



“Pen and Ink Communion”: Evangelical Reading and Writing in Antebellum America

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WRITING to his mother and sister on 31 January 1834, minister and moral reformer Samuel Francis Smith highlighted the crucial role that evangelically oriented reading and writing played in the lives of his family. “You will receive,” he told Sarah Smith and Susan Eleanor Smith Parker, “a Waterville Journal Feb. 1, & another by Sat. following, each contains 2 of my articles—also, perhaps, a Zion’s Advocate pretty soon, with another. The Watchman soon has one from me, & Temperance Journals.” In addition to contributing to various newspapers and magazines, Smith, who had taken a Baptist pulpit in Waterville, Maine, and had begun teaching at the local college, was circulating among his parishioners other popular forms of print, including the tracts his family was sending him from Boston. In his reading and writing, he also depended on and made reference to “steady sellers,” devotional works in which he had immersed himself as a student at

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Harvard College and Andover Theological Seminary as well as, more recently, popular titles such as Harriet Newell's memoir and Lyman Beecher's sermons.¹

"Pen and Ink Communion," as Smith, on 15 January 1834, christened the letters he exchanged with his family, marries the field of cultural history and the analytic of book history, particularly the latter's concern with the hermeneutics of reading and writing practices. It asks, as Janice Radway has, whether there might be an alternative to Robert Darnton's communications circuit, which treats authors, publishers, booksellers, and readers as discrete entities. Authors, as she remarks, are always readers, and during the process of creation they work with phrases, narrative conventions, character types, and plot devices they have encountered in other texts. And, as she reminds us further, readers engage texts from their own perspectives, raiding and revising them to suit their purposes.²

The letters written by Smith, Sarah Smith, Susan Parker, and Mary White, the woman Smith would marry after he had settled in Waterville, are themselves a narrative, a story about

¹Samuel Francis Smith to Sarah Smith and Susan Eleanor Smith Parker, 31 January 1834, Samuel Francis Smith Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif. All further citations to the Smith family's correspondence will be to this collection and will be cited by date in the text. I wish to thank the Huntington Library for permission to quote from the Samuel Francis Smith Papers and Olga Tsapina, the collection's curator, and Karen Lystra for valuable information about the collection. "Steady sellers" is the descriptor used for religious books that remained in print for several decades. For an analysis of their significance in devotional practice, see David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 61–64, 66–68.

²I have chosen the term "analytic" to suggest that the history of the book as it is currently pursued brings together particular theoretical premises, research agendas, and bodies of evidence. In this formulation, I am indebted to the introduction to *American Studies: An Anthology*, ed. Janice Radway, Barry Shank, Penny Von Eschen, and Kevin Gaines (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 4–5. In "What's the Matter with Reception Study? Some Thoughts on the Disciplinary Origins, Conceptual Constraints, and Persistent Viability of a Paradigm," in *New Directions in Reception Study*, ed. Philip Goldstein and James L. Machor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 327–51, esp. 338–39, Janice Radway responds to Robert Darnton's now classic circuit, which appeared originally in "What Is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* (Summer 1982): 65–83 (the essay has been reprinted most recently in Darnton's *The Case for Books* [New York: Public Affairs, 2009], pp. 175–206). For an introduction to the scholarship on reading, see Hall, "Readers and Reading in America: Critical Perspectives," in *Cultures of Print*, pp. 169–88, and, more recently, Leah Price, "Reading: The State of the Discipline," *Book History* 7 (2004): 303–20.

deeply committed evangelicals who relied on reading and writing to meet the double mandate of Protestant piety—preparing oneself as well as preparing others within reach to meet the promise of salvation. Their story intertwines with antebellum America’s book trades and benevolent societies, which produced and disseminated the books, magazines, tracts, and newspapers that called Americans to national conversion and global millennium. Much of the correspondence took as its subject the letters that filled the books the family was reading. This, then, is a related narrative, a story about letters within letters. It is a tale about how individuals used epistolary writing for mutual enlightenment. “Letters mingle Soules,” poet John Donne tells us, as indeed they did for Smith and his correspondents. Their shared examination of lived experience through the lens of doctrine served not only to mark their progress on the journey toward salvation but also to instruct others in the ways of faith.

The “pen and ink communion” the Smiths practiced involves three dimensions of reciprocity. First, pen and ink, two inanimate objects, when applied to a third, paper, establish the necessary material conditions for the epistolary act. With the intervention of human intelligence, which both stirs those inanimate objects to their task and sends their productions into the world, the epistolary exchange is set in motion: letters are written, and letters are received and read. In this second dimension of reciprocity, reading and writing, writing and reading, as the doubling suggests, function as mutually constitutive acts. For many antebellum Americans, these practices, which continually intersected and reinforced one another, were fundamental to articulating an identity with which to act upon the world. In the final, symbolically powerful dimension, “pen and ink communion” takes on a spiritual character. In the extended metaphor of communion, Smith and his family were partaking of the host in the form of reading and writing. This communion, like the sacrament itself, drew individuals into a congregation, in this case a virtually, not a literally, gathered body of believers.

Writing letters, as Konstantin Dierks has noted about British Americans’ use of the epistolary forms of communication, was

in the “many ways of making history, by many kinds of people [a]lways the common denominator.” Itself a social practice, letter writing was situated within and given its character by a particular historical context. Like their eighteenth-century predecessors on both sides of the Atlantic, Smith and his family penned the familiar letter, a form that depended on a body of shared knowledge and presumed both the ability to recognize and to place in context allusions and passages taken from other texts. Considered an appropriate form of sociability for men and women in the middling and elite classes, the familiar letter sustained bonds across geographical space in an increasingly mobile society at the same time as it sanctioned emotional expression and connection between its practitioners.³

Reading and writing the print that cascaded from the presses on both sides of the Atlantic was an equally common denominator for Smith and his correspondents, all of whom claimed membership in early-nineteenth-century America’s “evangelical subculture.” Defined by Joan Jacobs Brumberg as “a complex of behaviors, values and institutions that were deliberately promoted by antebellum evangelicals as an alternative to secular culture,” this community was nonetheless very much engaged with the larger American culture. Print, which was the lifeline connecting Smith and his correspondents to this subculture, was also the means they employed to achieve their “righteous empire,” as Martin Marty has labeled Protestant expansion at

³Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. xvi, and “The Familiar Letter and Social Refinement in America, 1750–1800,” in *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, ed. David Barton and Nigel Hall (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000), pp. 31–41. The shift from the familiar to the personal letter that occurred in the United States in the 1840s and 1850s was given its impetus by the reduction in rates charged for letters, which made it feasible for literate individuals in all classes to use the postal system. See Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and David Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 93–118. For another dimension of epistolarity practiced by New England’s ministers, who prior to the emergence of published newspapers used letters to report about public events, see Sheila McIntyre, “‘I See It Variouslly Reported’: News-Letters, Newspapers, and the Ministerial Network in New England, 1670–1730,” *New England Quarterly* 71.4 (December 1998): 593–614.

home and abroad. Smith, who embraced this ambitious project of moral and social reform, took part in the organized benevolence that generated and inundated the nation with its literature. A steady contributor to the campaign to spread religion and redeem morals, he published in a host of evangelical newspapers and magazines, appearing most frequently in the 1830s in the *Christian Watchman*, a Baptist weekly sponsored by the Baptist Missionary Society of Massachusetts. Print was also an important source for members of the subculture who were enacting distinctive patterns of familial relations and marital partnerships.⁴ The character of the bonds these men and women were forging can be seen not only in the letters Smith and White exchanged before their marriage but also in the collections of letters and journals they read during their courtship. Written by individuals who were involved in global evangelism, these narratives, or memoirs, as they were typically titled, were a source of inspiration for millions of readers on both sides of the Atlantic. The letters and journals of a select number of women, many of them the wives of missionaries or missionaries themselves, found their way into print alongside publications by men. Valued by members of both sexes, these collections served as primers for individuals who, like Smith and White, were negotiating evangelical unions in which women exercised considerable power.⁵

