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The barren soul: a study of Ellen Glasgow's religious revolt

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THE BARREN SOUL

A STUDY OF ELLEN GLASGOW'S RELIGIOUS REVOLT

BY

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PREFACE

He stared in amazement. "You're writing on Ellen Glasgow, on her religious beliefs! Did she have any?"

The time, the speaker, and the words changed but never the question. This paper is my answer. It is the study of five rather different aspects of a religious philosophy.

All of Miss Glasgow's writings were examined. However, since all the fictional writings could not be properly studied in a paper of this size, examples were taken mainly from seven novels selected as representative. These include the following: the first two published novels, The Descendant and Phases of an Inferior Planet; three of the middle novels, The Miller of Old Church, Virginia, and Barren Ground; and the last two novels, Vein of Iron and In This Our Life.¹

All references are to first editions.

¹ See Appendix I.
I

INTRODUCTION

The South was changing. The Civil War had ended. The Southerner had lost a battle of politics, but he was not defeated. He remembered the past and taught the children the exploits of the Army of Northern Virginia and of General Lee and his struggling University. He also was working for the future. Funds for new schools came from the North and with it a new invasion in the form of teachers and missionaries. With the modernization of farming and the expansion of the railroad, many left the family acres to seek an easier life in the cities. Negroes joined with immigrants to form slums. Country life was often ridiculed.

The center of life was a religious philosophy. Churches grew, and new denominations were formed. These became social centers. Ministers were often leaders in community politics and considered authorities on most affairs. Mission activities were popular, and the Salvation Army was founded. Sam Jones and Dwight L. Moody attracted large crowds in revival campaigns. The Bible was considered the ultimate authority on most subjects. The Klu Klux Klan gained church patronage in many areas.
In the world outside the churches there was a search for truth. The works of Charles Darwin slowly became popular. The Origin of Species was discussed by scholars, and students were exposed to the theory of evolution. In literature the pursuit of truth led to a pursuit of meaning. Darwinian theories were evident. Man was often portrayed as a mere step in the evolutionary process and not as a Divine creation. The effects were varied. Stephen Crane pictured a human as unimportant and isolated in a vast, empty universe; Mark Twain became a pessimist; Henry James, with an eye for diagnosis, wrote of man as a psychological case study. Central characters slowly changed. From the heroic "Barbara Frietchie" of Whittier, the poet turned to the dissolute "Minniver Cheevy" of Robinson. Tom Sawyer was replaced by Sister Carrie. The revolts against the past were labeled realism, naturalism, socialism, and communism. The philosophies of the world became influences in the South.

This world and this South became the setting for the early life of one rebel, Ellen Glasgow. She was born in 1873\(^1\) to a family seeped in tradition, especially religious tradition. Her inheritance from her father was the blood of stalwart pioneers who in the seventeenth century had fled

\(^1\) There is a discrepancy in the dating of Ellen Glasgow's birth. April 22, 1873, was the choice for passports though April 21, 1874, was often given as correct. See The Woman Within (New York, 1954), pp. 5, 6.
from Scotland to northern Ireland. Still seeking religious freedom in the eighteenth century, the Presbyterian Glasgow family sailed to America to establish communities in the James Valley and between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains. Francis Glasgow, the novelist's father, having both the zeal of the Presbyterians and the fury of a Southerner, tried early to enlist in the Confederate Army. He was recruited to help at the Tredegar Iron Works, the main munitions plant for the South. Mr. Glasgow became managing director of the plant after the war, but his supreme interest was his church work. As an elder in the Second Presbyterian Church he found little time for his other interests, the Democratic Party and prison reforms.

Mr. Glasgow was a stern father but a conscientious provider. He was described by his daughter as having "never committed a pleasure." He accepted the Biblical teachings literally and could be more emotionally involved with the valor and sufferings of the Moabites, Amalekites, and Philistines than that of Cary, Walter, or Rebe, his own children. Seemingly his views of life, his reactions to problems, and even his family ties were held firmly within the bounds of Presbyterian doctrine. Everything from poverty to death was

2 The Woman Within, p. 15.
stoically accepted as not only within the providence of God but directly ordered by that Power.

Miss Glasgow's inheritance from her mother was of a different character. Here was represented the calm, party-loving society of the planter class of the Tidewater. Spending more time in hunts, political discussions, and estate overseeing, this group took time to enjoy the arts and foreign travel. Most were Episcopalians. To them religion was not an entire way of life though it was an important segment. Doctrines were not a matter of strict adherence, and convenience and even pleasures were often placed above ideology. Skeptics and agnostics were accepted within the church membership. Mrs. Glasgow brought these more liberal ideas of religion into her marriage. She wept over cruelty to dogs but not over Old Testament feats. She shared her food or clothes more often than her beliefs. She was remembered by her daughter as always in the position of forgiving and sharing. The mother's lingering mental illness seemed only to strengthen the children's affection.

The ten children of the Glasgow family were trained in the Presbyterian tradition which included frequent Bible reading, prayers, church services, and missionary activities. Aunt Rebecca of the Glasgow family came often to delight the children with the Scott novels and to entrench into their
minds the Westminister Creed and the catechisms of the church. However, as adults only Emily, the oldest daughter, retained the Presbyterian affiliation. Arthur, the oldest son, lived in London and was not noted to be connected with any religious group. Frank, slightly older than Ellen, passively attended church and obeyed his father's wishes until an early suicide. Cary, Ellen's favorite older sister, adopted her scholarly husband's more liberal views. Rebe, the youngest daughter, married and left the family circle.

Ellen Glasgow's early desire was to imitate her mother. Though Mr. Glasgow was kind, was never purposively cruel, was a hard worker to supply family needs and a nurse to the children in illness, he did not win the affection of many family members. His daughter began early to resist his teachings and soon proved her will equal to that of her ancestors. The entire family was expected to attend church services, but Ellen refused. Through complaints of ill health and dogged insistence, she thereafter remained at home.

A more serious family conflict arose over the choice of reading material. The Glasgow home had a creditable library selected in keeping with the dominant theological views. Soon, with an inquiring mind and a cooperative brother-in-law, Miss Glasgow began to delve into philosophy, economy,
and science. She became enamored with the thoughts of Marcus Aurelius and the theories of Charles Darwin. Orders were issued to stop such reading, but by clandestineness the flow of books was increased. This secrecy, however, helped produce more of an enveloping sense of isolation, and the withdrawal from family affairs became more complete as congenial companionship was found in print.

As another means of escape and perhaps rebellion, Miss Glasgow began her long experiment with words. From short hymns and tales of nature there was progression to what was viewed as the pinnacle of happiness, a published book. The nightly prayer became "'O God, let me write books!'" In 1897, The Descendant was published anonymously. A rebel was recognized by the world. The work, rigorously condemned by religious groups, caused Mr. Glasgow to be ashamed to sit in the family pew at church when the authorship was announced.

The rebellion was not limited to family traditions and teachings. It covered many areas with the revolt centered around two related themes. In The Descendant a boy left a desolate farm with its one plowed field. He looked for a land of productivity. He found city slums. This was Miss

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3 The Woman Within, p. 36.
4 The Descendant, (New York, 1897).
Glasgow's theme of the soil. The boy also left a people who teased an outcast. In the city he hoped to find friends and a cause for which to fight. He found loneliness and failure. This was Miss Glasgow's theme of the barren soul.

These themes were more clearly revealed in a later work, Barren Ground. In this a young doctor went away to school and then returned to the family estate to teach modern methods of farming. He wanted to reclaim the red earth from waste. In the same story a girl of beauty left a land of pine. She studied agricultural texts and attended lectures. She returned to uproot the pines and plant corn. A third character was the storekeeper who assiduously experimented with new methods and produced clover where broomsedge once waved. This was Miss Glasgow's revolt against barren soil. In each of her novels there were hints of a land going to waste, covered by sumacs, and unproductive.

Miss Glasgow's second theme was related and interwoven in the same novel. The young doctor failed in his attempt to overcome the broomsedge and became an alcoholic. The girl mixed her youth with the fertilizer, and the land became fertile. But, she walked the acres in loneliness. The

5 (Garden City, 1925).
storekeeper in the novel was never understood or rewarded for his years of thoughtfulness except by a stone memorial in a church yard. This was the theme of the barren soul.

Man could reclaim land. He could survey green fields. Could he reclaim happiness? Could he find a life of hope and purpose? Was there somewhere a source of power to overcome loneliness and failure? In this second theme of the barren soul was revealed Miss Glasgow's religious revolt. It was prominent in each of the novels and could be easily detected in the autobiographical writings. In Fadiman's collection of philosophies, she placed orthodox Christianity among ancient mythologies. In a letter to Signe Toksvig she wrote of her early rejection of family Christianity. In The Woman Within, she coupled religion with science as both having failed her. (pp. 167-68)

So, Ellen Glasgow became known as a rebel, especially a religious rebel. She was a "lost rebel," and she was thought

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to be always in revolt. She was thought to be examining the fate of man when he was without the usual props of home, family, and religion. How could her characters hold to religious guidelines without possessing a faith? In the Glasgow writings, religion was "always treated skeptically and ironically, as though the novelist herself saw religion only as a part of an outworn code." Miss Glasgow's beliefs were called "complete unorthodoxy" and her philosophy one of beauty not religion. She was credited with rejecting orthodox Christianity "almost instinctively."

Was Miss Glasgow then in her revolt completely without a religious belief? Was she completely unorthodox, and was Christianity completely rejected? Was religion always treated with irony and skepticism? Howard Mumford Jones thought belief meant that one accepted the idea of a God, that the Divinity had some concern for the world, and that values were in some way attributable to that influence. Did Miss Glasgow reject all of these ideas? Jones listed the

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9 Dorthea Mann, Ellen Glasgow (Garden City, 1927), p. 3.


basic themes of religion as God, man, and the universe. Did Miss Glasgow ignore these themes in her writing?

By examining the life and writings, it becomes obvious that Miss Glasgow did not ignore the Christian religion nor did she completely reject it. She questioned many of its concepts. Some of those concepts she discarded. Some she retained in her own philosophy. Her revolt was not so much against religion as against whatever in life contributed to unproductive, lonely, and impoverished lives. In writing of God, the church, Christian doctrines, nature, and people, she revealed that, though religion could produce sterility, it also at times was not a cause of, but a cure for, a barren soul.

13 Belief and Disbelief in American Literature (Chicago, 1967), pp. 1, 146.
II
ELLEN GLASGOW AND GOD

At the end of the nineteenth century the people of the South accepted the theological teachings concerning God. Randall Stewart points out that in that area, God, and even more the Devil, were very real.¹ To the residents of one city, God lived in Richmond. Skepticism rarely existed, at least not verbally. Terminology of theology or the church structure could differ but not the Deity. Questions which occasionally surfaced were answered by commands such as "believe" or "have faith."

In each of Ellen Glasgow's books, God was a character. In the author's life God was an enigma. Her father believed in a fierce, warring God, a general of armies. This Power directed family relationships, political elections, financial gains, and even death. God knew what man needed, listened to man's prayers, demanded man's worship, and decided man's life.

Miss Glasgow chose to ask questions. As a rebel and dissenter, she found faith, belief, hope, and Scripture to

¹ "The Outlook for Southern Writing: Diagnosis and Progress," The Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXI (Spring 1955), 259.
be not solutions to problems but merely words which were often empty of meaning. The doubts which had been shadows behind the elaborate facade of the Episcopal Church, or the formidable catechisms of the Presbyterian Church, or the magnolia trees and rose gardens of society were exposed. And, after exposure, the questions were explored. In poetry, novels, short stories, autobiographical writings, and life Miss Glasgow revealed her search for truth. She wanted to find a believable God. She questioned the existence of a God. She also questioned his attributes.

Miss Glasgow was taught Christian theology both at church, when she attended, and at home. She learned catechisms and articles. And, as a child, she unquestioningly accepted the teachings. Her father acted as though God were a family member. Church going, hymn sings, and family prayers all reinforced the belief in God. So, Miss Glasgow wrote a hymn:

Drift from this land of mist and snow,
Drift to the land where I long to go,
Leaving behind me the world's sad choices,
Hearing alone the angel's voices,
At the foot of my Father's throne.  

In this, written before the age of eight, family teachings were evident. Life on earth was a preparation for another

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2 The Woman Within, p. 37.
life. While in the world one was confronted with many problems. God ruled in heaven, and there all things would be made right. Miss Glasgow at this period was also a devout believer in prayer. God was constantly being approached to cure sickness, help write books, or prevent animal suffering. God had not been reasonably considered and accepted as true. He had been merely taken for granted. Years later, the novelist in writing to a friend noted that she was a "born skeptic."³ Actually she was a born Presbyterian, for skepticism came during the questioning teenage period.

In the following years came questions of the family God. She saw a large black dog running from a crowd of men and boys. She saw the cruelty in a Christian society. She saw the red face of the sun and knew fear. She saw an old Negro carried off to the almshouse. She saw his protest and tears.⁴ She began to see the world. She questioned a God that would have made, or allowed, it. Her prayers she found were unanswered. By reading she found that the existence of God was a matter of question for some. She began to see the difficulties which a world wrapped in the theology of a God of love could

⁴ See The Woman Within, pp. 1, 9-11.
produce. People were blinded to cruelty and poverty. They dismissed it as part of God's plan and therefore right. It was a world of shams where all of life was seen through a theory.

Miss Glasgow saw the inconsistencies between the theories and life. "I could not trust an Everlasting Mercy, whether stern or mild, which was omnipotent, but permitted pain to exist . . . ." "...I could not worship my father's God..." She could not believe in the God of church hymns, or long prayer uttered in worship, or the barren lives of the people. Christianity then was mentally consigned to a place among mythologies, and a rebel became a skeptic.

At first the rebellion was bitter. It was a revolt against family traditions, a revolt against a people who gave God credit for beauty while failing to see ugliness. It was a revolt against the traditional God of society where loneliness, hunger, and cruelty were dismissed by a theology which denied their existence. God ruled, but the rich gained wealth by exploiting the poor. The concept of God was one which upheld the sham society. Miss Glasgow wished to have reality. The land must be cleared before new crops could be planted. The soil was overrun with broomsedge and pines. It

5 *I Believe*, pp. 94, 96.
was the job for a rebel to remove the shams and thereby have society improve. She would not only face the truth herself; she would show it to others.

