CHAPTER III

TWAIN ON RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY
It is common knowledge that religion unmistakably affects the members of a society irrespective of the fact whether religious beliefs are 'true' or not, whether they are adhered to zealously or discarded disdainfully. Mark Twain's writings also show a life-long interest of the writer in religious matters. His constantly wavering attitude towards Christianity notwithstanding, a major portion of his works especially his first travel book and the works produced in the last fifteen years of his life explore religious and philosophical issues. The later writings are particularly important in this case because they also point to the drastic change in his religious outlook in his later years. The 'irreverent believer' of the early writings is lost somewhere in the bitter outpourings and diatribes of the 'cynical agnostic' of later writings.

There have been some good studies of Mark Twain's treatment of religion. However, these studies have not given due consideration to two very important facts. One is that the publication of *Letters from the Earth* in 1962, and "Reflections on Religion" in 1963, completely changed the picture of Twain, the religious thinker. The omission of these works from the study of Twain's religious views has also rendered useless the early criticism of Twain's religion.
Secondly, no study of Twain's religious views can be called complete if it does not consider his philosophical writings. Twain's philosophical writings have generally been studied as separate from his works dealing with religion. As a matter of fact Twain's entire work should be a frame of reference for any unified picture of Twain the religious thinker.

The first thing that strikes readers about Twain's treatment of religion in his various writings is his heavy dependence on the Bible. It provided him characters, quotations and imagery. He may lean towards Biblical characters for the purpose of comedy or for writing serious passengers. More importantly perhaps, it was the exploration of the problem of evil that troubled his mind and soul throughout his life and which finds an expression in most of his works. In the pages that follow an attempt is made to study Twain's attitude towards religion and other related philosophical problems. The study reveals Twain's conflicting opinions about the Bible, his praise and criticism of Christ and some other Christian concepts and finally his failure to solve some of the philosophical problems he was confronted with.

II

Of all the books Twain read, the influence of the
Bible was the most profound. "The Mythology of Christianity", writes Elsnor, "engrossed his imagination."¹ He was introduced to the Bible at a very tender age because of his Presbyterian background and especially because of his mother's efforts. When he started his writing career he could draw upon the Bible because most of his readers were quite familiar with Biblical themes and incidents. "Thus the Bible provided a common ground on which Twain and his audience could meet."²

Elsnor has also noted that the three images used most extensively in his writings were those of the prodigal son; Adam, Eve and the Fall; Noah and the Flood. However, he does not elaborate his thesis completely and significantly omits the discussion of the influence of the Bible on Twain's major fictional works. Apart from these images Twain used the characters of Adam, Christ, Noah and most importantly of Satan in his writings. Satan very often voices the anti-religious views of Mark Twain in his later works. The other aspects of Christianity which attracted Mark Twain's attention were his critical analysis of the evil effects of the Established Church particularly the relationship of the institutionalized religion to man and society; his scornful commentary on the Church practices and his scathing criticism of the gap between Christian profession and practice.
Twain's attitude towards the Bible and its characters, though sceptical, is still marked by some degree of reverence in his early fiction. The Innocents Abroad contains many passages "which have obviously been written from the view of a believer." In these passages Twain expresses his views on the Bible, Christ and some Holy places. In one such passage Mark Twain, expressing his deep admiration for Joseph's story in the Bible, comments: "It is hard to make a choice of the most beautiful passage in a book which is so gemmed with beautiful passages as the Bible, but it is certain that not many things within its lids may take rank above the exquisite story of Joseph (p. 389)."

Twain held Jesus Christ in great reverence. Whenever he talks about Christ in The Innocents Abroad his tone at once reflects the adoration and veneration which a devout Christian feels for the Saviour. Thus Twain is of the view that the Colosseum in Rome, where thousands of Christians suffered martyrdom in ancient times, is a holy place. He says, "And well it might, for if the chain that bound a saint, and the footprints a saint has left upon a stone he chanced to stand upon, be holy, surely the spot where a man gave up his life for his faith is holy (p. 219)." In another impassioned passage, Twain, mixing his characteristic irony
with his reverence for Christ talks about the Holy sepulchre in a very reverent tone. He feels pained to realize that mankind has fought so ruthlessly and shed rivers of blood to gain possession of the Holy sepulchre:

With all its clap-trap, side shows and unseemly impostures of every kind, it is still grand, reverend, venerable for a God died there; for fifteen hundred years its shrines have been wet with the tears of pilgrims from the earth's remotest confines; for more than two hundred, the most gallant knights that ever wielded sword waited their lives away in a struggle to seize it and hold it sacred from infidel pollution. Even in our own day a war, that cost millions of treasure and rivers of blood, was fought because two rival nations claimed the sole right to put a new dome upon it. History is full of this old Church of the Holy Sepulchre—full of blood that was shed because of the respect and the veneration in which men held the last resting place of the meek and lowly, the mild and gentle, prince of peace (p. 457).