⁴Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Mission for Life: The Story of the Family of Adoniram Judson, the Dramatic Events of the First Foreign Mission, and the Course of Evangelical Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Free Press, 1980), p. xi. See also Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical Front, 1790–1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Clifton Jackson Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810–1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press for the East Asian Research Center, 1969); Martin Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970); William Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁵On print-driven evangelism, see Nathan O. Hatch, "Elias Smith and the Rise of Religious Journalism in the Early Republic," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), pp. 250–77; David Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University

Established by the Post Office Act of 1792, the postal system spurred the proliferation and dissemination of print. The system opened the mails to all newspapers, requiring only a small fee from subscribers; in order to reduce mailing costs, magazines, which were charged at higher rates, were designed to resemble newspapers. (Books were excluded from the mails before 1851.) Postal subsidies had a dramatic impact on the availability of print in the hinterland, including towns such as Waterville, Maine. Whether he published his opinions in the *Waterville Journal* or in evangelical magazines such as the *Christian Watchman*, Smith sent his essays to family, friends, and fellow evangelicals at minimal cost. These liberal policies were not extended to letters, which remained an expensive and relatively privileged form of communication. Prior to 1845 and 1851, when postal rates were substantially reduced, postage on a letter, which was typically paid by the recipient, could easily cost fifty cents, a formidable expense when many in the laboring classes made no more than a dollar a day. Although the practice was illegal, many Americans scribbled their letters on newspapers and sent them through the mails at the lower rate. However it was sent, the letter stood alongside print, both of which connected Americans in an increasingly far-flung nation. The more traditional oral and scribal forms of communication intersected with epistolary and print cultures. Together, they constituted a rich world of mixed media through which

Press, 2004); Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading, 1789–1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); David Nord, “Benevolent Books: Printing, Religion, and Reform, 1790–1840,” in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society, 1790–1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, vol. 2 of *History of the Book in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 221–46. On the particular role of texts in transmitting and sustaining an evangelical subculture among the already converted, see Brown, *The Word in the World*, pp. 9–21, 79–114. On the importance of reading and writing in the formation of another New England minister’s evangelical identity, see Mary Kupiec Cayton, “The Expanding World of Jacob Norton: Reading, Revivalism, and the Construction of a ‘Second Great Awakening’ in New England, 1787–1804,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 26.2 (Summer 2006): 221–48. On the reading and writing done by other New Englanders who claimed membership in the nation’s evangelical subculture, see Shelby M. Balik, “‘Scattered as Christians Are in This Part of Our Country’: Layfolk’s Reading, Writing, and Religious Community in New England’s Northern Frontier, 1780–1830,” *New England Quarterly* 83.4 (December 2010): pp. 607–40.

early nineteenth-century Americans engaged in reading and writing.⁶



Let me begin with a letter that serves as a window through which we glimpse Samuel Francis Smith, still a student at Andover Theological Seminary, as he apprenticed for his career. Writing to his mother and sister on 29 December 1829, Smith thanked them for the bundle of print they had sent: “I am much pleased with the general contents,” he told Sarah Smith and Susan Parker. And well he might have been. His family had sent steady sellers to supplement the library he had already collected and the books he had borrowed from the seminary’s holdings. The materials, including tracts, had arrived at exactly the right moment. Bent on reaching those still outside the fold, Smith and a fellow student were “determined to visit our poor family this evening.” They also thought “it highly probable that we shall institute a Sabbath School among the neighborhood in a short time.” In both of these instances, Smith and his colleague saw print as the proper instrument with which to galvanize the faithful as well as to convert the ignorant. The young proselytizers were not alone in their efforts. Committed to disseminating tracts and Bibles “with cheapness, security, and expedition to the most distant places,” as the Fourth Annual Report of the American Bible Society described its objective, evangelical publishers had flooded the market with their wares. Between 1825 and 1835, the first decade of its existence, the interdenominational American Tract Society issued more than thirty million tracts, and in 1827, it began issuing books as well. Between 1829 and 1831 alone, the society’s publications reached five million Americans annually and produced, in total,

⁶Richard R. John, “Expanding the Realm of Communications,” in *An Extensive Republic*, pp. 211–20; see also his *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). See, as well, Henkin, *The Postal Age*, pp. 2–3; Richard B. Kielbowicz, *News in the Mail: The Press, Post Office, and Public Information, 1700–1860s* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989), pp. 121–24; and John L. Brooke, “Print and Politics,” in *An Extensive Republic*, pp. 179–90.

at least five pages of print for every inhabitant of the United States.⁷

Unlike a number of the families Smith was trying to reach, his mother and sister had already been inspired by the moderate evangelical Calvinism he preached. Still, they depended upon exemplars to sustain them as they journeyed toward salvation. Printed works, memoirs most notably, were especially appropriate guides. Sarah Smith had asked her son about purchasing a copy of the *Memoirs of the Late Samuel Pearce* (1801). An eighteenth-century British Baptist who had embraced a “warmer, more evangelical stream of Calvinism,” as Brian Stanley has described his convictions, Pearce had not only drawn hundreds into Birmingham’s Cannon Street Church but had also rallied his fellow Baptists to support the denomination’s emerging missionary movement, an enterprise that would become one of Smith’s passions. Pearce, Smith declared, was “very good” (29 December 1829). But, he told his mother, if she wished to purchase a biography, she ought to consider the newly published *Memoirs of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. John Summerfield* (1829); the Irish Methodist’s tale of his own dissipation, repentance, and conversion went through three more editions in the next twenty years. Two weeks later (12 January 1830), Smith wrote again, this time posing the question “Will it be convenient to have *Martyn’s Life* from the Library the evening before I come?” Anglican minister and missionary Henry Martyn would become yet another model of service and sacrifice for Smith. Based on excerpts from Martyn’s

⁷Fourth Annual Report of the American Bible Society (New York: Printed for the Society by Daniel Fanshow, 1820), p. 8. On evangelical Protestantism between the Revolution and the Civil War, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), and Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). On evangelical publishers, see Mark S. Schantz, “Religious Tracts, Evangelical Reform, and the Market Revolution in Antebellum America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 17.3 (Autumn 1997): 425–66, statistic cited on p. 426; Amy Thomas, “Reading the Silences: Documenting the History of American Tract Society Readers in the Antebellum South,” in *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers’ Interactions with Literature, 1800–1950*, ed. Barbara Ryan and Amy Thomas (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), pp. 107–36; Nord, *Faith in Reading*, pp. 80, 86; and John Lardas Modern, “Evangelical Secularism and the Measure of Leviathan,” *Church History* 77 (December 2008): 801–76.

letters and journals, John Sargent's *Life and Letters of Henry Martyn* (1816) rehearsed Martyn's heroic tenure as an embattled missionary in India and Persia, which ended abruptly with his death at age thirty-one. Following its initial publication, Martyn's *Life* would take its place on the shelf of evangelical steady sellers—each of which was valued as, at once, prescriptive text, dramatic tale, and spiritual meditation—for the remainder of the nineteenth century.⁸

