and for Milton, Bunyan or Bulkley, but as he approaches the later manifestations of Calvinism, especially in the nineteenth century, he grows more critical and hostile. White's love-hate relationship with his heritage is most acute when he focuses on what he thinks of as the period of transition, when the gradual modification of Calvinism within Nonconformity finally led to its demise.

White often perceives this period as the 1840s, when he sat under the ministry of John Jukes in Bunyan Meeting and the teaching of Dr. Harris at Cheshunt; although sometimes it is viewed as occurring earlier. In my Prologue I noted that White saw himself as a “victim of the century,” who had been born “a hundred years too late” for total commitment to the faith of his ancestors. White’s novels are, among other things, attempts to comprehend these feelings of disconnectedness and loss. As he confronted his own past, he also began to interpret cultural history. It was natural for him to assume the role of the historian of Dissent, and to come to regard his own spiritual deprivation as an accident of history.

Thus Mark Rutherford in the 1840s complains that the Calvinistic scheme “was never of the slightest service to me in repressing one solitary evil inclination; at no point did it come into contact with me. . . . when the stress of temptation was upon me, it never occurred to me, nor when I became a minister did I find it sufficiently powerful to mend the most trifling fault” (A, 15). The same devastating accusation is brought by George Allen, of The Revolution in Tanner’s Lane. He finds, in “those dark three months” following the death of his wife, that the “gospel according to Tanner’s Lane did nothing for him, and he was cast forth to wrestle with his sufferings alone.” At this
juncture, however, more prominent than Allen's grief is the author's: "Surely a real religion, handed down from century to century, ought to have accumulated a store of consolatory truths which will be of some help to us in time of need" (RTL, 362). The sadness and yearning here are unmistakable. Yet White is referring to the evolution of the "real religion" of Luther and Calvin, of Milton and Bunyan.

In these two fictional instances, the underlying implication is that the "Dissenting College" and "Tanner's Lane" are somehow responsible for the uselessness and poverty of the doctrines they teach. In White's two finest analyses of the Puritan temperament, however, the short story "Michael Trevanion" and the narrative of Zachariah Coleman in the first half of The Revolution in Tanner's Lane, the transformation of Calvinism is not attributed to the fault of any individual or group but is perceived as the necessary consequence of the changing temper of the times.

White's fundamental sympathy with Calvinism is evident in his brilliant characterization of Michael Trevanion. He examines the rigid, scrupulous texture of Michael's mind with precision and ease, convincingly creating a man whose entire character has been shaped by the demands of his faith. Michael's first great anguish is his unhappy marriage; his second is a fear that his son will repeat his error by marrying a young woman "who is not elect" and may "have children who will be the children of wrath" (MS, 178). These qualms offend his son, Robert, not only because he is passionately in love, but because "truths believed by Michael, and admitted by Robert, failed to impress Robert with that depth and sharpness of cut with which they were wrought into his father" (MS, 161). Although Robert had been brought up in his father's faith, it was "the beginning of the latter half of the present century." Michael was already considered "somewhat of a fossil," and his son is perforce "inconsistent, as the old doctrine when it is decaying, or the new at its advent always is" (MS, 161).
The transition is conceived here as a cleavage between father and son, a rift between the generations. In *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, however, the transition is described as occurring in the heart and mind of Zachariah Coleman, as it had in his prototype, William White, Sr. Zachariah is a working man, a printer who in 1814 is about thirty years old. He is described as being "a Dissenter in religion, and a fierce Radical in politics." A Moderate Calvinist, he "held to Calvinism as his undoubted creed, but when it came to the push in actual practice he modified it" (RTL, 10). When the novel opens, Zachariah is able to resign himself to a loveless marriage, even though, "Calvinist as he was, he was tempted at times to question the justice of such a punishment" (RTL, 18). But he "had immortality before him," and "predestination was dear to him. God knew him as closely as He knew the angel next His throne, and had marked out his course with as much concern as that of the seraph. What God's purposes were he did not know. He took a sort of sullen pride in not knowing" (RTL, 19). But the coming year enlarges Zachariah's political horizons and involves him in the friendship of Jean Caillaud and his daughter, Pauline. In Puritan phrase, they are the unregenerate. Zachariah's marriage continues to be a source of great misery. Gradually, his commitment to Calvinist doctrine is undermined. Why, he wonders, has God condemned him to "a weary pilgrimage for thirty or forty years"? (RTL, 127). All his life he has assented easily "to the doctrine of God's absolute authority in the election and disposal of the creatures He had made," but he revolts when God touches him. Nevertheless, Zachariah worries guiltily because he has done nothing to try to enlighten his infidel friends; he knows that he must bear witness to his Master in season and out of season or be himself forgotten at Judgment. Moreover, his conscience protests against his own cowardice: "the awful figure of the Crucified seemed to rise before him and rebuke him" (RTL, 80). In a climactic and moving scene in the novel, he attempts to convert his friends
but fails completely. He uses the language of Saint Paul, which after years of "unquestioning repetition" and "childish association" seems abundantly clear to him. To his friends, he might as well have "spoken Hebrew" (RTL, 88–89). At the crucial moment, Zachariah balks. He is unable to tell his friends that they are "sold unto Satan, and in danger of hell-fire." He was "a century and a half too late," and "[h]e struggled, wrestled, self against self, and failed, not through want of courage, but because he wanted a deeper conviction. The system was still the same, even to its smallest details, but the application had become difficult. . . . Phrases had been invented or discovered which served to express modern hesitation to bring the accepted doctrine into actual, direct, week-day practice. It was in that way that it was gradually bled into impotence" (RTL, 90).