Though Twain doubts the veracity of the myth of certain holy places associated with Christ's appearance, the place of Christ's Crucifixion affects him differently and he expresses his unflinching faith in it. He remarks, "It is not possible that there can be any mistake about the locality of the Crucifixion. Not half a dozen persons knew where they buried the Saviour, perhaps, and a burial is not a startling
event anyhow; therefore, we can be pardoned for unbelief in the Sepulchre but not in the place of the Crucifixion (pp. 455-56)."

The Innocents Abroad is not the only book in which Twain shows praise on Christ. In "Captain Stormfield's visit to Heaven," the captain is asked to name the world he came from. Bewildered, the captain tells that he belonged to the world the Saviour saved. His bewilderment is, however, not over because he is further told that the Saviour saved many worlds and not just one.

The inspiring figure of Jesus Christ provided Twain some literary material as well. He casts the character of Joan of Arc in the mould of Christ. The parallels between the life of Joan and Christ are unmistakable. Like Christ she spends a pastoral childhood; she is the saviour of France; finally she is betrayed by her own people. In all her ordeals she displays Christ-like endurance, bravery and forgiveness. She becomes "a female Christ figure."4

The inspiring figure of Christ is one thing and the evils of the Established Church quite another. Throughout his life Twain nursed an antipathy towards priestcraft and the Established Church. In his opinion the Established Church always degenerates into an institution of exploitation
of the poor. He touches upon the evil effects of the Established Church on the life of the people in numerous works. In *The Innocents Abroad* his hostility towards the Established Church found an outlet in his trenchant criticism of Italy. He calls Italy a land which has been groping in the midnight of priestly superstition for sixteen hundred years. He finds that Italy is a land 'troubled with' unholy priests and an 'unpardonably' large number of Churches. Twain presents the riches of Churches in stark contrast to the poor masses of Italy living a very wretched life full of misery and hardships. He holds the Church responsible for the pitiable condition of the people of Italy. That is why he approves the Italian government's action of confiscating the domains of the Church run to the administration when it ran out of finances. Speaking of the riches of the Church and its adverse effect on the lives of the ordinary citizens Twain remarks:

Now where is the use of allowing all those riches to lie idle while half of that community hardly know, from day to day, how they are going to keep body and soul together? And where is the wisdom in permitting hundreds upon hundreds of millions of francs to be locked up in the useless trumpery of Churches all over Italy, and the people ground to death with taxation to uphold a perishing government?
As far as I can see Italy, for fifteen hundred years, has turned all her energies, all her finances, and all her industry to the building up of a vast array of wonderful Church edifices and starving half her citizens to accomplish it. She is today one vast museum of magnificence and misery. All the Churches in an ordinary American city put together could hardly buy the Jewelled frippery in one of her hundred Cathedrals. And for every beggar in America, Italy can show a hundred — and rags and vermin to match. It is the wretchedest, princiliest land on earth (pp.202-203).

Twain was greatly enraged to see the predominance of beggary in an otherwise 'rich country' and he exhorts the beggars, "Oh, sons of classic Italy, is the spirit of enterprise, of self-reliance, of noble endeavour, utterly dead within you? Curse your indolent worthlessness, why don't you rob your Church (p. 203)?"