Like the relations of Pearce and Summerfield, Martyn's story of Protestant piety was not, technically speaking, a memoir, a term we use for narratives in which the individual crafts his or her own persona. Pearce's volume was a collection of his letters compiled by fellow Baptist Andrew Fuller, to which Fuller appended three of his own sermons; Summerfield's was a biography, which included a selection of his letters chosen by John Holland; and Martyn's was an assemblage of material from his journals and letters as prepared by John Sargent. Today we refer to such volumes as life writing, a broad-spectrum designation that encompasses all narratives that take as their subject an individual's lived experience. More specifically, we would describe them as collections of letters selected by compilers with an eye toward their "moral-didactic" intent and content, as Gary Schneider has categorized them. Smith and his mother would have recognized the letters and journals as conversion narratives, a form of spiritual autobiography that charts the inner religious experience of a depraved sinner who is transformed into a humbled penitent awaiting God's grace. They would have been familiar with the typical pattern of awakening: "conviction of sin, severe depression, joyful conversion, and subsequent assurance punctuated by periods of spiritual deadness," as literary historian Daniel Shea has particularized the experiential journey toward the promise of salvation. And, like other New

⁸On the usefulness of memoir in offering noteworthy examples of piety, see Brown, *The Word in the World*, pp. 88–95. See also Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), and Adam Covington, "Swallowed Up in God: The Impact of Samuel Pearce on Modern Missions" (Fort Worth, Tex.: The Center for Theological Research, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009).

Englanders, they would have considered such stories—whether printed in books, tracts, magazines, or newspapers—as household staples.⁹

Pearce's and Summerfield's "memoirs" sat on Samuel Smith's table beside one "H Newell," as he referred to the *Memoirs of Mrs. H[arriet] Newell* (1814), a volume of excerpts from letters and journals that had been written by one of the earliest of America's many female missionaries. Compiled by Leonard Woods, the president of Andover Theological Seminary who delivered the memorial sermon with which the chronicle opens, *Mrs. H Newell* narrates a tale of conversion, marriage to missionary Samuel Newell, departure for India, illness enroute, and death shortly after childbirth at the age of nineteen. Born in Haverhill, Massachusetts, in 1793, Harriet Atwood experienced an adolescence similar to that of many of New England's evangelical daughters, whether Congregational, Baptist, Presbyterian, or Methodist. She attended Bradford Academy, a local institution that educated an unusually large number of students who married missionaries or who, like at least twenty female Bradford students between 1816 and 1846, became missionaries in their own right. In addition to her formal education, Atwood displayed a "taste for reading," which she pursued both on her own and in the company of other young women. Inserting examples of her preferences throughout the *Memoirs*, Woods made certain that *his* readers understood not only the importance of taking to print but also the value-laden hierarchies evangelicals imposed on the genres available to them. The reading Atwood and her friends chose was typical for

⁹On life writing, see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 1–14, 83–109. On the category of "moral-didactic" letters, see Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500–1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), pp. 233, 242–48. On spiritual autobiography, see Daniel Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 209, and William L. Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). On the approaches to and strategies for reading used by peoples religious, see Paul J. Griffiths, *The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 3–7, 22–28, 40–59. On print culture, see *An Extensive Republic*, pp. 1–74.

early-nineteenth-century females schooled beyond the rudiments of literacy—Rollin’s *Ancient History*, James Thomson’s *The Seasons*, Helen Williams’s *Letters on the French Revolution*, and David Ramsay’s *History of Washington*. Atwood also immersed herself in “novels and romances,” a habit that in proper evangelical fashion she came to repent. Following her conversion in 1809, Atwood increasingly turned her attention toward evangelical literature, including William Law’s *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728), an eighteenth-century steady seller that led her to ask “Why then am I not employed in His service? Why stand I here *idle* all the day?” Religious texts such as Law’s, like religion itself, prompted Atwood, as they did countless other women, to seek out the means by which she might enter the larger world and prepare herself and those less fortunate than she for the promise of salvation.¹⁰

Atwood’s choices were limited. Like all other professions, the ministry was closed to her. At the suggestion of her widowed mother, she considered teaching, a path chosen by one in five women in antebellum Massachusetts. Then came her “serious call”—to “spend my life among the benighted heathen,” as she labeled Asians. Armed with the marriage proposal from Samuel Newell and the permission of her mother, she would become a missionary and “make a female Indian acquainted with the way of life.” “My soul exalts at the thought!” she declared in a soaring proclamation of self-empowerment. On 19 February 1812, the newly married Newells set sail with Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann Hasseltine Judson, who had also spent her childhood in Haverhill and had been one of Atwood’s classmates at Bradford Academy. The husbands

¹⁰*Memoirs of Mrs. H. Newell, Wife of the Rev. S. Newell, American Missionary to India* (London: J. F. Dove, n.d.), pp. 8, 53. On women’s engagement with missions, see Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Mercer, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996), pp. 1–124, and Lisa Joy Pruitt, *A Looking Glass for Ladies: American Protestant Women and the Orient in the Nineteenth Century* (Mercer, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2005), pp. 42–86. On post-Revolutionary and antebellum female academies and seminaries and the crucial role they played in women’s entry into public life, see my *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). On the women’s reading practices, see my “Reading Women/Women Reading,” pp. 53–78.

numbered among the five missionaries first sent abroad by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. With her death on 30 November 1813, Harriet Newell's brief career as a missionary ended before it had properly commenced. Her career as an icon of evangelical Protestantism had only begun.¹¹

Newell's *Memoirs*, published the year after her death, took its place among the autobiographical narratives of other pious females. Although gender conventions restricted women's appearances before the public, their sentiments could, in certain circumstances, make their way into print. Cotton Mather provides a telling example. In the course of preparing the funeral sermon and memorial for his wife, Elizabeth, he happened upon a "self-examination" in her hand. Elizabeth's meditation on her spiritual state became Cotton's appendix for his *Religion of the Cross*, published in 1714.¹² Almost a century later, South Carolinian David Ramsay performed a remarkably similar act of appropriation. Three days before her death on 10 June 1811, Martha Laurens Ramsay told her husband of nearly twenty-five years a secret: she had kept a diary, which she had hidden in the drawer of a bureau in their home. An astonished David Ramsay read the diary and decided it should be shared with others. *The Memoirs of the Life of Martha Laurens Ramsay*, which he compiled and had published less than six weeks after her death, celebrated his wife as a female exemplar.

¹¹*Memoirs of Mrs. H. Newell*, pp. 67, 84. In *American Women in Mission*, Robert argues, as do I, that "divine calling, education, and marriage intersected in a female social context that paralleled that of the male missionaries" (p. 23). She also notes that those who married missionaries met through social networks centered on church membership and attendance at an institution of higher education. See also Maris Vinovski and Richard Bernard, "Beyond Catharine Beecher: Female Education in the Antebellum Period," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3.4 (1978): 856–69.

¹²Cotton Mather, *The Religion of the Cross . . . Occasioned by What Was Encountered in the Death of That Vertuous Gentlewoman, Mrs. Elizabeth Mather . . .* (Boston: John Allen, 1714). On Elizabeth Mather, see E. Jennifer Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), p. 131. Jonathan Edwards also published, anonymously, a description of his wife's spiritual pilgrimage. See David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 130; see also Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 3–13.