To begin she wrote her Declaration of Independence and called it *The Descendant*. Polite society did not mention illegitimacy. Miss Glasgow made her hero the illegitimate child of a poor farm woman and an unknown father. Polite society did not expose the weaknesses of ministers. How could servants of God show poor judgment, cowardice, pride, doubt, or inconsistencies? But, in a few pages, Miss Glasgow exposed a minister's actual personality. Prostitution was accepted but not admitted in society. Miss Glasgow wrote of three admirable prostitutes—a kind woman of the streets who assisted a fainting Michael Akershem, an intelligent painter who gave up society's code to live with a radical, and Mary Magdalen, who was painted to reveal not only sin but holiness. Christian society did not view any individual as ever far from God. Miss Glasgow portrayed a man alone.

The setting for the early chapters of the novel was a hilly section of Virginia. It was an area of ardent religious conviction and was populated by people intent on church and salvation. Into this environment Miss Glasgow projected a boy. She placed him on a hill where the child, having just escaped from a good-natured but lazy farmer and his
choir-singing, slovenly wife, was meditating on the local concept of God. God lived in heaven, sat on a throne, and was above the stars. The stars were only holes cut in heaven's floor to let the light through. God listened to prayers. God would punish the wicked. Nearby was a graveyard where white tombstones gleamed in the periwinkle. The child felt a chill wind which passed through the thin shirt. He was afraid. He crouched in the grass with a sob. It was time for a miracle. It was time for a voice or a call out of the darkness. It was time for a stranger to pass by and love and protect the child. Instead, in a short, one-sentence paragraph, Miss Glasgow wrote, "The night wind pierced his cotton shirt, and he fell to crying softly; but there was no one to hear." To society, God protected the fatherless. Miss Glasgow realized the child was alone, "a tiny human figure in the vast amphitheatre of Nature" with the sky only a "spangled vault above him." (p. 14)

In the next novel, _Phases of an Inferior Planet_, Miss Glasgow became even more explicit in her attack on the God concept. She created an adventurer in the field of theology who emerged as an unbeliever but who nevertheless became a pastor. Society was full of shams believers; why not

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6 _The Descendant_, p. 15.
portray them? Churches had many unbelieving but unexposed members; why not enlighten them of a minister's own lack of faith? Whereas the first novel as an adventure in independence was a very diverse study of society and its mores, the second was a concentrated expose of religious shams. Anthony Algarcife was destined for the ministry but was endowed with an inquiring mind. In listing his characteristics he called himself an atheist. He studied science, philosophies, and older cultures. After years of inquiring, poverty, and failure, he became a minister not because of a conversion to a God but because of gratitude to a man. In front of his congregation he quoted the Apostles' Creed and the Scripture lessons. In his study he realized his hypocrisy. He could not believe in a God. He saw little evidence of a Deity. He had sworn to a lie and affirmed his faith in a fable. In his life only one thing was real, the lie, and from it there was no escape.

Anthony could not believe in a God. But, neither could he completely dismiss the concept of a ruling Deity. He was gifted, or damned, in seeing both sides. He could see evidence that Christianity must be false, but he also saw evidence that pointed to its truth. He was plagued by what

7 Phases of an Inferior Planet (New York, 1898), p. 49.
he called "the damned eternal opposition" or "the other side." (p. 66) Algarcife could be sure of neither side of the argument. God did not seem to be in evidence. Often the only reminder of a Deity was the painted Christ and his unchanging smile in the church window. Yet, how could one explain the vicissitudes of life? Anthony could only reflect that at times a Power stronger than himself seemed to have "manipulated" his life. (p. 135)

Anthony failed to be an atheist. He became a skeptic or agnostic. So did his creator. In erasing shams, Miss Glasgow had tried also to remove what she considered the cause of the shams. One of those shams, she thought, was the traditional concept of God. She wanted to uproot the old and have a better society. She could never, however, completely destroy the concept of God in her own mind, nor was she always sure she wished to destroy the concept.

In The Descendant she wrote of Mike Akershem as alone in a vast, impersonal universe. In Phases of an Inferior Planet she created Anthony Algarçife who debated the existence of a Divinity. To believe that an omnipotent God ruled was impossible, but it was also "unreasonable to assume that there existed no consciousness superior to ours . . . ." "... My vague religious instinct leaned toward a distant trust in some spirit or divine essence . . . ." "... We
could not fail to perceive the signs, explicit or implicit, of an actual presence . . . ." The author was plagued by the opposition.

Miss Glasgow in writing of her books noted that everything that had occurred in her life became a part of her novels. Her skepticism developed into a dominating philosophy. Just as she revealed Algarcife's religious doubts and questions, so she did for the other major characters.

Like Algarcife, Mike Akershem (The Descendant) tried to dislodge the thoughts of God from his mind only to find the idea inseparable from his nature. Before his departure from the country, he laughed at the beliefs of others. As he left for the city, he left behind even the outward show of religion. When unhappy he was sure no Deity controlled the universe. However, he met Rachel Gavin and his loneliness dissolved. He was happy. In his own mind he acknowledged his readiness to come to God, that was if such a Being existed. (p. 144)

Each of Miss Glasgow's major characters, and many of her minor ones, revealed something of her doubt. Only the

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8 I Believe, p. 96.
9 Ibid., p. 104.
nonthinkers were eternally secure. From General Bolinbroke (The Romance of A Plain Man, 1909) to General Archbald (The Sheltered Life, 1932), Judge Honeywell (The Romantic Comedians, 1926), Virginia Littlepage (They Stooped to Folly, 1929), and even Grandmother Fincastle (Vein of Iron, 1935), the author revealed her questions. She wrote of no atheists, few believers, and many skeptics.

One of the spokesman for her position of skepticism was John Fincastle, a Presbyterian minister who became a philosopher in an attempt to justify the ways of God to man. His mother mourned his falling from truth into doubt. He had rejected the God of Abraham for the God of Spinoza. His mind was constantly involved with God's nature, God's actions, and God's law. After years of study he was visited by a German scholar. The German, after discussing metaphysics with him, regretted that he had no message to give to the people. After all the philosophers, he could only ask, "'What now?'" John Fincastle replied, "'God maybe'."10

In The Descendant, Miss Glasgow had given much the same terminology to a character. Mike Akershem had been an outcast. He had fainted from hunger. A prostitute had held his head and given money. After success he was telling

the story to Rachel who, in quick sympathy, wished that wherever the woman might be, "'May God bless her!'" Miss Glasgow then added the words, "And perhaps God did." (p. 148)

The eternal opposition was not belief or unbelief. It was "perhaps" or "maybe." Neither the orthodox faith in a God nor the complete dismissal of a God by the atheists could be accepted by the novelist. Miss Glasgow, however, could not settle into agnostical complacency. She as a child had believed. As an adult she came to doubt. Also an adult she never gave up the search for answers to her questions. Of her early revolt she wrote, ". . . I needed God more than they [the family] needed Him, and, in my own rebellious way, I was trying to find Him." Near the end of her life she revealed a continued search. "In my death, as in my life, I was still seeking God . . . ."¹¹

Many of Miss Glasgow's characters revealed a search for a Being in which faith could be placed. Dorinda Oakley revealed a loneliness. There was no one in whom she could confide, not even her closest companion, a Negro servant. Her mother believed in a God who never left one, a God who gave strength for duties. With nostalgia Dorinda remembered

¹¹ *The Woman Within*, pp. 93, 290.
the religious conviction of her mother. She had accumulated material wealth, but she recalled with envy her parent's material poverty and spiritual luxury. Louis Rubin described this novel, Barren Ground, as spiritually bare. The novel did not end, however, by merely depicting a spiritual loneliness. It also contained the story of a search for an answer to that barrenness of life.

Oliver Treadwell of Virginia detested hypocrisy. His uncle's churchgoing but moral wanderings caused a violent response in Oliver, the playwright who searched for reality. But, when pleasure and duty vied for attention in his own life, he longed for the courage which a past generation had possessed. They could live by a creed. They believed in a living Power which gave strength. They had confidence in God's punishment and pleasure. Oliver could not live by a creed. He knew no superior Power from which to gain strength. He lived in an enlightened age, but he regretted that "there was nothing for him to fall back upon . . . ."

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13 Virginia (Garden City, 1913), p. 460.
Ralph McBride of *Vein of Iron* was another who realized his loss of strength. He had grown to hate the cruel religious beliefs of his mother. Her God, who demanded sacrifice and strict self-control, he could not accept. Her faith has given her strength to endure while Ralph, without a faith, was bitter. He could give an appearance of happiness only if he did not think. Miss Glasgow seemed to indicate at times that a belief in God would have been helpful.

Cabell wrote that though Miss Glasgow was raised in the Presbyterian manner, her "affection for Jehovah" was "temperate."14 The novelist did reject much of the trappings attached to the God of the Old Testament. She regretted that her father had been enamored with that God instead of Christ and had taught his children accordingly.15 However, in *Vein of Iron* she portrayed one believer in Jehovah with a touch of envy. All of her earlier books had been of the North, the Tidewater area, or the city. Her father had been of the Presbyterian settlers in the mountains. Almost twenty years after his death, perhaps realizing his good points, she chose to commemorate his background. In *Vein*

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15 *The Woman Within*, p. 93.
she wrote of a most unusual character and that character's source of strength, a God which resembled Jehovah.

Grandmother Fincastle was a stoical Presbyterian who endured poverty, heresy, and war. Kneeling for family prayers, hobbling to church, or knitting for missionaries were possible because of her trust in a God that never failed. Her son had renounced the family faith; her daughter-in-law was ill; her granddaughter rebelled against community decisions. Yet, Grandmother meditated aloud, "... The Lord has never failed me. I am in the hands of the Lord."

Miss Glasgow described the old woman's faith and energy and then concluded, "... She had spoken only the truth. The Lord had never failed her. She was in the hands of the Lord." (p. 158)

One critic remarked that in Miss Glasgow's writings God was made "tenderly ironical."16 The God of Grandmother Fincastle was made tenderly admired. When many of life's beliefs were shaken, Grandmother held to her Rock. Others with more modern beliefs were forced to resort to her for help. The author seemed to have examined the world from which she had once wished to help erase thoughts of God only

to find that perhaps the world was better when it believed in God, even the traditional Jehovah. Any belief was better than floating wrecks of nothingness.

Miss Glasgow examined her world and found men were often proclaiming faith in a Deity but finding life unendurable. She thought man had often created his own God in the image of a man. Man's wishes were centralized and named the Deity. Man's little creations were obstructing the vision of a true Deity. God needed to be rediscovered as a being, not a creation. She thought the greatest need for her world was not for a "multitude of machines, but for a new and higher conception of God."\(^{17}\) The traditional image had produced a few stalwarts and many hypocrites. The modern view left man without a center for life. It seemed that hope lay in a better concept of God.

Miss Glasgow portrayed those who believed and were hypocrites. She portrayed a believer who was able to live truthfully. She also wrote of a man who, like his creator, thought a new God could help things. Ralph McBride of Vein of Iron had been to France and had seen a world mad in war. He had endured a marriage without love. In the bitterness of a depression he dismissed the idea that a new president

\(^{17}\) I Believe, p. 109. See also pp. 98, 99.
could help. "'It would take more than a new President, it would take a new god . . .'" (p. 405)

Miss Glasgow suggested that the world find a new God or rediscover the Christian God. For her own philosophy she modified the Christian concept and renamed the resulting Divinity the "Good."18 This was the "Being beyond and above consciousness" of The Woman Within. (p. 290) The Biblical God she questioned. The world without a God she detested. The "Good" became her solution.

Just as the existence of a God was questioned, so were the traditional attributes of God. The church had decided that God was omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. The creeds declared God to be just, merciful, and good. God rewarded the righteous and punished the wicked. God listened and answered prayer. From his creation to his salvation, all was well-planned and executed in wisdom.

Miss Glasgow did not believe in an all-powerful God that would allow pain. Why did God neglect animals? Why were prayers unanswered? She saw that often the good were not rewarded. Miss Glasgow found that despite religious teachings all things were not as they should have been. How could an omnipotent God rule when political parties in power

18 See Ibid., p. 96.
were always ready to kill opponents? How could God rule when one section of town failed to see the unpainted frame houses huddled near the River or the jail? Did God rule and cause wars? Or, did people insist on wars and God not interfere? Or, did God not possess power to enforce his will? Miss Glasgow believed in a superior Power, but she believed that Power was limited.

In many of her novels, Miss Glasgow placed in the minds of her characters the idea of a limited God. One of those questions she ironically placed in the meditation of a pastor. Michaek Akershem of The Descendant was the possessor of a brilliant mind. He knew more than the schoolteacher and had started studying with the minister. He could unravel philosophies, economic theories, and even produce admirable sermons. But, the boy disbelieved the minister's books. The minister felt an obligation to convert this stray sheep of his pasture. Soon, however, the minister admitted defeat. He would leave the task to omnipotent hands. Could even God save Michael? Miss Glasgow made it an "if" clause in the mind of the minister, the Lord could save him "if... He could unravel the meshes of Satan." (p. 24) By a mere clause the novelist had insinuated a problem in traditional theology: how powerful is God.
Miss Glasgow's most bitter questions of God's power were placed in *The Miller of Old Church*. In 1911, Cary, the author's sister, was dying. For years, since the beginning of deafness, Miss Glasgow had depended on Cary as a traveling companion and contact with the world. She had formerly questioned why of her own deafness. Now she questioned why of her sister's illness. It was a question insinuating revolt.