The ill-effects of the Established Church are highlighted in greater detail in *A Connecticut Yankee*. The first thing that the Yankee notices about the Kingdom of Arthur is the pathetic condition of the masses. They did not have any liberty and the society was divided into slaves and masters. The monarchy with its feudal structure had reduced the people to misery and hardship. It was actively supported by the Established Church. In fact both the
monarchy and the Church were hand in glove together to maintain an unjust social order. All the exploiters were highly religious-minded people. The Yankee is of the view that the monarchy and the aristocracy of England will lose all their power if the Church withdraws its active support to these evil institutions. Its false theological reasoning to preach the poor the virtues of humbleness and submission even in the face of oppression and tyranny has spelled disaster for them. The best example of the disservice done by the priests to the poor is provided by the pathetic condition of the prisoners in the Kingdom of King Arthur. The Yankee is filled with pity to see the "skeletons, scarecrows, goblins, pathetic figures, everyone: legitimatest possible children of Monarchy by the grace of God and the Established Church." 5

However, the priests interpret their lot in a different light. They preach the poor captives that God had put them there for some good purpose and teach them that "patience, humbleness and submission to oppression was what He loved to see in parties of a subordinate rank, had traditions about these poor old human ruins, but nothing more (p. 104)."

The Yankee views with great misgivings the very emergence of the Established Church. Before its arrival men were
men; they were equal. They had a man's pride and spirit and independence. The statues of the people were achieved rather than ascribed. But the arrival of the Church changed this ideal picture. The Yankee very wryly notes:

But then the Church came to the front, with an axe to grind; and she was wise, subtle and knew more than one way to skin a cat — or a nation; she invented 'divine right' of kings, and propped it all around, brick by brick, with the Beautitudes — wrenching them from their good purpose to make them fortify an evil one; she preached (to the commoner) humility, obedience to superiors, the beauty of self-sacrifice; she preached (still to the commoner, always to the commoner) patience, meanness of spirit, non resistance under oppression; and she introduced heritable ranks and aristocracies, and taught all the Christian population of the earth to bow down to them and worship them (p. 42).

The Yankee feels that a just and equitable social order can not come into existence as long as the Church reigns supreme. He therefore decides to weaken the power of the Church. In his view religion is a private and individual affair and the separation of the Church from the State an utmost necessity for a proper functioning of a country. The Established Church should not be used as a political machine because "it makes a mighty power, the mightiest
conceivable, and then when it by-and-by gets into selfish hands, as it is always bound to do, it means death to human liberty, and paralysis to human thought (p. 50)."

As if to illustrate the true nature of this 'mightiest conceivable power', Twain subjects his protagonist to suffer defeat at the hands of the Church. The Yankee's efforts to curtail the power of the Church are frustrated and the Church maintains its supremacy at the end of the novel.

The same mighty power of the Church is shown in Joan of Arc. Joan, the perfect embodiment of human virtue, is captured by the British and tried in an ecclesiastical court headed by Cauchon, a wily and malicious priest. Cauchon is mainly interested in self-aggrandizement and is guided by the British and not by his own conscience. He manipulates facts and 'proves' Joan guilty of breaking the 'laws of God.' The cold attitude of the people towards Twain's trial resulting from the fear of the Established Church further proves its unlimited power. The manner in which Twain presents Joan's character and the awesome power of the Established Church clearly point to Twain's own dislike for the Established Church.
III

In the beginning of this chapter it was mentioned that Twain's perception of religion changed drastically towards the closing years of his life. It was also pointed out that the critics' omission of *Letters from the Earth* and "Reflections on Religion" from their analysis presented only a half-true picture of Mark Twain the religious thinker. As a matter of fact some of the otherwise brilliant studies of Mark Twain's religion present a half-true picture because of the writer's omission of these writings. Thus Filip Foner's painstaking analysis of Twain's religion in his *Mark Twain: Social Critic* fails to satisfy a modern reader of Mark Twain because he does not make any mention of these works. Similarly Edward Wagenknecht's brilliant chapter on Twain's religion, "Charts of Salvation" in his monumental work *Mark Twain: The Man and His Work* is less convincing because of this unavoidable omission of these pieces. Even a critic like Bernard Devoto who had access to the unpublished writings and manuscripts of Twain thought that *The Mysterious Stranger* was Twain's final statement on religion and related matters. This erroneous view was followed by many critics partly because it was an established critic's view and partly because of their mistake of separating Twain's writings on religion from his philosophical
However, the fact remains that Twain's later writings are of crucial importance to understand his religious thinking. In these works his views on Christianity are greatly coloured by his personal pessimistic, deterministic philosophy. In fact so impatient is Twain in these writings to propagate his views that he even sacrificed the need of adopting a persona to express himself. In his brilliant study of Twain's last ten years, Hamlin Hill, repeating an opinion shared by many critics, points out that in these writings Samuel Langhorne Clemens broke the comic mask of Mark Twain to provide readers with his own comments. He writes:

Always uncertain and uncomfortable with fictions, Clemens more and more emphasized the autobiographical voice during his last years. His autobiographical dictations were the most obvious example, but his letters, diaries, essays and literary polemics were only slightly disguised versions of that same voice. The 'fiction' of the decade was almost always abortive and unfinished. Realistic fiction, Hannibal and the Mississippi River, were lost to him as resources for writing; instead anti-imperialism, antivivisection, vituperation against Mary Baker Eddy, and similar outbursts, largely lacking the humour characteristic of Mark Twain to provide distance and equanimity, were the major products. And the autobiography itself was the purest form of this confessional mode.
These autobiographical writings include Twain's "fiction", Joan of Arc, Pudd'nhead Wilson, The Mysterious Stranger; his short stories like "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg"; his philosophical pieces like "What is Man"; his dictations like "Reflections on Religion"; his Letters from the Earth and finally his anti-imperialistic writings. Apart from the autobiographical elements there are certain other recurrent motifs in these works. All these works reflect Twain's preoccupation with the problem of evil. They point to man's insignificance in the scheme of things. Some of these writings contain a negation of the Biblical worldview and present a very bitter and damaging criticism of the Biblical God, Christ and the Bible itself. Mark Twain's fascination with Satan also distinguishes these writings.

All these pieces are marked by Twain's growing pessimism. It may be contended that Twain's earlier writings are also tinted with the traces of his later pessimistic outlook. As a matter of fact throughout his literary career Twain the reformer is waging a war to ameliorate the human condition. In the earlier writings it is in the form of a struggle against a society that can be controlled. It is found in Huckleberry Finn, A Connecticut Yankee and the Prince and the Pauper. But in his later pessimistic pieces
the ones under discussion, he is fighting an already lost battle against a mechanistic and determined universe. In these works his pessimistic attitude "shifts from the injustices of a distorted social order to that of a hopeless and useless life in general."^7

Twain's novel *Joan of Arc* is poised somewhere in the midst of these two categories. Joan's final defeat is partly to be explained by a distorted social order and partly by a determined universe. Always fascinated by Joan, Twain thought her superior to Eve as she was above temptation. She is a perfect embodiment of human virtues and transforms even some ordinary persons like Paladin, La Hire and Dwarf into extraordinary creatures.

However, it can not be said that in Joan Twain "perceives a ray of hope" or that she offers the ideal example of the intuitively moral individual rising above the dehumanizing effects of environmental determinism."^8 True that Joan is identified with the Fairy tree in the novel which represents uncorruptible youth, moral purity and religious faith. True that despite Twain's scepticism about the interventions of God in the affairs of man, he prevents the descriptions of Joan's voices without being partial. Yet she does not conquer the environmental determinism as her
tragic death itself results from its dehumanizing effects. Pitted against a cruel and corrupt world of immoral priests and an uncaring King, she meets her downfall after being burnt at the stake. In fact it is Twain's eulogization of Joan that had led critics to say that she is above all experience. William Searle also misses this point when he says that Twain's praise of Joan is inconsistent with his moral determinism. The truth is that Twain has only a sentimental love for Joan, the individual, firstly because he had respect for some heroic figures like Martin Luther, Napoleon and Cromwell, because they possessed those qualities which ordinary mortals lack. Secondly this novel also has some autobiographical touches as Twain saw similarities between Joan and his daughter Susy. As a matter of fact Twain's love for his wife and his typical attitude towards all women colour this novel. Thus this sentimental love for Joan owes something to Twain's personal life and it is not inconsistent with his overall determinism as the tragic death of Joan and the presentation of a debased humanity in the novel would testify.