“All her conduct [had been] subservient to her husband’s happiness,” he explained; “she gave up every separate scheme, and identified her views and pursuits with his, and arranged all her domestic concerns, so as most effectually to promote his comfort.” It was this deference that earned her posthumous praise from one Benjamin Palmer, a minister in Beaufort, South Carolina. In a letter published in the *Memoirs*, Palmer remarked “what a wonderful faculty she must have possessed of keeping concealed her superior qualities under [a] veil.” The eighty-six pages of the diary David Ramsay excerpted constitute a second narrative in which Martha Laurens Ramsay removes the veil. There we discover a decidedly independent Ramsay fully in command of the debates swirling about late-eighteenth-century Protestantism. Cognizant of the theological intricacies of strict Calvinism and the moderate alternative presented in evangelical Arminianism, Ramsay, after a protracted struggle, pronounced herself a proponent of the latter. Harriet Newell chose yet another form of moderate Calvinism.¹³

Like Elizabeth Mather and Martha Laurens Ramsay, whose narratives were redacted by their husbands, Harriet Newell appeared in a volume assembled by a male. It would be a mistake to read such representations as transparent or unbiased. In all instances, the compilers were influenced by concerns of self and social identity that led them to emphasize particular religious affiliations, cultural values, and gender behaviors. As Woods reminded readers, women such as Mather, Ramsay, and Newell typically (and, as he made clear, appropriately) received “no other tribute than the remembrance and the tears of the grateful circle, which [they] adorned and blessed.” However, as he explained, “Providence has called some females to more public duties, and connected their names with events of general interest.”¹⁴

¹³David Ramsay, *Memoirs of the Life of Martha Laurens Ramsay Who Died . . .* (Charlestown, Mass.: Samuel Etheridge, 1812), pp. x, 44. On Martha Laurens Ramsay, see my *Learning to Stand and Speak*, pp. 253–58, and Joanna Bowen Gillespie, *The Life and Times of Martha Laurens Ramsay, 1759–1811* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).

¹⁴*The Life and Writings of Mrs. Harriet Newell*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1831), p. 5.

Of course, in the case of Newell, those “events” were domestic and foreign missions, which proselytized “the Hindoo in Asia, the Hottentot of Africa, and the inhospitable Indian of our dear native America,” as Newell dubbed the objects of evangelicals’ efforts.¹⁵ “Everyone,” Woods declared, “who remembers Harriet Newell, will remember the Foreign Mission from America.”¹⁶ And that they did. Reprinted in at least twelve cities and fifty editions between its 1814 publication and 1840, Harriet Newell’s *Memoirs* was enormously popular. The volume, which quickly became one of the nineteenth century’s steady sellers, was issued in still more editions as a tract on both sides of the Atlantic. There is indirect but especially telling evidence of the popularity of Newell’s *Memoirs*. Shortly before Harriet died, she and Samuel buried their five-day-old infant, whom they had named after the child’s mother. In researching naming practices in online genealogies and local history records, Mary Cayton has discovered that “Harriet Newell” appears hundreds of times across the nation between 1814 and 1840.¹⁷

Memorials in print, as Joanna Bowen Gillespie has characterized narratives such as Newell’s, invited readers to envision missionaries’ wives or female missionaries as heroines who were bravely promulgating Protestantism throughout the world. In religiously sanctioned acts of self-authorization, they would take the initiative and do what men could not—convert women to global Christianity *and* American domesticity. The darker-skinned Other, the “degraded female,” as Newell limned them, would thereby be not only religiously redeemed but socially elevated. Tutored by the Harriet Newells of foreign and domestic

¹⁵*Memoirs of Mrs. H. Newell*, p. 8.

¹⁶Leonard Woods, *A Sermon, Preached at Haverhill, (Mass.) in Remembrance of Mrs. Harriet Newell, Wife of the Rev. Samuel Newell, Missionary to India. Who Died at the Isle of France, Nov., 30, 1812, Aged 19 Years. To Which Are Added Memories of Her Life*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1814), pp. 32–33.

¹⁷Pruitt, *A Looking Glass for Ladies*, pp. 24–42; Mary Cayton, “Canonizing Harriet Newell: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement in New England, 1800–1840,” in *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812–1960*, ed. Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 86–87.

missions, the debased would enter the ranks of Christian womanhood and dedicate themselves, in turn, to converting their husbands and children. In the process of evangelizing their foreign counterparts, American women, whether at home or abroad, confirmed their superiority, now grounded exclusively in race. As it threaded its way through the pages of memorials like Newell's, such gender-inflected agency galvanized women engaged in missions and their supporters. Samuel Smith testified to its presence on 7 July 1834 when he wrote his mother about a "Missy Spirit among us [that] grows astonishingly." Describing Waterville's Female Missionary Society, which he helped to found, he told her, "I am greatly mistaken if of the recent converts who have joined this chh. 3 do not become missionaries, one other who has been a chh. Member 2 yrs., besides." Evangelical newspapers and magazines, another important engine of publicity, offered women an alternative, more quotidian means of receiving the evangelical message. Occasionally, that same engine was used for self-expression, as readers contributed essays, poems, and letters to the editors. Whether as individuals involved in missions or as their impassioned supporters, evangelical women engaged in a cultural imperialism that was as far reaching and as ambitious as that of its political and economic counterparts.¹⁸

The process by and form in which Newell's private letters and journals were offered to the public would, given the genre's long history, have been familiar to readers of

¹⁸Joanna Bowen Gillespie, "'The Clear Leadings of Providence': Pious Memoirs and the Problems of Self-Realization for Women in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5.2 (Summer 1985): 197–221; Mary Kupiec Cayton, "Harriet Newell's Story: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement," in *An Extensive Republic*, pp. 408–16; Cayton, "Canonizing Harriet Newell," pp. 69–93; and Mary A. Renda, "Religion, Race, and Empire in the U.S. Protestant Women's Missionary Enterprise, 1812–1860," in *Competing Kingdoms*, pp. 367–89. As Cayton notes, this naming practice followed the arc of the Congregational and Presbyterian diaspora. Most of the Harriet Newells appeared in New England, in states such as New York and Ohio, and in places where Calvinist traditions of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism were strong (see "Canonizing Harriet Newell," pp. 84–88). See also Brumberg, *Mission for Life*; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "Zenanas and Girlless Villages: The Ethnology of American Evangelical Women, 1870–1910," *Journal of American History* 69 (September 1982): 347–71; and Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

early-nineteenth-century religious texts. This intersection of scribal and print cultures has a secular history as well. In constituting a polite culture grounded in sociability, British colonial and, later, American elites relied on scribal culture for the circulation of their poetry and prose. Members of both sexes performed belle-lettres at tea tables and salons, and in taverns and literary clubs, in cities from Boston to Charleston. Gentlemen might choose to have their manuscripts printed; however, the same gender conventions that constrained pious females from sharing their works directly with the public discouraged belletristic women from doing so as well. Annis Boudinot Stockton, who presided at the tea table and salon at Morven, the Stocktons' estate in Princeton, New Jersey, was one of the relatively few women who challenged this proscription. The author of more than one hundred twenty-five poems, twenty-one of which were published in widely read newspapers and magazines, Stockton celebrated the patriots who had led the colonies to independence and, in so doing, took her part in ushering a newly independent America toward its proper role in the world. "All admiring nations round, / And millions yet unborn" looked to the republic as their model, she told readers of the *Gazette of the United States*. Stockton's poetry and Newell's journal and letters were devoted to interlocking enterprises. Stockton promoted the exceptionalism that distinguished American nationalism; Newell endowed that political agenda with a religious purpose that would, it was expected, eventuate in global millennium. In both cases, America led the world toward its divinely ordained future.¹⁹

¹⁹See Carla Mulford, "Print and Manuscript Culture," *The Oxford Handbook of Early American Literature*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 321–43, as well as three works by David S. Shields: "Eighteenth-Century Literary Culture," in *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, ed. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, vol. 1 of *A History of the Book in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 434–76; "British American Belles Lettres," in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, 8 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994–2005), 1:310–42; and *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). *Only for the Eye of a Friend: The Poems of Annis Boudinot Stockton*, ed. Carla Mulford (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), pp. 1–57, 118, 151.