In *The Miller of Old Church* Miss Glasgow created a conversation between two old men, both devout churchgoers and respected community leaders. Adam Doolittle and Reuben Merryweather sat on a bench in front of the overseer's house. Reuben liked to see the grass in the orchard. He was grateful to God for arranging the green between the trees. Adam, however, was not thankful. In fact, he thought the grass was overrunning things and a waste of space and effort. Why had God bothered with grass when he could have put grain there? It would not have been much more trouble, and it would have been more satisfactory to the farmer. Reuben refused to question the way of God and was certain God knew best. Adam, however, was not sure God knew or did best. He admitted having once held to that doctrine before investigation. People, he continued, jumped to conclusions and the
greatest jump was that "'things are all as they ought to be'." 19

Adam lamented that the world was conducted on such a wasteful scale. No farmer would dare imitate the policy. Twenty seeds rotted before sprouting, but one seed made it up. Adam could not understand why God was praised for the one successful seed. What about the twenty failures? Adam was also disgusted with the theory that all nature was happy and free. Why were ministers and other people always talking as if every animal didn't have to keep a watchful eye out for an unfriendly preying beast or a man with a gun? (pp. 223-25)

Through the minds and conversation of two old men Miss Glasgow was asking the question that a religious society had refused to ask. An omnipotent God existed, but there were twenty seeds that rotted and one that survived; an omnipotent God existed, but grass grew in the orchard instead of grain; an omnipotent God existed, but animals were in constant danger. How could one answer those questions? The God that existed, Miss Glasgow was sure, was not always in control.

19 The Miller of Old Church (Garden City, 1911), p. 223.
Another problem in Christian theology was that of justice. God was a being of love. He rewarded the good and punished the wicked. Or did he? Miss Glasgow is examining the world found that theory untenable. "Certainly I could not believe that goodness was rewarded either in present world or in some problematical Heaven."\(^{20}\) She examined her own life and found little justice. Her mother, once a bright, happy spirit, had suffered years of unexplainable depression. Her brother, recognized for his kindness, had found no release except suicide. Her sister Cary died. Perhaps the most obvious lack of justice was in her own deafness, "that I, who was winged for flying, should be wounded and caged!"\(^{21}\) The author looked at her world and asked if there were a God. She looked again at the world and asked if there were Divine justice.

Miss Glasgow had one of her characters inquire concerning the justice of God. Mrs. Ryder of *Phases of an Inferior Planet* was a kindly, wealthy aristocrat. Her husband was a wanderer after female beauty outside his own household. The woman possessed only one thing which to her was important, a child. Suddenly in the night the child

\(^{20}\) *I Believe*, p. 97.

\(^{21}\) *The Woman Within*, p. 139.
died. When the minister arrived, Mrs. Ryder asked of immortality. She requested of Algarcife, "Tell me that God is just!" (p. 290) Mrs. Ryder thought her loss was cruelty. She was questioning an attribute of God, and so was Miss Glasgow.

The double standard of justice was another area of attack. Cabell described his friend's books as "The Tragedy of Everywomen, as it was lately Enacted in the Commonwealth of Virginia." A common theme in the books was the price women paid for being partners in error.

The Descendant gave the story of justice as it was extended to women. Michael's mother died at his birth. She was an outcast. His father was never known and could have been any member of the community, even a respected one. Rachel Gavin, because of the love which she shared with Michael, lost her skill in painting. From pictures for art galleries she turned to fashion design. Her heart was not in her work. Meanwhile, Michael continued to lead in journalism and social reform. It was the old story of a woman suffering while the man succeeded. Rachel could only protest that life with its system of values was not fair. (p. 116)

22 Let Me Lie, p. 243.
Other women also suffered under the double standard of justice that was enacted either by God or man. Dorinda of Barren Ground suffered for her sin, but Jason seemed to escape. Ada Fincastle of Vein of Iron received the condemnation for her days with Ralph. The child was her fault. The women who stooped to folly were many—Rachel, Dorinda, Ada, Mrs. Waters (Vein of Iron), Janet Merryweather (The Miller of Old Church), Aunt Agatha, Milly Burden, and Mrs. Dalrymple (They Stooped to Folly). All were victims in the prevailing system of justice while the men who stooped were usually unknown and often unpunished.

The good were rarely rewarded in Miss Glasgow's world. In This Our Life contained a question, "... what has goodness ever done for him?" It was asked concerning Asa, who as a child was forced to give up school and help provide for the family. As a man he had to sacrifice his time to a hypochondriac and his pride to the wealth of his wife's uncle. Asa longer for a life on the farm. There he could be free. He grew old and tired. Even his final years were marred by a bitter wife and her gossip. His goodness went unrewarded in a world where hypocrisy was valued and truth ignored. Miss Glasgow often wrote of such characters who suffered under an unjust administration.

23 (New York, 1941), p. 166.
God was concerned for his people. He answers their prayers and helped them in trouble. This was the teaching of the church, but Miss Glasgow failed to see it evidenced in the world. A Deity "concerned with the intimate hopes and special fate of mankind alone, was, for me at least, then and always incredible." God did not seem to be omnipotent, omniscient, or just, but he did seem often to be indifferent.

Anthony Algarcife in *Phases of an Inferior Planet* voiced Miss Glasgow's belief. Mariana Musin, a musician in love with Anthony, wished to share her happiness. She visited the sick, spent her allowance for the poor, and was kind to the old. Since the people were an insufficinet outlet for her emotions, she turned to God. She became religious and aspired to sainthood. She wished to live a life that conformed to her ideals. Anthony, however, was not impressed by her activities and stopped her devotion with "'All the breath in your body isn't going to affect the decision of Omniscience'." (p. 80)

As an introduction to *In This Our Life*, her last book, Miss Glasgow quoted a poem which questioned the existence of God and the validity of his attributes.

24 *I Believe*, p. 96.
'Your creeds are dead, your rites are dead,  
Your social order too!  
Where tarries he, the Power who said:  
See, I make all things new?'25  

Miss Glasgow had looked at her world and found life to be barren. She had looked at her family and found that often religion was a cover for sterility. What was left for man? The Biblical God had promised to change such things as lives and meanings. Why, seeing the death of meaning, did this Power tarry? Was it that God was not concerned?  

Miss Glasgow further investigated the hopelessness of the situation in the same book. Peter had eloped with his sister-in-law. Craig had tried to drop out of life by drinking. Roy refused to think. Then, Peter committed suicide. In the family conclave when attempting to decide their action, Roy lamented that no help was available and nothing one could do would help. Uncle William, an ardent churchgoer then suggested, "'There's God!'" Roy's answer, in keeping with the philosophy of those present, was "'But it doesn't seem to matter, does it?'" (p. 275) God many times seemed to be strangely absent from his world.

25 Matthew Arnold, "Oberman Once More" quoted as a preface to In This Our Life. The last line is italicized by both authors. See the Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold, eds. C.B. Tinker and H.F. Lowry. (London, 1961), p. 320.
Miss Glasgow had named the Divinity in which she believed the "Good." This Good differed from the traditional God in many ways, but in some areas there was conformity. The Good was related to truth though both were incomplete. The Good deserved worship and admiration, not because it was omnipotent, but because it had "endured and survived in the struggle with evil." The Good was always present. It could perhaps be called everlasting or even omnipresent. The world was in a flux. Evil was evident. The Good was also evident. Never could the world or life be completely bad. The grass could spread in the orchard, but the apple trees survived. Many seeds rotted, but some still came up. There was sickness but also health. There was death and life. One could lose love, but friends and work remained. The Good, though, never became completely victorious and was never defeated.

Miss Glasgow did not write of the Good in her novels though she created characters that seemed to share some of her beliefs as Tucker (The Deliverance, 1904), Daniel Ordway (The Ancient Law, 1908), and Adams (The Wheel of Life, 1906). John Fincastle of Vein of Iron called his Deity the "Alone." (p. 111) He did not consider the Power omnipotent though he continued

26 I Believe, p. 98.
his worship. He worked not to make man acceptable to that God but to make that God understandable to man. The "Alone" and the "Good" therefore seemed somewhat similar.

Miss Glasgow was unorthodox in her religious beliefs but not completely so. She was not an atheist though she modified the Christian concept of God. She thought a new God or a clearer vision of the traditional God might help. She could not believe in a God that was omnipotent or just, but she did believe in a Good that endured. At times Miss Glasgow found the religious belief in a God to be contributing to the drabness of life by a system of shams. At other times she found faith in a Deity necessary for restoring fertility to a life.
During Miss Glasgow's childhood Southern churches were recouping war losses. Buildings were restored; ministers laid aside their arms; members were increased; projects became numerous; and new denominations were formed. Missionary societies were founded, and David Livingstone was a hero.

Miss Glasgow was familiar with churches and their teachings. She thought her own beliefs to be the result of the conflict between her father's Presbyterianism and her mother's Episcopalian beliefs. She noted that few groups appealed to her. "Few religious figures, and fewer religious creeds, appealed to my individual blend of inherited and acquired characteristics."¹ As a child she had been asked her opinion of the morning service. She replied, "'Well, father, he wouldn't let me answer back'."² In her life and writings she chose to answer back. Sometimes

¹ I Believe, p. 99. See also p. 94.
² This incident was related by Sara Haardt, op. cit., p. 19.
there were frontal attacks on hypocrisy or social climbing. She questioned the denominational differences of opinion. She questioned the group which sent missionaries and money to foreign countries while people near the church were hungry. She questioned the divine right of ministers and often portrayed the saints of men to be very fallible.

DENOMINATIONS

Almost every community had several types of churches. Often the competition was fierce. Ministers were regarded as generals of armies fighting not against the forces of evil but against the inroads made by a rival denomination. Often the church members would be unable to agree on policy, and divisions, bitter enemies, and new denominations resulted. Miss Glasgow was very familiar with the foibles of churches, but she did not instinctively reject religious groups. She was most closely connected with the Presbyterian and Episcopalians though she included mention of Catholics, Methodists, and Baptists. In each she saw both faults and traits of value.

The Presbyterian Church was a result of the Puritan movement in Scotland and England. It was well represented in the influx of settlers to America with members usually attracted from the educated middle class. In 1861, the
country's division resulted in the Southern members breaking with the Presbyterian Church to form the Presbyterian Church in the United States. In one of the rebelling churches was Mr. Glasgow. For thirty years he was a ruling elder. Hubert Blair Rouse thought Miss Glasgow may have hated her father and therefore had a strong antipathy to his church group. Miss Glasgow did not agree with her father's church creed and regarded herself as being the "only dissenter" from Presbyterianism in the family. She later described herself as simply not "sympathetic" with the Presbyterian Church.

Miss Glasgow often depicted the negative side of Presbyterianism. The first church of which she wrote in *The Descendant* was unlabeled but easily identifiable by its creed and catechism. It was a church which condemned the product of sin but never examined the unknown producer of that sin. Salvation was a stirring issue, but bad blood was a threat. The members like to watch Mike Akershem for the evidences of his heritage. They liked to hold skirmishes but retain their identity as being uncontaminated. Their church must save the lost but keep those converts at a

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4 *The Woman Within*, p. 59.

distance. Christ must not expect them to associated with those of low birth.

Miss Glasgow gave an entire gallery of Presbyterians and exposed their hypocrisy. Cyrus Treadwell of Virginia, a loyal member of the Dinwiddie Presbyterian Church, would never miss a Sunday morning sermon though in the week he found time to father a mulatto child. He would contribute to the Sunday School picnic but not to his son's bail. Mrs. Revercomb of The Miller of Old Church was a devout Presbyterian in an Episcopal community. Her delight was in quoting the first chapter of Chronicles backwards to the discomfiture of the youthful minister. Her religion embraced only creeds not people. She was often hard and cruel. She wished to control all lives and allow no room for the ways of nature. Mrs. Burden of They Stooped to Folly and Mrs. McBride of Vein of Iron were possessors of sister characteristics.

At times the satire was witty. A horse was described as having the "doeful face of a Presbyterian gone wrong." In Vein of Iron there was laughter over whether an Irishman made a bad Presbyterian or a Presbyterian a bad Irishman.

(p. 220)

6 Barren Ground, p. 94.
Miss Glasgow disliked hypocrisy. She disliked placing the value of creeds over that of human lives. She disliked man's neglect of human needs for those he called spiritual qualities. However, in Presbyterianism Miss Glasgow also saw admirable traits. She pictured her father as hard and inattentive to family emotional needs. She, however, admitted his fortitude. He never gave up. In family or business affairs he continued in what he saw as his duty. Miss Glasgow came to admire—and desire—that trait. She realized that she often gave up to despair. When her sister died, when deafness increased, when a lover died, she displayed her lack of his fortitude. In *The Woman Within* she wrote of an attempted escape by suicide. (p. 238)

In her display of Presbyterianism Miss Glasgow included some people which possessed the characteristics which she admired. Dorinda Oakley of Barren Ground was the product of the Presbyterian tradition. Years before the story opened, a missionary had returned and purchased a large farm. Since in the area Methodism was dying, he built a Presbyterian Church. Soon the group was flourishing, but the family did not thrive in that climate. The daughter married a man of the "poor-white" class. She soon recovered from her emotion but in facing the results was afflicted with a religious mania. Family prayers, Bible reading, and church
services became her emotional outlet. She dreamed of converting savages and saving babies from crocodiles. Her thoughts were of the next life, and little kindness was shown in the earthly one. In the developing plot, Dorinda disbelieved the creed but could not dislodge its force from her life. Her mother believed and taught "once a Presbyterian, always a Presbyterian." (p. 411) Dorinda found she had inherited the Presbyterian fortitude.

Miss Glasgow's mural of Presbyterianism was given in Vein of Iron. From John Fincastle, who gave up his church to study the ways of God, to Mr. Black, the minister in Tronside, all retained the Presbyterian tradition. The book was made appealing by Grandmother Fincastle, a staunch member and leader in the local church. She had a long history of such service. She nursed the sick, helped reconcile the community to her son's defection from the orthodox, and never failed to participate in the mission society. She believed in sin and punishment. She believed in war and sacrifice. She saw church errors as in Mr. Rowan, an elder who knew neither God, truth, nor people. Grandmother could be hard, but she could endure. In times of need she could be the central figure. From her Grandmother, Ada inherited fortitude. She shared not the peace but the endurance of the Presbyterians.
With the Presbyterian Church representing her father, Miss Glasgow turned more to the Episcopal Church of her mother. This was the church of the aristocracy. It represented the more liberal theology and was the church of Virginia history and traditions. It had usually managed to avoid divisions over slavery and theology. The church was largely unaffected by the revival campaigns of the traveling evangelists. Many social activities condemned by other groups were allowed.