Zachariah is unable to reconcile Calvinist doctrine with his own affections, his own growing experience. His rejection of that doctrine begins when "the man rose up behind the Calvinist" (RTL, 92), and he affirms his unregenerate friends in a spontaneous embrace. White's analysis here is that Zachariah essentially awakens from a dream; the language of Calvinism is part of the texture of his mind, yet the effort to apply this language to ordinary life causes it to disintegrate. The divorce between dogma and experience signals the degeneracy of the faith, as religious terminology that had once been vital becomes, in Mark Rutherford's words, "the merest phrases" (A, 10).

White's anguished fascination with the changing temper of Calvinist Independency was not confined to doctrine. His mid-century involvement had sharpened his awareness of the nuances of Nonconformity as a whole. His novels generally include descriptions of the range of Nonconformity within a particular community; and both his analyses of different religious groups and the shrewd insight his characters manifest in relation to religious questions proceed, as Valentine Cunningham says, from White's thorough knowledge of the "theological and social
variety in the Dissenting spectrum.” Cunningham observes; and he singles out for special praise the analysis of the different religious groups in the Cowfold of *The Revolution in Tanner’s Lane.* Here, indeed, in chapter 16, White’s confidence and authority are most in evidence: “There were three chapels; one the chapel, orthodox, Independent, holding about seven hundred persons, and more particularly to be described presently; the second Wesleyan, new, stuccoed, with grained doors and cast-iron railing; the third, strict Baptist, ultra-Calvinistic, Antinomian according to the other sects, dark, down an alley, mean, surrounded by a small long-grassed graveyard, and named ZOAR in large letters over the long window in front” (RTL, 234–35). The Wesleyan Chapel “had no roots in the town” and was disliked both by Anglicans and other Dissenters. Zoar is a “place apart” (RTL, 236). Its minister “was a big, large-jawed, heavy-eyed man,” whose “ministrations were confined to about fifty sullen, half stupid, wholly ignorant people” (RTL, 237). He is ignored by both the Independent and the Wesleyan ministers, “and, of course, the rector.” The reason for this coldness is not doctrinal but social: “He was a poor man and poor persons sat under him” (RTL, 236–37).

White is most satirical when observing the relationship between religious affiliation and social class. While he alludes in several places to the growing respectability of Nonconformity, he is especially conscious of this phenomenon in *Catharine Furze.* The novel is set in Eastthorpe, a town in the Midlands, again in the 1840s. Much of the action is dependent on Mrs. Furze’s desire to rise in the world and enter the exalted social sphere inhabited by the brewer’s wife, Mrs. Colson. Her plans include exchanging the family’s current home in the ironmongery shop for a new one in “The Terrace” in the north end of town. The move would also, she believes, “be a good opportunity for us to exchange the chapel for the church.” She argues
that the people who go to church are "vastly more genteel," and the service "and everything about it—the vespers—the bells—somehow there is a respectability in it" (CF, 23). White recognized, as John Lucas has remarked in *The Literature of Change*, that the "decay of dissenting movements" was "intimately bound up with class considerations," and felt that the desire for respectability must sound the death knell of genuine Dissent, "because it destroys the principles on which Dissent depends."76