William T. Frederick analyses *Joan of Arc* as a startling confession of spiritual unrest. *Joan of Arc* was written at a time when Twain was confronted with some
personal tragedies of his life; business failures, death of his daughter. Moreover, certain factors like scientific determinism, spread of industrialism, imperialistic wars, and the growing materialism were causing the decay of spiritual values. Twain, always a man of the world, was deeply influenced by these factors. "That he could represent Joan simultaneously as Christian, Democrat and nature goddess, and yet not exclusively as any of these argues a spiritual ambivalence, a tension among skepticism, determinism and faith which was by 1896 far from being resolved." 11

The overall vision of Twain as it emerges from this novel is that of a pessimist. Despite his praise of Joan in the highest possible terms, Twain does not suggest that her perfectibility is really an attainable ideal. On the other hand there is ample proof in the novel to prove that the forces of evil are too strong to be conquered by the forces of good represented by Joan, the female Christ. "Even as the best the human race has to offer, Joan cannot ultimately improve the course of human society or save herself." 12

In the other fictional works of this period, "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg", and The Mysterious Stranger
also Twain pessimistically surrenders to the evil inherent in man. His preoccupation with the figure of Satan in these works throws some light on the functioning of his troubled mind.

In the "Hadleyburg" story Twain presents human soul as entirely corruptible despite man's vain assumption that one can live a righteous life. Hadleyburg in the most honest, upright and supposedly incorruptible town inhabited by exemplary nineteen citizens of the region.

But then a mysterious stranger comes to the town and Hadleyburg has the ill-luck to offend him. He takes a vow to corrupt the whole town and succeeds in his endeavour by tempting the town with a sack of money. This portion of the story reads like "the reenactment of the fall of Adam." These exemplary nineteen citizens are exposed one by one as thoroughly corruptible. After his success the stranger, acting like Satan, comes out with the moral of the story which almost reads like Milton's Aeropagnatica: "As soon as I found out that you carefully and vigilantly kept yourselves and your children out of temptation, I knew how to proceed. Why you simple creatures, the weakest of all weak things is a virtue which had not been tested in the fire."
Twain's preoccupation with Satan continues in *The Mysterious Stranger* also. Edward Wegenknecht notes that "Satan seems to have appealed to him more as the principle of rebellion than as the principle of evil." In this novel also Twain voices his rejection of Christian worldview through the mouth of Satan.

*The Mysterious Stranger* is a novel of initiation. The principal character of the novel, therefore, is being educated in the mysteries of life by Satan who claims to be omniscient. Satan represents the "true voice of man's free will" while Theodore represents traditional Christianity. Through their encounters Twain tries to grasp the reality of life. He constantly views this reality from different perspectives: "His judgement on Christianity is based on the assumption that the world is deterministic; his judgement of (sic) is based on the assumption that the structure of the world must be a moral one." Thus Satan traces the history of mankind to Adam which is essentially a Christian idea but he denies after-life, a deterministic idea. His final judgement on life is utterly nihilistic:

Nothing exists; all is a dream.
God — man — the world, the sun, the moon, the wilderness of stars — a dream,
all a dream; they have no existence.
Nothing exists save empty space —
and you ...  

And you are not you — you have
no body, no blood, no bones you are
but a thought. I myself have no exis-
tence; I am but a dream — your dream,
creature of your imagination (p. 742).

Satan, voicing Twain's opinion, presents a wholly
pessimistic picture of man and not "an optimistic belief
in the collective power of the human mind" as Budford
Scrivner Jr. tries to explain. He has but disgust and
contempt for man: "Man is made of dirt — I saw him made.
I am not made of dirt. Man is a museum of disease, a home
of impurities; he comes today and is gone tomorrow; he
begins as dirt and departs as stench. I am of the aristo-
cracy of the imperishables (p. 742)." The moral sense
which Christianity claims makes man superior to other
creatures because it gives him the knowledge of right and
wrong is to Satan the greatest weakness of man. He views
man's pride in possessing the moral sense in the same
contemptuous manner:

It is your paltry race — always
lying, always claiming virtues which it
hasn't got, always denying them to the
higher animals, which possess them. No
brute ever does a cruel thing -- that is
the monopoly of those with the Moral Sense
When a brute inflicts pain he does it innocently; it is not wrong; for him there is no such thing as wrong. And he does not inflict pain for the pleasure of inflicting it. Only man does that. Inspired by that mongrel Moral Sense of his! A sense whose function is to distinguish between right and wrong, with liberty to choose which of them he will do. No what advantage can have out of that? He is always choosing, and in nine cases out of ten he prefers the wrong (pp. 659-670).

But it must be pointed out that Theodore always keeps his moral sense. He views Satan's judgment with suspicion and always tries to reform him.