However cherished Pearce, Summerfield, Martyn, and Newell may have been among evangelicals, the Bible was, as it was for all Protestants, the primary text, and in the study of scripture, Smith forged an explicit link between reading and writing. Corresponding with his sister, Susan, on 29 December 1829, Samuel asked, “You remember the blank book which was not appropriated to any particular use?” Unilaterally assigning it a purpose, he announced, “I am going to give you an extract for it.” The quotation from the Bible, he instructed her, is “what you are to write me about in your next.” Two weeks later (12 January 1830), he closed a letter with a second set of recommendations “for Susan to think about.” From specific citations he provided in English and Hebrew from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, she was to ponder each text’s arguments for the Trinity. The point is fairly obvious, at least for an evangelical of Smith’s stripe—in contrast to the Hebrew Bible’s supposed ambiguities, the New Testament conclusively demonstrated the Trinity’s validity.²⁰

Smith’s pedagogic approach had its roots in the reading and writing strategies of seventeenth-century New Englanders. Practicing what David D. Hall has called “traditional literacy,” Puritans returned again and again to the relatively few devotional works in their possession, reading them aloud, reciting, and committing passages to memory. Introduced prior to writing, reading unlocked the pages of scripture for believers and guided them on the road toward grace. The “ordinary road,” as John Locke labeled the progress of literacy instruction, was relentlessly religious. The “hornbook,” as he noted, was followed sequentially by the “Primer, Psalter, Testament, and Bible.” Considered more secular and utilitarian in orientation, the pen prepared one for societal engagement, and its use was taught more typically to males than to females, who were expected to center their lives in households. Still, as Kenneth Lockridge has

²⁰On the Bible’s special status relative to other religious texts, see Brown, *The Word in the World*, pp. 2–15.

estimated, by 1660, 40 percent of adult white women in eastern Massachusetts were able to write. Those who commanded both reading and writing approached their devotional works in exactly the same fashion as did their male counterparts. And, as Hall remarks, “from the moment of colonization and constantly thereafter, hundreds of people [throughout New England] set pen to paper in the course of their lives, some to write letters that others recopied, some to compose sermons as part of their life work as ministers, dozens to attempt verse, and many more to narrate a remarkable experience, provide written testimony to a civil court, participate in a controversy, or keep some sort of records—and of these everyday forms of writing there was no limit.”²¹

Mastering both forms of literacy was key to New Englanders’ “reading rituals,” as Matthew Brown titles his study of seventeenth-century Puritan devotional practices. Likening these rituals not to the metaphor of the “pilgrim,” who pursues a linear path toward salvation, but instead to that of a “bee,” Brown tells us that early New Englanders hovered around their Bibles and steady sellers reading discontinuously, extracting meanings, and recording them as part of their spiritual discipline. Brown’s men and women read intensively rather than extensively, moving back and forth among pages, collating passages together, and assembling those that related to each other into handwritten documents. Here, and in contrast to Harriet Newell’s private writing of the nineteenth century, which circulated in an expansive world of transatlantic print, print was meticulously rendered into manuscript, an equally important site of seventeenth-century text making. The practice had its eighteenth-century counterpart in commonplacing, a discipline in which readers transcribed passages from a variety of literatures and recorded their observations. These compilations

²¹See Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*, pp. 13, 19–140, 273–301 (quotation from Locke, p. 13), as well as several works by David D. Hall: *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*, pp. 3–70; *Cultures of Print*, pp. 36–78; *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, also edited with Hugh Amory, pp. 120, 123, 117–51 (citation of Lockridge’s estimate, p. 120); and *Ways of Writing: The Practice and Politics of Text-Making in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), quotation p. 1.

became personal histories of reading and writing. It is no surprise that this enterprise, with its emphasis on self-examination, was particularly appealing to Protestants. Promoted by John Locke, whose “new method of making commonplace books” included a system of indexing entries, commonplacing continued to encourage intensive reading. As print became more readily available and as men and women read more broadly in an increasing number of genres and forms, however, readers were also empowered to situate their canonical texts in new contexts. In their self-defined miscellanies, for example, readers placed selections from devotional books alongside extracts from popular novels.²²

When Samuel Francis Smith suggested that his sister, Susan, make use of her blank book to copy out texts and reflect upon them, he was recommending that she engage in reading and writing as reciprocal practices. Susan would have been familiar with the protocol: intensive reading, extracting and recording meanings, and meditating on those meanings. Readers should approach texts with studied reflection—“think of what we read—ponder it—compare it—weigh it—make our observations—formulate our conclusions,” readers of the *American Messenger* were told in language that could have appeared as well in a manual on commonplacing. They should devote the same care to steady sellers like Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) and Baxter’s *Saints’ Everlasting Rest* (1650) that the Puritans had previously lavished upon them. Like other evangelicals, Samuel Smith acknowledged that reading itself

²²Matthew P. Brown, *The Pilgrim and the Bee: Reading Rituals and Book Culture in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 1–106. On the discontinuous reading practiced by Christians since the fifth century, see Peter Stallybrass, “Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible,” in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 42–79. On other traditions of scribal publication, see Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1993). Eighteenth-century commonplacing had antecedents in the classical idea of *loci communes*, or “commonplaces,” which extended to the commonplacing of Renaissance humanists. On eighteenth-century practice, see Stephen Colclough, “Recovering the Reader: Commonplace Books and Diaries as Sources of Reading Experience,” *Publishing History* 44 (1998): 5–37, and Lucia Dacome, “Noting the Mind: Commonplace Books and the Pursuit of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65.3 (October 2004): 603–25.

could not ensure salvation; still, individuals could enhance their receptivity to grace if they cultivated seventeenth-century Puritans' closely focused, deeply engaged, and reciprocal approach to reading and writing.²³

But in addition to encouraging the persistent Protestant exercise of intensive reading and writing, Smith was also guiding his mother and sister through a new and luxuriously abundant environment in which a proliferation of texts enabled extensive reading. Literacy rates varied across the nation, but in New England more than 90 percent of the white population was able to read. Given such a wealth of print and a citizenry capable of profiting from, and being tempted by, it, evangelicals understood that, along with their global mission to spread the gospel, they had a domestic mission to ensure that various forms of print were properly apprehended and that the Bible held its ground against all the other texts clamoring for readers' attentions. Whether he was counseling his mother in the choice of steady sellers or instructing his sister in the study of scripture, Smith was engaging in a pedagogy common among evangelicals—telling them “how readers should read,” as David Nord has aptly described the lessons those involved in organized benevolence sought to impart. Readers should be selective, focusing on the Bible and steady sellers. The wrong books, as evangelicals intent on fashioning a nineteenth-century religious canon were well aware, could have a deeply pernicious impact, leading one to sin and damnation. Fiction, they thought, posed the most serious threat. Writing to his sister on 30 August 1832, Smith castigated one Mary Webb, the author of *Life of Chloe*. “She ought to take up residence in the Penitent Females’ Refuge for 6 months as a penance for such a trash book,” he declared. Although Smith indulged in secular literature now and again, he consistently called his correspondents to the Bible, to devotional books, and to evangelical magazines and tracts. These works, he insisted, offered the best occasion

²³*American Messenger*, “The Manner of Reading,” reprinted in Nord, *Faith in Reading*, p. 162.