*The Revolution in Tanner's Lane* is a novel in two nearly discrete parts—a fact that has long been the source of much critical indignation.77 In his intriguing chapter on Hale White, Lucas, however, suggests that the "odd, jagged and abrupt" break between the two parts is not evidence of incompetence and "faulty construction," but the product of conscious artistry. The abrupt transition, he argues, is "a proper means of dramatizing. . . . [White's] own sense of a crumbling tradition: there are very few links or continuities between Zachariah's kind of dissenting conscience and that of the community in Tanner's Lane."78 While I question whether White is so self-conscious a craftsman, it is possible that his deep sense of disconnectedness is, consciously or not, reflected in the novel's structure. Lucas's ingenious argument serves, at least, to redirect our attention to the main point: in the 1840s in the Midlands, Nonconformity no longer "attracts or moulds men of principle."79 The Michael Trevanions and even the Zachariah Coleman's are dying out. Spiritually degenerate, Nonconformists are now eaten up with zeal only for social climbing. In essence, this is how White presents the transformed temper and character of Dissent in the second part of his novel. Religious decadence is perceived to be ubiquitous, but in the novel White concentrates on the differences between the older, genuine Puritan ministers of the gospel and their contemporary Independent counterparts.

In spite of White's disclaimer, it is obvious that his characterization of the clergy in *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*
draws upon his own memory of Bunyan Meeting. The Reverend John Broad, the minister of Tanner's Lane Chapel, is clearly a caricature of John Jukes, while his predecessor, the Reverend James Harden, is modeled upon Samuel Hillyard. White's dislike—repulsion—is evident in the characterization of Broad, who is physically, as well as morally, unattractive, "a big, gross-feeding, heavy person with heavy ox-face and large mouth"—the diametrical opposite, indeed, of the "lean and fervid" Harden, a "genuine soldier of the Cross." Whereas Harden is "bold and uncompromising," a "fiery, ardent, untamable soul," Broad is weak and ingenuous. Harden "wrestled even unto blood with the world, the flesh, and the devil in Cowfold for thirty years." Broad, in contrast, is "moderate in all of what he called his 'views'; neither ultra-Calvinist nor Arminian." White allows that Broad is not a conscious hypocrite. No doubt of the "truth of what he preached ever crossed his mind," but he cannot believe as Harden believed, partly because of his character and partly because the "fervid piety of Cowper's time and of the Evangelical revival was a thing almost of the past" (RTL, 252-53). Broad is upright and respectable, comfortable, worldly, and generally wanting in energy and direction. Most damning, in White's eyes, is his refusal to involve himself in politics. White deliberately contrasts Broad's political neutrality in an important election (he does not wish to offend his deacons) with the political activism and republican tendency of earlier pastors. The Reverend Bradshaw (the one surviving representative of the old Puritan pastor in the novel and White's tribute to Thomas Binney) concludes his sermon with pastoral advice on how the congregation should vote. His preaching would be trivial, he explains, "if it did not compel them into a protest against taxing the poor for the sake of the rich" (RTL, 328-29). Similarly, Harden "never scrupled to tell anybody what he thought, and would send an arrow sharp and swift through any iniquity, no matter where it might couch" (RTL, 253). The retreat from political commitment is to White a sure indication of a dying
creed. Broad urges his congregation to keep themselves uncontaminated by worldly influence, as the controversies of the world "are so unimportant compared with our eternal welfare" (RTL, 336). White is apparently drawing on his memory of Jukes's sermons, and the implications of his satire are clear. The dust and heat of the arena is a thing of the past; Broad exploits the inspiration and distorts the language of early Puritanism; in his attempt to justify apathy, he in effect sanctions injustice. George Allen speaks for the author when he exclaims: "I cannot understand . . . how a Dissenting minister can make up his mind not to vote against a party which has been answerable for all the oppression and all the wrongs in English history, . . . and actually persecuted his predecessors in this very meeting-house in which he now preaches" (RTL, 316-17).

