CHAPTER I

THE CULTURAL MILIEU
It is axiomatic to say that art bears direct relationship to society, and literature records the dominant tendencies of the age either in its affirmation of them or more commonly in a rebellion against them. Fixed in time and place, no author can be wholly free from the influence of the intellectual temper of the age; the zeitgeist of the age shapes his work conclusively. It is for this reason that an understanding of the social and cultural milieu of an author is essential for any worthwhile study of that author.

American Literature is a classic example of the influence exerted by the time spirit on writers. In not many countries have the creative writers responded so passionately to contemporary ideas and issues as in America. The most important reason behind it is the fact that America is a pretty young country and since the colonial days the Americans have been very much conscious of their contribution to the development of the nation. The adoption of the European way of life to their new situation had been their main concern in the beginning. Then after the new nation came into being a new awareness came to the Americans and the literateur turned their attention to issues which confronted the nation and the ideas which were typically and
essentially American and held an special appeal for the people of America.

The contribution of nineteenth century writers in creating this new awareness about the separate identity of Americans is especially very important. In the nineteenth century American literature assumed a more literary form. It was more belletristic than polemical; more literary than didactic and more expressive of the cultural milieu than ever. It can safely be said that American literature really came of age in the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century is especially remarkable for the great changes in different spheres of life. It was an age of technological advance, of new ideas about the universe, and of political and civil liberty. Significantly it was also an age of debate over opposites. Opposite trends were shaping life. But the fact that contrary forces were at work in the nineteenth century, was itself a sign of a gradually advancing civilization. It is because "the debate, indeed, may be said to be the culture, at least on its loftiest levels; for a culture achieves identity, not so much through the ascendancy of one particular set of convictions as through the emergence of its peculiar and distinctive dialogue."¹ This controversy or the clash over ideas was a
very distinguishing characteristic of the nineteenth century American culture. The conflict between Calvinism and liberalism, industrialism and agrarianism and imperialism and anti-imperialism kindled the imagination of the literary artists.

In the pages that follow an attempt is made to study some of these important issues. The subjects taken up here include religion, the rise of industrialism, imperialism and the idea of progress which was almost the official philosophy of the Americans in the nineteenth century.

II

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed an unprecedented development of industrial capitalism in the United States. The rapid changes that issued from the civil war are generally traced to the break-up of old domestic economy and the California Gold Rush of 1849. However, the surrender at Appomattox in 1865 finally decided the course America would follow for at least the next fifty years: capitalism and industrialism as against ruralism and agrarianism. In fact the main issue of the civil war itself was not slavery or state rights or the preservation of the union but the
farm versus factory. "It is more properly styled the
American Revolution, a title it deserves far more than does
our struggle for independence from Britain... the surrender
at Appomattox was, therefore, an enforced and bitter capitul­
ation to the superior power of industrial capitalism, the
clear and inescapable triumph of machine over plow, of enter-
preneur over landowner." 2

The roots of this growth of industrialism lay in the
political and economic theories current in the nineteenth
century America. The development of the equalitarian thou­
ght in the nineteenth century stressed free franchise
for all irrespective of his economic condition and a system
of free competition in the economic sphere. Democracy was
identified with economic individualism. A consensus was
almost reached on the merit of capitalism and whatever
discussion there was, was on the acceptability of two diffe­
rent versions of capitalism. The English classical model
was generally approved by most of the thinkers. However,
there were people like Henry George who believed that the
different economic conditions in America necessitated an
independent American School. The voice of this group recei­
ved little support, but as parrington notes, "they do not
deserve to be forgotten for most often they were an expre­sion of the social conscience of the times — a homely
protest against the exploitation of farmer and workingman by the rising capitalism."

The advocates of capitalism pointed out that the rich natural resources of America should be exploited to the fullest extent by everyone. In their opinion the system of free enterprise, of laissez-faire, did not run counter to the old American ideals of liberty and equality. They rather thought that capitalism held the greatest benefits for an individual. A very important thinker of the time Francis Brown wrote "Neither theoretically nor practically in this country, is there any obstacle to any individual's becoming rich if he will, and almost to any amount that he will ... How is it possible, indeed, that the poor should be arrayed in hostility against the rich. When... the son of an Irish Coachman becomes a governor of a state, and the grandson of a millionaire dies a pauper." Another professional economist, Henry C. Carey who was opposed to the Manchester theories of rent and population, talked about the creation of an independent national currency. He even pointed out that the ideals as laid down in the Declaration of Independence could be fulfilled only by a proper distribution of wealth under a system of free economic activity.

Apart from the views of the economists, the long
tradition of moral philosophy also provided a basis for the growth of capitalism. Clergymen gave their full support to the principles of property rights and the liberty in economic sphere. Thus moral philosophers like Samuel Stanhope Smith and Francis Wayland thought that the government ought to protect the property rights of the individual. Francis Wayland went to the extent of asserting that the policy of laissez-faire was the only system open before America and the assistance to the poor in the form of aid was the least desirable thing. "Where poor rates (direct government aid) are highest, the poor will be found the most discontented and lawless and the most inveterate against the rich." In fact a very important sociologist, Max Weber, studying the conditions which permitted the rise of capitalism, in his brilliant essay "Protestant Ethics and the Rise of Capitalism" put forward the theory that the Calvinist ethic was one of the main causes of the triumph of capitalism. Though Weber studied those societies where capitalism failed to rise, his findings are fully applicable to the America of the nineteenth century the spirit of which was essentially protestant.