Across the street from the Glasgow home was the Grace Episcopal Church pastored by a Confederate veteran. With the influx of industry the church moved to a more residential area. Miss Glasgow's contact with the Episcopalians, however, was not ended. One writer described Miss Glasgow as having been influenced by Anglicanism.7 The novelist was influenced by the traditional beliefs which resulted in the Episcopal Church, but the group did not win her complete respect. She admired a church which could put people and their needs above adherence to a creed. Often she seemed to favor the group above others as her own funeral was conducted by two Episcopal ministers.8 However,


in the Episcopal Church she also saw hypocrisy, class consciousness, and a fear of thinking as a dangerous practice.

Uncle William Fitzroy was revealed as an Episcopal with a hypocritical bend. *In This Our Life* contained the story of this man who each Sunday occupied a pew with his wife. During the week, however, this ardent churchgoer enjoyed the company of several blond mistresses whom he kept in New York. Mariana Musin of *Phases of an Inferior Planet* was portrayed as a social-climbing Episcopalian. She was the product of a Catholic and Presbyterian marriage. When each parent attempted to convert her, she decided instead to become an Episcopalian. After all, the leaders of the community were members of that church. In *Vein of Iron* Miss Glasgow sarcastically noted the levels of acceptable behavior. Prize fighting was condemned, but fox hunting was allowed. (p. 374)

Miss Glasgow revealed many of her negative attitudes in *The Miller of Old Church*. Mr. Mullen, the young leader of the rural church, despised the lack of ritual in other groups. He conducted a service with ceremony. His rhetoric was the subject for community discussions. But, it was also a church where reality was ignored. The stupid woman who loved the minister but was married to the miller was praised. The self-sacrificing attitude of Mrs. Gay was used as an example though she had actually selfishly ruined
many lives. It was a church by which a man could be buried complete with elaborate stone while one of the women he discarded was not allowed in the churchyard. The one thinker in the church, Old Adam, thought not to settle any problem but merely to win in arguments with the minister. Miss Glasgow explained in the preface that the Episcopal Church was lenient in most areas but would not tolerate the "dangerous practice of thinking."³

Virginia revealed the weakness of the Episcopal tradition which taught adherence not thought. She was unable to cope with a changing world. She was trained in the manner of a lady. She could never forget the code of beautiful behavior. She could not think or question so she lost in the world where people were forced to do both.

In the same novel, Virginia, a positive trait of Episcopalianism was given. Mr. Pendleton was involved in helping everyone from the Negroes to a returning soldier. He did not like to face reality, but he could not avoid helping the weak. In the end, his life was given in protecting the wronged innocent. Miss Glasgow had written of the hypocrisy and failures of Episcopalianism, but she also wrote of their admirable traits.

Another minister which resembled Mr. Pendleton was Father Spears of *Phases of an Inferior Planet*. He was a devout believer, a leader in the High Church Movement, a follower of ceremony, and also an instigator of work among the poor. When his church refused to share their pews with the newcomers, the minister divided his time and worked with the outcasts. Through his efforts, Anthony Algarcife became a pastor. Anthony's interests were in the social betterment of the poor. He was a contributor and visitor to the children's ward at the hospital. He made calls to comfort the sick whether rich or poor. He tried to teach cleanliness. In the closing pages of the book, he pushed aside his own sorrow to help in settling a mill strike.

Miss Glasgow admired a religious structure which produced such service.

The Catholic Church was confined mostly to the urban areas of the South. As more immigrants appeared, there slowly developed a greater distribution. Miss Glasgow in studying philosophies investigated the Catholic beliefs. Her circle of close friends included a devout Catholic, Carry Coleman Duke. Miss Glasgow admired the life of St. Francis and made a pilgrimage to Italy. Though the life and teachings of the Saint were valued, she failed to respect his followers, the Franciscan Friars, whom she
observed beating a horse. After this experience, in traveling in Catholic countries she was disturbed by the cruelty to animals.\textsuperscript{10}

Miss Glasgow satirized the conflict between religious groups. This was done in her portrayal of the parents of Mariana in \textit{Phases of an Inferior Planet}. The father as a Presbyterian was sure the pretty Irish woman would be a devout wife despite her adherence to the Pope's teachings. However, soon the polish of love wore thin, and love was mixed with, or buried under, petitions to the Deity to save the soul of the partner. Miss Glasgow satirically noted that the previous illusions were "melted before the fire and brimstone of ecclesiastical dispute." (p. 19)

Miss Glasgow admired the serenity and self-sacrifice of the Catholics. She revealed this in her portrayal of Maria Fletcher of \textit{The Deliverance} (a novel judged unchristian\textsuperscript{11}). Maria had met three happy people in her life. One was a Catholic priest who was raised in an asylum, educated by charity, and worked in a leper colony.\textsuperscript{12} By such

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See \textit{The Woman Within}, pp. 175, 265.
\item \textit{The Deliverance} (New York, 1904), p. 391.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
characteristics Miss Glasgow revealed the admirable traits of a Christian group.

In *Barren Ground* it was noted that occasionally a Catholic immigrant was able to reclaim the wasted farm land when the Protestant neighbors had failed. (p. 4) Mrs. Bergen of *Vein of Iron* was able to maintain some measure of serenity because of her religious ritual. Her husband who did not possess that ritual was in despair over the difficulties. (pp. 298, 367) Miss Glasgow admired the faith of the Catholic saints, and she admired that faith when it was displayed in her world.

The Baptists and Methodist Churches flourished in the South. Membership increased often at the expense of the more established groups. The appeal was often emotional, and revival campaigns and camp meetings were popular. Miss Glasgow was undoubtedly aware of the influence of these groups, but she rarely mentioned them in her writing. In *The Descendant* she gave a bare sketch of a Methodist minister named Mr. Self. Her Negroes were usually labeled Baptists and possessed a child-like faith. Minerva Clay, the Timberlake washwoman of *In This Our Life*, verbalized her belief. She was thankful to the Lord for taking care of her. She was glad her religion made her happy. Her theology was unorganized; her praise was not grammatically perfect;
but Minera found satisfaction in her beliefs. Her religion was one of joy. Miss Glasgow had not attributed joy to the other religions groups. She was here describing an omission in the well-organized religions, and perhaps she was suggesting that happiness was needed.

ACTIVITIES

With churches gaining in membership, their activities also became more prominent. Often social activities were centered around the church and its hierarchy. Sermons were considered intellectual stimulation, and the gathering at church was necessary for learning news. Mission projects were considered vital, and ladies groups were constantly engaged in knitting and sewing.

Miss Glasgow had rebelled against church attendance, but she had attended the Moody revival in Richmond. She summed up the experience by recording that the preacher went on to "wider fields and riper harvests, while I relapsed, permanently, into 'original corruption' . . . ."13 She wondered if anyone heard the sermons or if anyone were helped by the mission projects.

13 The Woman Within, p. 35.
In This Our Life contained a question that Miss Glasgow may have asked her family, "'Do you suppose anybody has even been saved by a theory or helped by a sermon?'" (p. 225) Apparently the author thought the answer was negative. She thought the church had evaded the basic issues of life. It had "imprisoned its faith in arbitrary doctrines" and so did not satisfy man's needs.\(^{14}\) Her books which dealt with man's problems and needs were denounced from the pulpit because of this realism.\(^{15}\) Churches seemed to be involved in many things which were not serving man's needs.

Miss Glasgow described sermons in some of her novels. The sermons at Old Church (The Miller of Old Church) were full of rhetoric. It was a time for the minister to demonstrate his ability and for Old Adam to assimilate theological arguments. Mrs. Gay admired the sermons when she thought she was described. Judy Hatch enjoyed the sermons because of the minister. Others enjoyed the sermons because it gave time to observe the neighbors. Miss Glasgow disliked the traditional imagery, vocabulary, and hymnology of the church. In this novel, however, she revealed that even more she disliked a church-induced

\(^{14}\) Ellen Glasgow, "What I Believe," The Nation, CXXXVI (April 12, 1933), 406.

\(^{15}\) See A Certain Measure, p. 47.
hypocrisy which resulted in such unimaginative products of membership.

The church at Ironside in Vein of Iron proclaimed the glory of war. It made the conflict a matter of Christian principle and gathered the neighborhood in sacrificial giving of lives and money. Miss Glasgow, however, had the thinking members of the congregation reject the theory that war was holy. She detested war as a poor plan to improve the world, or perhaps it was a breaking through of man's savage nature. She would approve of no church which advocated violence on any pretense.

Occasionally Miss Glasgow recorded a sermon as being of benefit. Mike Akershem of The Descendant had been arousing the masses to revolt. He was not aware of the effects of his work in hurting others. He met Anna Allard on her way to attend services at a mission chapel. At first he scoffed that religion instead of bread was given to the poor. Anna explained that the object of religion was to "add to the general happiness." (p. 182) This was a new approach to Akershem so he attended the service. He heard little of the message, but it gave time for thought. He realized he was fighting a shadow of which he knew nothing. He hated poverty and was not familiar with poor people. He realized he had been fighting for little things, and all the big things had been ignored. He remembered his
youth and his plans. He realized his failure in attaining his goals. Miss Glasgow did not reveal the topic of the sermon. It could have been on helping one's neighbor, or honesty in work, or cleanliness in living. Mike Akershem, however, realized his error and began to plan for a new life during the sermon.

Miss Glasgow could not appreciate sermons on war. To her no God would require cruelty, and no religion should. She could not gain the resources which gave stability from a sermon, but she apparently saw this happen for others. Mrs. McBride of Vein of Iron was portrayed as a bitter woman who destroyed her son's will. She assisted in forcing an unhappy marriage and in his enlisting in the army. However, she was strong and acted by her beliefs. In describing her troubles to Ada, she revealed that mentally she had been tormented with doubts and indecision until during a sermon she was given what she described as a "new heart and a new spirit." (p. 241) Her creator could not appreciate her actions, but she could appreciate the strength behind the actions.

Anthony Algarcife of Phases of an Inferior Planet did not believe the words which he spoke in his messages. Yet, the people unaware of his skepticism found strength in his words. One woman was lonely and getting old. She had never favored religion. Algarcife, for her, stood for the church, and she came to love it. What was the difference?
What had she suddenly found in religion? She explained, "'It has given me something to hope for . . .'." (p. 201) Miss Glasgow could respect a sermon which gave hope or strength to an individual.

Miss Glasgow was described as having "turned the keen edge of her wit against many a hollow pretense and empty sham."16 The area to suffer most under this keen wit was the mission projects of the church. The South was rebuilding after the Civil War. There was the World War and its losses. There was a Depression. Diseases left the crippled, and slums multiplied. The church gathered collections for relief in other countries. The Negroes were without adequate schools, but funds for African missions were plentiful. Children starved in the cities, but money was collected for the war orphans in Belgium. To Miss Glasgow such mission activity was hypocrisy.

William Fitzroy in the novel In This Our Life was a wealthy businessman. He believed in providing for his family. He believed in giving liberally to St. Luke's Episcopal Church. When facing death, he donated large sums to a church orphanage and to schools. Yet, only a short while before his illness, he had been visited by

16 Virginius Dabney, Liberalism in the South (Chapel Hill, 1932), p. 383.
Parry, a Negro who wished money for college. For years the boy's family had worked for his family and been faithful. Mr. Fitzroy was familiar with this industrious family. The request, however, was denied. The Negroes had no need for education but did need religion. His money was given to mission projects far away. Parry received only a suggestion that he stop having such elevated ideas of attending school.

Roy Kingsmill, another character of *In This Our Life*, escaped from a home where a mother pretended sickness. After years she returned, sick, and with her child. She needed medical treatment. She needed someone to care for Timothy. Would her family care for her child while she regained her health? Her mother insisted the child could be accepted only if it were considered an orphan. Projects were underway for placing such children into respectable homes. Adopting foreign children was a mission project, but the children did have to be foreign.

Mariana Musin of *Phases of an Inferior Planet* joined the Episcopal church with a convert's zeal. She helped darn stockings for the poor, but her own stockings were darned by her mother. She neglected social functions in an attempt to convert the inhabitants of saloons by a pledge. Judy Hatch of *The Miller of Old Church* was also endowed with a vision of the distant. Instead of concentrating on making
her butter or cleaning her house, she was making clothes for the Hottentots, one of Miss Glasgow's favorite mission groups.17

John Calvin Abernethy of Barren Ground after buying a large farm with its slaves was plagued by conscience. He sold the slaves south, and the money he devoted to mission work in the Congo. Cyrus Treadwell in Virginia, though unwilling to help his illegitimate son or even his nervous wife, dispatched checks to the missionary society. Jonathan Gay in The Miller of Old Church, after ruining some souls of the neighbors, willed funds for the salvation of the heathen in China.

Miss Glasgow hated hypocrisy especially that covered with a scab of religiosity. At one time Miss Glasgow had helped with the City Mission and was a worker at The Sheltering Arms Hospital, an organization for charity health care. She recorded complete disillusionment with helping begging paupers who supposedly leaned on God. The hospital work had at times been satisfying, but she always retained a suspicion of mission work.18

Occasionally, however, in the novels Miss Glasgow revealed mission projects as potentially helpful. These

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17 See The Miller, p. 360, and The Descendant, p. 33.
18 The Woman Within, p. 81.
projects were always involved with local needs and based on individual action. Large, unwieldy organization she thought cold and often cruel. True charity always contained a personal touch.

At Ironside the church raised money for the heathen in China, but when the village prostitute became ill the church provided supplies and even a caretaker for the garden and pigs. In Father Spears of Phases of an Inferior Planet Miss Glasgow portrayed a believer, a minister, and a missionary. His mission field was a short distance from his rectory. His church members refused to share pews with the poor but would contribute money for a mission work in the slums. The pastor, unable to change his congregation, gave much of his time to the care of the outcasts. Anthony followed his guardian's steps. He entered the slums to teach cleanliness. He used his money to endow a baby cot at the local hospital, and he took an active interest in its occupant. The church funds for Asiatic missions he used in building a home for the orphans of New York.

In The Descendant another philanthropist was admired. Mike Akershem, alone and hopeless, had spent days looking for a job. Without money but with a vial of laudanum, he decided to end his life. Then he noticed a sign advertising jobs. The interviewer was interested in people and had
just dispatched a check for missionary work. He also saw needs in the people around him and was interested in the people he hired. Though he had no job suitable for Mike, he suggested a possible employer. Through this individual, Akershem began his career. Miss Glasgow could admire such a philanthropist who gave of himself to help his neighbors.