Some of Broad's more odious qualities extend to his family. Mrs. Broad keeps her son at home because she objects to the "mixture" of the Cowfold day school. Her religious feeling consists of a profound consciousness of being the daughter of a prominent Dissenting minister who has a chapel "in a great town" (RTL, 256). In consequence, she gives herself airs, has worldly ambitions for her children, and keeps her husband up to the mark in the secular concerns of the parish. Young Thomas Broad is, at eighteen, the "almost ridiculously exact . . . counterpart of his father" (RTL, 256). He giggles, simpers, and smirks, and is generally contemptible. White characterizes him as a lecherous fool and a conscious hypocrite. He is destined for a Dissenting College and is given extra tuition by his father in his weakest area, systematic theology, "and more particularly in the doctrine of the Comforter" (RTL, 274). The daughter, Priscilla, is equally objectionable. She is portrayed as a vague, empty-headed, pretty girl, with "flat unilluminated eyes" (RTL, 267). The Broads feel that they are lowering themselves in allowing their daughter to marry the son of a tradesman: "As soon might a Princess of the Blood Royal unite herself with an ordinary
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knight” (RTL, 268). The reader finds it scarcely credible that the intelligent and attractive George Allen could be even remotely interested in her. Naturally, his marriage to her nearly destroys him.82

In both the Autobiography and The Revolution in Tanner’s Lane, in fact, the really good, moral characters are the unbelievers. The atheist Mardon in the Autobiography and Jean and Pauline Caillaud of The Revolution in Tanner’s Lane are infinitely more decent, sincere, warm-hearted, and spiritual than the members of derelict Nonconformity. And Zachariah is drawn toward his infidel friends just as Rutherford is drawn to Mardon. Indeed, it is the atheist who points out to Rutherford the relationship between the despicable character of Mr. Snale, a deacon of the chapel, and the degeneracy of his religion: he “has heard sermons about all sorts of supernatural subjects for thirty years, and he has never once been warned against meanness, so of course he supposes that supernatural subjects are everything and meanness is nothing” (A, 46). Snale is a composite of the Broads junior and senior. Like Thomas Broad, he is outwardly respectable but really hypocritical, mean, and cowardly. He writes anonymous letters to the newspapers discrediting Rutherford, and he is also a secret sensualist: his “way of talking to women and about them was more odious than the way of a debauchee. He invariably called them ‘the ladies,’ or more exactly, ‘the leedies,’ and he hardly ever spoke to a ‘leedy’ without a smirk and some faint attempt at a joke” (A, 29). Nowhere does White see evidence of the deterioration of the passionate temper of Dissent more clearly than in such furtive sensuality hidden by a cloak of gentility. At a Dorcas meeting, Snale objects to Rutherford’s choice of The Vicar of Wakefield to read to the assembled company because “the company is mixed; there are young leedies present, and perhaps, Mr. Rutherford, a book with a more requisite tone might be more suitable on such an occasion” (A, 31). George Fox’s Journal is also rejected because “he did not, you know, Mr. Rutherford, belong to us” (A, 32).
Snale also resembles John Broad in thinking that a clergyman should keep himself unspotted from the world and know “nothing save Christ crucified” (A, 43). He would doubtless have approved of John Broad’s advising his son to avoid controversial topics: “I always myself doubted the wisdom, for example, of sermons against covetousness, or worldliness, or hypocrisy” (RTL, 345).

The condition of modern Nonconformity is further dramatized in *The Revolution in Tanner’s Lane* through the implicit contrasting of the sermons preached by the Reverend Bradshaw and those preached by the Broads. John Broad’s sermons are rhetorically empty and theologically null (“‘Unspotted from the world.’ Think, my friends, of what this involves. Spots! The world spots and stains!” [RTL, 336]). Bradshaw, in contrast, taxes “the whole mental powers of his audience” (RTL, 95). His sermons are “utterly unlike the simple stuff which became fashionable with the Evangelistic movement” (RTL, 96). Bradshaw appears as a zealous, aging Independent minister of the old school. In addition to being “republican through and through” (RTL, 95), he is a classical scholar and a Calvinist, believing “in predestination and the final perseverance of the saints” (RTL, 94). Like Thomas Binney, Bradshaw’s great gift as a preacher is his power of “getting into the interior of a Bible character” and making him come intensely, dramatically alive (RTL, 96).