The justification of industrial capitalism either on democratic grounds or as a natural growth because of the
protestant ethic rested on the assumption that the govern­ment will not indulge in foul play. The system of paterna­lism and favouritism would be a hindrance in the path of true economic equality and the government will make every effort to curb it.

With these theories providing a sort of stimulus, American social and economic life underwent a remarkable transformation in the the second half of the nineteenth century. The Railroad was typical symbol of the new age and it played a very important role in the centralisation process of America. Compared to the thirty-five miles of track in 1865, the area of railroad increased to two hundred thousand miles by the turn of the century. Transcontinental lines were also laid and the railways had reached the pacific coast. The Government's act of freely granting land for the purpose of railway lines gave a boost to the establishment of railways in America.

With the railroad easing the transport system, the industry of meat-packing also received a boost. Great names like Philip D. Armour, Nelson Morris and Gustavus Swift expanded their slaughter-houses into great industries of international repute. "Perhaps in no other field do we find so clear a demonstration of the triumph of capitalist
ingenuity over the forces of agrarianism or of the relegation of the grower and herder to a merely auxiliary position in the creation of our national wealth. 

Not only railroad or meat-packing but the business of oil also had a very mind-boggling rise. In fact the whole process of industrialization accelerated with the exploitation of the natural resources like oil, coal and iron. Great scientific discoveries of the period — telephone, dynamo — opened new avenues before the industrialists. The immigration from Europe on a heavy scale provided cheap labour which further changed the face of the old America.

The triumph of industry together with the immigration of a bulk of people from Europe also resulted in the growth of cities. The city was thought to be the land of opportunity and consequently the urban population of the country increased at an alarming pace. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston had assumed a metropolitan character in every respect. The city presenting the contrast of slums and palaces fostered a different kind of mind. Respectability and honour came to be attached to the city people. Most of the writers of the period — Henry James, Mark Twain,
Howells, Crane, Norris, Dreiser and Edith Wharton — depicted the varied patterns of city life in their fiction. However, the change from agrarian to urban way of life also made some demands on the Americans. "Americans needed to absorb the city into their consciousness — to accommodate and perhaps compromise their predilections towards the image of frontier, with all that this implied to the actualities of city living."8

Not surprisingly, the triumph of industry brought with it its attendant dangers. The America that took pride in its great material progress was not the America its founding fathers and philosophers had dreamed. The rise of capitalism and the policy of laissez-faire could not have taken place without the policy of paternalism. And paternalism degenerated into a policy of favouritism adopted by the government. If the government is to grant a gift, it will be granted in all probability to the highest bidder. This practically means the benefit of the few at the expense of the many. Under the presidentialship of Grant America saw the triumph of the profit motive; the shaping of public policy to promote private interest. Parrington rightly points out:

With its booming industrial cities America in 1870 was fast becoming capitalistic, and in every capitalistic society whiggery springs up as naturally as pigweed in a
garden... it exalts the profit motive as the sole object of parliamentary concern. Government has only to wave its wand and fairy gifts descend upon business... It graciously bestows its tariffs and subsidies, and streams of wealth flow into private wells. 9

The increasing gap between the rich and the poor which was incident to the mad capitalistic lust presented a very ghastly picture before the true democrats. The ideas of democracy and liberty were reduced to theories only and the new America was witnessing the victory of plutocratic forces. It was only towards the end of the century that the farmers of America voicing the populist sentiments, formed an alliance and with the Greenback movement launched their democratic struggle against plutocracy.

A direct result of the triumph of industry was a tragic change in the whole scale of values. The Americans under the influence of the noble ideas of the Enlightenment and Christian humanitarianism nourished by the environment of a new country free from the weakness of the old world had always dreamed of a simple, secure and comfortable life. But instead of a comfortable life, the Americans of the gilded age were witnessing a cut-throat competition, a ruthless rush for money and a final victory of the acquisitive instinct. The acquisition of material fortune became
an end in itself and people measured a person's success only in terms of the accumulation of money.

The extent of crude materialism can be gauged from the fact that the age accorded undue reverence to the rich men of the time. The 'Captains of industry', the 'lords of finance', as they were called, the Fisks, Goulds, Carnegies, Rockefellers and Vanderbilts were the folk heroes of the time. The meteoric rise of these industrialists to fame and fortune so captivated the age that it simply condoned any scandals involving them. People attributed the virtues of industry, self-reliance, perseverance and enterprise to their idols.

The spectacular success of these men gave birth to the 'rags to riches' myth which was further implanted into the imagination of the people by the novels of Horatio Alger. Horatio Alger who wrote more than a hundred and fifty novels, used the same plot in all his novels: the transformation of a poor but honest and industrious boy into a millionaire. His works proved to be best-sellers and inspired many generations of Americans to seek a fortune.