for the fundamental religious enterprises of meditation and prayer.²⁴

Having graduated from seminary and awaiting a call from a church in 1831, Smith remained in the town of Andover, where he divided his time between tutoring seminary students and preaching in the pulpits of neighboring ministers. He also allocated a portion of his labor to print-driven evangelism. Smith's timing was impeccable. Before the 1790s, only 14 religious periodicals were being published in the United States. Typically nondenominational in appeal, they had limited readerships and equally negligible survival rates. In the following four decades, religious publishing changed radically. The number of periodicals, evangelical and nonevangelical, expanded dramatically, as did their subscription bases and longevity. By 1830, 131 out of 193 periodicals were openly aligned with a denomination. The five largest Protestant denominations issued 54 percent of the denomination-specific newspapers and magazines: Presbyterians, 21; Baptists, 18; Congregationalists, 13; Episcopalians, 10; and Methodists, 9. Composed of congregations that were relatively autonomous, the Baptists, perhaps more than other denominations, looked to their newspapers and magazines to forge links among individual bodies of believers and the larger church.²⁵

Samuel Francis Smith was ready to rally the faithful. On 27 January 1832, he told his mother that he was sending "the *Watchman* three pieces, signed F for three successive weeks." Six days later, on 3 February, the "Prayer-Day for Colleges.—No. 1" appeared. Receiving privileged placement, Smith's four paragraphs appeared in the far left column of the first page of the *Christian Watchman*. The year before, Smith told readers, college revivals had commenced after a prayer day at the end of February, and before commencement that spring hundreds

²⁴See Robert Gross, "Reading for an Extensive Republic," in *An Extensive Republic*, pp. 524–25. See also Nord, *Faith in Reading*, pp. 113–29 ("How Readers Should Read" is the title of chap. 6, p. 113); Brown, *The Word in the World*, pp. 79–85; and Modern, "Evangelical Secularism and the Measure of Leviathan," pp. 859–68.

²⁵Brown, *The Word in the World*, pp. 143–57; the specific data are found on pp. 144–45.

of students had experienced conversion. The fateful day was approaching once more. “Christian parents, have you a son in college?” Smith asked. He entreated fathers and mothers to concentrate their prayers: “Think of the glorious things to be accomplished, through the instrumentality of those who may, in all probability, be converted, in our colleges, as an effect of your prayers.” In nos. 2 and 3, published on 10 and 17 February, Smith preached the same message (also carried on page 1), reminding readers, parents or not, that College Prayer-Day had its origins in eighteenth-century communal prayer events aimed at converting the world’s unrepentant, an enterprise in which Smith hoped Baptists and their ministers would play a decisive role.²⁶

Measuring 46 by 40 inches, the four pages of the *Watchman*, five columns each, kept its readers apprised about evangelism on the march, regionally, nationally, and globally. Consider, for example, the issue of 3 February 1832 in which Smith’s initial column appeared. That number included a maternal society’s annual report; an extract from a British official’s letter documenting “Romish Missions in India”; a summary of the Baptists’ Newton Theological Institution’s annual catalogue; a series of ordination notices; a general essay on revivals; and, under “Religious Compendium,” notices about revivals in Shelby, New York, Fredonia, New York, Rock Springs, Illinois, Chester County, Pennsylvania, and Roxborough, Pennsylvania. Two of antebellum America’s most prominent moral and social reform initiatives were represented: a description of the fifteenth annual meeting of the American Colonization Society; and a report on a temperance meeting in Washington, D.C. Two nationally known literary lights contributed their mite: a hymn by Sarah Josepha Hale and a sketch by Washington Irving appeared under “POETRY.”

²⁶Smith modeled the compositional style established by evangelical editors of newspapers, magazines, and tracts. His emphasis notwithstanding, students training for the ministry no longer dominated enrollments at antebellum colleges; instead, and increasingly, college students pursued a host of secular occupations, including law, commerce, medicine, science, and science-related professions such as engineering. See Nord, *Faith in Reading*, pp. 113–29, and Colin Burke, *American Collegiate Populations: A Test of the Traditional View* (New York: New York University Press, 1982).

The authors and the publishers the *Watchman* recommended could be found in the periodical's final column. There each believer might find a work that appealed to him or her: George Campbell's *Lectures on Systematic Theology and Pulpit Eloquence*, Frances Wayland's *Address Before the Providence Association for the Promotion of Temperance*, an anonymous *Gems of Piety* (as the collection was titled), and Howard Malcolm's *Bible Dictionary*, the last being "particularly suited to the young in acquiring knowledge of the Sacred Scripture." The profusion of notices for "just published" memoirs is perhaps most striking. In this regard, two examples stand out—*The Memoir of Mary Lathrop*, "who died in Boston, March 18th aged six years and three months," and the *Memoir of Addison Pinneo*, "who died at Hanover NH aged ten years." Although editors of the *Watchman* and publishers of religious print presumed that readers of any age would benefit from such memoirs, girls and boys, the audience for the increasingly popular genre of children's literature, represented a relatively new market to be targeted.²⁷



Nearly two years after his prayer day calls appeared in the *Watchman*, Smith's apprenticeship ended. He accepted a pulpit and left Andover for Waterville, Maine. Before he was ready to stand before his congregation, he told his mother and sister, he must have his "Preaching trunk." The material goods Smith required, which he listed item by item, prominently included books: the "two or three greatly tattered Hebrew Books" and the "Chaldie Manual," a dictionary of Hebrew and English, which he had left behind. Ebenezer Porter's *Lectures on Homiletics and Preaching, and on Public Prayer* must be bought and packed in the trunk, Smith informed his sister

²⁷On the increasing popularity of children's literature, see Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621–1822* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), and Anne Scott MacLeod, *A Moral Tale: Children's Fiction and American Culture, 1820–1860* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1975). See also Beth Barton Schweiger, "A Social History of English Grammar in the Early United States," *Journal of the Early Republic* 30 (Winter 2010): 533–55.

on 14 January 1834. Written by one of Smith's teachers at Andover and newly published, Porter's primer in ministerial performance staged subjects, texts, rules of argument, and styles of presentation. The *Lectures* had, however, nothing to say about clothing. No matter. Smith himself determined the sartorial dimensions of his office. Sister Susan was to take herself to a local merchant and purchase white pocket handkerchiefs. "Tell him the *best* & whom they are for. I suppose they will be about 90 cents apiece, but if they are more," Smith was still willing to pay. Once they were procured, "Mother is to hem them, & and you can put on my initials with cotton or silk." Susan was to add a "night shirt & cap and anything to fill it [the trunk] up—say E.g. my India Rubbers."

Smith's preparations, sermonic and sartorial, measure the distance that New England's Baptists had traveled along the road toward refinement. In 1793, Elias Smith, a Baptist in the same circumstances as Smith, had accepted money from a parishioner to purchase the traditional black cloth for a minister's gown. His parents, he noted, had been "not a little troubled to see me so richly attired. . . . Their fear was that such things might serve to lift me up and lead me to forget my dependence on God."²⁸ Had Smith arrived in Waterville three decades earlier than he did, he might well have met the same response from some of his parishioners. The intense pietism, the zeal for the humble and simple, remained strong in the interior of Maine in the decades following the Revolution. Inland, in the fields, barns, and houses of small and isolated towns, residents welcomed Baptist itinerants whose proselytizing brought the repentant to Christ. By 1800, as Stephen Marini has shown, Baptists had founded 75 churches in Maine; twenty years later, they had gathered 241 churches in the state. Although Congregationalism continued to prevail in the older and more densely populated coastal counties, the legally established church met

²⁸William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630–1883: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 746. As McLoughlin relates (pp. 745–50), Elias Smith later renounced the Baptists and became cofounder of the Christ-ian [*sic*] Church.

with little success in the interior. There Baptists and Methodists gained the ascendancy as immigrants from Rhode Island and eastern Massachusetts cleared, planted, fenced, and inhabited Maine's hill country. The Baptists among them played a key role in fighting for Maine's statehood and in breaking the Congregationalists' legal monopoly on public funding for religious institutions, both of which were achieved in 1820.²⁹