One of Bradshaw’s sermons—which White gives in detail—is about the real meaning of divine election. Bradshaw turns to the story of Jephthah (Judges 11) to reveal this doctrine. After powerfully recreating Jephthah’s vow—that if God would grant him the victory over Ammon, he would sacrifice on his return whosoever came forth from his house—Bradshaw images Jephthah descrying his daughter coming out to meet him “with timbrels and with dances.” And “she was his only child: beside her he had neither son nor daughter” (RTL, 98). White’s description of the sermon is vivid and moving. Jephthah is “brought
very low” (RTL, 99). “To what did God elect Jephthah?” Bradshaw demands of the congregation: “He elected him to that tremendous oath and that tremendous penalty. He elected him to the agony he endured while she was away upon the hills! That is God’s election; an election to the cross. . . . Be sure, if God elects you, He elects you to suffering” (RTL, 100). Bradshaw argues that although the cost of discipleship is high, yet “if Christ calls, . . . take your choicest possession, take your own heart, your own blood, your very self, to the altar” (RTL, 101). In the novel, his sermon is given even greater resonance by our knowledge that his wife had died in childbirth, and that after a period of intense grief, “he came back an altered man to his people in Bedfordshire” (RTL, 95). The sermon and its context, its anguished illumination of human experience, is surely meant to be contrasted not only with Broad’s feeble evangelicalism but with the “election” of Thomas Broad, and implicitly, of Hale White/Mark Rutherford.

Whereas Bradshaw lives and preaches self-denial, young Thomas Broad is weak and self-indulgent in both life and doctrine. In his first sermon as a student supplying a rural village, he speaks for three-quarters of an hour from the text, “the carnal mind is at enmity with God” (Romans 8:7). The laborers who form the congregation “listened as oxen might listen” to this fatuous performance (RTL, 284). After his ridiculous attempt to seduce Zachariah’s daughter, Pauline, who cuts his hand with a knife for his presumption, he simplifies his sermon on the carnal mind: “He had struck out the metaphysics and had put in a new head—‘Neither indeed can be.’ ‘The apostle did not merely state a fact that the carnal mind was not subject to the law of God; he said, ‘Neither indeed can be.’ ” Mark, my brethren, the force of the neither can’” (RTL, 292). Thus Thomas Broad acknowledges the relation between dogma and experience. White’s contempt resounds in every word.

These examples should make it clear that White’s presentation of Nonconformity in the mid-nineteenth century is both
bitter and dolorous. Valentine Cunningham, indeed, argues that White deliberately misrepresented Nonconformity in the period, and that his fictional recreations, in *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, of the pastoral succession of Bunyan Meeting are distorted by personal animus. While I think the charge of conscious malice is unfounded, Cunningham's remarks do call attention to the resentment and anger that are a significant feature of White's transformation of autobiographical material.

Earlier I noted the autobiographical character of much of White's fiction. "Hale tells me now," wrote Dorothy White, "that he never created a character in his life, never sat down to write without having somebody before his mind's eye" (GD, 66n.). This does not, of course, mean that all his characters are feature-by-feature portraits of real people, but that the memory of individuals was the foundation of his characterization. He extends, transforms, adds to that foundation as he imagines his characters in action. Certainly there is adequate evidence that the fictional clergy, especially, have their originals in fact. John Jukes's predecessor, Samuel Hillyard, the inspiration for James Harden in the novel, was an extraordinary pastor for nearly forty years: he was active in his support of the missionary cause; began the Sunday school in Bunyan Meeting; was a trustee of the Bedford Harpur Charity, a member of the committee of the Bedford General Library, and a Whig who spoke publicly in favor of Lord John Russell in the election of 1830. He established the Bedfordshire Union of Christians (Union of the Baptist and Congregational churches), and encouraged interdenominational worship generally. Three to four thousand people crowded to his funeral. John Brown, the minister who succeeded Jukes, states that during Hillyard's ministry the congregation grew in "numbers and influence." He remarks upon Hillyard's "genial and kindly" disposition, and his warm-hearted attachment to every good cause: "Passionately attached to the great principles of civil and religious freedom," he nevertheless "held his own
position with firmness and yet with such perfect good-temper and gentlemanly feeling, that he seems never to have made an enemy or lost a friend.” \(^8^6\) Jukes himself, in his \textit{A Brief History of Bunyan's Church}, writes of Hillyard's “amiable disposition, conciliatory manners, evangelical, earnest and pathetic preaching.” \(^8^7\)