In his eagerness to glorify business and businessmen Horatio Alger never realized that the folk heroes of the time were very often the rough, vulgar and dry
people with little aesthetic sense. Thus Commodore
Vanderbilt who was the richest person of his time, read
only one book in his life time, The Pilgrim's Progress, and
that too when he had crossed seventy. Moreover business
barons were not the great humanitarians that their popular
stereotype implies. Matthew Josephson, in his brilliantly
written book eroded the myth that attributed to these busi­
nessman the godly qualities. Granting the material achieve­
ments of these lords of finance, Josephson notes :

But all this revolutionizing effort
is branded with the motive of private gain
on the part of the new captains of industry.
To organise and exploit the resources of a
nation upon a gigantic scale, to regiment
its farmers and workers into harmonious
corps of producers, and to do this only in
the name of an uncontrolled appetite for
private profit - here surely is the great
inherent contradiction whence so much
disaster, outrage and misery has flowed.

Extremes of management and stupidity
would make themselves felt... The alter­
nations of prosperity and poverty would
be more violent and mercurial speculation
and breakdown each more excessive; while
the inherent contradictions within the
society pressed with increasing intole­
rable force against the bonds of the old
order. 10

It is true that the common people by and large
endorsed the new values. However, the reaction of some
scholars, a number of economists and most of the men of
letters was quite different and they for the most part were sceptical about the material progress of America. To the economists and the political thinkers the evils of the industrial America "served only to quicken an inherited skepticism of democracy. How can society expect to function adequately they asked without capable and honest leadership and how can such leadership be hoped for in a rough and tumble democracy that loves the noisiest demagogue?" The exponent of this group of thinkers was James Russell Lowell who thought that too much of democracy was the main reason behind America's ills. Another group of thinkers led by George William Curtis was of the view that the root of evil was political. This group stressed the necessity of civil service reform for the proper functioning of the government. Another school of thought under the leadership of Edwin Lawrence Godkin who described the new civilization of America as "chromo civilization", regarded the system of unwise paternalism as the main cause of the evils that afflicted America. He thought that unless business was separated from politics there would not be any positive change.

However, all these thinkers gave little thought to the social and more importantly moral and spiritual consequences of the rise of industrialism. It was left to the writers and poets to explore the deeper implications of the
questions posed by the triumph of materialistic values. American writers responded to the call and tried to portray the actual life of the people. They were "committed during this period to the absorption of the new conditions of culture into a systematized consciousness... it was through American writers that the American consciousness was preserved and slowly began to evolve." It is difficult to agree with Michael Millgate's view that the American writers regarded business as essentially an interesting activity and "committed the mistake of regarding the American businessman as an entirely unprecedented and extraordinary phenomenon... as necessarily a great man, a type of the epic hero." It will be proper to say that the American writers turned to business and businessmen not only for literary material but they also grasped its real nature and very forcefully expressed their disapproval of the new scale of values. Thus Walt Whitman, the representative poet of America very astutely observed in his "Democratic Vistas":

The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater. The official services of America, national, state, and municipal, in all their branches and departments except the judiciary are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, mal-administration, and the judiciary is tainted. The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism... In business (this all
devouring modern word, business) the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain... Money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field... I say that our new World democracy, however great a success in uplifting the masses out of their sloughs, in materialistic development, products and in a certain highly deceptive superficial popular intellectuality, is, so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects, and in really grand religious, moral, literary, and esthetic results." 14

In this misgivings about the material forces, Whitman was echoing the thoughts of Emerson, Thoreau, elder Henry James and Charles Dickens. In his famous essay "New England Reformers" Emerson considered the Americans' obsession with trade as the root cause of all the evils of their society. The elder Henry James also very emphatically pointed out: "entire system of trade, as based upon what is called 'Unlimited Competition' is a system of capacity and robbery." 15 In fact it is not surprising that an outsider's view of the American situation was not very different simply because he himself happened to be a literary artist endowed with the same literary sensibility and love of humanity. Charles Dickens in his American Notes and Pictures from Italy while conceding that Americans possessed the virtues of cordiality, hospitality and affection, added that the great blemish in "the popular mind of America... (was) the national love of trade." 15
Most of the great writers of the nineteenth century — Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne, Melville, Howells, Twain, Henry James — had not lost faith in democratic principle. Rather they realised that the false democracy of their time had cut short the stature of the individual. The individual was submerged in the mass. The theme of a number of nineteenth century novels was the moral alienation of the individual resulting from the improper functioning of democracy. They tried to explore the problem of reconciling individual freedom with norms of social life without the individual losing his perspective.

The disgust of the men of letters with the 'business civilization' of America has been expressed in two different ways. On the one hand the writers refused to do anything with the America of their time and sought refuge in the culture of the old world and in the distant lands of their imaginations. The most prominent example of this sort of escapism is provided by Henry James in a number of his novels. In works like *Roderick Hudson* (1876), *The American* (1877) and *Daisy Miller* (1879), his theme was the flight of Americans in the cultured and polished society of the old world. Taking a cue from Henry James many other writers and intellectuals like Henry Cabot Lodge and Marion Crawford denounced the poverty of materials in their native land and
became real expatriates thinking and feeling like Europeans. Others like Henry Adams who was sceptical about the whole nature of material progress retreated into the past. Adams sought refuge in the twelfth century Europe. The New England writers — Emerson, Holmes, Whittier, and Charles Eliot Norton especially insisted upon the past and its rich traditions. Their great efforts in translating the classics like the Iliad, Vita Nuova and Faust were inspired partly by their desire to contrast the noble ideals and heroic aspirations of these works with the base materialism of their time and partly by their concern to preserve a glorious past.