Another pessimistic idea that is presented in the novel is that of death as a release from the imprisonment of life. In fact in his later years Twain was very much preoccupied with this idea. First there are some references to it in *A Connecticut Yankee*. Later in his short epigrams attributed to Dave Wilson in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Following the Equator*, he is constantly seen welcoming death.

In *The Mysterious Stranger* this idea is voiced through Satan. He tells Theodore that he will bring Nikolaus to an early close. To the boys' pleadings against it he argues that if he did not do it, Nikolaus would catch scarlet fever with pathetic after-effects: "for forty six years he
would lie in his bed a paralytic log, deaf, dumb, blind and praying night and day for the blessed relief of death (p. 598)."

Nikolaus finally dies as Satan had predicted. His tragic death is mourned by all and his mother finds fault with God's ways to man: "But in His hard heart there is no compassion. I will never pray again (p. 711)." Here Twain introduces a Christian idea through Theodore: "Why, He had saved it from harm — but she did not know (p.711) In other words Theodore says that God can sometimes bring good out of apparent evil.

The Mysterious Stranger does not resolve the contradictions of Twain's mind. This failure to come to a final solution of life's mysteries also characterizes "What is Man", which Twain called his gospel. This work is presented in the form of a dialogue between a young man and an old man. The embittered and cynical old man obviously voicing the opinions of its ageing author, explains to the young man the meaning of life. Considering man merely a machine he denies man any freedom of thought. All his ideas, religious or political, are determined not by his inner convictions but because he wants to gain the recognition and approval of people he values. The mind of man is merely a blank tablet
and there is no fundamental difference between his mind and that of animals. The old Man further says that it is human environment which influences his mind and his feelings, furnishes him his ideals and sets him on his road and keeps him in it. He even denies man the freedom of instinctive action. Instinct is merely petrified thought, thought solidified and made 'inanimate by habit.'

"What is Man" thus emphasizes the law of causality and flirts with the evolutionary theory. But it is also Twain's plea for pardon because if man is helpless, he can not be blamed for his actions. It exonerates man from all blame because he is doomed to be defeated, sentenced to commit fault, and fated to be a worthless creature.

IV

Twain's final statement on religion are recorded in "Reflections on Religion" (dictated in June 1906) and Letters from the Earth (written in 1909). In these works Twain expresses his contempt for the Christian conception of God, Christ, heaven and hell and the Bible. "Reflections on Religion" were direct dictations to his biographer Albert Biglew Paine while in Letters from the Earth Mark Twain uses Satan as his very thinly disguised persona. Satan
exiled from heaven, comes to earth to pass his time and reports back his observations to St. Michael and St. Gabriel. These works may be considered a culmination of a process that began with Calvinism and continued through his experiences of the world and his family tragedies. The tone of these works is so acrid and astringent that Twain did not want them to be published in his lifetime. Before writing "Reflections on Religion" Twain wrote to Howells on Sunday, June 17, 1906: "Tomorrow I mean to dictate a chapter which will get my heirs and assigns burnt alive if they venture to print it this side of 2006 A.D. which I judge they won't; there'll be lots of such chapters if I live 3 or 4 years longer. The edition of A.D. 2006 will make a stir when it comes out." 19

However, it came out in 1963 and not 2006, thanks to Charles Neider's courageous efforts... But it did make a stir as it changed the hitherto accepted picture of Mark Twain the religious thinker. For nowhere else does Twain express his contempt so strongly for Christianity and the Bible, as he does here.

Twain launches an attack upon the Biblical God vehemently. He calls Him "a man overcharged with evil impulses far beyond the human limit (p. 332)." God's acts
also enraged Twain:

In the old Testament His acts expose
His vindictive, unjust, ungenerous,
pitiless and vengeful nature constantly.
He is always punishing — punishing
trifling misdeeds with thousandfold
severity; punishing innocent children
for the misdeeds of their parents; puni­
shing unoffending populations for the
misdeeds of their rulers; even descending
to wreak bloody vengeance upon harmless
calves and lambs and sheep and bullocks
as punishment for inconsequential tres­
passes committed by their proprietors
(p. 332).