People writing about Jukes give the impression of trying to do him strict justice. John Brown notes that he was “in many respects a contrast to his predecessor,” but still “a man of weight and worth, who did good service of a steady solid sort.” Brown further describes him as being “defective in the quality of humour and in power of imagination,” but states that his preaching was instructive and useful and his conduct in public life firm and kindly, “if erring on the side of caution.” \(^8^8\)

Thus it is clear that White's perception of the two pastors was to some extent shared by others. He generalizes from his own experience and suggests that this trend was typical of the deterioration of Independency as a whole. But what can be said for White's dualistic characterization of his fictional clergy? Why the complete separation of good and evil, past nobility and present corruption? Why is his attitude toward the Broads so incensed, so nearly vicious? We cannot, I think, attribute this characterization to spiteful vengeance or intentional malice: White simply did not have a petty mind. The explanation of this polarization of past and present lies, rather, in White's intense ambivalence toward his religious heritage.

“Born a hundred years too late.” Bradshaw and Harden are a measure of what White felt he had lost, and in some ways the Broads point to what he nearly became. In the portraits of the Broads we can see an impulse that is characteristic of White's creative method. His fiction—concrete events, dramatic situations, or character—becomes a means of psychologically focusing, defining, rendering concrete, conflicting or uncontainable and threatening emotions. Jukes and the period of his ministry
are inextricably bound up with White's complex feelings concerning both conversion and heresy. His characterizations reveal how radically he was affected by these events, and how deeply the feelings they evoked smoldered in his mind. Jukes is no longer a distinct, external being; White had assimilated him. In *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane* he surfaces in two parts, as it were—the original man split into father and son.

It is revealing that the detestable young Thomas Broad's life resembles White's in a number of ways. I alluded earlier to their similar experiences of conversion. Both were teachers in the Sunday school, both were students for the ministry; and, interestingly, Mark Rutherford's reprimand from the president over his sermons resembles the advice Thomas Broad receives concerning his. The first sermons preached by both characters concern the Atonement. Broad is advised by an older student to avoid "what may be called the metaphysics of Redemption," which might be appropriate for a London congregation, but "in the villages we cannot be too plain" (RTL, 284). Rutherford is told that his sermon "might perhaps have possessed some interest for cultivated people," but that he should recall where his duty would lie: "amongst humble hearers, perhaps in an agricultural village or a small town"; and people would not understand him if he insisted on talking over their heads (A, 22, 23). While these similarities may argue a lack of inventiveness on White's part, they are surely also immensely suggestive. I do not know if they are conscious. Thomas Broad may be seen as a walking summary of individuals White knew in Nonconformist circles, but he is also the repository of White's fears, the dramatic expression of his loathing for his earlier self. The Broads together are the concentrated sum of what Jukes, as individual and representative, had come to symbolize for White; namely, all that was false both in Independency and in his own character. He had been influenced by this falseness, had once welcomed it, and had almost become part of it.
The Whites were dismayed and resentful that John Jukes refused to support Hale in the New College heresy question after the Report of the Council had appeared. William White clearly thought that this was an occasion upon which their pastor ought to stand up and be counted. From the pulpit he might vindicate the character, if not the judgment, of one of his own congregation. William White had been a valuable member of the church and the community. He was forced to conclude that Jukes’s failure to help them proceeded not from cowardice but from dislike. White learned from a friend of a conversation at Jukes’s supper table, in which Jukes had apparently misrepresented Hale’s case to Dr. Binney, who had been preaching in Bedford. In response to an inquiry from William White, Jukes alludes to these quarrels and complains in an injured tone that he has “during the last few days, been too often and too cruelly misrepresented.”

In *The Revolution in Tanner’s Lane*, Jukes’s attitude toward the heresy issue is fictionally transformed into Broad’s refusal to side with the Allens and vote for the Whigs. The narrative includes an episode in which Broad misunderstands George Allen’s actions. When, after the close victory of the Tories an intoxicated mob attacks Broad’s home, Allen intervenes and tries to protect the house, in which his wife and child are temporarily lodged. Broad assumes that he is the leader of the mob and refuses to admit him. Shortly after this event, Priscilla falls fatally ill. Three months after her death, the Allens announce that their pew is vacant, although (like the Whites), they remain on the church books. A church meeting is held to consider the Allens’ position: they have “absented themselves from the means of grace” but have joined no other Christian community; they have associated with infidels (Zachariah and his daughter); they have abetted an unruly mob (RTL, 376).