However, another group of writers — Mark Twain, Hamlin Garland, William Dean Howells and Edward Bellamy, etc. — did not share Henry James's colonial feeling toward Europe. They rather depicted in their fiction the evil effects of the new material values on society and social relationships. If Hamlin Garland expressed her belief in the economic equalitarianism through her numerous stories, Howells through works like Annie Kilburn, A Hazard of New Fortunes and A Traveller from Altruria portrayed the upstarts and nouveaux riches, and the evil effects of their values in warping human relationships. The growth of the sociological novel in the last decade of the century further explored the various ramifications of capitalism and
its effect. Many writers identified themselves with labourers and launched an attack on the great industrial wizards of the age.

III

The American mind has been very much susceptible to the influence of religion. Right from the writings of the early settlers, like those of Mathers, down to the nineteenth century, religion has had an important place in the life of the citizens of the U.S.A. and has coloured the writings of almost all major writers. This colouring is there either in the form of the understanding of society's problems in the light of Christianity or in the form of a criticism of the institutionalized religion and its stifling influence on the life of the common men.

Alexis de Tocqueville, who made the first comprehensive study of American political and social institutions in his monumental work *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840) regarded religion a very powerful force in American life. He dwelt at length on the contribution of religion to American democracy. Unlike Europe where Christianity was gradually losing ground, America paid a high respect to the outward forms of religion, its rites and rituals. Expressing his
surprise Tocqueville noted:

On my arrival in the United States the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention; and the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things. In France I had almost seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country. My desire to discover the causes of this phenomenon increased from day to day. In order to satisfy it I questioned the members of all the different sects; I sought especially the society of the clergy... they all attributed the peaceful dominion religion in their country mainly to the separation of Church and state. I do not hesitate to affirm that during my stay in America I did not meet a single individual or the clergy or the laity, who was not of the same opinion on this point. 17

Tocqueville also observed that Christianity was clothed with fewer forms, figures and observances in the United States. Moreover, the clergy identified themselves with the majority opinion and did not venture to interfere in the political affairs of the state. In a way they recognised the two distinct realms of a true democracy — the spiritual and the secular. Another feature of American religion which surprised Tocqueville was the balance between the material success in this world and the other-worldly aspects of religion. Lastly, he noted, religion clearly
defined the boundary of all facets of American philosophy and behaviour. It placed a moral restraint on the behaviour and the Americans rarely disputed openly its precepts. "While it permits Americans to do what they please, religion prevents them from conceiving, and forbids them to commit, what is rash or unjust." 18

Though Catholic Church has been a force to be reckoned with in the United States — especially the new wave of Catholic immigration after the civil war resulted in the increase of Church membership — the dominant position has been held by protestentism, by Calvinism more specifically. Protestant Christianity was openly taught in the American schools in the nineteenth century.

Calvinism emphasized total depravity of man and presented a pessimistic view about man's salvation because God was under no obligation to save any man regardless of his virtuous life. The grace of the Calvinistic God can not be refused or acquired by anybody of his own free will. Stressing the study of the Bible, Calvinism also made it clear that Christ gave away his life for those who will achieve salvation and not for everyone.

The reception given to many books openly defending theism and Calvinistic doctrines, suggests that the masses
greatly clung to supernaturalistic ideas. Hickok's *Humanity Immortal* (1872) and the *Logic of Reason* (1875) were the defenses of reason. Another important book *Systematic Theology* (1873) by Charles Hodge, was the defence of the infallibility of the word of God. It was followed by G.T. Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology* (1888), defending the Calvinistic view of life. Apart from these books certain other factors like the immigration of thousands of Scotch Irish presbyterian to the U.S.A. who settled in different parts of the country further popularizing these ideas, also helped in preserving the moral attitude of Calvinists. In fact the remnants of Calvinism are still very much present in the U.S.A. "The religious conservatism that exists to this day in much of the Midwest, South, and Southwest attests to the tremendous moral force exerted by Scotch presbyterianism", Horton and Edward noted as late as 1967.¹⁹

However, while the common people were practising Calvinistic theology and the Catholic dogmas, a confined section of society was applying reason to understand Christianity. The age of Enlightenment which stressed the need of human beings' release from their self-imposed tutelage, triggered off many forces which greatly affected the thinking minority. The most important change resulting from the ideas of the Enlightenment was in the field of religion in the form
of a movement called Deism. By the end of the 18th century Deism had acquired a very important place in the life of the upper class Americans. In fact the first three presidents of the U.S.A. were deists.

Deists entirely rejected the Calvinistic conception of God as a vindictive and revengeful being. To them God was the supreme power, benevolent and merciful. However, He does not interfere in the affairs of the world which is governed by strict mechanical laws. They also tried to prove the existence of God on a rational basis. They advocated for a natural religion free from priestcraft and the institutionalized rites and rituals and put a very high premium on a virtuous and unsinful life. In fact Benjamin Franklin believed that the best service to God will be by doing good to man.

Deist literature is full of the discussion of the abominable practices of different religions. Intolerance and fanaticism in any form was anathema to the deists because in their opinion the essence of all religions was basically the same. They did not believe in revelation, magic and other unusual happenings. They accepted the morals of the Bible without regard to its historicity and regarded Christ as a very pious person whose teachings were as old as the
history of creation and had a lot in common with the teachings of other religions.