Fourteen years later, when Smith was installed as minister at Waterville's First Baptist Church and was appointed to the faculty of the denominational Waterville College, he entered a settled community that had moved well beyond the social and religious fractiousness of earlier years. His church was thriving, as was his college. Opening as the Maine Literary and Theological Institution in 1813, the school had been renamed Waterville College in 1821, and it had established four male academies across the state to prepare students for a college curriculum. The town, originally an agricultural center, had prospered as shipbuilding and lumber industries were developed. Waterville's residents supported a local newspaper and numerous social and moral reform societies, including an antislavery society, which invited William Lloyd Garrison to speak as early as 1832. The town, First Baptist, and the college were ready to welcome Harvard and Andover graduate Samuel Francis Smith.³⁰

During his apprenticeship, Smith had relied on the support of his mother and sister. Now that he was settled in his vocation

²⁹Stephen A. Marini, "Religious Revolution in the District of Maine, 1780–1820," in *Maine in the Early Republic: From Revolution to Statehood*, ed. Charles E. Clark, James S. Leamon, and Karen Bowden (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1988), pp. 118–45, and *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 25–115.

³⁰See Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 131–53; David Branson Potts, "Baptist Colleges in the Development of American Society, 1812–1861" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1967), pp. 12–16; Henry Burrage, "The Beginning of Waterville College, Now Colby University," *Collections and Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society* 4 (April 1893): 124–45; Earl Smith, *Mayflower Hill: A History of Colby College* (Hanover, N.H.: University of Press of New England, 2006), pp. 1–16; Stephen Plocher, "A Short History of Waterville, Maine" (honors thesis, Colby College, 2007). Waterville College was renamed Colby College in 1867.

and had become romantically attached to Mary White, he began to look to her. Theirs was a courtship in which biweekly exchanges soon became weekly, then almost daily, until their marriage nine months after Smith arrived in Waterville. As one might expect, each correspondent suggested devotional works to the other. On 15 January 1834, Smith recommended English evangelical Robert Philip's *Guide to the Thoughtful*, which he had found "entrancing, enrapturing. It has been my feast for a week day and night." "It *must* promote spiritual mindfulness," he added.³¹ Had she read it? She had not and promised to "procure it immediately." Had Smith "seen or read the Memoir of [Roger] Williams by Prof. Knowles," White asked on 27 January 1834? She had "heard it highly spoken of—but have not examined it." Neither had he. Each issue of the town's newspaper, the *Waterville Journal*, in which an article of his appeared was promptly mailed to Haverhill, Massachusetts, where White resided with her parents. "I do receive the Waterville journal about every week," she confirmed, indicating the frequency of Smith's contributions. She also read the *Watchman* assiduously, "as soon as it comes[,] to find if possible your dear signature—and if I find that you may be sure I regard the paper as doubly valuable." White also charted Smith's double appearances in the *Watchman*, remarking in the same letter, "Neither did I overlook the little piece in the last entitled 'The Missionary Call' taken from an old *Watchman*" (21 April 1834). In exchanges such as those in which Smith and White were engaged, we see print circulating by a variety of means—obviously by means of the material object itself but also by recommendation, description, and conversation about a work's substance and implications.

Mary White had also been reading the British evangelical Hannah More. "In reading H More's works, I came across the chapter on sensibility and like it greatly," she confided to

³¹Robert Philip published a host of widely read guides, including: *Christian Experience: Guide to the Perplexed*; *Communion with God: Guide to the Devotional*; *Eternity Realized: Guide to the Thoughtful*; *On Pleasing God: Guide to the Conscientious*; and *The God of Glory: Guide to the Doubting*.

Smith on 23 June 1834. White's approval is not surprising, for More championed the same causes she and Smith did. Urging schooling (and, in the process, conversion) for the poor, More opened Sunday schools and wrote tracts, which, beginning in the late eighteenth century, were widely distributed on both sides of the Atlantic. More's emphasis on moral reform through education also had a gendered dimension. Herself a learned woman, she insisted that women in the middling and elite classes should be granted more advanced education. That education, designed to prepare them to participate in organized benevolence, should refine the recipient's sensibility, or "affections," a quality eighteenth-century men and women on both sides of the Atlantic had been expected to cultivate as a complement to "reason." Before the end of the century in Great Britain, however, sensibility had been detached from reason and associated with excessive emotion, a fault to which women were thought to be particularly vulnerable. White took seriously More's admonition about sensibility's supposedly solipsistic tendencies: "It is alas too true! I felt, precious love, on perusing it that much was applicable to myself, and I hope it may prove profitable *literature*." Nonetheless, unlike the British, Americans of middling and elite status were not dismissing the affections but recalibrating them. American commentators argued that those infected with a "false" sensibility were emotionally self-indulgent, but "true" sensibility, which was grounded as much in rational discernment as in the emotions, fortified the individual's moral strength and prepared him or her to take action in the world. In making More "profitable," in learning from her "*literature*," White strove to become a woman of true sensibility.³²

Mary White's perspective was also shaped by her denomination's gender prescriptions. Beginning in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, New England's Baptists moved from

³²On sensibility, see Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1986); G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Adela Pinch, "Sensibility," in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Nicholas Roe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 49–61.

relative egalitarianism to a more hierarchical model of gender relations in which women were invited voluntarily to subordinate themselves to male authority. In terms of certain marital conventions, White practiced the deference Smith would have expected. Writing on 10 February 1834, she signed her letter “Truly thine, *Mary*” and, calling him by his middle name, added “it is, my dearest friend, with trembling delicacy that I venture to ask your permission of more indulgence—of addressing you by the endeared appellation of ‘*Francis*.’ If you think me *hasty, pardon, chide, and deny, won’t you?*” And yet, in the context of the evangelicals’ “righteous empire,” White had the opportunity to become Smith’s equal in a marriage devoted to religious uplift and organized benevolence. Mary White took that opportunity. Letters written during their courtship anticipate the evangelical union to which the partners would commit themselves.³³

In telling Smith about a female reform society in which she was involved in Haverhill, White explained that members began the meetings with prayer and then read aloud for the rest of the hour, an agenda that replicated long-standing devotional practices on both sides of the Atlantic. The older members had decided to restrict themselves to “missionary subjects,” which saturated evangelical print and served as a focus for voluntary societies, so that they might impress upon younger members “the importance of all missionary exertions and lead them to feel deeply,” as she told him on 10 January. Five days later, on 15 January, Smith heartily acknowledged “the necessity of doing much for an object so sacred, so momentous,” and he asked White if she might “favor [him] with some thought on Female Prayer Meetings? They languish at Waterville.” Yes, she could do that. White had attended female prayer meetings in several churches and thought them “one of the means which our Father employs to build up his church on earth.” She suggested that the meetings begin with a chapter from the Bible read aloud and then move to prayer intermingled with singing.

³³See Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 113–79.

The subject of missions at home and abroad appeared with increasing regularity in the couple's correspondence. Smith had been reading the *Missionary Herald*, the magazine sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The "missy cause is increasingly dear to me," he declared. White returned his enthusiasm. "I am pleased," she told him, "to hear of an increasing interest felt among your church in the missionary cause. I hope many may be trained there for future usefulness in the distant vineyard of our God."³⁴

One month after he arrived in Waterville, Smith took stock of his future. Writing to his "Dearest Mary" on 13 February 1834, he weighed his accomplishments, laced them with aspirations, and laid both before her. He described his ordination and the examination that had preceded it, both of which had taken place earlier that month. Although he had expected "a pretty thorough racking on the machines of the inquisition," all had gone well and the examiners "had been *abundantly* satisfied." He had already taken on a demanding schedule—writing two sermons a week for his congregation, which numbers "45 or so families & thus far I have called on but just 30," and teaching Greek and German at Waterville College. The responsibilities he enumerated told only half the tale. Smith was equally committed to the evangelical press. "When I began to write for the press," he recalled, "I imagined 2 or 3 articles wd be all I shd ever be able to fabricate; & accordingly, after the first, I stopped for a year." He had stunningly underestimated his capabilities: "since that time, I think a moderate calculation wd Set all my printed articles of every kind at 150."