Twain incriminates God with treachery for having not warned Adam
of death if he tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree. In
defence of Adam he argues that Adam was innocent and had no
knowledge of death. Twain also identifies the earthly half
of God with Christ and holds him responsible for creating hell.
He arraigns him in the bitterest possible terms:

We conceive that the earthly half is
just, merciful, charitable, benevolent,
forgetting and full of sympathy for the
sufferings of mankind and anxious to
remove them. Apparently we deduce this
character not by examining facts but by
diligently declining to search them
measure them and weigh them. The earthly
half requires us to be merciful and sets
us an example by inventing a lake of fire
and brimstone in which all of us who fail
to recognize and worship Him as God are
to be burned through all eternity...
We have nothing approaching it among human savages, nor among the wild beast of the jungle (pp. 333-334).

Twain also cries shame upon the Real God, the God of grandeur and majesty, the omniscient and the Omnipotent. He explains the indifference of God to man's affairs with reference to the Boer War. The God who is called Father is wholly unsympathetic and has designed everything to inflict misery from the very first day of creation. He is completely destitute of morals and "proves every day that He takes no interest in man, nor in the other animals, further than to torture them, slay them and get out of this pastime such entertainment as it may afford — and do what He can not to get weary of the eternal and changeless monotony of it (p. 349).

The Bible about which Twain had spoken so highly in The Innocents Abroad also incurs the wrath of his embittered soul. The first charge that Twain makes against the Bible is its lack of originality. Thus it borrowed the idea of the Golden Rule and the Deluge from other sources without even acknowledging this debt. Similarly the idea of the Immaculate Conception had been worn threadbare before the Bible adopted it as a new idea. To Twain this idea is
a very puerile invention. It enrages Twain so much that he also charges Christianity and the Bible with immorality. "It could occur to nobody but a God that a divine son procured through promiscuous relations with a peasant family in a village could improve the purity of the product, yet that is the very idea (pp. 337-338)."

The idea that the Bible corrupts the mind recurs in Letters also. In this work Satan, the mouthpiece of Twain while criticising the Biblical account of creation summarises Bible: "It is full of interest. It has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and some good morals; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies (p. 14)."

Twain had completely lost belief in the Christian concepts of heaven and hell. In "Reflections" he points out that its existence is based merely on hearsay evidence. If Christ had really been God he would have proved its existence. In the Letters, on the other hand, Satan makes fun of man's conception of heaven. In his opinion man attaches utmost importance to two things in this world: sexual intercourse and intellect. Yet there is no mention of sexual intercourse in heaven. As for intellect "in man's heaven there are no exercises for the intellect,
nothing for it to live upon. It would rot there in a year — rot and stink (p. 13)."

In both these works Twain tries to seek a solution of the problem of evil by fixing the entire blame on God. Denying man any free will Twain says that all control is vested in his temperament and his circumstances — things over which he has no control. In the "Reflections" he points out that God alone is responsible for every act and word of a human being's life between the cradle and the grave. In the Letters Twain also makes a distinction between the true and supposed law of God. The temperament of man is the true law of God while the commandments is the supposed law of God. So it is quite impossible for man, an automatic mechanism, to follow the commandments.

V

The preceding discussion just shows how far Twain had come from his Innocents Abroad days. The early scepticism of his travel books and fiction pales into insignificance when one goes through his works produced in the last decade of his life. This raises two fundamental questions about his religious thinking. What were the forces that shaped his
early scepticism? What were the factors that brought about such a drastic change in his religious outlook in his closing years?

The answer to these questions necessitates an analysis of some of the facts of Twain's life and the impact of science on his overall philosophical thinking.

A highly controversial book on Mark Twain, The Ordeal of Mark Twain, by Van Wyck Brooks, highlights the impact of Calvinism, especially imposed by Twain's mother, Jane Lampton Clemans, on his thinking. It is true that Calvinism exercised a powerful influence on Twain's early thinking in that he became familiar with the Bible and other sacred works at a pretty early stage of his life. However, in these very years Twain's religious thinking was affected by the liberal ideas of his father John Clemens, and uncle John Quarles. In his later life uncle Quarles became a Universalist. In fact Twain's town Hannibal witnessed frequent discussions on the relative merit of Calvinism and Universalism. The Universalists, though few in numbers, held an appeal for sensitive and intelligent people like Twain.