MINISTERS

Ministers in the South enjoyed immense popularity. They were community leaders. Often they were regarded as the intellectual leaders of society. Their influence was great in political parties, school systems, and social clubs. Miss Glasgow often created ministers in her novels, but in The Woman Within only one was mentioned, Mr. Moody, who singled her out for attention as a child in his service. (pp. 34, 35) Otherwise ministers were strangely missing from her life until the time of her funeral. By examining the novels one can determine that pastors were not her favorite people. She wrote of ministers from four denominations.19 Some were central figures while others were

19 Presbyterian, Mr. Black (Vein); Episcopalian, Mr. Mullen (The Miller); Methodist, Mr. Self (The Descendant); Catholic, an unnamed priest (The Deliverance, p. 391)
merely mental images in the thoughts of characters or even background characters such as John Calvin Abernethy. She pictured ministers as men with failures from poor vision to zealots with expanded egos. She pictured them as hypocritical, cowardly, and stupid.

Her first minister, featured in The Descendant, was without a name and known by his friendship with Mike Aker-shem. Miss Glasgow pictured him as physically lacking a chin so thereby unqualified for sainthood. Spiritually he had only attained the state where pleasure and duty were defined. Miss Glasgow stated that the next step was the conviction that what one ought to do and what one wanted to do were the same. That is, one would think himself so nearly perfect that he could not possibly want anything that was not right. (pp. 4, 5) This minister was also a coward. His daughter was to have a birthday party. All the neighborhood children were invited except Mike, the illegitimate orphan. The minister's wife and neighbors would object to inviting the outcast. The minister, though protesting and knowing that Christ would have done differently, agreed to omit the boy.

In the same novel Mr. Self, a Methodist minister, was named in keeping with his personality. As a self-centered
individual he was "a gentleman of a great many ideals and a very few ideas." (p. 166) Another minister with a fitting name was Orlando Mullen, the pompous Episcopal minister in The Miller of Old Church. He, as Self, had a glorified ideas of his calling and talents. He chose to speak of the woman's place of self-sacrifice and meekness while proposing to the most rebellious girl in the neighborhood. He was sure he had been placed to give, but never receive, suggestions on all aspects of life. He considered himself an authority on every field from women or horses to the Scripture. His own ideas he detested when translated into the language of the local residents. He was unaware of the romantic sentiments of his female followers but upset when Old Adam questioned him on some minor point of the resurrection.

Horton Davis lists the chief satirists of ministers as Jonathan Swift, Samuel Butler, and Peter DeVries. Ellen Glasgow could also have been mentioned. Where were the intelligent, courageous, dedicated ministers? She wrote of none with a combination of those traits. In each she portrayed the errors of common to ordinary individuals, and often those errors were magnified. In Mr. Mullen she reached

her peak and portrayed what one writer called a "very fallible representative" of a religion that was "hollow" or a "meaningless ritual."\textsuperscript{21}

Miss Glasgow could criticize, but she could also admire. She wrote of ministers as men. She wrote of them as possessing some admirable traits. The minister-friend of Mike Akershem in \textit{The Descendant} was a coward and intellectual inferior, but he was kind and sympathetic. Mr. Black of \textit{Vein of Iron}, though believing in a righteous war and enforcing strict adherence to creeds, could sympathize with an idiot being mistreated by other children. Father Spears in \textit{Phases of an Inferior Planet} was compassionate to both rich and poor. Miss Glasgow wrote in \textit{The Deliverance} of a priest who through a kind act helped save a life. (p. 541)

Gabriel Pendleton of \textit{Virginia} was minister of St. James Episcopal Church in Dinwiddie. He was a Confederate veteran and poor. His wife scrubbed floors and bravely attempted to feed her family on her husband's meager pay. Her beauty faded, but to her husband she was unchanged. To him, all marriages were made in Heaven. He failed to see the unhappiness that could result from such a union as his own. He preferred beauty to ugly truths. He was generous. When

\textsuperscript{21} Dillard, pp. 126, 127.
returning from Appomattox, he sold his watch and divided the money with his friend. In human behavior he recommended mercy or the teachings of Christ rather than the Hebrew law. He was sure of his beliefs but not domineering. His life ended in serving others. A Negro boy was wrongly accused by some drunken white men. The boy had no one to take his part. Gabriel died fighting the boy's battle.

Miss Glasgow wrote that the value of life was measured by the things above and beyond life such as a saint giving his life for the people or a hero giving his for those he did not know.\textsuperscript{22} Gabriel was a fallible minister, but he was also a saint and a hero. He was one who gave value to life by his actions.

Religion was not always treated skeptically in the works of Ellen Glasgow. It was not always a ritual without meaning. She examined the church. She saw denominations, group activities, and ministers. Each had faults. Each also at times could be of help to man in his search for happiness and purpose.

\textsuperscript{22} See \textit{I Believe}, p. 110.
IV
ELLEN GLASGOW AND DOCTRINES

Church doctrines were familiar to Southern society. Their terminology was used in the daily conversation of the people. There was salvation, redemption, justification, baptism, inspiration, and condemnation. Churches often were possessive of a certain group of beliefs of a particular name. Often the beliefs were the same though the emphases were different. Baptism could be by immersion or sprinkling. Salvation could consist of a call, a repentence, or faith. These creeds or doctrines were often formulated into a well-worn catechism.

Cabell noted that Puritianism possessed many fine points but often employed them in much the same manner as the porcupine.¹ His Richmond neighbor probably agreed both to his thought and imagery. She questioned the Christian doctrines of the church. How could kind people believe that to ignore baptism resulted in an eternity in hell? Why did salvation depend on blood? Why were animals neglected in

¹ James Branch Cabell, Straws and Prayerbooks (New York, 1924), p. 141.
theological salvation? She questioned her father's beliefs which were "sound on doctrine, from the fall of Adam to infant damnation."² What was sin? Miss Glasgow decided to give her own definition. What about salvation? Was it the result of Divine favor? Was the Bible God's message to man?

SIN

Sin was a delightful word. Whispered in gossip it immediately arrested attention. In church, the most interesting sermons were on sin complete with illustration.³ The Christians were taught that sin originated in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. The sinful nature was then transmitted to all children. Sin required punishment so there was eternal damnation. God determined--or predestined--those who would be saved or lost. Randall Stewart thought the basic test for Christian orthodoxy was a belief in original sin.⁴ Miss Glasgow as a child believed in that doctrine as well as damnation and

² I Believe, p. 94.

³ Miss Glasgow wrote of the religious "exciting spectacle of sin" in A Certain Measure, p. 216. She hints at this attitude in many novels. See Beyond Defeat: An Epilogue to an Era, ed. Luther Y. Gore (Charlottesville, 1966), pp. 23, 87.

predestination. As an adult she wished to dismiss the subject. As a novelist she usually treated sin, predestination, and damnation sarcastically.

The most laughable treatment of sin and its satellite doctrines was given in Old Adam of The Miller of Old Church. This was the local antiquary who could recite not only the past history of the leading families but could also analyze with accuracy the character of his contemporaries. In religion he thought himself an expert. One of his most challenging feats was in questioning Mr. Mullen on some obscure Biblical point. The citizenry considered him an authority, but Old Adam refused to make up his mind on eternal damnation. After all, he concluded, it was much easier to sleep when one thought damnation probably was not true. (pp. 8, 9)

Other characters in the same novel, however, had very definite opinions on the matter. Sarah Revercomb could never trust surface calmness. She knew the doctrines of original sin and predestination would keep reappearing and disturbing the calm. The injustices of the world she attributed to sin. At a funeral she was even comforted by her belief. Abel was sure that for his mother even the eggs in the hen-house were considered predestined to be saved or damned. (p. 206)
To Dorinda of Barren Ground living with Mrs. Oakley was like living with the doctrine of predestination. John Fincastle of Vein of Iron was able to evaluate many beliefs and their effects on neighbors. Meeting Mrs. McBride he likened to meeting in the road the "grim doctrine of predestination." (p. 112)

Miss Glasgow questioned the Christian teachings of predestination and original sin. At times she laughed at the absurdities which such beliefs produced in life. At times she seemed bitter over such beliefs. At times a note of wistfulness for the old beliefs seemed to enter her thoughts. Ralph McBride of Vein of Iron displayed this tone of wistfulness. John Fincastle had returned to Ironside to die. After the burial the old manse was being examined. The house was dirty. The shingles were rotting away. The drain pipes were clogged with leaves. Ada wanted to return and repair the house. Ralph mentioned the problems of money and extent of work needed, but Ada only reminded him of the early settlers who had built homes despite Indian attacks, lack of tools, and inadequate food supplies. Ralph contended that the first Fincastles had possessed something else, something which his own generation did not possess. The early settlers possessed a belief. "'He had not only civilization, but Heaven and Hell, within himself. It takes conviction to set out to despoil the wilderness . . .'" (p. 460)
He summarized by thinking that predestination had conquered the land. Original sin or predestination were hard. They could cause pain and bitterness, but such convictions also produced endurance and fortitude.

Miss Glasgow had attempted to forget her father's beliefs, especially that of predestination. She could not forget, however. She confessed to Cabell, "'My soul is the last unwilling scapegoat of Predestination'." She could not completely forget nor could she completely ignore the benefits of such beliefs.

In The Descendant a picture was given of lost belief and its result. Pat McTibs, a bricklayer, was an honest man and worked to provide for his family. He was guided by beliefs in original sin and predestination. Though not without faults, he feared straying from his beliefs. Kyle then converted McTibs to communism. The earlier beliefs were gone. He had no cause to continue his narrow life. His dozen children were committed to the care of charity. McTibs' wife also accepted the new beliefs and committed suicide. (p. 127)

The world may have been deluded in its beliefs, but were not such beliefs helpful? Miss Glasgow thought they

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5 The Woman Within, p. 275.
were often necessary for civilization to continue. In *This Our Life* has been labeled a "sermon against the younger generation." Standards, discipline, and beliefs were missing from the lives of the characters. A nurse asked Asa if the world were always such a mess. Ada tried to explain the new system on the basis of lost excitement in that salvation and damnation were no longer important. Asa thought perhaps service to humanity could take the place of such doctrinal beliefs and restore reason to the world order. The nurse replied that the world was coming to regret the loss of a hell and that the regret would last forever. A belief in humanity could never fill the center of existence as did the old beliefs. (p. 289) Miss Glasgow could not only satirize the old beliefs she could also realize their value.

Sin in Christianity was defined as either the commission of an act displeasing to God or the omission of an act pleasing to God. The unforgivable sin or sin against the Holy Spirit was unbelief. Miss Glasgow knew the teachings against lying, stealing, and breaking the Sabbath. She saw the neglect of the first commandment regarding love while

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6 See *I Believe*, p. 94.

7 Malcolm Cowley, "Miss Glasgow's 'Purgatoria'," *The New Republic*, CIV (March 31, 1941), 441.
the sin of adultery was magnified to a place of horror and fascination. She noticed a people's fear of pleasure. She detected the contradiction in a people who believed in a God of love yet feared punishment for happiness.

Miss Glasgow often wrote of this fear of pleasure in her novels. Dorinda Oakley of Barren Ground was young and trained in the religious tradition. When Rose Emily was dying and Jason repeatedly told the sick woman she would recuperate, Dorinda was concerned. Suppose Rose Emily should die before she repented. Shouldn't she be prepared for death? Jason scoffed at the idea. Rose Emily needed no time to prepare, "'what opportunity has she ever had to commit a pleasure?'" (p. 84)

Sarah Revercomb of The Miller of Old Church feared happiness as displeasing to God. To see a person depressed was safe, but to see one happy was to prepare for trouble. Abel's marriage of convenience was welcome. He could never love Judy. He would never know the joy which his love for Molly had given. Such behavior was peaceful, for one must "tread softly in the way of pleasure lest God should hear." (p. 290)

Virginia, in a novel by that name, had bought a blue silk. She had gone foxhunting. She had planned a trip with her husband. She had experienced the happiness of
marriage to Oliver and of producing three children. She had enjoyed life. She had committed a mortal sin. In punishment, Harry, her child, was ill. As she swabbed his throat, she repented. She promised to abstain from all pleasure and happiness if he would be spared. For her joys she must suffer. There was never happiness without pain. Her sin had been happiness.

Miss Glasgow could not accept the belief that pleasure was sin. She chose to define the unforgivable sin as cruelty or inhumanity. "I believe that there are many evils, but that the only sin is inhumanity . . . ."8 " . . Cruelty is the only sin." " . . Cruelty is that unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost."9 The novelist always reacted violently to any form of cruelty from an overloaded horse or a beaten dog to the mistreated poor.

Miss Glasgow's heroes and heroines were always portrayed as kind to animals and usually considerate of people. Fletcher of The Deliverance was the sketch of a cruel man while in contrast the crippled Tucker was kindness and concern. Ben Starr in The Romance of a Plain Man would help a horse up a hill or a frail suffragist in a parade.

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8 I Believe, p. 109.
9 The Woman Within, p. 10.
Patty Vetch (One Man in His Time, 1922) would stop to help a wounded bird. (p. 18) Dan Montjoy in The Battleground (1902) remembered Stonewall Jackson's assisting a horse with a load. (p. 344)

Miss Glasgow pictured Mike Akershem in The Descendant as a lover of animals from pigs to cats. Anthony Algarcife of Phases of an Inferior Planet scattered crumbs on the fire escape for the birds. He meditated on science but stopped to rescue a beggar's hat and a yellow dog from under a cable car. Kate Oliver in Beyond Defeat talked little of doing good but found room on her farm for all the misfits of society. Her care embraced dogs, horses, trees, and men.

Slavery was viewed by Miss Glasgow as an act of cruelty in a religious society. She thought that society hypocritical which enjoyed the products but failed to see the characteristics of an institution. She noticed that slavery had been only a "slight impediment" to the religious conviction.10

Miss Glasgow wrote in Virginia of Mrs. Pendleton, a minister's wife who marketed near the old slave market. Mrs. Pendleton never considered the people who had been

10 A Certain Measure, p. 133.
sold there. If she had thought of them she would have rationalized the conduct by thinking that changes were good for everyone. Miss Glasgow also wrote of Charlotte Fitzroy, the kindly wife of a rich, stingy man portrayed in *In This Our Life*. When Parry visited to ask for school funds, William was gruff and scared the boy. Charlotte regretted her husband's decision and could only be thankful that her husband had not lived during the days of slavery.