These liberal ideas influenced the individuals as well as many religious organisations and subdivisions. One religious system to be influenced by some of these ideas was Freemasonry. Basically derived from the medieval sagas and Biblical tradition, the teachings of Freemasonry were greatly coloured by the rationalistic - deistic ideas of the enlightenment. Some individuals like Thomas Jefferson, president of the U.S.A. from 1801 to 1809 and Albert Pike (1809-1891) did a remarkable job of popularizing the message of Freemasonry in the United States.

Freemasonry's belief in the exalted conception of God and its motto of freedom, equality and brotherhood of mankind were quite popular in the U.S.A. of the nineteenth century. Founded on piety and virtue, Freemasonry laid great emphasis on the performance of good deeds. But the most important feature of this cult was their belief in the transformation of a person's personality from the lower condition of spiritual darkness to a very high level of consciousness.

Of the persons credited with spreading the deistic ideas in the U.S.A., the name of Thomas Paine (1737-1809) figures very prominently. His most important work *The Age*
of Reason appeared in 1794 and 1795. Basically a very bitter criticism of the revealed religion, it brings into discredit the inconsistencies in the Old and the New Testaments. Holding Christ in high esteem but regarding Christianity in league with the powers of despotism, Thomas Paine was especially critical of the politically established Churches because they preached against the common people. Paine applied reason in his understanding of Christianity and did not believe in miracles, supernaturalism and other unbelievable incidents which characterized Christianity.

The ideas of Paine and others spread the deistic message far and wide. But it will be a mistake to think that deism was only an eighteenth century phenomenon. Although the term deism was not much in use in the 19th century, it was very much present as an attitude. Moreover because of a gradual process of secularization, people could easily proclaim themselves as sceptic or atheist without needing the shield of deism.

The nineteenth century America was remarkable for a number of new movements in religion. A growth of sectionalism, denominationalism and sectarianism sums up the state of religion in that period. Various Churches were subdivided and many religious organizations were formed. Some of the
movements that flourished in the 19th century were spiri­
tualism, Millerism, Mormonism, Adventism, Perfectionism,
Shakerism, and Christian science. The followers of these
religious groups were very committed people and believed in
the transforming power of religion. Most of these movements
were characterised by millennial ideas. All these new
movements had a touch of novelty about them. The ideas prea­
ched by these movement held appeal for the restless as well
as the complacent and prosperous people of the city. It has
been suggested that "the continued vogue of supernaturalism
in the more traditional as well as heterodox forms answered
the emotional needs of a large number of Americans. It pro­
vided assurance in a period of change and dislocation incident
to industrialisation and urbanization and to the challenge
of the new science with all its uncertainties." 20

However, despite the vogue of new religious cults and
despite the existence of deism as a religious attitude, the
belief in religion and for that matter in supernatural ideas
was being greatly challenged by the reality of the last
quarter of the nineteenth century. The great changes appa­
rent in every walk of life left their mark on religious ideas
too. Thus the rapid rise of industry and the resultant urba­
nization also started the process of secularization. The Church
which used to be a very strong social tie in rural areas
ceased to perform that function and had to loosen its control on the life of the people. There was a definite decrease in the observance of the Sabbath. Besides the city was also the centre of the advance of science and the people were more receptive to scientific ideas in cities than in villages.

The scholarly efforts of many philologist and learned people studying closely the religious texts also resulted in the watering-down of the people's religious perceptions. Their conclusions often ran contrary to the orthodox views about Christianity. Thus they proved that the Bible did not have a divine origin; rather it was a collection of a heterogenous pieces of writings written over a thousand years. The description of deluges, virgin births, Crucifixion and atonements had their precedent in the older religious writings of other peoples. Writing about many features which Christianity shared with other religions these philologist with their amazing knowledge of anthropology tried to show the naturalistic rather than the supernaturalistic basis of religion. Thus the popularity of books like GospelCriticism and Historical Christianity (1891) by Orello Cone, or Who Wrote the Bible (1891) by Washington Gladden or the religious novels of Margaret Deland and Mrs Humphrey Ward— all these works propounding heterodox views about religion— further point to the crumbling
Finally, the onward march of science exemplified through its epoch-making discoveries most powerfully delimited the appeal of supernaturalism. Geology proved the antiquity of the earth which questioned the chronology of the genesis suggested by the Bible. Astronomy established the insignificance of man in the face of an infinite universe. Most importantly, the Christian belief of considering man a special creation, directly descending from Adam, was in conflict with the Darwinian thesis. In his highly influential book *The Origin of Species* (1859), he tried to prove that the present man has gradually developed from simpler forms of animal life. All these discoveries greatly affected the religious thinking of the people.

IV

The intellectual temper of the nineteenth century, barring its last decade, was by and large optimistic. It believed in the rational ideas of the enlightenment. The optimism coupled with the belief in rationality gave birth to what is popularly known as the myth of progress which epitomizes the nineteenth century intellectual thought. The
idea of growth characterized the writings of biologists, historians, social scientists and literary artists.