There was a definite change in Twain's religious outlook after he left Hannibal in 1853. As a Cub pilot he
was introduced to deistic ideas through, among other sources, Tom Faine's *The Age of Reason*. He also came under the influence of Freemasonry. In 1861 he became a Freemason joining the Polar star Lodge Number 79 of St. Louis. However, the impact of Freemasonry, though clearly noticeable in *The Innocents Abroad*, cannot be overestimated as has been done by Alexander E. Jones. It is true that certain masonic tenets especially the ones stressing the human origin of religious creeds, contempt for the traditional Jehovah of the old Testament did appeal to Mark Twain. However, it cannot be said with any amount of certainty that Twain came to form liberal views especially under the influence of Freemasonry. Alexander E. Jones' view that Twain's respect for God the Creator under the influence of Freemasonry, remained "even in his final years" is wholly erroneous as has been suggested in the preceding pages.

Twain's experiences of the world also played a very important role in shaping his thinking. He witnessed the goldrush period closely and realized how civilization is made up of the usual depravities, baseness and hypocrisies. The great hopes that he held for mankind were certainly eluding him like the Utopia that eluded the Connecticut Yankee. Edward Wagenkecht has put it precisely: "The great
idealists ask too much of mankind, too much of themselves; their vision of what life might be is so high that the thought of what it is becomes unendurable." These experiences coupled with his personal tragedies — death of his daughter and wife and the business fiasco — turned him into a philosophical mechanist.

Mark Twain's intellectual predicament was also greatly a result of the impact of the then current scientific thought. The growth of Darwinian school of thought in the 1870s, and the mechanistic philosophy in 1890s with the new claims in Physics, shook the convictions of most of the intelligent men of the time. Mark Twain was no exception. His knowledge of science though not complete by any means, was nevertheless quite exhaustive.

He was familiar with Darwin's theory of evolution. Darwin's idea that there is no fundamental difference in man and animals recurs in the last writings of Twain. However, Twain did not accept Darwin uncritically. He rather differed from Darwin on the question of the moral superiority of man as has been discussed elsewhere in the chapter. It might be said that his disgust with humanity combined with Darwin's theory to produce his idea of 'man's descent from higher animals'. Stan Poole makes a very interesting
observation on the influence of Darwinism on Twain's thought. He says that "it seems more likely that Mark Twain treated the complex body of theoretical material associated with Darwinism as a source of stimulating ideas he found useful for expressing his own varied response to life but which never provided the kind of unified vision necessary for a coherent philosophy."  

The mechanistic thought of Huxley and Haeckel dwells upon the functioning of a natural law, the indifference of the impersonal universe to man's personal life. Their thought reduces man to a state of nothingness. The ideas of Twain's gospel "What is Man?" as discussed elsewhere in the chapter conform greatly to their mechanistic view of life. He also considers man a mechanism, an unimportant creature in the overall scheme of the universe.

The idea of the insignificance of man in the vast universe also owed a great deal to Twain's lifelong interest in geology and astronomy, the sciences which while emphasizing the infinite time scale and the vastness of universe, make human history and human world look so trivial.

Minnie M. Brashear in her famous book *Mark Twain: Son of Missouri*, has developed the thesis that Mark Twain's
philosophy basically springs from eighteenth century thought and is completely unaffected by the intellectual development of his own time. In a rebuttal of her point of view, Hyatt Howe Waggoner, while rightly pointing out that Twain's philosophy owed a lot to nineteenth century scientific thought, clarifies: "If Mark Twain's philosophy has points in common with those of Hobbes and Hume, that is not strange; Hobbes and Hume influenced the whole course of modern thought. The fact to be noted is that his philosophy also has much in common with the ideas of Darwin, Huxley and Haeckel." However, the truth lies in the fact that Twain's religious and philosophical thinking was a result of all these factors: early atmosphere at home and in his town, the exposure to deistic ideas, the scientific thought of his time, and most importantly his own unique reaction to various experiences of life.

2. Ibid., p.3.


19. Quoted by Charles Neider in his introduction to "Reflections on Religion", _Hudson Review_, Vol.XVI (1963) No.3 (Summer), p.331. Page numbers of the subsequent references to the text of "Reflection", also from the same work are indicated in the text.
Though Twain seems to have been influenced by the then current scientific thought, he perhaps did not make a direct study of the higher criticism of the Bible. The higher criticism of the Bible, largely based on the findings of anthropology, stressed the mythical and allegorical dimensions of the Bible. But Twain seems to have tenaciously clung to the literal interpretation of the Bible.


Mark Twain : The Man and His Work, op.cit., p.212.