Sin was defined as cruelty or inhumanity by Miss Glasgow. However, she saw other aspects of the world which she thought wrong. These she labeled either an "error of manners," a "mistake in conduct," or "evils." Cabell noted that in some of Miss Glasgow's writing the wages of sin turned out to be art of a "remunerative quality." To Miss Glasgow, however, the art was more remunerative than the sin or evil. In her novels errors received their punishment.

Adultery in Miss Glasgow's works was not portrayed as a lasting, pleasurable experience. Her first novel, *The Descendant*, was of Rachel Gavin and Mike Akershem, who

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11 *A Certain Measure*, p. 133.

together found love but also bitterness. Dorinda Oakley of Barren Ground liked to meet Jason by the willows, but with the knowledge of pregnancy also came the knowledge of Jason's marriage to Geneva. Dorinda spent her remaining years in loneliness, never again sharing herself with anyone.

Ada Fincastle of Vein of Iron thought the world owed her the pleasure of two days with Ralph. But on the Indian Trail she could not forget her moral teachings, and the birth of her child ended her stable existence. Ralph returned but never the dream of happiness.

Sex was a satisfying experience only within marriage. Grandmother Fincastle in Vein of Iron recalled her entire life, the relationship with her husband, the births of the children, and even daily tasks, as happy. Her husband, a minister, loved as he lived, robustly.

N. Elizabeth Monroe wrote that Miss Glasgow never worked at cross purposes with eternal values in social and moral questions. Miss Glasgow usually condemned things which were in opposition to those eternal values. This condemnation came not through a frontal attack but in subtle coloring. Spiller called this the author's "moral

searchings." One evil attacked by the writer was hypocrisy. She always hated shams so she drew portraits which could not be misconstrued. From Mrs. Watkins, the foster mother of The Descendant, who led the choir but made home miserable, to Cyrus Treadwell of Virginia, who gave to missions but neglected his home, Miss Glasgow revealed the social evils of a sham existence. Ministers like Algarcife (Phases of an Inferior Planet), wives like Mrs. Burden (They Stooped to Folly), mothers like Mrs. Timberlake (In This Our Life), reformers like Akershem (The Descendant), husbands like George Birdsong (The Sheltered Life); all were shams, and all were exposed as guilty.

In This Our Life has been thought a defense of old-fashioned virtues. This defense came by exposing evils. Sex was revealed as devastating, and hypocrisy resulted in family dissolution. Greed, envy, disloyalty, lying, thievery, a lack of love, failure to keep promises, and the lack of self-control, all were revealed in the context of regret that life was so hollow and meaningless. The evils of society were ruining life. Where was trust? Where was


love? Where was loyalty? What was life without them? Perhaps it could be called hell, for hell was not looked to as a future place of fire. Hell seemed to be mere existence. It resulted from a life in which the old beliefs of sin and predestination were forgotten and where there was nothing to take their place.

SALVATION

Salvation was a sacred word to the Christian. It called forth images of a cross, blood, sacrifice, and heaven. Salvation was preached about, worked for, and denied to those of different faiths. Salvation was a gift of grace, but works were sometimes thought to help. The central figure of salvation was Christ, and the goal was life in heaven.

Miss Glasgow remembered her father as one who judged actions on their value to salvation. He was fond of the Christian symbolism in Cowper's hymn "There is a Fountain filled with Blood." His daughter's idea of salvation was very different, and she hated the hymn. "The blood symbolism in religion has always sickened me . . . ."16 She thought blood necessary for a weakened South but not

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16 The Woman Within, p. 285. See also p. 15.
for religion. She found that animals were omitted from the plan of salvation, and none of them "could expect so much as a crust or crumb of divine grace in the exclusive plan of salvation." At times when discovering a new philosophy, there was the "startled wonder, and the eager awakening of a religious conversion" before again settling into the revolt against a "murdered God, whose body must be partaken of."17

Such characteristics were translated into the lives and thinking of her characters. Mary Evelyn Fincastle in *Vein of Iron* sickened at the sight of blood and complained that the plan of salvation was based on misery. Miss Glasgow often satirized the subject as in Mrs. McBride who thrilled at the symbols of the crucifixion and atonement. To her, salvation was more important than happiness.

In depicting Grandmother Fincastle in *Vein of Iron*, Miss Glasgow's most complete discussion of salvation was given. Grandmother believed that only through the blood of Christ could man be saved. She believed that after death one enjoyed heaven. There was the hope of a resurrection. Her son John Fincastle denied the Virgin Birth of Christ. What would happen to him? Her daughter-

17 *I Believe*, pp. 95, 102, 99.
in-law Mary Evelyn as a saint would be asked to judge her husband. How could she? The righteous would be taken to be with Christ. Her son looked so angelic; would he be condemned? She found no answers in catechisms or creeds. Salvation, she concluded, must be left in the hands of God. Ada questioned her Grandmother's faith. Grandmother depended on God, but her mind and body were growing decrepit. How could Grandmother, who believed so many important things, be worried about such little ones? "'Effectually called, . . . justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved,' was it still possible for one to be upset because a pan of milk curdled?" (p. 107)

Miss Glasgow wrote of many characters that worshipped God or Jehovah but few that knew Christ. Daniel Ordway of The Ancient Law and Adams of The Wheel of Life were his most direct followers. In these, Christ was not respected as a sacrifice, saviour, or founder of a religious sect. Christ was respected for his teachings of self-sacrifice, morals, and kindness.

N. Elizabeth Monroe thought it incredible that of the entire cast of characters only Grandmother Fincastle and Aunt Meggie in Vein of Iron should apply Christian principles to their lives.18 Actually Miss Glasgow often gave evidence

of Christ's teachings though her characters were not immediately identifiable as Christians. The minister of The Descendant wished to invite Michael to a party because he was sure Christ would have done so. Algarcife in Phases of an Inferior Planet did not believe in many Biblical precepts, but he followed Biblical principles in his care for the poor. Gabriel Pendleton in Virginia preferred the Christian teachings of love to the ancient laws of justice. Dorinda Oakley in Barren Ground rejected most of religion but gave evidence of Christian principles by her rescue of Jason. Ada and John Fincastle in Vein of Iron did not follow their ancestors' creed but did follow their teaching of social custom. Few of these characters were labeled Christians, but all were aware of Christian doctrine or bore some faint resemblance to Christians.

One became a Christian or was initiated into Christianity through a conversion experience. This was a period of time in which one felt the presence of God and the direction of life was changed. Miss Glasgow did not completely discredit such experiences for she wrote of such a period in her own life. She was high in the Alps. For a moment she felt in contact with the very life or being of the universe. She knew blessedness and felt a prevailing inner light. Her experience faded never again to be repeated.19

19 See I Believe, p. 100 and The Woman Within, pp. 165-166.
Dorinda Oakley of Barren Ground recalled her conversion experience. She had been happy, almost ecstatic. She felt she had entered the ranks of the redeemed. Life was peaceful. There was a quietness with which not even love could compare. But, the experience passed, and religion had not satisfied. (p. 60)

Miss Glasgow did not find the ecstasy of a conversion lasting, and she did not think salvation to be the result of God's intervention. Happiness, success, and peacefulness were never the lasting result of a moment's inspiration. Man's salvation was always the result of man's own efforts. Most were saved from wasted lives by sheer endurance. Dorinda's experience of conversion faded. She then chose to milk cows, plant fields, and buy more land. Her aim was not a mystical experience or a life of ease in the future. Salvation was not attaining sainthood; it was attaining fortitude. The goal of salvation was not so much a future heaven; it was a life in which the spirit did not break.

The Christian viewed death as an entrance to heaven. Miss Glasgow wrote of her thoughts when very ill: "When I thought of dying ... it was not of dying as a cold negation, but as a warm and friendly welcome to the universe, to the Being beyond and above consciousness ... ."20

20 The Woman Within, p. 290.
On Miss Glasgow's tomb was inscribed a verse, "Tomorrow to Fresh Woods and Pastures New." Did she believe in a heaven? She believed in a future. She looked to that future with anticipation.

In her novels she was often sarcastic in mentioning heaven. In The Descendant she likened heaven to happiness. One was not felt and the other not seen. (p. 147). In Vein of Iron heaven was judged to be happy because of the serene expression on the faces of the dead, and when bugs envied man and desired a heaven, God gave them the Shenandoah Valley. (p. 449)

Cabell noted that many of the Glasgow characters near the end of life had a "renovated belief in a future" in which all would be well or gained spiritual help from "observing a light in the sky or in somebody's eyes." This was true in most of Miss Glasgow's books. Happiness was a prediction for each character--Mike Akershem, Abel Revercomb, Dorinda Oakley, Ada Fincastle, Craig Fleming, and even Asa Timberlake. Each near the end of the story had renewed courage for the future.

Miss Glasgow portrayed death as an experience not to be feared in The Miller of Old Church. Jonathan Gay had been

21 Let Me Lie, p. 236, 237.
shot by Abner Revercomb. He had been looking for Blossom, his wife. Abner thought his daughter had been seduced. Death came slowly for Jonathan. He remembered his childhood. He remembered old friends. He heard the humming of bees in the meadow. He wished not to be bothered. His murderer was unimportant. He wanted only to have the "ineffable sense of approaching discovery" and to know the "unexplored, the incalculable vastness" which seemed before him. (p. 423) Death seemed only the promise of future happiness.

INSPIRATION

A third Christian doctrine into which Miss Glasgow delved was that of inspiration. Christians believed the Bible to have been written by God's direction and under his guidance. The result was a product without error. The Bible was a guide to God and to correct living. It was the ultimate authority on all subjects. Mr. Glasgow often gathered his family and read to them. In the family Bible, he recorded the dates of the childrens' births.

Miss Glasgow revealed a strong interest in books. On some she based her philosophy. The Thought of Marcus Aurelius was a well-marked traveling companion and described
as an "ever-present help in trouble,"22 This interest was transmitted to a missionary in *Vein of Iron*. He was an early settler who went to the Indians and carried with him two Bibles and a hand-copied version of the Emperor's writings. (p. 21) Mike Akershem (*The Descendant*) while in church heard not the preacher but a mind-echo of the royal philosopher. (pp. 184-85)

Miss Glasgow in searching for a stable conviction also studied eastern mysticism. Her library included a worn set of *The Sacred Books of the East*. She chose a verse from the *Bhagavad-Gita* for inscription on her sister's tomb.23 The writings of Schopenhauer, Santayana, Pascal, Kant, Spinoza, Locke, and Hume were studied in searching for a belief. She read and admired Darwin's works. When mourning the death of a relative, however, she conceded that more than any philosophy golf had helped her.24


23 Cary McCormack's inscription in Hollywood Cemetery: "The unreal have no Being/The Real never ceases to be." This is taken from the Second Reading, no. 16. Wesley la Violette translates this in *The Bhagavad Gita; The Immortal Song* (Los Angeles, 1945) as: "The unreal has no being, no entity;/The Real has always been nor does it ever cease to be." p. 23.

24 *The Woman Within*, p. 177.
Miss Glasgow also studied the Bible, but she did not accept her father's beliefs concerning it. To her it was not infallible though "... it is my favorite book, I believe, taken as literature and discarded as prophecy ... ." Miss Glasgow valued the moral teachings of the Bible, and she thought Christianity might have succeeded had it ever been tried. Heiney called this Christian influence in her works a "deep and old-fashioned sense of right and wrong." Auchincloss called it the "curious streak of the preacher" in the author. Monroe thought the characters merely chose right and wrong in spite of themselves. There were condemnations of pride, greed, selfishness, and

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26 Ibid.
29 N. Elizabeth Monroe, op. cit., p. 67.
hypocrisy. There was approval of love, kindness and self-control. Every book contained its moral lessons not as a central plot but as a part of the life of a character.

Miss Glasgow also profited from the vocabulary of the Bible. She preferred the King James Version and thought the Elizabethean English increased the book's influence.30 In every book she revealed its influence. In The Descendant she used Biblical imagery to describe characters. Michael was likened to a John The Baptist as he left the wilderness. (p. 47) Anna Allard was a Madonna. (p. 187) The names were Biblical: Michael, Shem, John, Anna, Rachel, and Daniel. There was mention of Ester and Jael. (p. 131) The term "weighed in the balance" was employed either completely or in variations to describe Driscoll's social action. (p. 65) Madame's love (p. 91), Michael's ambition (p. 191), Rachel's move (p. 240), and Michael's murder. (p. 256) Michael's life was seen as "the writing on the wall" (p. 256); he had a vein that resembled the "brand of Cain" (p. 240); a funeral sermon was preached on "who can find a virtuous woman" (p. 86); and Rachel was likened to a child that "puts away childish things." (p. 158) Rachel quoted Psalm 42:1 (p. 113), and the minister had I John

30 Letter to Bessie Zaban Jones, Letters, p. 150.
2: 16, 17, and 25 as a sermon text. (pp. 183, 184)

Phases of an Inferior Planet continued in the use of quoted Biblical phraseology. The foreword was Ecclesiastes 9:11, and Algarçife's sermon text was Ecclesiastes 6:12. (p. 315)

Almost every character was endowed with the Biblical vocabulary. Jonathan Gay in The Miller of Old Church referred to Cain and Abel (p. 16), Old Adam noted that a man was "born to trouble, . . . as the sparks fly upward" (p. 110); and Mr. Mullen preached on a woman "who looketh well to the ways of her household." (p. 130) Though this vocabulary diminished in the more mature writings, it never completely disappeared. In Beyond Defeat the child was given the Biblical name of Timothy with the Biblical definition, Godfearing.

Miss Glasgow did not instinctively reject the Christian doctrines of sin, salvation, and inspiration. Though she often treated them skeptically, she also realized that such teachings were valuable as props and at times necessary in maintaining a stable order for civilization.
Childhood was enjoyed on a farm. The trees were named, and a child liked to run to the ice pond when a storm was brewing. Squirrels' nests were robbed, and there were fears the animals would be hungry. Miss Glasgow in later years enjoyed walks in a Maine woods, wished for a farm of her own, and in her writing used names such as Oakley and Pinetop. The novelist enjoyed nature, but she came to question the family teaching of God's control of it. Her family believed that God created the world in seven days as told in Genesis. Sin or the Fall had resulted in bad crops or rocky soil, but God could overcome such obstacles. Miss Glasgow questioned these concepts.