The United States which was relatively free from the strangle-hold of rigid customs and traditions, despite the vogue of supernaturalism, provided a suitable environment for the reception of these ideas. A critic very aptly remarks:

American life, largely mobile because of the frontier experience, the shift of population to urban centers, and the incoming of throngs of immigrants, suggested that there was little indeed that was fixed and final... All these reasons, then, help explain why the scientific and especially the evolutionary position, emphasizing as it did the long-favored doctrine of progress, the power of man to reconstruct society, and a generally optimistic faith in the future, found congenial soil in America. 21

In the social sciences the idea of progress is quite conveniently traced to the French thinker Condorcet (1743-1794) who in his work Sketch of an Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Spirit (1795) talked about the development of mankind through nine epochs. The tenth, Condorcet argued, beginning with the revolution results in the final betterment of humanity providing absolute equality of opportunity to everybody. In his opinion the popular education of people was the foundation of progress.
Greatly influenced by Condorcet, Saint Simon (1760 - 1825), another French thinker, stated the law of the three stages of social development. He also propounded the organic theory of human society. However, it was not Saint Simon but Auguste Comte, his collaborator, who fully elaborated the philosophy of history in his numerous writings. Comte systematically explained the law of the three stages of intellectual thought: theological, metaphysical and positive. In the first stage man thought of the universe in terms of supernatural, all-mighty and anthropomorphic power. In the second stage the role of deities in human affairs was discarded and man came to believe in an undefined force. It is the third stage with its rejection of all old supernatural doctrines and mystical beliefs, which showed man's remarkable progress. Now with the help of science man analyses the universe in exact, demonstrable and predictable terms. In fact so accurate is Comte's analysis that Woodbridge Riley thinks that "the three centuries of American existence — the seventeenth with its theocracy, the eighteenth with its abstract theories of political rights and its faith in constitutions and the nineteenth with its industrialism on science — would seem to be pages out of the positivist philosophy of history."

The idea of the gradual progress of mankind also
illuminates the writings of historians and political and legal scientists. The historians like Bancroft, Parkman and Motley believed in the gradual development of the human race. They thought that mankind was able to achieve its present enviable position because of the superiority of some great individuals and some institutions. In fact John Fiske set out to write the history of mankind with the express purpose of promoting the Darwinian concept of evolution. Fully believing that historical changes result from fixed and predictable laws, Fiske studied the evolution of language of Anglo-Saxon people, and of their political institutions. In the hands of these able historians history was no longer a record of unrelated events without any pattern or meaning. It was now an interpretation, a philosophy and a pointer to a systematic growth of mankind.

The political scientists elaborated the idea of the slow but gradual growth of political institutions. The state was no longer considered an artificial creation. Like political science, the writings on law also reflect the influence of the myth of progress. A very prominent thinker of the time Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr, wrote a book *The Common Law* (1881), in which he epitomizes the popular opinion of the time. Holmes points out:
The life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience. The felt necessities of the time, the prevalent moral and political theories, intuitions of public policy, avowed or unconscious even the prejudices which judges share with their fellowmen, have had a good deal more to do than the syllogism in determining the rules by which men should be governed... the law embodies the story of a nation's development through many centuries and that in order to know what it is, we must know what has been, and what it tends to become. Much that was taken for granted as natural, has been laboriously fought for in past times: the substance of law at any time corresponded fairly well to what was regarded as convenient by those making or interpreting it, but the form or machinery and the degree to which it is able to work out desired results, depended much upon its past. 23

Not only social sciences but biology also propagated the idea of progress. Darwin's theory of the development of man from simpler forms is too well known to be discussed here. Moreover, it was Herbert Spencer, rather than Charles Darwin, who left an extraordinary influence on Americans coming to maturity after the civil war. In 1852 he wrote a paper 'Development Hypothesis' in which he gave a theory of organic evolution and found a key to this evolution in the struggle for survival. He came to form his opinions independently of Darwin and coined the famous expression 'survival of the fittest'. In his outstanding career, Spencer also deduced certain laws relating to physical, organic and social
development. He pointed out that the progress of mankind lies in the transformation of the homogenous into the heterogenous and simple into the complex.

The credit to popularize the evolutionary doctrine in America goes to John Fiske. Fiske tried to show the potential theism of Spencer's *First Principles* (1860) after the great debate between science and religion had been reinforced by the spread of evolutionary theory. Fiske thought that the evolution was simply God's manner of achieving his noble purposes and that the purpose of all natural processes was to produce happiness. In his *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* (1874) he clarified the Spencerian conception of cosmic evolution. He suggested that evolution just proves the existence of a supernatural and eternal force. Fiske also argued that faith in a benevolent God and immortality was not contrary to the theories and postulates of science.

The wide acceptance of Spencer's and Fiske's ideas just proves that the American mind was ready to believe anything which guaranteed progress. The disciples of Spencer and Fiske discovered unity, growth, purpose and order in the universe, and as Parrington notes:

*In the evolutionary science were the grounds of a genial optimism that nothing could shake. If they had lost something of*
jauntiness of the transcendental faith that beheld God plowing furrows of Brook Farm, they were armed with a scientific faith that by tapping stones and comparing fishes they should find His plan in an evolving series of life forms... Freedom, love, benevolence progress towards a millenial perfection -- these were the clarion notes in a huge symphony in praise of human perfectibility that assaulted American ears in the Gilded Age. 24

The same optimism characterised the poetry of the representative poets of America. Whitman accepted the evolutionary idea though it bore the influences of Emerson rather than Darwin. He exalted the stature of man by praising the future possibilities and the potential goodness of man. Another poet of the period Sidney Lanier, thoroughly immersed in Darwinism, tried to bridge the gap between science and religion. His poetry is also marked by a note of hope and hospitality to the new scientific doctrines.