The episode embodies a complex transformation of some events that involved the White family. Hale White’s grandfather
had been "Radical, and almost Republican" (EL, 21). He had his windows smashed by an angry Tory mob during the Napoleonic Wars because he refused to illuminate for British victories over the French; and William White also had his windows destroyed because he was a member of Lord John Russell's Committee at the borough election in 1832. Hale's cradle had to be carried to the back bedroom to avoid being hit by stones that came through the windows (EL, 39; GD, 196). In 1850, at the culmination of a period of growing dissatisfaction with Bunyan Meeting, William White resigned the office of superintendent of the Sunday school and gradually ceased to attend services. He was struck off the Roll of Church members on May 4, 1854. A statement in his pamphlet on the expulsion from New College undoubtedly has a personal application. He writes of the many thoughtful men who attend no place of worship and hear no religious teachers "simply because there are none within their reach whom they can hear. They used to go to chapel or church, but tired out at length with the old organ grinding, . . . have silently dropped away." The episode of the falling out of the Allens and the Broads thus draws on events in White's background and fuses his father's feelings with his own feelings of rejection and injustice. Similarly, the fictional episode of the church meeting gives White a means of focusing—and disguising—his personal anger. Broad's speech, a tangle of religious platitudes and biblical tags, is an example of White's satirical power at its finest. Interestingly, the prayer that precedes it is at least as applicable to the question of heresy as it is to the fictional situation. Broad prays that his congregation might all "be wise as serpents and harmless as doves! Might they for ever cleave to the faith once delivered to the saints! Might they never be led astray to doubt the efficacy of the Blood of the Atonement once offered by the Son of God!" (RTL, 375).

The climax—the unjust reprimand and censure of the Allens before the church—is resolved triumphantly for the accused.
They are vindicated; the Broads are made to appear weak, ineffectual, and foolish. John Jukes the man has disappeared, but John Broad is more than his surrogate. He is the imaginative vehicle through which White’s strongest emotions are encountered and transmuted. This creative metamorphosis may be a form of wish fulfillment. It is, at any rate, White’s way of coming to terms with passionate and even violent feelings.

White doubtless knew that during the nineteenth century Nonconformity expanded in numbers and became a formidable political power. His novels are not concerned with the disappearance of Nonconformity, but with what, in his own experience, were the insidious effects of the diffusion of its energy. His indignation and anger merge with genuine grief. If his experience were typical of mid-century Nonconformity, if it exemplified a general decline, “reaching after a meaning” might ultimately be regarded not as heretical but as simply trivial.

Indeed, White’s views were not unparalleled. In the 1840s and 1850s, some Nonconformist leaders were lamenting the degenerating spiritual condition of Congregationalism. In 1849, Edward Miall, editor of The Nonconformist, attacked the churches for their “aristocratic spirit” and “snobbish class-distinctions,” for their “professional spirit which exalted the ministry into a caste of religious experts,” and for the “trade spirit” which indirectly condoned dishonesty and materialism.93 At the end of the 1850s, John Angell James echoed these criticisms with more gravity. In his series of articles on “What is the Spiritual State of our Churches?” (1859) he argued that the churches were being “poisoned by worldliness,” that real self-sacrifice was fast disappearing, that a “self-indulgent and effeminate spirit prevented Christian people from discharging their duties in the nation’s social and political life,” that ministers were “regarded for their talents rather than for their spiritual accomplishments,” and that personal godliness was generally in decay.94 And, as we saw earlier, historians of Nonconformity
since R. W. Dale have detailed the decay of the Calvinistic spirit in the nineteenth century. Dale also corroborates White's perception of the effects of this transformation on individual character. "The Revival," he argues, "helped to suppress the original type of Independent character," qualities which included "reserve, a firm self-restraint, . . . patient, resolute industry, punctuality in the discharge of all obligations, . . . a keen interest in theology, and a keen interest in politics, a delight in books and in intellectual pursuits of the severer kind." These characteristics had given way to the influence of the Revival:

Congregationalists ceased to be keen theologians, and they ceased to be keen politicians. During the first twenty or thirty years of this century, the best and noblest men in the Congregational churches were all aglow with the zeal of the Revival. These men touched the imagination of their contemporaries, and exerted over them the most powerful moral and religious influence; and they created for their successors a new ideal of the Christian life. In the next generation, the ideal Christian man was one who avoided "worldly" amusements, and freely spent all his time and strength in religious work; and among all religious work, evangelistic work had the highest place.\(^95\)

Similarly, R. Tudur Jones suggests that while during the years 1815 to 1850 Congregationalism had much in it to admire—courage, enthusiasm, a sense of widening horizons, a desire to reform society—there were also attendant weaknesses: "a tendency to moral smugness, a decline in vital piety, a lack of intellectual discipline and power, a disrespect for the dignity of public worship and for the great principles of the Congregational way."\(^96\)

It is true, however, that White perceived only the negative part of this complex. In spite of at least some evidence to the contrary, he persisted in regarding genuine religion as having been unequivocally on the downhill slide since the 1840s.
Although Thomas Binney preached in King's Weigh House Chapel until 1873, and Caleb Morris, popular preacher of Fetter's Lane Chapel and White's personal friend, was in London until 1856, White tends to write as though the former belonged to a past era and the latter were completely uncharacteristic of his time. Especially after Morris left England, White's intimate connection with Independency faded and his religious life grew progressively more isolated. The emphasis in his fiction on the destructive, negative aspects of nineteenth-century Nonconformity is in some way a necessary, if unconscious, justification for his continuing isolation—more than justification, for in writing about these ghosts of his Bedfordshire past, he attempted to exorcise their continuing presence and power.

One final reason for White's ambivalence toward nineteenth-century Nonconformity must be mentioned: he found Dissenting circles cold and joyless. Mark Rutherford is constantly distressed when his sermons elicit no response and bring about no personal communion between minister and congregation. Sunday after Sunday he has a sense of isolation and failure: "It was amazing to me that I could pour out myself as I did, poor although I knew that self to be, and yet make so little impression" (A, 46). The image is revealing: not just his opinions, but his most intimate self is worthless. His assessment is not confined to Congregationalism. After he left New College, White "supplied" the Unitarian chapel in Ditchling, Sussex, for a year, and in the 1850s preached occasionally at Friar Street Unitarian Chapel. In that decade he also preached at Little Portland Street Unitarian Chapel in London. Even here, in the home of the disaffected, White encountered narrowness and rigidity. Mark Rutherford finds the doctrinal differences between Independents and Unitarians trivial in comparison with the common frigidity of their atmosphere: "the difference of a little less belief was nothing. . . . here, as amongst the Independents, there was the same lack of personal affection, or even of a
capability of it” (A, 109). In spite of their liberal doctrine, “I do not think that I ever had anything to do with a more petrified set. . . . Their method was as strict as that of the most rigid Calvinist. . . . Socially they were cold, and the entertainment at their houses was pale and penurious” (A, 100).

With such groups, Rutherford tries to share the best part of himself—his spiritual dimension—and create relationships based on that gift. But “not a soul kindled at any word of mine, no matter with what earnestness it might be charged” (A, 46). Thus another grievance against Nonconformist circles was that their cold and moribund atmosphere denied the expression of his essential self and thwarted his real vocation. The “word” that he intuitively felt he was “sent into the world to say” could not be uttered, and “all other speech seemed beside the mark and futile.”

White’s experience of mid-century Nonconformity, then, was that it was external and unreal, loveless and cold; it provided no guide for actual living nor any help for pain. The drama of his heresy soon faded. He was to search, after freeing himself from orthodoxy, for a “real religion,” one that would answer his frequent and most important query, “wherein can it help me?” He had left “Moderate Calvinism” behind him, but his liberation cost him dearly. The road to the Celestial City was long and difficult, and the valley of the shadow had yet to be traversed. Inherited dogma had at least protected him from self-knowledge. When the old clothes fell away, he was left with only the naked self. White says that, when he testified to election before the congregation of Bunyan Meeting, he answered questions which “did but disclose ‘the dark unbottom’d infinite Abyss.’” Before he could discover genuine freedom, he had to confront that abyss within his own psyche.