Cabell thought Christianity should be believed because of the beauty and usefulness that it romantically contained. Miss Glasgow did not agree. She searched for truth. To her the Christian concept of nature was unacceptable. She laughed at the notion of man's formation from dust by a

1 Desmond Tarrant, James Branch Cabell: The Dream and The Reality (Norman, Okla., 1967), pp. 72, 73.
Divine order. She satirically noted in A Certain Measure that perhaps man soon after he gained an upright position had seen his reflection in the water and thereafter considered himself made in the Divine image. Then man had looked again and reasoned that woman was not so closely patterned on the Divine. (p. 226)

After Darwin's theory of evolution was introduced to the world, it gained supporters in schools and opposition in churches. In 1925, the theory gained the publicity of a heresy for some and an absolute for others as the Scopes trial divided the groups. Miss Glasgow was introduced to the works of Darwin by her brother-in-law. She became the victim of a family persecution, but still she studied Darwin. Her father attempted both by reasoning and wrath to end her infatuation with The Origin of Species. The opposition made her more adamant. "The humorous or ironic point of the jest was that, at the time, I was too young to comprehend a word of the Darwinian hypothesis . . . ."2

In her teenage years Miss Glasgow studied Darwin merely as a form of rebellion. Later she came to accept logically some of the theories though, in writing to a friend, she insisted that her belief in evolution came long

2 The Woman Within, p. 92.
before her exposure to Darwin. As she grew older, Darwin assumed the role of prophet in her life, and she carried a rose to his tomb in Westminster Abbey.

The novels reveal the author's infatuation with Charles Darwin. His theory influenced her first title, *The Descendant*. Rachel Gavin in that book was a painter who believed in evolution after reading a child's book on the subject. John Driscoll, also in the same book, took trips attempting to supply the missing date to prove the theory. Anthony Algarcife in *Phases of an Inferior Planet* attempted to extract the germ of truth from Darwin's theories and reconcile it with other philosophies. The little town of Dinwiddie in Virginia had been unaffected by the theory for twenty-five years. Oliver then came with his books, and Miss Priscilla was upset. Wasn't Darwin the originator of the thought that man descended from monkeys? She could never teach that in her school for young ladies.

Miss Glasgow often wrote of man's descent from the trees, his kinship to the soil, his primitive or jungle sensations, and the thin crust of civilization over those sensations. Howard Mumford Jones thought the novelist had

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a "severe case of evolutionary measles." Each book revealed both the vocabulary and the thought.

Michael Akershem of *The Descendant* was described as one of "primitive ferocity" in whom the "old savage type, beaten out by civilization, . . . [was] recurring here and there in the history of the race, to wage the old savage war against society." (p. 246) Abel Revercomb of *The Miller of Old Church* was a close observer of nature and in makeup was related to the soil. He wished to escape from an approaching marriage that promised neither happiness nor tranquillity. He wanted freedom. He possessed that "prehistoric memory of the soul" in which "the senses surfeited by civilization cry out for the strong meat of the jungle . . . ." (p. 312) The "raw sensations of the jungle" had never deserted such individuals since they "left the tree-tops." (pp. 395, 264)

Virginia and Dorinda were mere products of evolution and thus instruments of nature in the novels *Virginia* and *Barren Ground*. Virginia was likened to the first woman who searched for the first man on a vast, empty earth. (p. 51) Dorinda displayed her fear and anger as an animal which feared its fate and wished to escape. (pp. 138, 149) John

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Fincastle of Vein of Iron was forced to return to the manse before death as "an animals that slips away from the herd toward finality." (p. 443) No one escaped the heritage. Even the social reformer Craig Fleming of In This Our Life, when confronted with reality, experienced the "savage drumming of terror." (p. 396)

Though Miss Glasgow believed in evolution, she found at times some discrepancy between the theory and life. "I believe in evolution, though I do not believe that evolution must, of necessity, mean progress." Man had gained some social concepts. At times he was kind. At times he faced reality. But often evolution left wide gaps of unresolvable ideas. Progress was inherent in the evolutionary theory. Darwin taught that Nature selected for the good of her products. The evolutionary theory involved the upward swing of the world; from inanimate matter came life, from apes came man, from cruelty came kindness. In Darwin there could possibly be small regressions, but in Miss Glasgow they were large. Progress, she thought, was very slow or nonexistent.

Man had escaped primeval darkness and accumulated a few virtues as justices, courage, or loyalty. The accumulated

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5 I Believe, p. 107.

virtues of civilization, however, were often lost in the jungle nature. In *The Descendant* Mike Akershem attempted to improve society but instead murdered a man in a moment of anger. Miss Glasgow saw Akershem as a product of "Nature's careless handiwork" and his life revealed the "prodigal waste of Nature." (pp. 13, 29) Dillard thought that Miss Glasgow, after picturing the negative side of evolution in Akershem, then began to give the positive side. 7 Actually from Akershem, Miss Glasgow passed on to Old Adam, who saw twenty seeds rot and one survive. He saw men and animals as constantly endangering each other. Nature was wasteful. An insecticide salesman in *Vein of Iron* saw pests reproducing more rapidly than man. In fact, there seemed to be a race between a bug and a man who wished to destroy it. Where was progress?

In evolution the strong were to endure as the weak were sloughed off. Miss Glasgow saw the weak as often in ruling positions. In *This Our Life* was the story of a society in which the weak were in command. Stanley, a pretty, stupid sister, always won the battles with the stronger Roy. A hypochondriac wife retained control over her husband. Those who cared most for humanity were often the first

7 "Pragmatic Realism," p. 71.
defeated. Craig wanted to help the weak. He had promised to aid Parry in obtaining money for college. He was defeated by an emotion which he detested and could not explain. Asa reflected that though man had many philosophies he was always "incurable biological." (p. 157)

Miss Glasgow failed to see progression in evolution, but she saw hostility. Nature made changes. Nature selected for its own good. Nature, therefore, would be indifferent. Miss Glasgow wrote of its cruelties. Of her own life she wrote that she could produce a good novel "if life ceased hostilities." She was appalled at the misery of animals in a "hostile world." There was "the malice of life," the "cruelty of civilization." and the "cold implacable inhumanity of the universe." 8

In the novels, the world, nature, life process, or system of things was viewed as hostile. Parker thought Miss Glasgow more fair in her treatment of nature than her guide Hardy. Hardy had seemingly manipulated nature to prove his point. 9 Miss Glasgow, if she did not manipulate, at least sorted facts to reveal her attitude. The Miller of Old Church told of a man deeply in love. He planned his

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8 The Woman Within, pp. 105, 272, 168.

home and started cutting logs. As Abel and Molly walked together in the field the narrator noted, "... Nature seldom suffers such high moments to pass before they have been paid for in physical values." (p. 208) The couple argued, "Two playthings of Nature, swept alternately by the calm and storm of elemental forces ..." (p. 209) They parted, "Nature, having wearied of her play, was destroying her playthings." (p. 240)

Barren Ground was given divisional names of broomsedge, pine, and life-everlasting. From these three natural productions of beauty Miss Glasgow pointed out the bareness of the land and the bareness of the resulting lives. Her broomsedge was Hardy's heath. Her country was "vaguely menacing," (p. 26) "like a beast that is waiting for the right moment to spring and devour." (p. 57) People were submerged and buried by the land as life used up its victims. "Over the immutable landscape human lives drifted and vanished like shadows." (p. 336) People were unable to cope with the encroaching broomsedge. Dorinda was "caught in the whirlpool of universal anarchy." (p. 248) The story was called by one a "saga of the soil." 10

The land, nature, and life were menacing, overcoming,

10 Grant C. Knight, American Literature and Culture (New York, 1932), p. 349.
desolate, and hostile. Even the theory of evolutionary indifference could not dislodge that belief from the author's mind.

Miss Glasgow failed to see significant progress in evolution. She saw nature as hostile. She believed in evolution but regretted the loss of tranquility that came with the belief. "... It is more agreeable, I confess, to regard oneself, not as a biological accident, but either as a thought in the mind of God or as a unit with an appointed harmonious place in the vast rhythm of creation." To believe in evolution was to believe in chance and accidents. No longer could one believe in ultimate good from a superior power that governed in love. Miss Glasgow wanted truth, but she also would have liked tranquility.

Miss Glasgow's heroes and heroines were usually believers in the evolutionary process. They were pictured often as lacking the tranquillity inherent in the Christian creation belief. Asa Timberlake (In This Our Life) lived in a world dominated by machines and science. His mother's strong, old home had been leveled to provide space for gas stations. Trees had been uprooted for sidewalks. Yards had been sacrificed for bigger homes. Everything was

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11 I Believe, p. 107.
larger, faster, and more flashy. Nothing was better or more secure.

The people of *In This Our Life* were looking for happiness or a stabler factor in the flux of their environment. Roy looked for something to make life endurable, something to hold by. She had found all of life to be a sham or a lie. There was nothing lasting and good. Her father tried to think of a philosophy to help. "What power, what belief, could he invoke? Had we abolished both reason and morality, to fall back upon the raw mercies of biology? In the flux of time, what was valid, what was permanent? Was there nothing he could offer her, nothing, except that blind instinct for decency which mankind had picked up and lost, and picked up again, between lower and upper levels of barbarism? Was there nothing else, not even a trail of smoke from the old altars?" (pp. 434-35) The world in disregarded belief in a creating and controlling Power had lost more than a God. It had lost security.

Nathan Pedlar of *Barren Ground* revealed something of Miss Glasgow's ironic bitterness at the loss. Sitting on the porch overlooking the plowed fields, he noticed some falling stars. He wondered aloud to his wife where such stars went. "'When you stop to think of it, it's odd what becomes of everything. It makes the universe seem like a
scrap heap". (p. 393) The world needed a stable conviction of purpose and plan.

Miss Glasgow through many characters was searching for some meaning that could still exist in an evolutionary world. She was the Dorinda of Barren Ground who gained an education and wealth but who wished for the convictions of her parents. Miss Glasgow with Oliver of Virginia gained intellectual and professional supremacy only to envy the binding creeds of the ancestors. Miss Glasgow was the Roy of In This Our Life who looked for something in an evolving world which one could grasp. She was the Ralph of Vein of Iron who saw the gaps in credibility in the religious teachings but who also saw in those teachings a strength, peace, and purposefulness which he could not possess. In yielding the old beliefs and embracing the new, the sense of order, and sometimes hope, was lost.
VI

ELLEN GLASGOW AND PEOPLE

Ellen Glasgow wrote of God, churches, creeds, and nature. The center of her books, though, was people. Each novel was the story of a life, its troubles and successes. Each included the passage of time and a cast of supporting characters.

Miss Glasgow had learned of life from some participation and much observation. As a child she had feared her older sisters and withdrawn into a world of books. She had feared her father and his anger at her rebellion. She had chosen her companions with care. As she grew older and deafness commenced, she again withdrew into a world where few penetrated the outside circle of silence and even fewer the inner circle of reticence. A few lovers, a few traveling companions, and some authors and critics made up her world. She wrote of herself in The Woman Within as an exile in the world and in every conceivable world. She could think of no age in which she could have been a part. (p. 279) Her world was made endurable by her work and her few friends. But, the exile was interested in
people. She observed and wrote.

Christianity had noted a division in people: saved and lost, redeemed and damned, good and bad. The saved, redeemed, or good were the people favored by God or those who worked to further God's plan. This was the positive force in the world. The other class, the lost, damned, or bad were the negative forces. Christianity promised happiness to the strong and faithful believers. It also promised happiness to those who gave their lives in service to others. Christianity did not define success as a life of ease but rather as a life of endurance and fortitude.

Miss Glasgow divided society into the weak and the strong. The weak were the individuals who lacked the inner resources to overcome but who could ruin lives by their own inadequacy. They were unable to fight the hostility of nature or the scheme of things. The weak were damned, not from outside but by themselves. There were two types of weak individuals: the saints and the intellectuals. The first was the hypocritical, pale, womanly character who controlled her environment by a ruthless, but subtle, attitude of sickliness and supreme piety. She was usually very religious in words but lacked that characteristic in practice. Miss Glasgow hated these shams but created many
such characters in her stories.

The most bitter portrait of a "saint" was given in The Builders. 1 A wife ruined a man's life, left a successful career in shambles, and yet retained a look of injured innocence as well as a reputation of saintliness. Her name was Angela. The Ancient Law concerned a family ruined by a wife who maintained iron rule from her couch. No one dared dispute her purity or judgment.

Mrs. Gay of The Miller of Old Church was another with a saintly reputation but a background of destruction. She was pictured as fragile, always requiring assistance to her couch, always requiring her sister's solicitous care, always leaving an appearance of gentleness, yet always achieving her desire. Her health was a matter of great concern, and any difficulties were sifted from her life so as to prevent a strain on her heart. She felt her contribution to life was her gentleness. This she thought kept men from animal passions. In actuality, she only prevented steps in rectifying mistakes. Her brother-in-law seduced a girl and wished to claim his child. He was prevented because of fearing damage to the invalid's heart. As a result a man was killed, a girl became mentally unbalanced, and the

1 (Garden City, 1919).
child possessed a warped personality. In the end, even Jonathan, her own son, was sacrificed to her weakness. Yet, this woman was greatly admired as saintly by the minister. Her name was Angela.

In the last novel, *In This Our Life*, Miss Glasgow wrote of another saintly hypocrite. Lavinia had been unable to shape her world until she developed an illusion of suffering and weakness. With a Bible open beside her bed, she destroyed Asa's faint rays of happiness. She spoiled one daughter and created a hell for the other. No one, not even the old, rich uncle, rebelled because Lavinia had a bad heart and must be spared. Lavinia read the prayer book, listened to sermons on the radio, and talked of sin. Asa grew old, Roy in despair ran away, and Stanley killed and lied. Lavinia, as Angela, was a saint to all, but to Miss Glasgow she was a vicious menace.