However, this optimism was not to last forever. The biological thought soon gave way to the theories of physics and the intellectual leadership passed from Spencer to Haeckel. The world that physics unfolded did not have order, harmory, or growth but only flux and chance. It signified the end of the myth of progress. Instead of the teleological conception of the universe, the mechanistic theory held an unhappy appeal for intellectuals and writers. "The
idea of progress slipped quietly from their minds, and in its stead was only a meaningless and purposeless flux of things. With the final victory of the mechanistic theory, all old faiths in free will, purposive providence and a benevolent universe crumbled. There was utter hopelessness in the mind of intellectuals and other perceptive souls.

The most prominent example of this pessimism and disillusionment is Henry Adams's classic work *The Education of Henry Adams*. He was not convinced of the material progress of America; did not see any order in the universe; and discarded the evolutionary historiography of his time that envisaged an orderly progress of human institutions.

The obsession with the mechanistic theory and the resulting despair and despondency found a suitable expression in the naturalistic novels of Theodore Dreiser, Franc Noris and Stephen Crane. Mark Twain also came to write a number of works showing his belief in the mechanistic theories. These writers conceived of man as a pawn in the hands of a cruel fate. Man was believed to be guided by chemical forces from within and social forces from without and hence not to be blamed for his actions. It was a far cry from the earlier America of Emerson and Whitman.
The last decade of the nineteenth century witnessed American excursion into imperialism. The war against Spain, the armed conflict against Philippines and the interference in China are some important events in the history of America. The champions of imperialism tried to justify America's expansionist venture on a number of grounds. Their arguments in favour of imperialism can be fully understood only in the context of the nineteenth century: the then current philosophy and the economic prosperity of America.

A number of Americans viewed the new reality in darwinian terms. They thought that the idea of the 'survival of the fittest' fully applied to nations and it was in keeping with the law of nature that a strong nation should dominate the weak ones. The religious-minded people interpreted the doctrine of inevitability to prove God's will in granting divine guidance to strong nations. Thus the American president William McKinley knelt down on his knees to get divine sanction for his imperialistic policies. In fact political Darwinism was openly popularised by the widely read magazines and the public speeches of some noted speakers. As early as June 1854, Hunt's Merchant's Magazine brought out:
As in modern society the capitalist has the pauper in his power, so among nations the rich ones will require the service of the poor ones, or cause their destruction. Nor is the universal and irresistible operation of this law to be regretted... It is better that an inferior race should thus become extinct than that the development of a superior race should be prevented. 26

By the end of the nineteenth century political Darwinism had become so popular that the Republicans openly supported this. A very strong supporter of this idea, Senator Albert J. Beveridge even preached it in Congress:

God has not been preparing the English speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation and self-admiration. No! He made us master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigned. He has given us the spirit of progress to overwhelm the faces of reaction throughout the earth. He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples. Were it not for such a force as this the world would relapse into barbarism and night. And of all our race He has marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world. 27

Another argument in favour of imperialism revolved around the business interests of America. The champions of imperialism maintained that America's object should be to
develop its industrial economy at home and promote trade throughout the world. The changing scenario in America and Europe also gave weight to their views. By the end of the decade America had achieved political unity at home as a result of the closure of its frontier and the rapid process of industrialization. The development of industry, trade, and banking necessitated the creation of new markets. As long as the contiguous territories remained to be conquered, the industrialists and entrepreneurs did not think much about the overseas expansion. But with the final closing of the frontier, the business interests of the country could be realised only through the creation of new colonies. Albert J. Beveridge's famous 'March of the Flag' speech delivered on April 27, 1898, clearly sums up this attitude:

American factories are making more than the American people can use. American soil is producing more than they can consume. Fate has written our policy for us, the trade of the world must and shall be ours and we shall get it as our mother, England, has told us how. We will establish trading posts throughout the world as distributing points for American products. We will cover the ocean with our Merchant Marine. We will build a navy to the measure of our greatness. Great colonies, governing themselves, flying our flag and trading with us, will grow about our posts of trade. Our institutions will follow our trade on the wings of our commerce. And American law, American order,
American civilization and the American flag will plant themselves on shores hitherto bloody and benighted, by those agencies of God henceforth made beautiful and bright. 28

The world-picture also goaded the imperialists to clamour for expansionist policies. There was a general triumph of industrialism in Europe and the process of colonialism which had been started by France, Spain, England and Poland 300 years ago had now reached its final phase. Italy and Germany also joined the race for colonies and the imperialists in United States thought that their country should also make efforts to get possession of some colonies before they are claimed and gobbled by the European nations. Thus Senator Henry Cabot Lodge was a very vocal supporter of this idea. He pointed out on many occasions that America had better join the race before she found herself left at the post.