By his reckoning, Smith was ready to marry and establish a family. White and her parents agreed. In the months between his ordination and their marriage in September of that year, Smith and White prepared themselves for their forthcoming

³⁴On the role evangelical women played in voluntary associations, see Mary Ryan, *The Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); and Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

life together. Writing to “My very dear friend” on 17 February, White mentioned that she had been reading “Malcolm on Marriage.” Written by Baptist minister and missionary Howard Malcolm, *The Christian’s Rule of Marriage* was “according to my judgment very good, very fair.” White closed another letter (10 January) with a reference to Adoniram Judson, the missionary who had traveled to India with Samuel and Harriet Newell. She hoped to send Smith a copy of the letter Judson had written to his wife in anticipation of their marriage. Ann Hasseltine Judson, the first of Judson’s three wives, displayed an initiative that illustrated the agency evangelical women might exercise. Focusing on the “poor, ignorant females,” as she labeled them, Hasseltine Judson established and taught in a series of female schools, solicited monies for Bibles and tracts, and took on translation projects in Burmese and Siamese. (She also singlehandedly rescued Judson after he was imprisoned and sentenced to death by the Burmese government.)³⁵

Less than two months before their wedding, White wrote Smith about George Dana Boardman, a missionary who worked with Judson. On 7 July she asked, “Do you not think, my love, that Boardman’s *Memoirs* is *uncommonly* interesting?” Smith might have predicted her reaction. The son of a Baptist minister, Boardman had been schooled at academies in North Yarmouth and Farmington, Maine, before completing his education at Waterville College and Andover Theological Seminary. Like Martha Laurens Ramsay’s *Memoirs*, which had been edited by her husband, Boardman’s volume, which Baptist minister Alonzo King had assembled, incorporates two narratives, one penned by King and the other drawn from letters written by both Boardmans, husband and wife. King’s Sarah Hall Boardman is the properly subordinate wife. As he tells readers, Henry Dana Boardman had been attracted not by Hall’s “personal charms” but instead by “her intrinsic excellence, heightened by her modest, unobtrusive spirit.” White, neglecting to mention King’s representation of the missionary’s

³⁵Hasseltine Judson, quoted in Brumberg, *Mission for Life*, p. 83; for more on the Judsons, see pp. 79–106.

wife, informed Smith that she found the *Memoir* “most enchanting” because of the “very delightful . . . intercourse of Mr. Boardman and his wife. The manner in which he speaks of her, the respect he evidently cherishes towards her—and the mutual affection that seemed to exist between them.”³⁶

There is considerable evidence that White’s perspective on the Boardmans’ marriage was more experientially accurate than King’s. Testimony to their mutual devotion permeates the *Memoir*’s 320 pages. Writing to Sarah’s parents shortly after the newlyweds arrived in Burma, George intoned rhetorically, “Could a man, in addition [to his vocation], have one confidential friend, who sympathized in all his joys and sorrows, and with whom he could enjoy all the endearments of social and conjugal life, he might be happy indeed.” Boardman had found such a mate—“Such a friend, such a wife I have, in my beloved Sarah.” Six years later, as he struggled with the tuberculosis that would take his life, Boardman celebrated his “beloved wife, whose untiring assiduity has mitigated many of my pains, and who is ever prompt to render all the services that the purest affection can dictate, or the greatest sufferings require.” Sarah Boardman was not only a dutiful but a devoted wife. “You,” she addressed her parents, “may have some faint idea of [my grief], when you recollect what he was to me, how tenderly I loved him.” Committed not only to an admirable man but to a cause, Sarah Hall Boardman remarried three years after the death of her husband, becoming the wife of the recently widowed Adoniram Judson.³⁷

Like Harriet Newell, Ann Hasseltine Judson and Sarah Hall Boardman offered women such as Mary White expansive models for evangelical marital relationships. Women who actually served as missionaries with their husbands, Judson and Boardman illustrated how women in marriages dedicated to God might negotiate and exercise power. In taking them as exemplars, women like White could map a dynamic in which

³⁶*Memoir of George Dana Boardman, Late Missionary to Burmah*, comp. Alonzo King (Boston: Lincoln, Edmands & Co., 1834), p. 81.

³⁷*Memoir of George Dana Boardman*, pp. 93, 294, 308.

women engaged in the spread of Protestantism. White and Smith might not become missionaries themselves, but she could play an equally important role as his partner in a ministry redoubled by her presence in it. That, to be sure, was Smith's intent as well. In a final letter to White, written the afternoon before their wedding on 16 September 1834, he asked her to join him in a partnership. "We shall be laborers together in God's vineyard," he declared. Once married, their "ministry [would be] the great absorbing topic to which we must make everything bow."

In this union of equal, and equally committed, evangelicals, White staked out a social space between those who demanded rights for women, including suffrage, and those who insisted that women be content to restrict their activities to their immediate households. Like women's rights activists, White crossed the socially prescribed boundary between the home and the world beyond. With a confidence grounded in her evangelical faith, she plunged into organized benevolence. But she did so under the sign of women's obligations, not women's rights. Equally important, the organized benevolence in which she participated was dominated by men. Men had societies; women filled the ranks of auxiliaries. Men edited the print that flowed from the evangelical press; women read these publications and only occasionally contributed to them. White's engagement with the world did challenge a gender hierarchy that limited women to the home; simultaneously, however, the very structures of Bible, tract, and missionary societies required that she practice the deference she eschewed in her marriage.³⁸

In the cultural labor of making meaning, Samuel Francis Smith and Mary White, Sarah Smith, and Susan Eleanor Smith Parker treated reading and writing as mutually constitutive enterprises that were always shaping and reshaping one another.

³⁸Smith went on to a distinguished career as the minister of the First Baptist Church in Newton, Massachusetts, where he presided for the next three decades. Their setting changed; the substance of the couple's life did not. In the ensuing decades, Smith served as editor of the *Christian Review* along with other publications of the Boston-based Baptist Missionary Union. He published the popular Baptist hymnal, *The Psalmist*, and wrote more than 150 other hymns. Smith is remembered today as the author of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," one of those hymns.

They journeyed across centuries, choosing readings from seventeenth-century steady sellers as well as contemporary sermons. They circulated their writing in epistolary, scribal, and print forms. In this “pen and ink communion,” they opened to each other their personalities and predilections in the reading each chose and in their exchanges about those choices. Deeply engaged evangelicals, they grounded their lives in the Bible and in the widely circulated devotional books they read in the same intensive fashion as their Puritan counterparts. In looking to women as well as men for models and in finding inspiration in tales of sin, repentance, and conversion, we observe Smith and White preparing themselves to take their convictions into the world. We chart Smith’s career as a prolific contributor to the evangelical press and White’s as a leader of female voluntary associations. Both brought their practices to bear on evangelical Protestantism’s signal project—national conversion and global millennium. As we watch them embark on their respective careers as moral reformers, we glimpse the cultural being embedded in the social. We observe how their reading and writing were institutionalized in church services, female prayer meetings, Sabbath schools, female missionary societies, colleges, and moral reform associations, all of which advanced a powerful evangelicalism that continues to shape our world today.

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