Miss Glasgow laughed at the weak who ruled. She also laughed, but bitterly, at the weak who could not rule even themselves or their immediate environment. These were the intellectuals. Oliver Treadwell of *Virginia* was one who felt time seeping away and his life wasted by work on a railroad. His plays revealing truth were rejected by the crowd. He began to mask truth but please the audience. His name became famous. He grew rich. His family was well
cared for. Oliver then found he could not control his own nature. He deserted his wife for an actress. He had no creed or conviction which gave stability. The man of brains was a man with a will of straw.

Miss Glasgow's most intellectual character was John Fincastle of Vein of Iron. This philosopher wrote of God and attempted to reconcile duty with life. He wrote for hours in the cold, occasionally stopping to gaze at the mountains. He meditated on philosophers and was visited by foreign scholars. Yet, he was unable to stand by his convictions for, when confronted with a problem involving a social code, he succumbed to the crowd. Ralph McBride, who loved his daughter Ada, was forced to marry Janet. John Fincastle did not possess the courage to make truth evident. The philosopher was unable to cope with life as he found it. He was unable to support his family. His mental powers were far in excess of his stamina.

Oliver Treadwell, John Fincastle, Angela Gay, and Lavinia Timberlake possessed a common characteristic. All were unable to cope truthfully with their world. To Miss Glasgow these were the weak or damned.

Miss Glasgow also wrote of the saved or the strong. In Christian theology the saved were those who adhered to
a creed. Miss Glasgow wrote of some Christians as strong. Perhaps she remembered her father who had strength in convictions. Miss Glasgow's characters who possessed a creed and were therefore strong could perhaps be called the Puritans.

Sarah Revercomb of *The Miller of Old Church* was a Puritan who believed in damnation and salvation. She ridiculed the weaker beliefs of her neighbors. She ridiculed the vicissitudes of her son's affections. She won in every argument not by intelligence but by a dominant spirit. She gained enemies and confounded the new minister. Underneath a rough exterior was kindness--extended mostly to flowers. Sarah was strong. Never did she give up to despair. A bad marriage was overcome by increased determination. Her strength ran a household, and her creed was a source of consolation.

Miss Glasgow wrote of other characters who derived strength from a religious code. The strongest was Grandmother Fincastle. She was a devout believer in a God who assisted in sickness, in poverty, and in inner conflicts. When the family questioned minor theological points, she answered with firm conviction. As others feared the future, she anticipated it with courage. As others wept at death,
she calmly meditated on the resurrection. As other families scattered, the old manse continued to be her family home. She was old. She was poor. She was strong. Her strength came from a firm conviction in a religious system.

Wagenknecht thought Miss Glasgow created better stoics than Christians.² These stoics were a second type of strong individuals. These characters were not religious but were the true saints of society. Often they were religious skeptics. They could be hurt; they could bend, but they could never break. Their vein of iron held firm. It was an inner resource. It was derived from a religious background. In each, belief was shed, but a way of life continued.

Gabriella (Life and Gabriella, 1916) was a strong character who discarded her mother’s beliefs but retained the will of the religious. Nicholas Burr (The Voice of the People, 1900) became a governor, carrying with him not a religious belief but his step-mother’s habits. Dorinda Oakley of Barren Ground was another possessor of the vein of iron. Dorinda dreamed not of a mission field but of her own land. She tried to reclaim acres not souls. Her mother could endure because of a belief. Dorinda could

endure because of a vein of iron.

Miss Glasgow also applied the term "vein of iron" to Ada Fincastle in the novel *Vein of Iron*. Ada found resources not in prayer or church but in herself. She could resist a moral code. She could maintain family ties. She could endure Ralph's rambling emotions. She could face financial disaster, long working hours, and a loss of beauty. When others committed suicide, she continued her work. She, like Dorinda, possessed a vein of iron which "could not yield, could not bend, could not be broken." (p. 135)

Christianity gave divisions to men. Christian society gave goals. Man was always searching for happiness and success. Happiness came in several ways. A man who believed could be happy through the acceptance of life with all its changes and trials. Happiness also came through submerging one's own desires in service to others.

Miss Glasgow often wrote of her unhappy life. One cause of this unhappiness was loneliness. Her deafness closed the door for many friendships. Few friends seemed faithful. The faithful seemed to die young. Miss Glasgow wrote of this loneliness in several of her novels.

Dorinda (*Barren Ground*) mused on the difference between herself and her mother. Her mother's life, though lived
in the same geographical area, was totally different. She could never discuss her problems with her mother. The pregnancy must never be known. She asked herself, "Were people like this everywhere, all over the world, each one a universe in one's self, separate like the stars in a vast emptiness?" (p. 180)

Ada Fincastle (Vein of Iron) was another character who mused on the loneliness of the world. No one could communicate with another for no one was truly interested in another. Many starved or killed themselves, but few cared. The organized charities with a disdainful attitude asked questions and uttered platitudes. Ada thought, "Each human being lived in its own cell of clay, confined within an inert speck of creation, and indifferent to the other millions of cells by which it was surrounded." (p. 404)

Another cause for Miss Glasgow's unhappiness was the misery which she saw in the world. How could one be happy in a suffering world? How could one be happy where animals were mistreated? How could one be happy when the world was hostile? In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow wrote, "Although I have not been happy (what creature with imagination could be happy in a suffering world?), I have been always interested and often amused." (p. 104) Her amusement took the form of ironic laughter. All of her life
she reviewed as sadness which in reflection could be met only with ironic laughter.

Some of Miss Glasgow's characters possessed this same ironic laughter at life. Marmaduke of They Stooped to Folly saw the ridiculousness of humanity but could laugh at its follies. John Driscoll of The Descendant saw the bitterness and failure of life. Instead of mourning the loss, he jested at the waste.

Miss Glasgow was not a happy woman. However, near the end of her life she wrote of an "uplifting sense of inward peace,"3 The doctor had told her of a badly damaged heart. She faced death and found there was nothing to fear. The rebellion of ironic laughter changed to a measure of inward calm.

In Miss Glasgow's writings there are few happy characters. Usually happiness was a chance happening, an emotion of a moment. Happiness was often a reflection or a prediction. Miss Glasgow, however, did write of people who achieved inward peace. At times the serenity came through an acceptance either of a God-ruled universe or the acceptance of the processes of life. These were Miss Glasgow's strong characters.

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3 The Woman Within, p. 283.
Another means of achieving peace other than through a religious or stoical acceptance was through personal renunciation of one's own desires and a life of sacrifice to others. Daniel Ordway of *The Ancient Law* was her outstanding example. Daniel gave up his fortune and reputation for others. He lost his family, but helped to care for drunkards. His salary went to help the poor. His peace had resulted from his losing thought of himself in service to others.

Adams of *The Wheel of Life* found he could retain inward calm only by a kindly dissociation of his desires from his actions. He no longer loved his wife. She had ruined his career. Yet, he still nursed her and was kind. By his personal renunciation he found inward peace. Geismar thought it strange that in this novel Miss Glasgow traced happiness to a religious form of self-denial. Actually she gave this method of attaining happiness many times. McDowell called it her precept of losing one's life in order to find it.

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Abel Revercomb in The Miller of Old Church found his happiness only when he gave it up. He had loved Molly and lost her. He wanted to fight or escape, but instead he tried to bring happiness to another's blighted life. Judy was more unhappy than himself. He would give her a home. He entered politics and tried to improve the world. From his usual quick temper he became calm and able to face difficulties without an emotional crisis. He could see Molly and keep his impulses under control. He could view his lonely life and failure with inward quietness. He gave up his own life and regained Molly. His inward serenity came through self-renunciation, or he lost his life in order to find it.

Dorinda in Barren Ground found her greatest peace after rescuing Jason from the poorhouse. This man had deserted her when she was pregnant. He had lied to her of his affection. He was a coward. He became a drunkard and lost his medical practice. He then lost his farm. Dorinda took the sick man to live at her home. He was no longer youthful, handsome, or even rational. Dorinda, however, found peace when she returned from her work to see him sitting in the wheelchair. Collins correctly called this inconsistency in character. He might have added that the

6 Joseph Collins, "Realism in a Southern Novel," Ellen Glasgow (Garden City, 1927), p. 36.
inconsistency was that Dorinda, who had shed so many traits of Christianity, was here practicing one of the most basic teachings, self-sacrifice for the good of another.

Another goal in life was success. Success could mean an accumulation of wealth, land, or houses. Success could be prestige. Success could be political power, fame, or intellectual attainment. Christians measured success by fortitude and endurance.

Miss Glasgow accepted the Christian definition of success. One succeeded when one endured. Miss Glasgow often lamented her lack of courage and fortitude. Her father never bent. Whatever happened he accepted without signs of fear. His daughter learned to admire those traits. Only near the end of her life did she feel she had inherited some of his powers of endurance. She wrote in The Woman Within, "I had done my best, and I could do nothing more. I had finished my course. I had kept the faith." (p. 283) Miss Glasgow, in paraphrasing Paul's statement of II Timothy 4:7, was giving the Christian teaching of endurance.

Monroe suggested that Miss Glasgow's meaning in dealing with her characters was that man, despite any loss, could hold on in the darkness of the universe. Man did not fight the world; he merely retained his grasp.7

7 N. Elizabeth Monroe, op. cit., p. 64.
Miss Glasgow seemed to call this retaining of one's grasp, or endurance, success. In every strong character this trait was portrayed.

This part of Miss Glasgow's philosophy was summarized in her last novel, *In This Our Life*. The successful character was not the wealthy uncle, or the authoritarian wife, the beautiful Stanley, or the intelligent Craig. Success was attributable only to Roy and Asa. Only these two could "fight on toward an end which they could not see." (p. 465) This was fortitude, endurance, and the ability to retain one's grasp. This was also success.

Miss Glasgow in writing of people did not instinctively reject religion as unnecessary. She wrote of many who misconstrued its concepts, but she also wrote of those who were respected because of a stable conviction. Some Christians she wrote of not with skepticism but with admiration.
CONCLUSION

Ellen Glasgow was a rebel. She rebelled against a religious system. She was unorthodox in her beliefs and often treated religion skeptically in her writings. However, she was not always in rebellion. Her beliefs were not completely unorthodox nor was religion always treated skeptically or as part of an outworn code. Religion was not ignored for some teachings of Christianity were incorporated into her writing and into her own broader system of values.

The nature and existence of God was a question for Miss Glasgow. She could not accept the Presbyterian teachings of her father, but neither could she completely dismiss the concept of a Deity from her mind. She accepted a power called the "Good" which, though not always omnipotent, just, or concerned, deserved worship because of its endurance.

In the church Miss Glasgow saw hypocrisy and social-climbing as well as charity, stability, and serenity. Sermons often failed to deal realistically with the basic issues of life but did give time for thought and at times strength for action. Mission projects concentrating on the
foreign lands were rejected, but individual acts of kindness were valued. Miss Glasgow often became a caricaturist when portraying ministers though occasionally she included traits of warmth and kindness in the portrait.

In writing of Christian doctrines Miss Glasgow thought of sin as cruelty or inhumanity. Other wrongs were errors or mistakes, and all received punishment. She disliked the blood and suffering imagery in salvation but admired Christ's moral teachings. The Bible she disregarded as prophecy but found its precepts and vocabulary useful.

The Darwinian theory of evolution was central in Miss Glasgow's views on nature. However, she thought there was little progress and much hostility in evolution. She regretted the loss of serenity which had been inherent in the Christian view of a God-planned world but which was missing in the newer theory.

The two classes of people in Miss Glasgow's world were the weak and strong, resembling the saved and damned of Christianity. The weak were saintly hypocrites and intellectuals; the strong were the puritan possessors of a religious code or the skeptical possessors of a vein of iron. Miss Glasgow wrote of a world which contained little happiness but in which inward peace was attainable through a stable belief or a life of self-renunciation. Her measure
of success seemed to be one's ability to endure.

Miss Glasgow treated religion skeptically or rejected it when the system produced sterility or a sham. She favored religion when it aided man in his fight against loneliness, unhappiness, and a barren soul.
APPENDIX I

Ellen Glasgow's first novel, entitled *Sharp Realities* was never published, and the manuscript was destroyed. What is sometimes considered the author's last novel, *Beyond Defeat*, was published in 1966 and was merely a clarification of *In This Our Life*. In this study *Beyond Defeat* is considered not as a separate novel but as an appendage to *In This Our Life*.

The novels published during the author's life are:

1. The Descendant 1897
2. Phases of an Inferior Planet 1898
3. The Voice of the People 1900*
4. The Battleground 1902*
5. The Deliverance 1904*
6. The Wheel of Life 1906
7. The Ancient Law 1908
8. The Romance of a Plain Man 1909*
9. The Miller of Old Church 1911*
10. Virginia 1913*
11. Life and Gabriella 1916*
12. The Builders 1919
13. One Man in his Time 1922
14. Barren Ground 1925*
15. The Romantic Comedians 1926*
16. They Stopped to Folly 1929*
17. The Sheltered Life 1932*
18. Vein of Iron 1935*
19. In This Our Life 1941

A volume of poems, The Freeman and Other Poems, was published in 1902; a volume of short stories, The Shadowy Third and Other Stories, in 1923; and collected prefaces named A Certain Measure in 1943.

The Old Dominion Edition was published by Doubleday, Doran and Company between 1929 and 1933 in eight volumes.

The Virginia Edition in twelve volumes (those marked by an asterisk) was published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1938. This is considered the standard edition.
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<td>The Romance of a Plain Man</td>
<td>Glasgow, Ellen</td>
<td>New York: Macmillan and Co.</td>
<td>1909</td>
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_____. "What I Believe," The Nation, CXXXVI (April 12, 1933), 404-406.


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Reva May Jenkins was born November 19, 1939, to parents who farmed near Etlan, Virginia. She was one of five children and the oldest daughter. After graduating from the Madison County High School in 1958, she entered Bryan College (Dayton, Tennessee). A degree in English was awarded in 1962. In the autumn of that year she entered the Nursing School of the University of Virginia (Charlottesville) and in 1965 became a Registered Nurse. She thereafter pursued a career in the field of nursing until 1967 when she obtained a leave of absence to study in the Graduate Department of English at the University of Richmond. In 1968 she returned to a position in nursing administration at the University of Virginia Hospital.