As is clear from some of the passages quoted above, a powerful argument of the imperialists included their belief in the superiority of American civilization. It was pointed out by many that the mission of America was to spread civilization and the ideals of liberty and equality in the midst of the less fortunate people of the world. The concept of the 'Whit Man's Burden' was openly embraced by
protestant Churchmen also. They thought that they should contribute their mite to the regeneration of the backward people. More aggressive proponents of this view believed that the people sitting in darkness are not capable of learning democracy or running their own government and it was in their own benefit that the civilized people should rule them. This idea had its origin in England but the American imperialists were in constant touch with and borrowed from British imperialist ideas. "The Victorian insistence... upon the division of the globe between civilized and uncivilized societies in time affected American perspectives too."

The last two decades of the previous century also saw the publication of two great works in support of imperialism which greatly influenced the foreign policy of the United States. These works present the syntheses of all the old arguments about the need and legitimacy of imperialistic ventures. The first of these works was Josiah Strong's *Our Country* (1885) which stressed the idea of the inborn superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and urged the Americans to spread the American values of civil liberty and spiritual Christianity in the backward lands.

Even more important was the book by Alfred Thayer
Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power on History* (1890) which was couched in Darwinian terms. Mahan viewed the relationship between nations based mainly on self-interest and was not opposed to the use of force. A nation should be prepared to fight and follow the policy of aggression for its own existence. He stressed the need of a powerful navy which he regarded more effective and flexible than an army and considered the export of finished products to other nations indispensable for the proper functioning of the navy. Mahan's views influenced not only the policy makers of the United States but also those of Japan, England, and Germany. In America the credit for popularizing his ideas goes chiefly to Theodore Roosevelt.

With all these arguments hanging in the air, the United States was just biding its time for a suitable opportunity. The stage was set and only a spark was needed to crystallize these imperialist sentiments into a reality. It was provided by the revolution for Cuban independence from Spain. The imperialists with the help of the yellow press convinced the people of the United States that Spain needed a war and that the United States stood for the highest ideals of liberty and democracy in this war. The war was finally declared on April 25, 1898 which ended in Spain's defeat. Spain was forced to sign a humiliating peace
treaty and had to relinquish Cuba. The imperialist nature of this protocol can be gauged from the fact that Puerto Rico and all Spain's other islands in West Indies were ceded to the United States. By one ambiguous clause, the United States also took control of the Philippines.

The Filipinos welcomed the American army and under the able leadership of Aguinaldo assisted them to take Manila. However, the news of the terms of the treaty of Paris with Spain, and the brutality of the Americans in the Philippines soon disillusioned the Filipinos and they turned against the Americans. Using primitive weapons they resisted the American army until after the turn of the century. It was only when Williams Howard Taft was made the Governor General of the Philippines in 1907 and when the Filipinos were assured of their independence that the Philippines problem could be solved.

In Africa and Asia also imperialism had taken firm roots. In the years 1898-1900 the Boer War was going on in South Africa. The Boers led by Kruger were fighting British imperialism which under the leadership of Cecil Rhodes was assuming dangerous proportions.

In China the nature of imperialism was more subtle. Under many treaties signed at different periods, the Chinese
government gave trade concessions to the United States and other European powers. By these agreements significant areas in the thirteen richest, most populous and most desirable commercial cities were rented to the foreign powers and they turned these provinces into their 'Sphere of influence.' However, this looting of China did not continue without a violent reaction on the part of the Chinese people. A militant group of Chinese named 'Boxers' rose in rebellion against the foreign encroachments of their motherland. But they could not match the strength of the combined forces of the Europeans and Americans. The Chinese defeat had disastrous results for it and it had to pay huge indemnities. The whole of China was dismembered and the European nations — France, England, Germany and Russia besides the Asian army of Japan — occupied different territories of China. The United States did not take any territory because of its advocacy of the 'open door' policy but it did exploit China's economic resources through many consortiums and loans which Chinese gave very grudgingly.

The entry of the United States into the race for colonies did meet with opposition at home. The opponents of the imperialist policies argued on religious, ethical humanitarian and also practical grounds. They talked of
the curtailment of armaments which would result in the prevention of war. The pacifists thought that the United States did not have any moral right to rule the unwilling people; it repudiated the philosophy of the natural right of all peoples to self-determination and self-government. Many of the anti-imperialists believing in the superiority of the American people, thought that the involvement in the affairs of the old world will have disastrous result as the Americans will be affected by the ills of Europe. The anti-imperialists also pointed out the futility of the imperialist ventures on practical grounds. In their opinion imperialism would result in navalism, militarism and war incurring thereby heavy expenditure and taxes and giving no profit.

The anti-imperialist sentiments attracted people from all walks of life. Most of the writers and intellectuals sided with them and the opposition to the official policies of the government took an organized form. On June 15, 1898, in Boston the American Anti-Imperialist League came into existence. They in one voice opposed the American policy on the Philippines. However, the victory of McKinley in the presidential election of 1900 on an openly imperialist platform was a big blow to the voice of the anti-imperialists. Further, the diversity in their views and
their disunity did not work in their favour and even at the height of their organized activity they were not very influential.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


6. He points out that the essence of capitalism lies in its stress on the pursuit of profit and the organization of all enterprise in a rational manner. Two major characteristics of capitalism, standardization of production and the specialized division of labour were greatly encouraged by protestant ethic which stressed a uniformity of life and the importance of a fixed calling in life.


19. *Literary Thought* op. cit., p.47.
